Chapter 1
Mapping the Field:
Cultural Dimensions Explored by Hofstede

ABSTRACT

Hofstede’s investigation of culture and cultural dimensions is the most widely cited research in the analysis of topics related to the field. How the author presented his work had an impact in the past, and still has an impact on today’s scholars and practitioners who, thanks to its dimensions, are able to implement a framework that helps to deepen processes of cross-cultural relationships. However, such innovative research has often been criticised by the same academics that were putting it into practice. On the other hand, many scholars consider his work to be a milestone. This chapter reviews Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and explores both sides of the argument, summarising the pros and cons of applying his approach to ethics and sustainability. The work also recommends areas for further discussion and research, as three of the dimensions proposed by Hofstede will become foundation for the development of the remainder of this book.

INTRODUCTION

In order to highlight the main studies that form the basis for this book, it is essential to present an overview on culture and the role it plays in the management field. Culture is a “multi-layered” issue. It includes deep-rooted and long-lasting principles, cognitive artefacts and symbols, collective
procedures and arrangements, “and shared doings and sayings” (Inglehart, 2018; LeVine, 2018; Hickman & Silva, 2018; Luthans & Doh, 2018).

Many authors focused on the cultural perspective of organisations (Turner, 1971; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979; Pettigrew, 1979; Louis, 1980a, b; Whorton & Worthley, 1981) without presenting a proper definition of the topic. Others, instead, took into consideration the symbolic activity typical of cultures (Peters, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), or decided to follow in the footsteps of a culture, exploring stories, legends, ceremonies, and myths developed inside and outside the boundaries of organisations (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976; Dandridge, 1979; Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Wilkins & Martin, 1980; Martin & Powers, 1983; Trince & Beyer, 1983).

On the other hand, according to Schwartz and Davis (1981), Deal and Kennedy (1982) and Kilmann, Saxton and Serpa (1985), organisational culture could be also considered as a tool or a tactic in the “managerial kitbag”: this implicates that culture should be seen as a factor that can be managed by organisations, as it is considered a metaphor or an essential means for conceptualising organisations’ viewpoints (Smircich, 1983).

This is not considered to be possible if Nicholson (1984) and Schein (1984; 1988) are taken into account, as they believed that culture was not something an organisation has, but something that an organisation is. Their perspective was that management could not control culture, nor cultural dimensions, features, or components, as management needed to be seen as part of a culture. In this sense, each organisation has its own cultural identity. Nevertheless, this does not mean that organisational culture does not exist. It is real and is important, thus it must still be defined and assessed.

Other scholars (Sathe, 1983, p. 7) trying to identify culture inside organisational borders suggested that it is a “multi-layered” issue, as it includes deep-rooted and long-lasting principles, “cognitive artefacts and symbols, collective procedures and arrangements, and “shared doings and sayings”. Thus, organisational culture is set when groups of individuals can, in spite of their peculiar differences, instinctively evaluate in a common and universal manner how their organisation can be distinguished from the environment (Harste, 1994). In order to find the features of organisational cultures, Schein (1984) and Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv and Sanders (1990) suggested the necessity of paying attention to broader national, racial, and religious cultures, while, Turner (1971) and Schein (1984) looked at organisational culture as giving attention to a learned and shared set of responses to the organisational environment, tasks, and issues.
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