Chapter 10
Relativity in Perspective in Culture Theories: The Götheborg IV Model

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ABSTRACT

Changing business environments due to the influence of technological advances have increased awareness amongst scholars and practitioners for a need to re-perspectivise culture beyond the normative dimensional construct. This chapter discusses the relative perspectives of culture in the dimensional and emergent theoretical frameworks. The purpose is to reconcile the two frameworks towards a holistic perspective of the study of culture in the field of international business studies. In illustration of how both frameworks are needed in order to understand human behaviour in the era of Industry 4.0, the processes of firm globalisation are discussed in relation to the elements of the Uppsala model and the Götheborg IV model. This chapter provides readers with a novel means of conceptualising culture beyond the dimensional construct. The model presented in this chapter can be used to help identify gaps in knowledge with regards to culture in organisation management. Practitioners are invited to apply the model supplied in this chapter to their consultative work where applicable.

INTRODUCTION: CULTURE IN THE ERA OF CYBER PHYSICAL SYSTEMS AND INDUSTRY 4.0

The past 30 years have witnessed advances made in the various fields of sciences that set the context for the current academic discussion of culture in the field of international business (IB) studies. Culture in a post-globalized world. Notable advancements in science that have changed the manner in which humans think and behave in everyday contexts include findings in disciplines such as molecular biology, the human genome, (the narrowing of) biodiversity, new quantum superstrings, nanotechnology, (autopoietic) artificial intelligence, augmented reality and cyberspace. Coupled with the recent “Great Acceleration” of human population consumption, patterns of human habitation have been imprinted on Earth in the
form of sediments of manufactured materials including aluminium, plastics, and concrete (Waters et al., 2016). These current trends of human impact on earth and its resources indicate that integral models of socio-cultural, political and economic development need to be formulated. These movements are helped by the processes of globalization, but still require a consciously combined cross-disciplinary effort with a global outreach (Cordeiro, 2016; Alvstam, Johansson & Jonsson, 2015; Møller, 2012; Parekh, 2009; Eriksson, 1993; Daly et al., 1989).

While contact between peoples of different cultures goes back to the era of the Silk Route trade, what is notably different in the processes of globalization today is that policy and technological advancements continue to increase the rate at which humans interact with each other. In 2000, Thomas Friedman described a “farther, faster, cheaper and deeper” globalization based mainly on improved global transportation systems. Since then, cyber physical systems have come into the world’s automation and communication infrastructure with the emergence of Industry 4.0 enabled by the infrastructure of the Internet-of-Things (IoT).

Culture has never been an easy concept to decipher or measure. It is an intricate feature of groups of individuals, manifesting in various dimensions and at different levels of society (Steers, Sánchez-Runde, & Nardon, 2013; Schein, 1990). This challenge is further compounded today by advancing developments in cyber physical systems, where wireless technology and social media platforms on the Internet allow for the forming of virtual groups with instant contact that further blur concrete geographic boundaries of groups of individuals. Social media platforms for example literally connect individuals from various remote locations in virtual space in real-time, no physical border crossing necessary.

It is these developments in technology, coupled with the continued divergence in views in both academia and in the practitioner worlds on the concept and definition of culture that has proved to be one of the biggest challenges in understanding the dynamics of organization science and international business relations. Already in 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had uncovered 164 definitions of ‘culture’. Culture is a product of the mind through shared meanings and symbols:

*Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 357)*

Today there would be more definitions to contend with, as expressed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1992, p. 210), “I have come to the conclusion that the analysis of culture could be likened to the task of identifying mushrooms. Because of the nature of the mushrooms, no two experts describe them in precisely the same way, which creates a problem for the rest of us when we are trying to decide whether the specimen in our hands is edible.” It is this context of instantaneous contact between individuals, enterprises and governments across national and geographical boundaries that have raised conceptual and theoretical questions to the academic circles in the study of culture in IB studies. It is a contextual understanding that carries theoretical pressures echoing after Hall’s thoughts about the analysis culture. One could do far better contemplating mushrooms than discuss with any logical consequence the topic of culture.

However, scholars and practitioners alike are generally positive in mindset. In a reflection of changing business environments due to the influences of technological advances, there has been an interest
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