

**MEASURES OF PLEASURES: CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**
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Abstract	Measuring culture originated in cultural anthropology, but all social sciences contributed to comparative cultural studies. Tracing critical approaches towards a measurement of cultural values one is bound to strip the biases and stereotypes bare and to invade numerous academic fiefs. Hofstede defined interdisciplinary cultural dimensions but failed to anchor studying of culture's consequences in the academia. Measuring culture (rituals, patterns, business recipes, symbols, standards) we end up measuring values and competence in management of knowledge and skills, of norms and behaviours, cutting many corners of established disciplines. Demanding, but should we fail to do so, our cross-cultural experiment with the European integration could result in the corrosion of character and bowling alone.	
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Measures of Pleasures: Cross-Cultural Studies and the European Integration

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Abstract

Measuring culture originated in cultural anthropology, but all social sciences contributed to comparative cultural studies. Tracing critical approaches towards a measurement of cultural values one is bound to strip the biases and stereotypes bare and to invade numerous academic fiefs. Hofstede defined interdisciplinary cultural dimensions but failed to anchor studying of culture's consequences in the academia. Measuring culture (rituals, patterns, business recipes, symbols, standards) we end up measuring values and competence in management of knowledge and skills, of norms and behaviours, cutting many corners of established disciplines. Demanding, but should we fail to do so, our cross-cultural experiment with the European integration could result in the corrosion of character and bowling alone.

Key words: cross-cultural measurements, comparing values, learning standards, bias, integration, knowledge management

1. Measuring globalization's discontents.

“We take... standardization for granted, but without standardization, there would be no mass production or mass communication. Which is to say, without standardization there wouldn't be a modern economy. Today, according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, there are close to 800.000 global standards.”(Surowiecki, 2002, 85)

Global standards mentioned in the above quotation are mostly technical ones – they are about plugs, screw threads, radio frequencies, disquette sizes, and compatibilities. They can be easily measured and compared, though they are not always easy to implement.

Overall significance of the work of Geert Hofstede is linked to the introduction of the first standard conceptual framework (both academically sound and managerially useful) to cross-cultural studies. Noting the discrepancies between various definitions of culture and a diversity of values analyzed within particular academic disciplines, Hofstede introduced his five (originally four) dimensions of national cultures without anchoring them in a single theory of culture borrowed either from psychology, social psychology, sociology, economics, political and legal sciences or anthropology, although he relied on Kluckhohn's anthropological definition of value as a tendency to prefer certain states of affairs above the others and on Rokeach's concepts of terminal and instrumental values, attitudes and beliefs as referring to mental programs or software. For most practical purposes (IBM studies leading to “Culture's Consequences”) plotting a relative position of a single national culture compared to the others in a five-dimensional space was enough to guide adjustment of managerial techniques to a local constellation of cultural factors and to generate a new academic discipline. However, Hofstede's reluctance to engage in an academic - institutional and paradigmatic - warfare slowed this process down and prevented cross-cultural studies of culture's consequences for preferred modes of organizing from gaining a more expansive foothold in the academic division of labour.(1)

Global success of Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions among managers, consultants, politicians and trainers is also due to timing. Modernization and globalization, muted and distorted but not halted during the prolonged period of Cold War, forced us to compare not only technical and military standards, but also different ideological and marketing principles, business recipes, political settings, educational

influences, governance structures, research, demographic or banking policies, credos and mission statements – all of which had been based on apparently incompatible cultural standards. While theoretical concepts of culture and cultural standards remain notoriously ambiguous and vague (for instance definitions of cultural standards introduced by Alexander Thomas refer to “all forms” of perception, thinking, judgement and behaviour), practical applications of cross-cultural comparisons (e.g. expat training before overseas assignments, cultural due diligence procedures before mergers, acquisitions and strategic alliances, cross-national studies of a logic of honour, etc.) abound. This results in a situation of a de facto cultural relativism (we agree that values can be identified and cultures compared from many pragmatic and culture-bound points of view), although there is no corresponding general theory of cultural relativity (and thus no cultural relativism de iure), because a theory enabling us to compare local cultures would have to be itself free of any local commitments and thus would have to constitute “a view from nowhere” (i.e. from a value-determined position equally distant to all value systems represented by compared cultures). Although there is no distinct theory of cultural relativity, relativist assumptions are implicitly present in social constructivist paradigm and its forerunners - ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism, as well as in qualitative approaches (Alvesson, Skoldberg, 2000) and in sensitizing to a dominant culture in methodological choices for cross-cultural management research (Usunier, 1998). Another explanation for lack of a corresponding theory of cultural relativity can be sought in the fact that comparing standards often meant making the world safe for condescension (First, Second and Third World) or euphemism (Newly Developing Countries) (Geertz, 2000, 74), which resulted in ideological and political debates around historical and comparative studies (cf. Mamdani, 2000). Cultural relativism’s links to political pragmatism emerged from attempts to construct governance structures in order to prevent violent conflicts (in the wake of two world wars, decolonization, Cold War and the breakdown of Soviet Union). Cultural relativism reinforced a broad search for norms, standards and measurements(2) on the part of politicians, sociologists, organization scientists and corporate managers. The establishment of the United Nations, growth of academic associations, standing conferences and other virtual communities, Declaration of Universal Human Rights, adoption and twinning projects, the emergence of World

Bank, World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund, World Economic Forum in Davos and World Social Forum in Porto Allegro, but also military interventions in Kuwait, Kosovo and Afghanistan or famine relief operations in many parts of the world, were attempts to introduce global standards (protocols, procedures, regulations, agreements) facilitating global cooperation and an efficient and fair conflict-solving (Zolo, 1998). What became transparent during the last years of the XXth century was a gradual insertion of negotiated international standards against which local societies (and their cultural “softwares”) are measured in the public debate and the coupling of this insertion with temporary or permanent interorganizational governance structures capable of implementing decisions made according to these standards. Most of the authors agree that these attempts to institutionalize cross-cultural “clearing houses” for values, norms and actions can hardly be viewed as a success story (Bergesen, Lunde, 1999), but without them even limited international or local humanitarian interventions – based on values upheld by international communities - would have been much harder to organize. Globalization (technology, media, economy, politics, cultural communication) and management of complex governance structures (permanent or temporary, political or economic) require global cultural standards based on a theory reflecting a pragmatic cultural relativism. Managers, scientists and citizens are confronted with relativism of cultural re-engineering of values at local, state (euthanasia, immigration, birth control, local democracy) and global level (poverty, overpopulation, environmental degradation, contagious diseases, weapons of mass destruction). Public discussions demonstrated that our legal, political, religious, moral, aesthetic and social values are being constantly re-engineered and that cultural standards are being renegotiated, thus reinforcing cultural relativism at the expense of cultural fundamentalism (political, religious or economic) and increasing the need for measurements and comparisons.

2. Measurements and integration of diversity

Measurement of cultural differences and a development of cross-cultural competence in bridging them become increasingly important not only because of globalization (trade links, logistical chains, production or distribution networks, foreign assignments, mergers, acquisitions, strategic alliances) but also because of the emergence of

knowledge management as an ideology of professional communities networked both inside and outside of the confines of the academia. Knowledge management as an independent field of academic studies is devoted to integrating and standardizing activities in science, business and society at large and to the networking of various categories of knowledge workers in organizational or networked settings. In order to standardize and re-engineer organizations, institutions and companies (many of them formally allied or networked but culturally incompatible), standards of knowledge management have to be introduced, due diligence observed and regular measurements taken (for an analysis of this process at the British universities – cf. Fuller, 2002). Many of the outcomes of these measuring and re-engineering processes are bound to produce a cultural shock, and a public debate around a clash of values - revealed, compared, re-arranged, promoted or demoted in value systems as a result of the clash. This has already been the case with the standardized measurement of knowledge workers' inputs (macdonaldization of the universities)(Ritzer, 2000) and a reversal of biological policies of modern nation states (abortion and euthanasia, genetic engineering), with standardized public opinion polls and an integration of new technologies into business models (MP3, Napster, Gnutella). Cultural shocks resulting from multidisciplinary measurements of cultural software of universities, fast-food restaurants and political parties are plentiful. Managerial scientists speak of “dumb” universities” and “smart” McDonald's restaurants, economists and politicians claim that “biopower and biopolitics must understand and welcome the necessity of death and seek to prevent life.”(George, 1999, 92).(3) Does it mean that that we are already well-advanced in acceptance of cultural relativity, versatile in standardization of measurements of cultural variables (e.g. values, norms, and corresponding behavioural patterns), competent in “collaborative cross-cultural learning”(4)? Are we developing and operationalizing a model of cross-cultural competence in organizational sciences in the context of globalization and organizational learning? Not necessarily: cultural standardization and a possibility to compare cultures along chosen dimensions (for instance the Hofstedian ones) is hampered by a relatively slow process of decoding bias built into national, professional and other cultures. Professional and organizational cultures, which determine the conditions under which knowledge is produced (for instance theories of cultural relativity and methodologies of

comparing cross-cultural differences) can be analyzed from two theoretical points of view. The first one, which has been mentioned already, relies on an extension of Hofstede's model of dimensions of national cultures onto the cultures of professional communities or organizations. This point of view is supported by empirical evidence that nation-states have been retreating from a comprehensive maintenance of cultural software, thus delegating more responsibilities towards local, regional, professional corporate and organizational communities, whose respective subcultures took over at the expense of a national culture. The advantage of this approach consists of a possibility to develop and hone measurement techniques already introduced by Hofstede and further continuously developed and perfected by others (cf. for instance, House et al. on leadership, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars on cross-cultural competence, de Mooij and Usunier on global marketing and advertising). The disadvantage consists of a tacit assumption that a set of dimensions describing national cultural clusters relative to one another can be simply translated into a set of dimensions contrasting organizational or professional cultural clusters with one another (as if organizational or professional cultures were simple concretizations of national cultures in specific domains and always had to bear a stamp of their national embedding).

Another approach consists of redefining culture as a province of knowledge and focussing on individual cognitive frameworks, cognitive maps, scripts, cross-cultural negotiations and the language of international joint ventures (Cray, Mallory, 1998) or even as part of the knowledge management domain, where it is defined as; “varieties of common knowledge; infinitely overlapping and perpetually redistributable habitats of common knowledge and shared meanings” (Holden, 2002, 316). This allows to apply the principles of knowledge management to “social life of (culturally relevant) information”, with organizational culture as a competitive resource based on “tacit (cultural) knowledge” and “social (culturally determined) learning” (thus annexing the authors linked to knowledge management studies – cf. Brown and Duguid, Nonaka and Ichijo, Castells and Cortada – to the ranks of the representatives of cross-cultural studies). Max Boisot has even developed a three-dimensional model of information space, which offers an interesting possibility of analyzing organizational cultures from the point of their

treatment of information – clustering all organizational forms according to the degree of abstraction, codification and dissemination of knowledge and information (cf. Boisot, 1995, 1999). Together with John Child he had applied his own model to the explanation of recent transformations of Chinese enterprises and economic networks, trying to explain a different institutional trajectory of Chinese transformations with the cultural preference for a personalized information processing and an ensuing choice of clans rather than markets as a dominant organizational form (Boisot, Child, 1996). The advantage of his approach is in linking the measurement of organizational culture to a relatively easily identifiable model of organization's communications, both internal and external. Is information coded, abstract and disseminated as in an ideally mobile, borderless, transparent market – type organization? Boisot's four ideal types of organization within the I-space (bureaucracies, markets, fiefs and clans) resemble the typology introduced by Kim and Quinn in order to conduct comparative studies of actual and desired organizational culture by means of an Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument – hierarchies, markets, clans, adhocracies (Cameron, Quinn, 1999). OCAI is an instance of a pragmatic toolkit for a change manager (who wants to manipulate organizational culture in order to trigger change processes) and it has been developed with managerial applications in mind ("to help managers, change agents, and scholars understand, diagnose and facilitate the change of an organization's culture to enhance its effectiveness"). The disadvantage of Boisot's model applied to organizations as social systems consists of reducing culture to those aspects, which are relevant for management of knowledge as an organizational resource for innovativeness and competitive advantage of business firms, and disregarding those, which are not, but which can nevertheless play an important part in maintenance or change of cultural standards and in shaping individual cognitive maps (e.g. power processes, triggering mechanisms independent of information flows, generational, social, traditional, situational and contextual factors). Nevertheless, cognitive and knowledge management related theories of culture, even if their authors remain highly critical of "Culture's Consequences", continue the Hofstedian tradition of reconstructing dimensions of mental software and add a pragmatic, if slightly narrower twist to the cross-cultural tale.

3. European integration as a challenge for cross-cultural management

Enlargement of European Union offers a number of opportunities to compare organizational, regional or national bias in cross-cultural communications and to re-conceptualize them from the point of systematic integrative changes. A problem faced in the early 1980ies by managers of IBM (and of other multinationals) – namely how to convert intercultural clashes and conflicts into a cultural synergy in multicultural organizations – is now being faced by most of the European societies linked to the European Union. Changes caused by the latter should lead to re-engineering of national cultural standards in case of their incompatibility with the integrated multinational organizational cultures of competitive European companies and networks. Processes of re-engineering of cultural values have so far been mainly studied in the framework of global modernization and democratization studies. Using data from World Values Survey in order to explain the repeated failure of some of the world's regional elites to launch a modernization program, Inglehart suggests that modernization and economic development are closely related to the shift from traditional, absolute social norms to more rational, "postmodern" ones, and that a global cultural map can be drawn by plotting a relative position of several societies on two dimensions of cross-cultural variation (traditional vs secular-rational authority and survival vs self-expression values). He arrives at the following civilizational clusters termed "cultural zones": Orthodox, Islamic, hierarchically Catholic, historically Protestant and Confucian and stresses the role of a syndrome of "trust, tolerance, well-being and participatory values tapped by the survival/self-expression dimension"(Inglehart, 2000,96). Can these indicators be used within the context of a secular project of European integration, which does not articulate values in religious terms, and which involves mostly countries from either a Protestant or a Catholic zone? If they could, we would be methodologically well off with standard research projects – for instance World Value Survey – and their data banks could have been mined for correlations between cultural zones and probabilities of organizational evolution or individual decision making. They can certainly be used in this way, in fact Hofstede encourages exactly this approach, but they do not differentiate enough between countries within single or mixed cultural zones and, as Inglehart himself admits, they fail to account for the influences exerted by the Communist political techniques of

management and control, which were based on a conscious undermining of horizontal trust and on reinforcing authoritarian control of the power elite. Incidentally, inability to account for these differences impedes also our more recent attempts to understand the re-engineering of religion in militant islamic movements, which are also instances of ideological revision and revival linked to a political and communitarian mobilization. Moreover, as Therborn points commenting on enculturations within the European cultural space – globalization of youth cuts across religious and national traditions (Therborn, 1995), diminishing their influence much more quickly than in the case of other demographic groups and triggering alternative lifestyles. How, then, should cultural standards be measured, compared, and re-engineered? European integration is a process, whose ends are being continuously redefined (from a community of coal and steel through European Union to a federation) and means are subjected to an ongoing negotiation (financial and political leverage, decision-making procedures, infrastructural standardization). Negotiating involves a continuous re-defining of values, norms and means involved(5) – in a sense, nothing is sacred and a taboo of yesterday becomes negotiable tomorrow. What does it mean in terms of comparative cross-cultural studies in managerial and organizational sciences?

First, it means that we have to network international virtual research communities able to create and maintain a cross-cultural “clearing house” for interpretation of data (for a similar idea of multicultural research teams analyzing answers to open-ended questions – cf. Segalla, et al., 1999). Examples of such clearing houses can already be found in various domains. There is, for instance, a joint commission of German and Polish historians and educational specialists who wrote school textbooks for German and Polish children with the explicit aim of overcoming negative national stereotypes. The most serious problem lies in interdisciplinarity and pragmatic tint of cross-cultural field and paradigmatic controversies intertwined with academic politics. Independent platforms for exchanging ideas on innovative management research – EURAM is a case in point (as are EGOS, SCOS or a new CEMS Ph.D. program) – offer a chance of overcoming it at a pace compatible with the one of the European integration processes..

Second, it means that we have to provide toolkits for identifying values, norms and behavioural expectations for managers working with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Available toolkits are either linked to the consulting services (and form proprietary knowledge of consultants or their companies, which decreases academic impact) and in most cases based on a simplified Hofstedian typology or anchored in a single discipline, usually empirical social psychology, distant from practical applications (cf. Schwartz,1992), although some recent undertakings (US-based research projects on comparative leadership or EU-based research projects on managerial decision-making) can potentially be attractive for knowledge management officers of corporations or for the public authorities. Development of tailor-made managerial toolkits for dealing with cross-cultural differences within the framework of European integration can become a dual (research and consulting) project for mixed teams of researchers and consultants. Hofstede had already encouraged researchers in 1980 to look for support of “enlightened and creative practitioners” (a process of attracting consultants to the universities and of researchers offering consulting services has been accelerated in the 1990ies and teams he had envisioned are quite well advanced).

Third, research communities linked to cross-cultural issues should systematically scan available data sources for potentially valuable information on values and their transformations. Shadowing national and supranational initiatives in cultural content industries, literary, film or music prizes and consumer preferences could improve our understanding of the making of value systems and of a social construction of triggering mechanisms. In fact, this scanning and comparing becomes a new challenge within the academic profession, calling for a new job description, a new generation of international conferences and a gradual replacement of paradigmatic and institutional loyalties with nomadic, flexible and temporary networking, especially around newly emerging issues and specializations. Cross-cultural studies within the sciences of management stand a good chance of introducing a data-re-cycling concept to the academic community thus economizing on research development costs. Before it happens, however, cross-disciplinary data-mining and interdisciplinary teaming up in volatile networks have to be on their way towards a preliminary acceptance in “les salons” of the academia. Let me

close on a visionary note. Having co-founded International Association for Cross-Cultural Competence in Management in Vienna, a group of academics representing Danish, Dutch, British, Austrian and Italian universities organized a conference on cross-cultural aspects of business management. Among research papers on comparative marketing and advertising, there was a report by a Hungarian colleague, which attracted most attention. She concluded her studies of cultural clashes between Italian managers and Hungarian employees after a takeover by listing cases of bias and arrogance of the former and complaining bitterly that Italians were slow to learn about the Hungarians' perceptions of their attitude and to make use of the local employees' high level of skill and learning capacities. One of the Italian researchers happened to be involved in the above-mentioned takeover and responded to her coolly, complaining in private that she was too emotional and biased to present a balanced analysis of relationship between two groups. During an informal chat in a pub after the conference, the very same Italian colleague exploded when during a lively discussion he had noticed that his inferior English puts him at a disadvantage. He lashed out against his Austrian and British colleagues accusing them of a tacit bias built into English as the language of academic conferences. The latter responded to him coolly, complaining in private that he was too emotional and biased to weight advantages and disadvantages of the dominant position of English in scientific communities.(6) What conclusions can we draw from this double incident? It seems to me that it demonstrates to us the direction in which cross-cultural studies might be developed within the context of the enlargement of European Union (reducing the tension, dismantling the scaffolding for a cultural clash and defusing conflicts with cultural due diligence) and the necessity to couple empirical cross-cultural studies with a theoretical reflection on the triggering contingencies, which make some values more relevant than the others to our individual and collective behaviour. Measuring similar displeasing incidents could belong to cognitive pleasures of cross-cultural researchers.

Notes:

- (1) Hofstede's critique is mild ("dimensional models are preferable for research and typologies for teaching purposes"), and attitude relativistic ("there is no normal position in cultural matters")(Hofstede, 2001, 28,452).
- (2) Tacitly approved cultural relativism is currently under attack, provoking a response: "The objection to anti-relativism is not that it rejects an it's-all-how-you-look-at-it approach to knowledge or a when-in-Rome approach to morality, but that it imagines that they can only be defeated by placing morality beyond culture and knowledge beyond both."(Geertz, 2000, 65)
- (3) Lack of space prevents me from going further into the details of this sweeping statement about a major historical transformation of European values based on Foucault's concept of biopower, which is summarized by Susan George in the following way: "Under the biopolitical regime, death becomes intensely private, lonely, almost shameful taboo. Death used to mark the moment when the individual ceased to be subject to temporal sovereign and became the object of God's judgement. Biopower cares nothing about death: it deals only with mortality...it needs vast bureaucracies to administer social security and old age pensions, to enforce rules of safety and hygiene."(ibid.)
- (4) Bartholomew and Adler have been interested in shifting their theoretical focus away from a "hierarchical" perspective and such concepts as cultural influence and adaptation towards a more horizontal, institutionally networked, and socially embedded one (cf. Bartholomew, Adler, 1996).
- (5) Debates on the nature of cultural values and the re-engineering of cultural standards often occur in academic no man's land between economists and aestheticians: "Economic and aesthetic value function in many value discourses as hedges against uncertainty... in the wake of the perception of uncertainty associated with aesthetic judgement and market fluctuations" (Ruccio,Graham,Amariglio, 1996,66)
- (6) Dominant position of English in a global context attracts attention of sociologists interested in comparative studies and in integrating processes among professional elites (cf. Swaan, 2002)

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