

CROSS CULTURAL ANALYSIS IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Culture has been identified as a significant determinant of ethical attitudes of business management in case of international business. This research study explains about five cultural dimensions such as individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation, in business management among the nations. Research results indicate that national culture has a strong influence on business management. In addition to national culture, general attitudes of the respondents towards business ethics are related to their personal integrity; their attitudes towards questionable business practices are related to the external environment and business characteristics as well as to the personal integrity of the company. Preparing the manager or company personnel who is responsible for international business or collaboration of that company, to face the challenges of globalization when they enter business world, is one of the crucial business strategy to withstand in the market. The best way to develop this ability is to increase their cultural intelligence so that they can adapt and perform effectively with different kinds of environments. Mainly 4 different approaches are used to understand the cultural diversity among difference nations and they are lecturing, reading literature, sharing sessions, and field trip. Among these 4, field trip is the most essential and effective way to learn and adopt with this cultural diversity.

Keywords: Cultural dimension, international Business, Business Management, Attitudes, Business ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Research in the area of business ethics has been increasing during the last three decades. Empirical research on business ethics is triggered due to rise in conflicts in the business corporations. There is phenomenal growth in the globalization of business and corresponding increase in ethical conflicts faced by multinational firms like Nestle (infant food formula controversy), Lockheed (problem of bribery), Union Carbide (Bhopal tragedy), Mitsubishi (sexual harassment), Ford Bridgestone/Firestone (tire crisis), Royal Dutch Shell (environmental controversy), Nike (sweatshop conditions in Southeast Asia), Enron, McLane, Adelphia, Tyco, Qwest, Global Crossing, and WorldCom (accounting irregularities and fraud), Johnson and Johnson (falsification of data to cover lapses in the manufacture of Pérez) and McDonald (exploitation of workers and human health). These conflicts have ignited research interest in international business ethics, particularly on the influence of culture.

Culture influences the behaviour and mental outlook of a particular group of people. Culture helps people to conceptualize and make representation to the world. Culture includes the idea of what life is and what life should be, the standards for

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what is right and what is wrong and definitions of what men and women are and should be. It is a shared set of meanings and standards by which the members of a society regulate their lives. Culture plays a significant role in the ethical attitudes of a person.

The cultural issues in international business and marketing arise out of cultural diversity among different nations.

Culture is an independent variable, which influences the organization's ethical attitudes and behavior and thus affects international business. Culture includes an extensive number of dimensions and values. Two countries can be closely similar in a particular cultural dimension and dissimilar in other dimensions.

Culture is an abstraction and not an entity to be measured. To facilitate cross-cultural comparisons, one needs to identify the dimensions common to all cultures, particularly in the area of business. For the operationalization of culture, Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been widely accepted in the international business field and have been repeatedly validated over time. "Cultural analysis is always incomplete ... the more deeply it goes, the less complete it is".

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Culture, Values, Attitudes and Ethics in Business

Culture: Anthropologists define culture as "an ideational system," it refers to "what humans learn, not what they do and make". In Geertz', "culture interpretation of human beings experiences and guides their action". The idea here is that culture has to conceptualize and represent the world. Culture sets "standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting". These ideas provide standards for what is right and what is wrong. It becomes more complicated when cross-cultural comparative analysis is made general; it becomes utterly futile and meaningless to compare cultures. Meaningful comparison between and among cultures can be made only on similar standards of human conduct.

Values: Values are the core of culture. They endure beliefs about important goals in life, and serve as guiding principles. They serve as criteria for determining what is good and bad, for choosing between available alternatives. Though values may change in response to major changes in technology, economy and politics, they are fairly stable. People from different societies hold different values with varying degrees of intensity, relevance and direction. Each culture has its own value system, in the hierarchical ordering of values in terms of their importance.

Attitudes: Attitudes are learned predispositions. Culture is one of the main source for the formation of attitudes. Other sources are generation effects, social role, laws, mass media, military units, prisons, school, family, parents, peers and reference

groups and direct experience. People raised in a particular culture acquire certain attitudes, even without questioning the validity of these attitudes.

Culture and business ethical attitudes: Ethics is a systematic approach to moral judgments based on reason, analysis, synthesis, and reflection; business ethics is the application of ethical principles to issues that arise in the conduct of business activity. Business ethics is an application of general ethical principles to actual practical problems in the area of business such as dishonesty in advertising, bribery and other malpractices to determine what is considered to be appropriate and in conformity with the general ethical standards.

Culture influences ethical decision-making both directly and indirectly by interacting with other variables. Bartels (1967) was the first to recognize the importance of the role of culture in ethical decision-making in marketing. He “contrasts the cultures of different societies which produce different expectations and become expressed in the dissimilar ethical standards of those societies”. According to him, cultural factors such as “law, respect for individuality, nature of power and authority, rights of property, concept of deity, relation of the individual to the state, national identity and loyalty, values, customs and mores, state of the arts.” are the most basic determinants of ethical standards of a society.

Cross-cultural studies in business ethics: Cross-cultural studies focus on investigating the relationship between culture and business ethics. It tests the hypothesis that there are cross-cultural differences in business ethical beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of people involved in or associated with business. Most of these cross-cultural empirical investigations study the respondents’ business ethical attitudes, behavior etc., based on respondents’ answers to questions on certain unwholesome business practices such as giving or receiving “gifts” or “gratuities”, software piracy and dishonesty in advertising. Many of them focus on the ethical perception of the respondents by examining their responses as to whether specific problem situations present ethical dilemmas.

Based on the above studies the first hypothesis is made

Hypothesis 1: There are no significant differences in the cultural attitudes in business management in international business.

Hofstede’s Cultural Typology

Hofstede who is in the field of international management develops an empirically validated typology. He identified four dimensions through a combination of multivariate statistics and theoretical reasoning.

- **Individualism vs Collectivism:** In individualism the interest of societies is lost; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her family. In collectivism the interests of the group prevails over the interests of the individual; harmony with the social environment is a key virtue.

- **Large or small power distance:** Power distance explains the way a society handles inequality among its members. It is the extent to which the members of family, school and community and places of work “within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”.
- **Strong or Weak Uncertainty Avoidance:** Uncertainty avoidance is “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain and unknown situations”. Societies alleviate this uncertainty by resorting to the domains of technology, in adopting stricter codes of conduct and rituals.
- **Masculinity vs. femininity:** Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are sharply differentiated. Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, focused on material success, while women are supposed to be tender and concerned with quality of life.

Long-term or Short-term Orientation: Long-term or Short-term Orientation known as Confucian dynamism was discovered by Michael Bond in 1980s. Long-term orientation characterizes cultures which place more importance on values associated with future orientation while short-term orientation cultures place more importance on values associated with past and present orientation.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and one’s ethical attitude. More specifically,

- The business management with a high individualism tend to look at business practices such as gift-giving, nepotism, software piracy and sharing insider information as more unethical
- The business management with a high power distance score take superiors’ orders, whether ethical or unethical, more seriously; they are less likely to challenge directives than the business managers in countries with a low power distance score.
- The business management in countries with a high score in uncertainty avoidance focuses more on legality than on ethicality of actions. They tend to perceive business practices which are done ‘legally’, such as export of harmful products, marketing of products that are injurious to health, and firing of older employees.
- The business management with a high masculinity scores are less likely to perceive ethical problems in practices such as firing older employees, dishonesty in advertising, damage to the environment, and marketing products that are injurious to health than the business managers in countries with high femininity scores.
- The business management in short-term oriented countries perceives practices such as profiting at the expense of damage to the environment as less unethical than the business management in long-term oriented countries.

OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ETHICAL ATTITUDES

There are other factors besides culture, which influence company's attitudes. Researchers investigated the influence of personal characteristics like nationality, religion, employment, personal beliefs and values, situational factors like referent groups, codes of conduct and type of ethical decisions, organizational factors like size and industry factors (industry type and business competitiveness), attitudes and conduct.

In this research, besides the influence of culture, the effects of the personal characteristics, religion, employment, organizational factors - organization size - and industry factors - industry type - level of competition are investigated.

Personal Characteristics

Religion: Religion and culture are interrelated constructs. Like culture, religion affects the value system of its adherents. Religion provides the reason for being ethical and the points of reference for evaluating conduct. Since all religious traditions have some perspective on business practices, religious affiliation play a significant role in an individual's business-ethical attitudes.

Employment: Managers from certain functional areas like marketing have more chances to face cultural problems and dilemmas than managers involved in manufacturing operations.

Organizational Factors

Organization Size: According to Murphy (1992) organizational size is one of the best predictors of ethical conduct. Vitell and Festervand (1987) opine that small firms might be under greater pressure to engage in unethical behaviors in case of cultural diversity problems to remain competitive. It was confirmed that the respondents from smaller firms believed that unethical practices were common in their industries. According to Veit and Michael (1996), investment analysts employed by smaller firms seek high ethical standards in case of cultural issues. Dalton and Kesner (1988) showed that large organizations were more likely to indulge in unethical behavior in case of cultural diversity problems than small firms.

Industry Factors

Level of Competition and Industry Type: Level of Competition and Industry Type are closely related variables. Sethi and Sama (1998) opine that the cultural diversity problems determine opportunity and propensity to engage in ethical or unethical behavior depending upon the market-competitive factors. Hegarty and Sims (1978) found that competitiveness tends to decrease cultural behavior. However, Dubinsky and Ingram (1984) did not find any such relationship in their study.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between cultural attitudes of the respondents and their personal characteristics and organizational factors.

Research Methodology

Research design: The cross-cultural survey research method is used to study the relationship between culture and how it influences the business. Primary data were collected from business managers participating in executive programs in selected business schools around the world, using a questionnaire designed specifically for cross-cultural research.

Culture or Nation as Unit of Analysis: An important issue in cross-cultural comparative studies is whether to take the nation or a particular culture within a nation as the unit of analysis. Culture in general refers to a group of people (societies). "Nation", however, is a political concept. A nation is a created entity, with political boundaries arbitrarily drawn. Consequently, the same culture may be found in more than one nation. For example, in both Rwanda and Burundi the Hutu constitute the vast majority and the Tutsi form the traditional aristocratic minority. A nation may also contain many cultures. For example, India, with a population of 950 million, has hundreds of cultures with 267 distinct languages and dialects.

The choice of the unit of analysis (culture or nation) depends essentially on the focus and purpose of the research. In this research "nation" is taken as the unit of analysis, because "nation" provides a common political and legal environment within which business managers operate. The dominant approach in management today is also to equate "nation" with "culture", and study samples from nations to make cross-cultural comparisons.

Choice of Nations: Three nations (India, Korea and the United States) were given more concentration among other countries for this cross-cultural research using a systematic sampling procedure. Systematic sampling, a procedure "in which cultures are selected in a systematic, theory-guided fashion" is recommended for the selection of cultures in cross-cultural comparative studies where cultural variation is deliberately sought for meaningful comparisons. Cultures are chosen in such a way that they represent different values and cultural dimensions. Since we are comparing Hofstede's cultural dimensions with ethical attitudes, it would be relevant to use systematic sampling in the selection of cultures, which exhibit significant differences in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The United States, India and South Korea have been chosen based on the results of earlier studies, which have confirmed significant cultural differences among these countries in practically all of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. For example, in Hofstede's (1980) study, the United States is ranked the most individualistic country, while India and South Korea are judged to be more collectivist oriented. The United States and India are found to be more masculine, whereas South Korea is more feminine. Korea and India are

long-term oriented cultures, while the United States is a short-term oriented culture. Korea exhibits more power distance than India and the United States. In addition, each of the countries chosen for this research has its own tradition and history. Economically, they are far apart from each other. They also represent different stages of human development

Mainly these three countries are concentrated more due to the reason that they have more no of cultures and languages (cultural diversity) within it.

- **India:** India is predominantly a Hindu country, with 82.4% of its one billion populations adhering to Hinduism. Hindi is the official language of the country, spoken by about 30% of the population. The Indian Constitution also recognizes 17 regional languages. English is an associate language for many official purposes. India got the 12th rank among the world's largest economies, with a per capita income of \$460 (for 2001).
- **South Korea:** Korean is the official language of the country. Mahayana Buddhism and Chundo Kyo are the traditional religions of Korea, and none of them is predominant now. At present 37.9% of the population (17.4 millions) are Christians. Korea got the 13th rank among the world's largest economies, with a per capita income of \$9,400.
- **United States of America:** The U.S. has the largest economy in the world with per capita income of \$34,870 and it is the home for 153 of the 500 world's largest corporations. Christianity is the predominant religion, with 85.3% of its population (P.270) as per Maria Joseph Christie et al. Other major religions are Judaism (2.1%) and Islam (1.9%). English is the official language.

Instrument for the Study

An instrument, which measures uniformly across cultures, without cultural bias, is imperative for the validity of any cross-cultural study. The most highly regarded solution to avoid cultural bias suggested by researchers is de-centering – a process in which researchers from different cultures are involved in developing research questions. In the present research, experts with bilingual skills from all three cultures were involved in the design and the forward and backward translation of the questionnaire to avoid any cultural bias.

The instrument consists of three sections. The first section is composed of 20 content questions from the Value Survey Module developed by Geert Hofstede to compare culturally determined values between and among people of two or more countries. These 20 content questions allow us to compute scores on five dimensions of national value systems. There are four content questions for each of the cultural dimensions studied and all content questions are scored on a five-point scale.

The second section measures the ethical attitudes of respondents. Researchers believe that it is difficult to get accurate empirical data on ethical attitudes and behavior of respondents, since business ethical decisions involve complex, multidimensional issues (personal as well as business) and it is impossible to address and control all the variables in a questionnaire. In the past, vignettes have been found to be one of the effective data collection techniques for ethics research, since they help to standardize a series of independent variables. In this research, vignettes were used mainly to obtain data on business-ethical attitudes of respondents.

There are three parts to the second section. The first part lists eight statements and asks for the opinion of respondents on a five-point scale. Second part of this section consists of twelve vignettes – one each on twelve questionable business practices that are commonly faced by individuals in business. Several of these vignettes were adapted from those used in the past by other business ethics researchers e.g. gift giving, padding. The third part comprises questions on respondents' understanding of the concept "ethical"; their perception of the degree of importance given by their respective companies to different stakeholder groups; and their opinion regarding the influence of different factors (personal, organizational, national) on business managers to make unethical decisions.

The third section of the questionnaire contains demographic questions (respondents' present nationality, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation, functional area of work) and a few questions about the company where they are employed (company size, types of business, and level of competition faced by the company in the industry). A pilot study was conducted among the participants of the Executive Master of International Business Program at Saint Louis University to improve the contents of the instrument.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Since we were using an existing instrument, which already had been tested for its validity and reliability, the questionnaire used was not tested for the first section

- **Validity:** The second section of the instrument (vignettes) was reviewed by a panel of experts in linguistics from all three cultures (India, Korea and the United States) for its clarity and domain appropriateness, to ensure its content validity. The results of the pilot study showed that in general the ethical attitudes of respondents differed in accordance with theoretical expectations basically ensuring construct validity. On the basis of the results of the pilot study and the feedback received from the respondents, the instrument was modified.
- **Reliability:** The alpha values were obtained, and are above the threshold for acceptability. They are obtained for each section, and indicate the reliability nature of the instrument.

Variables Included in this Instrument

- Independent variables:
 1. Personal characteristics and organizational factors,
 2. Hofstede's cultural dimensions.
- Dependent variables:
 1. Respondents' attitudes toward twelve questionable business practices
 2. Respondents' attitudes toward business ethics in general and
 3. Factors influencing business managers to make unethical decisions, in case of cultural diversity

Cultural Attitudes: Barriers to International Business

The social environment encompassing religious aspects, language, customs, traditions and beliefs, influences the buying consumption habits. Many companies face failure in foreign countries, due to their inability to understand the socio cultural environment. Whenever a company establishes business in some African countries, the local population expects that many jobs will open up for them. Only few countries perceive that they are exploited. Due to the entry of foreign firms, the economic and the social environment of the area completely change. An example is southern China, which has completely changed to an affluent society due to the fact that almost 2000 companies get their products manufactured in coastal south China.

1. **National Taste:** In Thailand, People prefer black shampoo; Nestle brews different varieties of instant coffee because people in those countries have different tastes. Green is the favorite color of all the Arab countries; Red is still widely used in Russia, in banners, posters, and hoardings.
2. **Language:** Cross culture and cross border operations call for necessary language skills. South Koreans have learnt Indian languages to operate in India. Hyundai or LG Companies change their brand names and slogans in different countries. In Japan, General Motor's slogan is "body by fisher" means "corpse by fisher", and Pepsi Cola slogan is "come alive" means come out of the grave. Prior to promoting the brand, organizations take into account the socio-cultural background of a specific nation and interpretations of a name in the local language.
 - One firm, trying to find a name for a new soap powder, tested the chosen name in 50 languages. In English, it meant "dainty." In other languages it meant different - "song" (Gaelic), "aloof" (Flemish), "horse" (African), "hazy or dimwitted" (Persian), and "crazy" (Korean). It was obscene in several Slavic languages.
 - Chew's "Nova" was spoken as "no va" in Italian, which means "doesn't go."
 - Coca-Cola in Chinese became "Bite the head of a dead tadpole."

3. **Values and Beliefs:** Companies understand the significance of different designs and colors in different countries. Blue is perceived as feminine in Holland and masculine in wider. Green is favorite color in the Muslim world, but is associated with illness in Malaysia although it is a Muslim country. White indicated death in China and Korea but it is the color of bridal dresses in Europe. Red is associated with danger in many countries but it is a favorite in Russia. 'Swastika', which is considered sacred in India, has completely different connotations in the West. Green, which is popular in Moslem countries, means disease in jungle-covered countries and cosmetics in France, Sweden, Netherlands. Red signifies something blasphemous in African countries, but wealth and masculinity in Great Britain.
4. **Demography:** A number of demographic factors such as age, sex ratio, family size and occupation influence the business of many companies. Companies concentrate on different segments. For example, Barbie generates huge revenues through the children's segment of affluent countries.
5. **Literacy rate:** Countries with a high literacy rate experience a better standard of living. The need is for standardizing goods, supported by technical services. For a country with an educated population, the amount of training required for the staff will be far less than in the case of the country which has a low literacy rate. It influences the cost incurred. The argument holds in the case of educating the consumer about the products manufactured.
6. **Female Workforce:** The most spectacular change in the current era is the empowerment of women throughout the world. In China, Indonesia, Russia and Thailand, women are major contributors to the GDP. With economic independence, women no longer have to depend on men to make decisions and so they make their own decisions about whether to purchase any consumer product or durable. Deluxe, a well-known brand of paint in Europe was promoted through campaigns directed at women, because it was felt that women have an aesthetic taste for colors in the household paint segment. The performance of the i-pod of Apple hit the roof in terms of revenue generation due to female customers. The female work force is very strong in various sectors in many countries. Indian women in IT enabled services and handicrafts, Chinese women in the soft toys and ceramics and Indonesian women in garments and paper work, have brought great success to their countries.
7. **Double Income Families:** The household income increases as the demand for the number of products increases proportionately. This is especially for packaged food items, electronic gadgets, household appliances, health

equipment. Japanese entertainment electronics and French perfumes dominate the whole of Europe and North America. Pizza Express, McDonald and Kentucky Fried Chicken invariably rule the households of double income families throughout the world.

8. **Impulse Buying:** Benefit oriented buying takes place everywhere. Preplanned shopping and scheduled purchases are gradually going away. Throughout the world, people need instant items. They see, ask and buy. It is a major challenge to international businessmen to provide benefits to lure impulse buying.
9. **Nonverbal Signs:** Shaking your head up and down in Greece indicates “No”; swinging it from side to side indicates “Yes.” In most European countries, it is considered impolite not to have both hands on the table. The American sign for “OK” is an obscenity in Spain.
10. **Product:** Campbell Soup was unsuccessful in Britain until the firm added water to its condensed soup so that it would appear to be the same amount of canned soup the British were used to purchasing. Long-life packaging, which is used commonly for milk in Europe, allows milk to be stored for months at room temperature if it is unopened. Americans are still wary of it. Coke had to alter the taste of its soft drink in China when the Chinese described it as “tasting like medicine.”

Findings

Based on the extensive number of researches conducted in the field of cultural analysis in business management, it is being explored by researchers to discover and understand the complex phenomenon to minimize the gap.

The following questions arise based on the research studies. The answers are also presented after every question.

1. How do you feel that gender affects management effectiveness?
 Respondents disagree that gender posed no negative impact towards management effectiveness. Interviews indicated that “accepting different genders in the workforce”, “individual’s capability” and “different organizational culture” were the favorable themes pointed out by the respondents. The employees are aware of the existence of gender stereotypes in the workforce but it does not hinder management effectiveness. The findings of this study proved that balancing career and family could cause stress and anxiety, particularly in women.
2. How do you think nationality affects management effectiveness at your workplace?
 This research showed that nationality has an impact on how the society perceives successful leadership as well as on the relationship between

leaders and subordinates. It was found that workforce focuses on the level of experience an individual has in order to climb the ladder. Malaysian societies have the strong tendency that their nationals are lacking in comparison to the expatriates. Hence, the locals face hindrance in the workforce as the expatriates are given priority in attaining top management post in the hotels.

3. How do you think such cultural issues become a hindrance in achieving management effectiveness?

It is understood that despite the on-going cultural stereotypes in the workforce and its way of being a hindrance to some extent to the employees in attaining management effectiveness, the workforce do not view it as a major hindrance to their growth. Instead it was termed as a “trivial issue” and can be minimized over time. The favorable themes such as “acceptance and adaptability”, “diplomacy” and “open-minded” suggest that being in the industry calls for an understanding from each individual in accepting and adapting to different cultures. The management has an important role to play in practicing diplomacy with their employees in terms of handling people from all walks of life due to the cultural differences. Hence, being open-minded in terms of looking at the bigger picture and looking past small issues formed by cultural stereotypes would help in minimizing the issue.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research was to investigate and compare the impact of national cultures on the ethical attitudes of business in international business, using multivariate statistical analysis. Additionally, employing Hofstede’s cultural typology, Cross-Cultural Comparison of Ethical Attitudes of Business study examined the relationship between cultural dimensions of individualism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation, and the ethical attitudes of business managers in these countries. Following are the major conclusions of the study.

- Culture has a strong influence on business attitudes toward both business ethics in general and various questionable business practices in particular. In addition to culture, business managers’ general attitudes toward business ethics are related to their personal integrity; their attitudes toward particular questionable practices are related to the external environment.
- There is a strong relationship between cultural dimensions of individualism and power distance and ethical attitudes of business toward certain questionable business practices. The analysis of the relationship between ethical attitudes of business managers toward questionable business practices and cultural dimensions of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance,

and long-term orientation produced mixed results, likely due to the effect of extraneous variables and the lack of notable differences in cultural dimension scores among the countries surveyed.

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