

# 3

## HOFSTEDE'S FIVE VALUE DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

### Objectives

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain the differences between Hall's cultural framework and Hofstede's cultural framework.
- Describe five value dimensions of Hofstede.
- Explain the relative position of these (national) values when projected on the Inverted Pyramid model.
- Analyze a cross-cultural incident according to these (national) values when projected on the Inverted Pyramid model.

## Introduction

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch researcher who is seen as a significant informant and researcher in intercultural studies. His book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*<sup>1</sup> is considered an important cornerstone in the research field. A great number of business studies have taken his theory as a framework and many other cross-cultural training programs are based on his data.

In comparison with Hall's theory, Hofstede's theory is more significant on two grounds. Firstly, it departs from verbal/non-verbal communication, which is largely related to the outward expressions of the Tree Model, and hence, easier to change. Focusing on the second layer, Hofstede draws a framework of values, deep assumptions, and guiding morality that are difficult to see and very slow to change. Secondly, Hofstede conducted systematic research on these values and projected them on a 100-point scale of measurement. While with Hall's theory, one can only have observation and conclude that this culture is likely to be *more* Monochronic than the other culture; whereas Hofstede's theory allows us to look at a wide range of cultures with a comparative perspective and attach a number to it.

It must be noted that Hofstede does not deal with co-cultures. His data mostly points at values of a dominant culture within a nation. On the Tree Model, he does not discuss the fundamental concerns and only points out the "typical" outward expression of these values without warning that the non-typical elements are constantly present. On the Inverted Pyramid model, he does not deal with the universal and individual levels of these values (Figure 1). For the sake of consistency and in order to reach a thorough and systematic method of analysis, we will explore Hofstede's theory in accordance with the Inverted Pyramid model and link the arguments across all analysis levels.

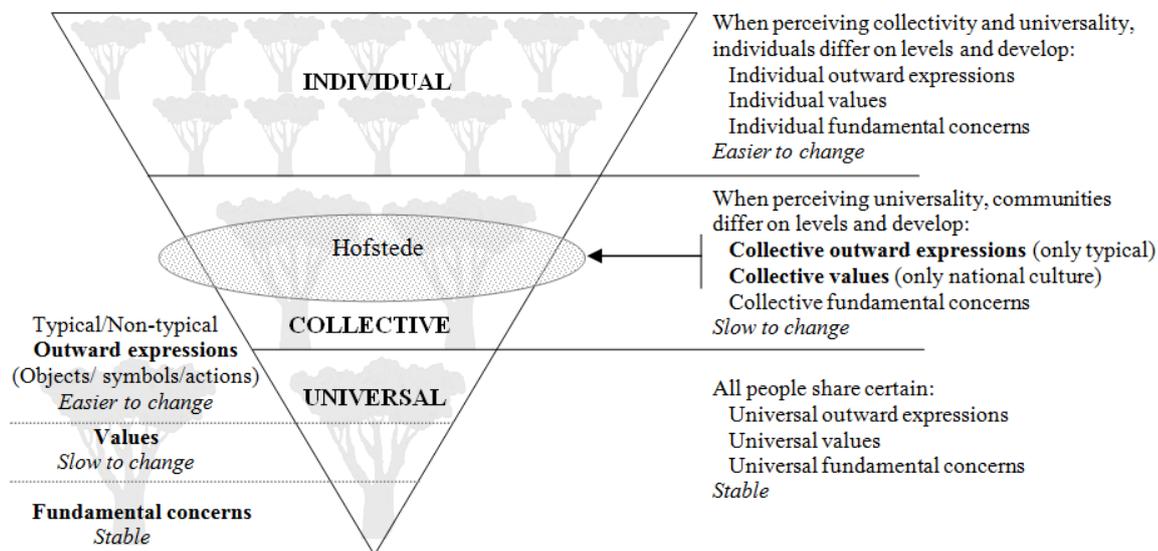


Figure 1. The position of Hofstede's theory on the Inverted Pyramid model (Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, 2014)

## The first collective value dimension: Power Distance

### *Power Distance according to the Inverted Pyramid model*

At the universal level, *Power* is a fundamental concern because human groups everywhere are organized into a hierarchy. Decision makers are present in groups of any size and ethnicity (e.g. the head of a family, the chief of a tribe, or the rulers of a city state, etc.). The value attached to power is

called *Power Distance*, defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of the society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

Universally, all people accept to a certain degree that we are not equal. No matter where you come from, you will always acknowledge that your tribal headperson, your managers, your parents, your teachers, and even someone who is older than you have a degree or two more power than you do. Put any two persons in a room, in the end we will have a senior and a junior, depending on their different fields or levels of expertise. Mankind is capable of specialization in labour and power, reaching for cooperation beyond kinship, aiming at a better chance of survival (see chapter 1).

At the collective level, while all societies have the same fundamental concern about Power and accept that some people should have more power than others, each community has a different level of acceptance, ranging from high to low degree of acceptance and anywhere in between. This is what it means with we are not different in kind (Power/Power Distance), but we are different in levels (High/Average/Low Power Distance). It is crucial to note that Power Distance as a value does not mean “power” in the abstract sense, but rather how people *look at* power. In other words, it is *not about the reality of power but about the perception of power*. For example, two workers perform the same job and have the same boss. In principle, the gap of power between the boss and the workers is the same. However, the way that the two workers may look at this gap can be very different. The first worker may show greater respect for his boss, accepting that he/she controls most of the decision making process (high Power Distance). Meanwhile, the other worker may challenge this power gap more often by questioning her boss’s decisions, demanding his/her explanation, etc. (low Power Distance). When this attitude is widely accepted in a community, then we have a collective value. A culture can be high or low on Power Distance and most cultures rank somewhere in between.

The index of different countries on the collective value of Power Distance can be found at [geert-hofstede.com](http://geert-hofstede.com). These scores do not indicate Power Distance among the countries, only within it. One of the most common errors we make is to mistake Power for Power Distance. A rich person does not automatically have higher Power Distance over a poor one. He/she simply has more Power in term of wealth. A poor person is more likely to have low Power Distance towards a rich one if he/she comes from a low Power Distance culture. A wealthy and powerful country like the US may have more power (reality), but other countries do not necessarily *accept* the way that the US can use that power (perception). Similarly, as the unfortunate remnants of a long history in patriarchy remain, men still seem to have varying degrees of power over women in all societies (one need only look at the number of male authorities and wealthy people to conclude this). However, this does not mean that men have high Power Distance over women, because both men and women do not simply *accept* this gap of power.

The index in this table are also the *average* score of each country, which should make us cautious of falling into the trap of stereotyping by assuming that all things in a country will be converged to that single number. Additionally, national culture is never homogenized but a complicated mixture of many co-cultures, which are also not included in this index.

You may notice that some of the statistics do not seem correct according to our common sense. For example, Pakistan (55), Japan (55) and Quebec Canada (54) collectively score very similarly on the Power Distance scale. But anyone who is familiar with the strong emphasis on social honour in Pakistan and the intricate system of social ranking in Japan will immediately question the positions of these two countries when put on par with the French culture in Canada. This is one of the main

shortcomings in Hofstede's study. His pool of participants drew from 80,000 IBM employees from 66 countries, and while this is a large sample, it may be that those who answered his questionnaires did not represent the average collective cultural profile of that country.

At the individual level, we can only predict that someone from a country with an average Power Distance is more likely to be average on how he/she accepts inequality as well. Very often, a person may hold a completely different way of looking at power when compared to his/her dominant culture. Is your own level of Power Distance similar to your country's score in the index? While many of you may say "yes", many others might say "no." That is the complexity of individuality. Not only may we hold a different value from our community, as an agent of evolving culture, we are also capable of adapting our concerns, values, and outwards expression to suit the circumstance. For example, it is not uncommon to see a Vietnamese business person adjusting his/her way of shaking hand (a firm handshake instead of a soft one) when communicating with a Western counterpart. Hofstede's index of collective values, therefore, are mostly useful when you have to deal with a *collective unknown national audience* and try to make a prediction which would stand the biggest chance of hitting the majority at the collective national level. In business, nation-wide marketing, new product launching, and large-scale sales are examples of commercial sectors that may find Hofstede's data the most useful to consider.

#### *The typical outward expression of Power Distance in society*

Most of the time, our first experience of Power starts in the family. Immediately after birth, we observe how much the Distance of Power is generally accepted through examples set by the elders. While a certain degree of obedience towards parents is universal, at the collective level, cultures with high Power Distance will have more obedient children than cultures with averaged or low Power Distance. Similarly, respect for elders is seen as a basic universal virtue, but the importance of this virtue differs along the scale of high-average-low Power Distance. While all parents expect their children to be independent someday, those in low Power Distance cultures would be more ready to let their offspring start their own life at an earlier age, stand on their own feet and enable them to make their own decision in what to study, how to make money, who to marry, when to have a family, etc.

At the top level of the Tree Model, language appears to be the most obvious outward expression of Power and Power Distance. While English has only two pronouns "you" and "I," some societies, especially Japan and Vietnam, have more than a dozen ways of social role indication, dictating how people address each other<sup>2</sup>. In Vietnam, it is sometimes impossible to talk appropriately if two persons do not know the age of each other and cannot establish a ranking relationship for communication.

At school, the role pair parent-child is replaced by the role pair teacher-student with basic values carried forward from one sphere into another. Respect for the teacher is universal, but it is more so in high Power Distance cultures where students may stand up when they enter, and bow or greet when they pass by. Everywhere, teachers control a classroom's communication, but in cultures with high Power Distance this becomes a strict order with students speaking up only when invited and teachers are almost never publicly contradicted or criticized. In countries under the influence of Confucianism (China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Singapore), the teacher is ranked below the king and above the father. Here, the quality of one's learning is dependent upon the excellence of one's teacher.

Similarly, an organization is under the influence of the dominant culture. While subordinates universally rely on their managers and organizational structure is universally a pyramid of hierarchy,

the degree of dependency and hierarchy differs along the scale of high-average-low Power Distance. For example, a high Power Distance oriented boss also means a benevolent autocrat or paternalistic/maternalistic boss, ready to listen to his/her employees' personal stories, to take care of them, and to protect them in exchange for loyalty and obedience. This family model emphasizes a two-way reciprocal power relationship between authority and subordinates, demanding each side to fulfill their socially expected roles, and thus sometimes may become emotionally loaded. In comparison, average and low Power Distance cultures also share more or less similar characters, albeit with much less emphasis.

It is crucial to bear in mind that firstly, most cultures score somewhere in between. Secondly, a great number of these observations are simply the *typical* outward expression of collective concerns and values in our Pyramid model. In reality, it is not uncommon to observe non-typical incidents at the collective level. For example, Israel's collective value of Power Distance is 13, but the degree of respect a rabbi (religious leader, meaning: a Great one) perceives in Israel very likely indicates a number much higher than 13. At the individual level, non-typical outward expressions are endless. The punk rock band Pussy Riot, who stages unauthorized provocative guerrilla performances in opposition to the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is not compliant in any sense with the high Power Distance value of Russia at 93. Thirdly, we need to remember that the outward expression layer of the Tree Model is subject to change and does not guarantee the value. It is not a two-way cause-effect relationship. A low Power Distance culture (value) is likely to have a big middle class (typical outward expression), but a culture with a small middle class cannot be guaranteed to be a low Power Distance culture. Values may lead to certain outward expressions but not the other way around.

### *The origin of Power Distance*

Most of the high Power Distance countries are at lower latitudes and most of the low Power Distance countries are at higher latitudes. At lower latitudes (tropical climates), agricultural societies are prevalent. Survival and population growth in these climates demands a relatively limited intervention of man with nature: everything grows. In this situation the major threat to a society is the competition between human groups for the same territory and resources. The better chance for survival exists for those societies that have organized themselves hierarchically and are dependent on one central authority who keeps order and balance.

At higher latitudes (moderate and cold climates), nature is less abundant. There is more of a need for human intervention with nature in order to carve out an existence. There are stronger forces supporting the creation of industry next to agriculture. Nature, rather than other humans, is the first enemy to be resisted. Societies in which people have learned to fend for themselves without being too dependent on more powerful others have a better chance of survival under these circumstances than societies which educate their children towards dependence.

### **The second collective value dimension: Group Attachment**

#### *Group Attachment according to the Inverted Pyramid model*

In chapter 1, we learned that human are social animals. At the universal level, we are born with a very perceptive mind to be ready in joining the first cultural group we see after birth. Step by step, children become integrated into different in-groups such as family, school, workplace, etc., and learn to think of themselves as part of the "we" group, distinct from other people in society who belong to the

“they” group (out-group). The tendency for humans to form different groups is because cultural diversity is a critical strategy to protect collective knowledge and heritage. It helps us recognize who belongs to our in-group, and thus defines who we can trust, who we can share our knowledge with, and who we can live and die for. *Group* is therefore a fundamental concern, universally significant in all human societies. With this concern, the entire human race also shares the same value that exhibits the relationship between each individual and his/her group. Hofstede does not give a generic name to this universal value like what he did with the previous value of Power Distance, so we will term it in this book *Group Attachment*.

At the collective level, communities differ from each other in the level of importance they place on Group Attachment. Some expect individuals to build a strong bond with their in-groups, thus emphasizing a high level of Group Attachment. We can call this characteristic *collectivistic*. Some others allow individuals to cultivate certain degree of independence and have a pretty loose relationship with their in-groups, thus emphasizing low level of Group Attachment, or *individualistic*. The term individualistic can be misleading, since nobody can be completely on his/her own. We are first and foremost collectivistic because we are a social species, but we are just different in being more or less collectivistic than others by being attached to our in-groups more or less than others. The same counts for Power Distance, which dictates that we will always accept distance in power, just whether we are more or less willing to do so (high or low Power Distance).

Note that Group Attachment is exclusively about the relationship between *one* individual and his/her in-groups. We cannot use this index for a group (e.g. the company is so individualistic that they ignore a customer’s requirements); or for an intergroup incident (e.g. the democratic and labour parties have become very individualistic in this issue). When you see a group of people working in teams, joining a protest, or forming a party, etc., it does not mean they are collectivistic as these are just a universal, average ways of group functioning. It also says nothing about this value since there is no relationship between this in-group and an individual within it. Similarly, without an in-group context, we cannot decide if the individual is individualistic or collectivistic. Thus the description of a person as “independent, freedom-loving, and rebellious” does not automatically indicate this is an individualist because we do not know how he/she is attached to his/her in-group.

The index of different countries on the collective value of Group Attachment (note that Hofstede uses the term Individualism – Collectivism) can be found at [geert-hofstede.com](http://geert-hofstede.com). That is to say, you need to watch out for non-typical collective outward expressions that do not comply with the national scores. Hofstede uses the term Individualism to name the index, so the higher the score, the more important Individualistic value – or weak Group Attachment is for a country.

Similarly to Power Distance, we see again some scores that can be hard to digest. Italy, for example, is positioned right next to Denmark and Belgium and scores highly on the scale (76) while another country with a quite similar level of Group Attachment stands 25 points further behind: Spain (51). Again, this reminds us that Hofstede does not distinguish between dominant culture and co-culture within a nation. It turns out that the Italian participants in his study were mainly from the Northern part of the country where economical wealth is significantly higher than the South, which in turns influenced how people think about their relationship with in-groups. Note that this “wealth – value” causal direction is one way only. Wealth can result in a change of value, but not the other way around. A rich country can make its people become more individualistic, but holding individualistic value does not ensure that a country will become rich.

At the individual level, there is a likelihood that someone from a country with an average Group Attachment will hold the value at a similar level. However, this is never guaranteed. There is a complexity of various aspects of Group Attachment which interact with each other, depending on particular situations. A person coming from the most collectivistic country such as Guatemala can show a strong dedication towards his/her homeland, but at the same time has a very loose relationship with his/her own family. In much of the Middle East, tribal loyalty is much more influential than religious affinity or even national pride. Here, nation is a new concept, with many countries created only after World War I and still adjusting to the artificial boundaries that were imposed by the Western colonizers. In a recent study, 62% of the Middle Eastern people expected their governments to do what is good for either Muslims or Arabs, while only 31% thought the national policies should benefit their own country.<sup>3</sup> Different identities and affinities with different co-cultures such as clans, tribes, religious sects, ethnicities, and countries make it very complex for even the individuals themselves to decide if they have weak or strong Group Attachment. Indeed, the appropriate question would be: “Which group?”

On that account, again, Hofstede’s value index is mostly useful when you have to deal with a collective unknown national audience and try to make a generalization that would be the most likely to match with the average target at the collective national level.

#### *The typical outward expression of Group Attachment in society*

One of the most salient characteristics of this value is the perception of *harmony*. Although this notion is universally important in all societies, the emphasis placed on it differs along the scale of individualistic-average-collectivistic. Harmony is attached with much more significance on the collectivistic end, showcasing a strong Group Attachment and willingness to maintain order and stability. Direct confrontation is considered rude and undesirable. The word “no” is seldom used because saying no is a confrontation. “You may be right” or “we’ll see about it” are examples of polite ways to turn down a request. In the same vein, the word “yes” should not necessarily be seen as approval but as maintenance of the communication line: “Yes, I hear you.” In this sense, Hall’s High Context strongly correlates with collectivism, since indirect communication also aims at maintaining harmony and avoiding direct confrontation.

In a group setting, collectivists are more likely to consider themselves part of a group and it can be illogical to speak up without being sanctioned by the group. In most cases, it is more advantageous to let collectivists form groups and let them speak up later as a representative of a group.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, while speaking the truth is universally important, this virtue may be more flexible if the truth turns out to possibly hurt the harmony of a group that leans on the collectivistic end of this value dimension.

The second characteristic of Group Attachment is a universal notion called *face*, understood as public dignity of a person or a group. The desire for face goes hand in hand with the desire for harmony, since losing face leads to shame and confrontation, and thus, losing harmony. Maintaining a positive face is desirable for everyone, however, it is much more important towards the collectivistic end of this value dimension where losing face is a serious personal affront. Face is also considered a social currency, for it can be lost, gained, built up, or given to others in sense of honor or prestige. In many cases, allowing someone to save face is more important than telling the truth. That is why face is extremely vulnerable at the negotiation table where just a seemingly harmless correction of someone’s statement can lead to severe loss of face and impact the whole process. Face is strongly

connected to the concept of shame. You lose face when you or someone in your in-group commits a misdeed or when your in-group is projected in a negative light.

The third characteristic of this value is how *interdependence* is perceived in each society. Although this is a universal virtue and nobody can survive without relying on a network of reciprocal support, individuals can be expected to reach different levels of interdependence. Children everywhere are expected to take care of their parents, but this is more so in cultures geared towards the collectivistic end where the son(s) remain in the house to care for senile parents for instance. Children work everywhere, but the purpose of their working can be very different, either selling their old toys, playing music to the passers-by to earn money for themselves, or taking an active role in labour work to contribute to the household's well-being. When the collectivistic family is wealthy enough, child labour may translate into a different form as they work hard to get good grades, not entirely for themselves, but for the family who supports them wholeheartedly and envisages a future where they will have a good job to return the responsibility. Interdependence is also accountable for how a person would act to satisfy his/her own will or with his/her in-group taken into consideration. Parental blessing is significant in every wedding, but it is more so in collectivistic cultures where a person is not just marrying another person but his/her whole (extended) family. Watching the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* or any Bollywood movies loaded with inter-cast tragic love stories is enough to understand how being part of a social group and taking mutual responsibility are fundamental in collectivistic societies.

Interdependence manifests itself in what each individual is supposed to contribute, and in turn, can expect to gain from the group he/she belongs to. Many businesses get it wrong to calculate buying power depending on individual income, simply because collectivistic families normally pool their resources. This circle of favor and reciprocal obligation goes far beyond immediate time and space. You may be expected to help someone because of any of the following reasons: he/she is your colleague or relative; you do not know the person but he/she is a colleague or relative of your colleague or relative; he/she helped you in the past; his/her colleague or relative helped you in the past; they will help you in the future; or they will help your colleague/relative in the future. Everyone is (potentially) in debt to everyone else and this circle of interdependence keeps the cohesion strong. Of course this happens more or less everywhere, but the intensity of favor network differs from one society to another.

The last notion we need to explore within this value dimension is *trust*. Naturally, trust is universal, and it can be further distinguished as affect-based trust (derived from the emotional bonds between group members) and cognition-based trust (built up on the knowledge, skills and performance of individuals).<sup>5</sup> The former is more associated with collectivism and the latter with individualism. This explains why in some societies, candidates who belong to an in-group which the employer knows (son of a friend of a friend; distant relative; old acquaintances, etc.) will have a better chance of being hired. The employee will act according to the interest of the in-group he/she belongs to, which may not always coincide with his or her individual interest. Outsiders looking at this incident can have different ways of judgement. The collectivists would nod their head: "He is doing the right thing. How else would we trust him if he couldn't even help his own relative?". The individualists may wonder: "He is *not* doing the right thing. How can we trust him since he is helping his own relative?"

Of course both types of trust are essential in doing business, but some societies may need a different order of trust building when compared to others. For example, some societies emphasize cognitive-

based trust as in “It doesn’t matter who you are, as long as you can do the job” or “Trust me! Everything is written down in the contract”. Some other societies do not tend to get down to business that quickly because affect-based trust has not yet been established, the in-group has not formed. Many Western businesspeople are impatient and consider this a waste of time as it takes days or even weeks for their partners to really talk about “things that matter.” The impatient individualistic businesspeople who try to force quick business with collectivist partners condemn themselves to the role of out-group members.

Again, it is crucial to bear in mind that firstly, most cultures score somewhere in between the two extremes on this value dimension. Secondly, most of these observations are the typical outward expressions of the Tree Model. The reality will confront us with numerous non-typical incidents at both collective and individual levels. A timely example is how the captain of a Korean ferry abandoned his sinking ship in April 2014 with more than 300 casualties, and later on was found busy drying his bank notes<sup>6</sup> - an incident at the individual level which contradicts sharply with how collectivistic Korea’s score is (18). Thirdly, the following table of typical outward expressions cannot act as absolute indicator of the value since we cannot count on a reversed causal relationship. For example, a collectivistic country is more likely to have lower occupation mobility, but a country with lower occupation mobility is not necessarily a collectivistic country.

#### *The origin of Group Attachment*

Many factors support the guesswork: climate, population and wealth. The latitude was the first predictor of power distance and it also plays a role in predicting the score on this value dimension. Inter-group conflicts in lower latitudes promote group dedication and attachment for survival. Countries with moderate and cold climates in higher latitudes tend to show more individualist traits where people’s survival depends more on personal initiative. Population growth is also strongly related to collectivism.

### **The third dimension: Gender Association**

#### *Gender Association according to the Inverted Pyramid model*

In our modern days, the role of men and women are largely overlapped. Men are increasingly working in occupations which traditionally are more popular with women and vice versa. Thanks to culture, we do not entirely rely on genes but develop accumulated knowledge and technology to reach the most optimal labour specification. Genetic features play less and less important roles in deciding what a person can do. However, our psychology is still very clearly influenced by the dichotomy of men-women, to the extent that despite the more convergent reality, the cultural traits we tend to assign to each gender are more divergent. Competition and aggression for example are usually attributed to the masculine side, and caring or loving are to the feminine side.

That is to say *Gender* is never too far from our universal concern, and we associate different traits of gender as masculine or feminine. We should not mistake this value for Gender Role, which is the outward expression in the Tree Model, indicating how a *man* or a *woman* is expected to do. For this reason, we change the original term used by Hofstede (Masculinity-Femininity) for Gender Association. It indicates how masculine or feminine *virtues* are attached to behaviour and motives. Gender Association as a value does not always take gender into account, but more often than not, the cultural traits that are stereotypically associated with a man or a woman. Thus, a man can be associated with feminine gender traits such as calm and submissive, a woman with masculine traits

such as determined and unruly. Even a social movement such as “going green” can be associated with feminine orientation. Every aspect of a society, not only its people, can be associated with masculine and feminine traits: a policy, an industry, a court case, a job, a text book, etc. The definition offered by Hofstede looks at the role of men and women, and therefore can be misleading. Further, Gender Association differs from Power Distance and Group Attachment in a sense that it does not deal with social interaction between people but rather the drive and motives for their actions.

Universally, a surviving community needs a combination of both masculinity and femininity. However, at the collective level of the Inverted Pyramid model, the mixture can be varied, ranging from high level of association with femininity to high level of association with masculinity, and of course everywhere in between. At the individual level, it goes without saying that a person is never completely masculine or feminine, especially a person of modern society where he/she will surely need both qualities to excel.

The index of different countries on the collective value of Gender Association (note that Hofstede uses the term Masculinity) can be found at [geert-hofstede.com](http://geert-hofstede.com). The higher the score, the more important masculinity associated traits are for a country. Again, you can see that most countries do not score too far from the average, which warns us against the risk of simplifying cultures and stereotyping them around the two dichotomized polars, making them either masculine or feminine. We should not mistake extremes (which are described for the sake of clarity and contrast) for the reality.

Some scores can be confusing, for example the Arab world and Pakistani score 53 and 50, respectively. Both societies are famous for very conservative gender division, yet positioned midway on the scale. A more questioning case is Russia who leans completely on the feminine end (36). To explain these scores, apart from non-representative pool of participants as was the case earlier, Gender Association should be understood from a few different angles, which will be discussed in the next session.

#### *The typical outward expression of Gender Association in society*

The outward expression of this value can be seen in two categories: gender role and social activities.

Firstly, when it comes to *gender roles*, femininity associated societies have feminine traits prevailing among both men and women, with male roles tending to overlap with female roles: Both men and women are expected to be modest and caring; more men are doing traditionally female professions such as nursing and secretarial jobs; more women are taking traditional male professions such as police and soldiers, etc. Emancipation for feminine societies means both genders can break free, liberated with choice. Note that even the “masculine” jobs in this society can be executed in a feminine way, as both men and women are expected to get the jobs done as such. Police in The Netherlands, for example, are famous to be kind and considering, even to an extent that they have been mockingly called “social workers.”<sup>7</sup> In short, femininity has nothing to do with the kind of jobs, but how a job is done. Both men and women in feminine societies lean towards femininity.

In masculinity associated societies, women tend to split into two groups: (1) they stick to traditional female jobs and behavior; and (2) they break the barrier, spreading to fields that are traditionally male dominated. Group number 1 thus has very distinct social gender roles which require them to be modest and caring. A common image in American movies shows the girls as cheerleaders for sport matches played by the boys. In group number two are women who move on to liberate their career

choice and take the men's jobs. More often than not, when they take traditional male professions, they also adopt the masculine manner of conduct: competitive, dominant, and self-reliant. Look no further than Margaret Thatcher for an example. In short, women in masculine societies are either feminine or masculine, while the men are expected to be only masculine. Emancipation in societies towards this end means liberation for the women in group number 2 and not the men in general. Many of them would probably be laughed at if they express the wish to be a kindergarten teacher.

Secondly, when it comes to *social activities*, each society can be associated with more feminine or masculine virtues. In general, modesty is crucially a universal norm, but the emphasis placed on this norm is so much stronger in feminine cultures. People downplay aggressive behavior and attempts at excelling and standing out. The Dutch, for example, love to ridicule an assertive person with their favorite saying: "Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg," roughly translated as "Act normal, because being normal is mad enough." Boasting about achievement is no culture's monopoly, it is just more so in some and less in others. Masculine societies often show "the bigger the better"- sort of mentality. Do not mistake this with being proud. Everyone has a strong sense of pride, but masculinity and femininity deal with how one expresses his/her pride: loudly blowing one's trumpet or modestly mentioning the achievement as if it is just the most normal thing to do.

Similarly, competitiveness is universally needed in all societies, however, it is more of an essential characteristic in some masculine cultures, typically manifested through the spirit of "let the best win". A masculine educational system would make the best student the norm. A masculine employer would want to see a candidate with an impressive CV and bold promises. A masculine job seeker would place strong emphasis on high salary, promotion and job opportunities. Reaching towards an extreme level, a masculine attitude can lead to aggression, the use corporal punishment or violence. On the contrary, a feminine education would make an average student a norm. A feminine employer would prefer a candidate who does not sell him/herself too hard and who is down-to-earth. A feminine job seeker would prioritize a pleasant work atmosphere with a good balance between work and life. Feminine virtues also nurture willingness of teamwork, discussion, negotiation and compromises instead of resorting to assertiveness or violence.

Another important manifestation of this value dimension is how a society reacts to its citizen's wellbeing. All governments have policies on environment, services, education, animal right, and social welfare but these issues will get more of the attention from a feminine government than a masculine one. An important note here to distinguish femininity from collectivism: Caring and fighting for the wellbeing of an "in-group" is collectivism, while caring and fighting for the wellbeing of "everyone" is femininity. The love of a father to his family is an act of collectivism and not femininity. The vast fortune of Bill Gates being donated to various funds and organizations is an act of femininity and not collectivism (although we can also argue that if you focus on the incredible amount of money itself being openly donated, what Bill did can also be seen as an act of masculinity, showing how successful he is in order to make such an incredible thing happen).

All in all, Scandinavian countries are the most typical examples of feminine societies. Tax payment can be shockingly high in this part of the world—in Denmark, this can mean up to half of the total salary for an ordinary middle class employee. Same-sex marriage was first legalized in The Netherlands and the country has the world's only legal Red Light district. In Europe, a working person has up to 30 days of paid annual vacation days and in The Netherlands, many executive men work part-time in an attempt to balance working and private life.<sup>8</sup> In Sweden, a new gender-neutral

personal pronoun “hen” was created as an alternative to the gender-specific female “hon” and male “han”, completely avoiding the cumbersome inclusive form of he/she as we are using<sup>9</sup>. Of course, it would be wrong to assume that everything in these countries is confined within the feminine virtues. The score index shows the average of all things together, and more often than not, isolated incidents or observation (the easy-to-change outward expressions of the Tree Model) have a non-typical value. For example, some masculine countries such as Slovakia (110), Hungary (88), Poland (64), and Germany (64) offer the world’s longest period of protected parental leave – a non-typical feminine policy at the collective level<sup>10</sup>. That is to say, again, that the following table should be used with care, since much of the observation is merely the outward expression of the value and not a direct indicator of the collective national value in itself.

#### *The origin of masculinity - femininity*

No strong correlations have been found with outside factors which could explain why some countries have dominant femininity and some have dominant masculinity. Feminine cultures are somewhat more likely in colder climates, suggesting that an equal partnership between men and women improves the chances of survival and population growth in these harsh climates.

### **The fourth dimension: Uncertainty Avoidance**

#### *Uncertainty Avoidance according to the Inverted Pyramid model*

Trying to predict and avoid harm is universal and part of basic human instinct. Fear is the result of both strongly innate feeling and social learning. In general, we have several inborn fears, for example the fear of falling and the fear caused by loud noises. These fears are genetically coded in our body and it is a healthy emotion since it helps keep us from harm. Most other fears are learned from the culture of our life, what is good and what is bad, what is safe and what is dangerous. Our fear may have an object (fear of the dark) or no specific object. The latter is called *Uncertainty*.

The best way to avoid Uncertainty is using rules. And thus, the value of *Uncertainty Avoidance* is basically about “how rules are imposed in a society in order to deal with ambiguity and the unknown”. There are two types of rules: *institutional rules* focus on formal regulations, written laws, structured guidelines or organized procedures. Examples of institutional rules are everywhere around us, from the way we keep a work diary of appointments to how a legal case is proceeded. The second type of rules is *social rule*, which are informally agreed-upon codes of conducts or operation. In general, social rules are values, virtues, rules of morality and motives, such as “In what way you should communicate with a senior person” or “How tolerant you are towards a radical idea”...etc.

At the collective layer of the Inverted Pyramid model, cultures vary in levels as to how they are likely to avoid uncertainty and using rules to deal with the unknown. Some cultures tend to adopt many rules, some others less, which lead to two orientations: strong and weak Uncertainty Avoidance.

There is a cautious point we need to bear in mind: A culture can have two contrasting value orientations when it comes to institutional and social rules. The Dutch, for example, are more likely to score high on institutional rules with their rigid system of bureaucracy, industrial and linear mentality of work processing, etc. However, when it comes to social rules, it is safe to say that they tend to lean towards weak Uncertainty Avoidance. If you are a person of high Power Distance, and you treat a Dutch elderly person with extraordinary respect (who is very likely low on Power Distance), the result of this conduct mismatch is absolutely not a disaster. Similarly, you can react either liberally or conservatively to a radical idea without being harshly condemned by others. Social

rules are weak when they are more flexible, accepting and lenient to accommodate different rules. On this account, the score of 54 for the Dutch seems like an average of their strong tendency on institutional rules and weak tendency on social rules.

Now let's focus on another country for comparison. China scores 30 on this value dimension but that does not mean it is low Uncertainty Avoiding on both types of rules. Known for their flexibility at producing and manufacturing, the Chinese may score low on institutional rules, but their society is famous for rigid cultural codes of conduct. There, the unwritten morality in communicating with an elderly is high Power Distance. Unlike The Netherlands where social rules may be flexible, if you treat an elderly person with low Power Distance, you are very likely to get in trouble. Social rules are strong when they are strict, exclusive, and rigorous. On this account, the score of China seems to be skewed with its index indicating Uncertainty Avoidance on institutional rules and not social rules.

One odd case of this index is Singapore (8) – a country that exercises one of the world's strictest systems of laws and punishment. It bans selling chewing gums and littering can be fined up to \$1000<sup>11</sup>. The mixture of Chinese, Malaysian, and Indian ethnicities may allow certain degree of tolerance towards social rules, but knowing that all these three cultures strongly adhere to rigid social behaviours makes it almost impossible that Singapore scores low on social rules. Again, this is an obvious example that warns us against the tendency to see culture as statics. Index such as this should act as supporting instruments for strategic or initial planning in macro-projects but analysis has to be very contextual and specific when dealing with the non-typical outward expressions and complexity of a myriad of cases, scenarios, and situations at both the collective and individual levels.

The index of different countries on the collective value of Uncertainty Avoidance can be found at [geert-hofstede.com](http://geert-hofstede.com)

#### *The typical outward expression of Uncertainty Avoidance in society*

Similar to other values, the degree of Uncertainty Avoidance is built up during childhood. A strong Uncertainty Avoiding family will teach their children clear and strong rules to judge everything around them, with little room for doubt or relativism. Staying safe is ideal, and what is different is dangerous. A weak Uncertainty Avoiding family will be more prepared to give children the benefit of the doubt to unknown situations, people and ideas, allowing a wide range of personal interpretation as to what this means in a given case. Being flexible is ideal, and what is different is curious.

One of the most salient features of this value dimension is how *expertise* is perceived and evaluated. Strong Uncertainty Avoiding students want a good teacher who clearly gives them criteria of how to get a high grade, who organizes learning in a highly structured format of precise objectives, detailed assignments and strict timetables, who shows he/she is an expert and has all the answers. Weak Uncertainty Avoiding students may tolerate a teacher who says "I don't know", who evaluates a student by the amount of well-argued disagreement and not accuracy, who organizes open-ended learning situations with vague objectives, broad assignments and flexible timetables. Similarly, a strong Uncertainty Avoiding customer would prefer a sale approach that emphasizes historically trust-worthy quality judged by formal experts, attractive insurance policies, and excellent customer care. A weak Uncertainty Avoiding customer would not mind a newly launched product of similar approach with some humor and self-exploring to get to know what they potentially will buy.

Another interesting outward expression of this value is vested in how *innovation* is associated with Uncertainty Avoidance. It is debated that weak Uncertainty Avoidant people are more likely to

stimulate basic innovations as they maintain a greater tolerance towards different ideas. On the other hand, they seem to be at a disadvantage in developing these basic innovations towards full implementation, as such implementation usually demands a considerable amount of detail and punctuality. There is a strong case for synergy between innovating and implementing cultures, the first supplying ideas, the second developing them further. Similarly, in a project, the initial phase may need weak Uncertainty Avoiding team members to boost trouble shooting, brainstorming, creative thinking, vision forming, but in order to transform these ideas into a concrete product, strong Uncertainty Avoiding members are needed. The secret of many successful stories behind a strong reliable product is the capacity to move from Uncertainty Avoidance (not knowing what is going to happen – no specific object) to Risk management (knowing what is the possible risk with a specific object). By predicting as many as possible ways the product can go wrong, changing an unfamiliar risk to a known risk, strong Uncertainty Avoidant producers can be pro-active in overseeing a product's life, and for each of the possibilities that can go wrong, a solution is ready to be implemented.

On the philosophical and religious level, strong Uncertainty Avoidance also has a tendency to a belief in absolute *Truth*: “There can only be one Truth and we have it”. The search for this ultimate Truth leads to both positive development such as high achievement in philosophy and intellectual ideologies, but can also get bogged down to radicalism. Religious hard-liners are examples of those who strongly believe that their way of understanding God is the only correct way. This tendency runs high in monotheistic religions such as Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Bahaism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The world has witnessed endless rivalries among the last three sibling Abrahamic faiths who all worship one God, believe in one book (but each of them thinks their book is the pure version of God's words), and follow one set of rules in correct and moral conduct (each of them believes that their own set of rules is the only way to gain God's pleasure and enter heaven).

Religious conflicts are less likely to happen among polytheist worshipers who see the universe in a less absolute paradigm: there are many Gods, semi-Gods, deities, and natural objects with spiritual souls; there are many books, manuscripts, continuously evolving to relate with reality; there are no fixed sets of spiritual rules and no absolute or sure way to secure heaven (many religions do not even talk about heaven and creator). To a certain extent, this may explain the low scores among Asian cultures that are deeply under the influence of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, since these are not technically religions but more philosophies of life. For people from these cultures, there is no need to seek the absolute Truth. Life is an open-ended situation where good Virtues are what matter.

### *The origins of Uncertainty Avoidance*

The grouping of countries suggests that the roots of differences go back as far as the Roman Empire, 2000 years ago. In East Asia it assumed roots in the even older Chinese Empire. Both empires left a legacy of large power distance. However, the heirs of the Roman Empire score on the strong uncertainty avoidance side while the Chinese-speaking countries score much lower. Both empires were powerful centralized states which supported a culture pattern in their populations prepared to take order from the center. The two empires differed, however, in one important respect. The Roman Empire developed a unique system of codified laws which in principle applied to all people with citizen status regardless of origin. The Chinese Empire never knew this concept of law. The main continuous principle of Chinese administration has been described as “government of man” in

contrast to the Roman idea of “government by law”. Chinese judges were supposed to be guided by broad general principles, like those attributed to Confucianism as a philosophy of life.

### **The fifth value dimension: Time Orientation**

#### *Time Orientation according to the Inverted Pyramid model*

Human societies have always been organized within space and *Time*. The former is related to the relationship between human and nature, a value dimension we will explore in the next chapter within the framework of Trompenaars. The latter focuses on how we perceive and vision our life activities across the time spectrum. *Time Orientation* is a universal value that relates to how we see the influence of the past, presence and future in our life: How far we plan ahead; how quick we expect our result and rewards; how important is saving and spending, etc.

At the collective level, time spectrum exerts different degree of influence in different societies, creating two orientations on this value dimension: short- and long-term Time Orientation. In a nutshell, *a focus on the past and the present* would lead more towards short-term Time Orientation, and *a focus on the future* will lead more towards long-term Time Orientation.

This value dimension is inspired by Confucianism, a philosophy of life originated in ancient China. It focuses on virtues with incredibly strong emphasis on acquiring skills and education, working hard, not spending more than necessary, being patient and persevering, and being well prepared for the future. These fundamental virtues play as cornerstones of life in all the societies under the influence of Confucianism: China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. Unsurprisingly, these are also the countries with a tendency of leaning towards long-term Time Orientation. In the index table, the higher the score, the more important future exerts a significant influence in people’s life.

The most significant element of this value dimension is how people perceive *future planning*. We are not taking about how well they plan or how organized their plan is, but how far ahead a future is envisaged and prepare. A short-term Time Oriented family would reward their children immediately for a straight A. A long-term Time Oriented family would teach their children that a bright future with good opportunity of employment is the ultimate reward which they need to keep their eyes on, not a toy they can immediately have. Average Time Oriented parents would save money in the bank for their children’s education. Long-term Time Oriented parents would go further with sacrificing their lifetime for manual hard work in the hope that their offspring would excel (a very well-researched case among American immigrant families from Asian background). In the same vein, a short-term Time Oriented company may adopt the business approach of reap-and-run for immediate profit, while a long-term Time Oriented company would be ready to accept various business cost and loss to keep their eyes on the future prize. Customer behaviour is also deeply influenced by this value, with long-term Time Oriented buyers being thrift and strategic spending while short-term Time Oriented buyers are more attracted to trends and immediate needs. The option for long-term Time Orientation also requires a sacrifice at short-term problems. China has been dealing with serious issues such as women trafficking as a result of the long-term “One-child policy” in order to curb its exploding population<sup>12</sup>. In comparison, we can find many examples of how a person or an organization chooses to solve or focus on the symptoms (short-term) and bypass the roots of the problem (long-term).

The second significant element on this value dimension is the notion of *pragmatism*. A short-term Time Oriented society places an immense emphasis on tradition while a long-term Time Oriented society tends to respect tradition but also allows adaptation. Long-term minded people care more about “what works” while short-term minded people care more about “what is right”. This brings many polytheist Asian societies into focus since they walk a fine line between a great respect for tradition and a tendency to adjust and change. The strong interpretable philosophical nature of their belief (Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism) makes it possible to escape the rigid paths of right and wrong based on specific rituals, rules and actions, allowing people to replace fixed regulations and laws with the importance of purpose. “Becoming a Buddhist” is hardly a goal, but Buddhism, or any other philosophies, should be seen as means of “becoming a good person”. This is the reason why a majority of people in Asia would register themselves as “atheist” but in reality, they are more likely to practice a combination of several religions. Their goal is not becoming a believer, but using selective parts of different religions to become a good person.

In comparison, societies that have a strong tendency to respect tradition but also inherit a strong practice of rigid monotheism would not have the balance that some Asian societies enjoy. “What is right” is much more important than “what works”, and with an unfortunate mixture of mismanagement, it can lead to a gradual collapse. After the period of Golden Age when the Muslim world was advanced (9-13th AD), Islamic countries withdrew into traditionalism. Concerned with the absolute Truth and the strict adherence of religious laws which left no room for pragmatic adjustment, many opinion leaders in the Muslim world seem to interpret modern technology and Western ideas as a threat rather than an opportunity. The recent revival of radicalism in Islam illustrates this point, showing how obsessive with tradition radical followers can be, even to the smallest detail of how to grow a beard, how to dress, how to eat or clean the teeth, exactly the way the prophet Muhammad used to do in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

However, reality is never neat and tidy, since non-typical outward expressions and values are always constant at both collective and individual level. That is to say, you should not be surprised to see some Chinese companies being more interested in reaping quick benefits rather than building a long-term reputation, or how the Norwegian government (score 44) is in fact extremely long-term minded when dealing with the gigantic natural gas resource the country possesses.

## **Values at large**

### *The interactive nature of values*

We have discussed Hofstede’s value dimensions and those from Hall separately. However, it is important to note that in any single incident, several values are usually at play, interacting with each other, enhancing or downplaying each other. When we, for example, analyse the horrific trend of more than 10,000 suicides in Japan, Hong Kong and Korea during and after the Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998, we should take into account many values other than just the most dominant dimension of Group Attachment which indicates the terrible consequence of face loss. Strong Uncertainty Avoidance and masculine Gender Association are clearly significant values which can be used to explain the motives of these suicides.

### *The global change of values*

In the first chapter, we have touched lightly on the issue of values changing at the global scale. All societies seem to evolve very fast compared to themselves in the past. However, when put in a frame for comparison, all societies tend to move forwards heading to more or less similar directions, which makes the gaps among different societies tend to stay similar. That is why Hofstede's index, although conducted a long time ago, still holds significant value until today.

So if we are moving forward more or less together, which orientation in each value dimension are we, as human race, heading to? The long history of triumph for democracy and the availability of knowledge would hint at the continuous development towards lower Power Distance. When poverty is a history and each individual gets more access to self-esteem and actualization, we can also expect the on-going tendency of weak Group Attachment or individualism. The lack of resources and the extreme vicinity of interpersonal-intergroup communication would surely pull us together and the more efficient way to solve problem of our co-existence tend to reject violence but a more nature-friendly, cooperative attitude of feminine Gender Association. In a world that is increasingly more complex, strong Uncertainty Avoidance will gradually give way to weak Uncertainty Avoidance, enabling individuals to flexibly cope with different ideas, work places, people, and expectation. Similarly, long-term Time Orientation will show its winning card if we are to aim at a more sustainable and mutual co-existence.

**Summary**

- Hofstede presents 5 value dimensions that focus on the collective level of the Pyramid model. The point system of measurement gives powerful comparative perspectives when compared with Hall's dimensions.
- Although cultures can be analysed according to bi-polar dimensions, it is crucial to remember that all societies share more or less similar universal concerns and values dimensions. They place different level of importance on these concerns and values. Power and Power Distance are universal concern and value, but each society deals with Power by adhering to different levels of Power Distance: High or Low. The following graphic summarizes Hofstede's values system in the framework of the Tree model, as presented in this chapter:

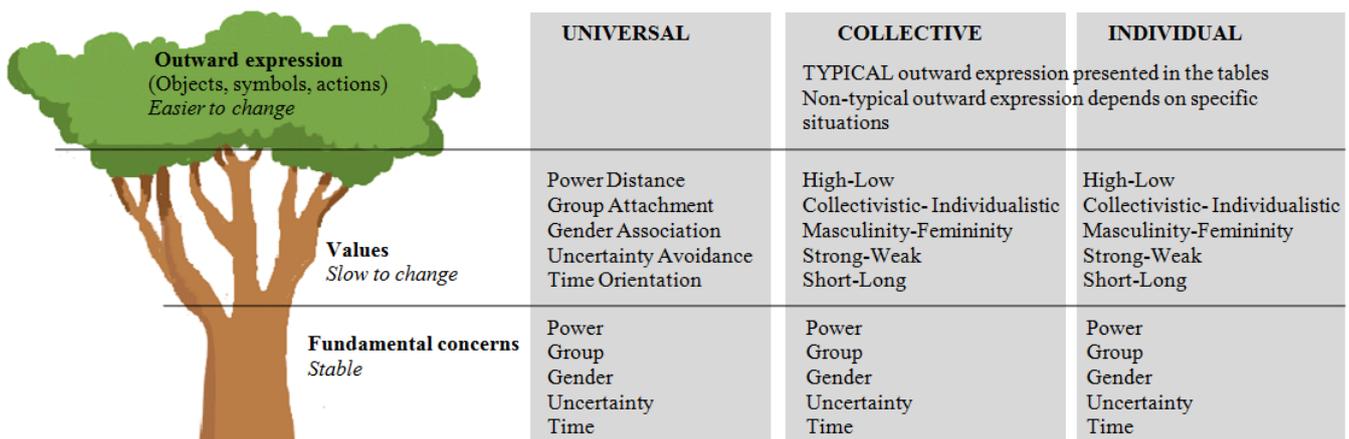


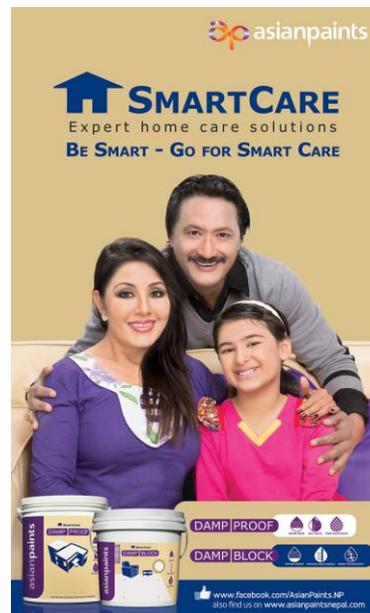
Figure 2. Hofstede value system according to the Tree model and the Inverted Pyramid Model

- There are always non-typical outward expressions and values in each society. Even the most feminine society will have endless masculine symbols, words, and actions at both the collective and the individual level.

## Activities and Discussion ideas

1. The strong economic development of several Asian countries (Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong – the 5 Asian dragons) has been largely attributed to a specific set of cultural values that helped to boost these economies from inside. Discuss with your group members and come up with a list of collective value orientations that may have contributed to the success stories of the 5 Asian dragons.
2. Look at the following advertisements and discuss with your group members if they are going to be successful in your home country. Explain why and why not. Pay attention to the dominant collective values.

Choose a country of your choice as a group, and brainstorm how to adjust the advertisement in order to successfully launch these products in the new market of the country that you have chosen.



3. Analyze this case according to the Inverted Pyramid model: “In China, public concerns about corruption are often expressed on the Internet since mainstream media is heavily censored by the authority. Online services have helped people quickly and anonymously share information. Within minutes, a single Web entry, or post, can be resent thousands, even hundreds of thousands of times. Chinese officials are worried about the power of online micro-blogging services, called Weibos. Facebook is banned. Recently, China’s government announced new rules for the Internet. Bloggers can receive severe jail sentences if they are found guilty of spreading unconfirmed reports online”.

- At the collective level, China has the value index of: 80/20/66/30/118. Are the outward expressions in this case (the words and actions of the bloggers and the authority) typical or non-typical of the averaged Chinese collective values? Please explain.
- At the universal level, we have a list of 5 concerns that all societies share (Power, Group, Gender, Uncertainty, and Time). The concerns reflected in this case are surely shared by your own home country. Discuss how your country would deal with them.

4. Analyze this case according to the Inverted Pyramid model: “The Watergate scandal was a political scandal during the 1970s in the U.S. It was caused by the break-in of the Democratic National Committee’s Headquarter. The Nixon administration attempted to cover up its involvement. When interviewed and cornered by the Australian journalist, Frost, he was said to yell aggressively: “No – when the President does it, it is NOT illegal”.

- At the collective level, The US has the value index of: 40/91/62/46/26. At the individual level, are the outward expressions in this case (the words and action of Nixon) typical or non-typical of the averaged American collective values? Please explain.
- At the universal level, we have a list of 5 concerns that all societies share. The concerns reflected in this case are surely shared by your own home country. Discuss how your country would deal with them.

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**Citation: Chicago bibliography style**

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