

## COMMENTARY

***On Studiu despre valorile și comportamentul românesc din  
perspectiva dimensiunilor culturale după metoda lui Geert Hofstede  
(Study about Romanian values and behaviour from the perspective  
of cultural dimensions according to Geert Hofstede's method),  
by Adina Luca, INTERACT, 2005***

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The study, published in 2005<sup>2</sup>, continues to be a landmark in the Romanian management literature addressing the influence of culture on management practices and work behaviours. This is due both to the celebrity of Hofstede's management model<sup>3</sup>, and to the fact that its authors consider it the first representative study in the analysis of this model in Romania, using exclusively Geert Hofstede's methodology and the research instrument developed by him – Value Survey Module, 1994 – on a representative sample of the Romanian population: the study is conducted in collaboration with Gallup Romania (Interact, 2005).

Although the study was published in 2005, it has not lost its relevance, as it is used as a reference in more recent studies of Romanian authors addressing various management topics: cultural dimensions in management (Rusu, Isac, Cureteanu, 2015); organizational culture (Hudrea, 2015); leadership styles (Leoveanu, 2015); the impact of cultural values in consumer behaviour (Negrușă, Toader, Vidican-Manci, 2015), or topics of social psychology: cultural change (Boacă, 2016); social representations of power (Neculau, Iacob, 2013). The study

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<sup>2</sup> The study can be accessed at <http://customer.kinecto.ro/2005/Interact/Overview%20Cross-%20Cultural.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> According to a study by Søndergaard (1994) on reviews, citations and replications of Hofstede's first book in which he presented the results of his study - *Culture's Consequences. International Differences in Work-Related Values*, 1036 SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index) quotations from the book, 36 reviews, 61 replications of the study, and 274 applications of the model of national culture dimensions were found between 1986 and 1994.

is however problematic, for it lacks critical appraisal. We will discuss below the main issues that we believe are problematic in the study, in the wider context of the debates in the field of cross-cultural management.

The purpose of the study is to develop a “theory based on sociological research to analyse which management and human resource practices work and which ones do not work in Romania and why” (Interact, 2005:2). The study is part of a broader discussion in the field of management (cross-cultural management in particular) on the transfer of know-how and management practices from one cultural and social context to another. In the case of post-socialist countries, this debate also includes the import of Western management theories and practices, which have become major landmarks or even models to follow and apply, in the context of broader discussions on the transition to a market economy and the existence of a difference between the so-called “socialist/communist” work values and behaviours (most often considered negative, as they hinder economic progress) and the “capitalist” work values and behaviours (considered positive, as they are associated with economic success).

There is a wider theoretical context to this, namely cross-cultural management theory is dominated by the approach to cultural diversity in the workplace in terms of national cultural differences, which are explained using national culture models/dimensions; Geert Hofstede’s model is the best known and the most widely used model. Hofstede is considered to be the first author who scientifically legitimized cultural relativism in management (Chevrier, 2003). However, one of the main limitations of Hofstede’s study is the very universality of the national culture dimensions model which he proposes and the deterministic concept underlying it. The national culture dimensions proposed by Hofstede are: power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation - Confucian dynamism (Hofstede, 1996).

The main criticisms of Hofstede’s model are: 1) the way in which he uses the concept of “national culture”; 2) the concept of culture is seen as implicit, essentialist, causal; 3) the number of respondents is not representative – the samples are not national, the respondents are from one company, predominantly from one department; (4) Hofstede believes that the variation in the answers of the IBM employees derives from the national culture, and does not take into account the organizational and professional culture that accounts for the multiple and contradictory cultures within the same organization (McSweeney, 2003). Other criticisms generally made of the approach by models focused on national culture are: use of national culture as a unit of analysis, a “positivist” approach to culture, universalism, reductionism, focus on very general elements and neglect of cultural interactions and other (organizational, economic, individual, contextual, etc.) factors that may influence work behaviour (Yeganeh, Su, 2006).

Therefore, the study starts from a model which has its own theoretical and methodological limitations, in addition to the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study itself, which prevent it from providing solutions/approaches that are appropriate for the reality of the management of organizations, namely a reality of differences in work behaviours and values in addition to the transfer of management practices from one cultural and social environment to another. The interpretations are thus based mainly on common sense and generalizations that are not acceptable in a scientific study - i.e.: "However, if we observe the behaviour of most people, we may conclude that" (Interact, 2005: 6); "No Romanian entrepreneur I know has financial projections for one year ahead" (Interact, 2005: 9).

In addition, there are psychologizing interpretations and a conspicuous subjectivism - i.e. the existence of an emotional relationship between the population and authority, which is characterized either by "worshipping and dependence" or by "hatred and counter-dependence" (Interact, 2005: 6); authority complex (Interact, 2005: 6); the society's inability to make long-term plans is due to the triggering of defence mechanisms (Interact, 2005: 8). A number of interpretations are based on general knowledge (history, religion, etc.); this type of arguments is also taken from the initial model proposed by Hofstede - i.e. "the forced mix with other nationalities through migration and the struggle to maintain a national identity under many foreign rulers" (Interact, 2005: 8) (as explanation for the "anxiety level" in Romania); "Therefore, the religious tradition is the main cause of the short-term orientation of all the European countries and the USA" (Interact, 2005: 9). Then there are the value judgments recurrently expressed by the wording "the good/bad news is" - i.e. "Another piece of good news is that the population's individualism is increasing" (as it is correlated with the finances that the country receives) (Interact, 2005: 7); "the collectivist mind" is associated with "agricultural thinking" (Interact, 2005: 7).

The text is also marred by a number of methodological problems, such as changing some of the dimensions of Hofstede's model, although the research is based on the model's measuring instrument, without operationalizing and theoretically supporting the new concepts (the Power Complex instead of Power Distance, the Anxiety Level instead of Uncertainty Avoidance), and repeating part of the research on the grounds that there is a discrepancy between the results and the initial estimates. For example, Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) becomes the Power Complex understood in its psychological meaning (Interact, 2005: 4), considered to be obvious due to the low score for this dimension (Interact, 2005: 4) and to different "assumptions" regarding the answers to a series of questions on the relationship with one's superior (Interact, 2005: 6). PDI is the dimension for which the research was repeated because the score

was “surprisingly low” compared to Hofstede’s initial estimates for Romania (Interact, 2005: 5); the new score, which is similar to the one in the first research, is justified by the population’s lack of habit to be asked the opinion on authority or the reluctance to give straightforward answers to strangers (Interact, 2005: 5), the conclusion being that “in reality, the PDI level is very high” (Interact, 2005: 5).

The findings of the study are formulated as recommendations for organizational and managerial practices appropriate for the Romanian economic environment. The recommendations are abundant in stereotypes on work values and behaviours of Romanian employees and entrepreneurs, which, correlated with the interpretation given to different behaviours and values associated with national cultural dimensions, suggest an implicitly superior/inferior, desirable/undesirable position. For example: “Innovation may not be the best strategy. (...)” (Interact, 2005: 9); “many Romanian employees may go into a state of paralysis and inaction as a result of delegation of authority” (Interact, 2005: 12); “We believe that, if you want to send your managers to management schools, the German and British schools are most appropriate. There, your managers will learn a form of business discipline and ethics that may influence their actions in the future and thus they will be more appreciated by their subordinates” (Interact, 2005: 13).

Moreover, the recommendations are made in terms of management models: “French/German structure”, “French managerial behaviour”, “American management” (Interact, 2005: 10), an approach which was prevalent at a given time in cross-cultural management (understood as compared management between national management systems and models) and which has the same limitations as those mentioned for the models of national culture dimensions/orientations.

In conclusion, although the study tries to provide answers to a real need to understand the impact of cultural diversity on organizations, it ends up producing and reproducing several stereotypes and problematic approaches in cross-cultural management.

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