

Cross-Cultural-Management

Authors revisited:

Fons Trompenaars

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The Manager

Excerpt of MASTER'S THESIS

“Managing International Cooperations: Evaluation of models measuring national cultural differences and their implications for business, illustrated with the examples of India, Japan & Germany”

[The Title of this publication deviates from the original title of the chapter in the master's thesis]

Name: Schoen, Raphael
Address: Schoenfliesserstr. 21
10439 Berlin
Rafael.schoen@hhl.de
info@global-iq.org

University: HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management
Study program: Part-Time MBA (P9)
Chair: International Management
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tobias Dauth
Date: Berlin, July, 8th, 2015

1.1 Fons Trompenaars

Persons polled	Countries analyzed	Questionnaire items	Dimensions
30,000	55	57	7

Fig. 18: Brief overview of the cultural study of Trompenaars.¹¹

Source: Own Illustration.

As next important concept of cultural study, we will focus the work of Fons Trompenaars. He postulated seven dimensions and developed its questionnaire items together with Charles Hampden-Turner, focusing especially on the aspects of cultural dimensions in combination with management related topics. As with Hofstede he doubts the strong unifying forces of culture, where as a consequence not all individuals dispose of the same collective programming (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, p. 735).¹²

Trompenaars' and Charles Hampden-Turner's approach for developing their dimensions is to put the respondents of the questionnaires into dilemmas, which emerge from universal problems. Hence culture, according to Trompenaars, is the way in which these dilemmas are resolved. These dilemmas address relationships with people, the relationship to time, and the relationship among people. For management relevant issues each culture resolves those dilemmas in their own particular way (Trompenaars, 1996, pp. 51-52).

Universalism vs. Particularism: This dimension measures the inclination of the individual towards general or specific orientation. Universalists tend to feel that general rules and obligations are a moral reference. Universalists are inclined to follow rules even when friends are involved (Trompenaars, 1996, pp. 52-53). Whereas particularists value the special circumstances and personal backgrounds of decisions more than existing rules (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, p. 735). Hence by this cultural trait either the clear judgment of situations is influenced, or the individual is conscious about his decision, disregarding its moral implications.

¹¹ Data source: Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 1997, pp. 1-2.

¹² See also bell curve approach p. 13.

Individualism vs. Collectivism: Trompenaars defines what he conceives as being Individualism vs. Collectivism as, “The conflict between what each of us wants as an individual and the interests of the group we belong to” (Trompenaars, 1996, pp. 52-53). Trompenaars measures individualistic and collectivistic tendencies in a society and follows Kluckhohn/ Strodtbeck and Hofstede by including this dimension in his cultural value system.

However the question arises how the managers, being polled by his study see themselves, more as individuals or more as belonging to a certain group? Trompenaars points out that, apart from individual imprints, individualistic or collectivistic tendencies can emerge at the same time (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, p. 739).

Neutral vs. Emotional: This dimension mainly focuses on the predominant trait of expression of sensations. In relationships between people, both prudence and emotions play a role. Which of them is dominant depends on whether we are affective, showing emotions or whether we are emotionally neutral by suppressing emotions. This dimension can be also regarded as behavior which is impulsive at one end of the spectrum and disciplined at the other, where the measured cultures populate the scale between both extremes (Trompenaars, 1996, p. 57).

Specific vs Diffuse: This dimension shows the degree of separation between work and family life. In diffuse cultures work and family cannot be separated whereas in specific cultures a division of life and work can be observed (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, p. 739). Specific cultures have an inclination for direct speech that might be interpreted by diffuse culture as offending. In diffuse cultures also exists the concept of losing face, i.e. something that is made public that should be held private. Therefore diffuse cultures take their time to come to the point in conversations (Trompenaars, 1996, p.86).

Achievement vs. Ascription: In business, in some societies respect and status is accorded to persons, independent of their actual achievements. This respect is ascribed due to age, gender, academic title and class. This dimension measures the tendency as to whether individuals tend to accept achieved status in societies by performance or accept ascribed status (Trompenaars, 1996, pp. 60-61).

Time orientation is an important aspect within strategic considerations. Is strategy linked to the future? Or is strategy oriented to the future by mere linear extrapolation of time, originating from the past (Trompenaars, 1996, p. 63)? With this dimension Trompenaars follows other cultural studies. He combines the static time definition of Kluckhohn/ Strodtbeck, i.e. the inclination of an individual towards past, present or future, with Hall's interpretation of monochronic workflows, which is undertaking sequentially one task after another, versus the polychronic tendency: several tasks simultaneously.

Internal vs. External control (Subjugation): The dimension of internal control versus external control is inspired mainly by the work of Kluckhohn/ Strodtbeck on the relationship of man to nature. Trompenaars defines it as the inclination of man to control nature and externally imposed circumstances. More precisely the meaning the actor assigns to his environment as an internal or an external locus of control (Trompenaars, 1996, p. 64).

When individuals tend to yield the control of their actions to the environment as a sort of subjugation, they search e.g. for responsible external factors to account for their failures, whereas if they tend to fully control the environment individuals take full responsibility for their own actions.

In summary, Trompenaars' work had been, compared to others, subject to relatively harsh criticism. Similar to criticism to which Hofstede has been exposed to, was that due to the selection of the persons being polled, mainly managers, that results are systematically distorted and do not reflect the real profile of a culture, rather the

profile of the managers of an average company culture in certain industries (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, pp. 740-741).

However, from the author's point of view, that may be an issue when one generalizes his results. As a matter of fact his results are, for his target group (mainly management related employees), even more representative, but they shouldn't be used to generally describe the behavior of an entire culture.

Another point of criticism has been that Trompenaars never showed exactly how he developed and used his dimensions and did not detail the methodology of his study sufficiently (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011, p. 742). Finally nevertheless Trompenaars manages to guide the question of cultural behavior to another approach of putting his respondents into dilemmas, which they need to resolve and furthermore connects the intercultural aspect with company, industry, job-related, and gender cultures (Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 1997, pp. 221-242). In conclusion, Trompenaars' work has been, from the author's point of view, despite of all criticism a significant contribution to research of cultural aspects of management.

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