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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the application of Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions in management to the situation of Malaysian (n=8) and American (n=4) instructors in implementing a new English-as-a-Second-Language curriculum in Malaysia. American and Malaysian cultures are compared on four dimensions: social differentiation by gender; desire for certainty; acceptance of unequal power distribution; and interdependence between individuals. Differences between the Malaysian and American teachers on these dimensions are then examined, based on observations in meetings in which interaction and problem-solving were required. It is observed that the Americans needed to learn that within this context: (1) the meetings were not decision-making events but decision-initiating events; (2) roles of friendly surrogates need to be understood for the purposes of negotiation and consensus-reaching; (3) stress and methods to alleviate it when soliciting open, direct communications and constructive criticisms need to be understood; (4) communication techniques and behavior to enhance and protect others' dignity or "face" need to be learned; (5) indirect communications being used need to be listened to in order to sort out the true message; and (6) medium of communication (oral vs. written) was an important factor. Appendices include: Hofstede's descriptors of societal dimensions and Malaysian/American decision-making and communication differences. Contains two references. (MSE)

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Intercultural communication and the decision-making process: Americans and Malaysians in a cooperative university setting

by Kim Hughes Wilhelm

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Intercultural communication and the decision-making process: Americans and Malaysians in a cooperative university setting

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to relate Hofstede's (1984) findings that "no management activity can be culture-free" (p. 81) to the decision-making and communicative processes of Malaysian and American instructors when implementing a new English as a Second Language curriculum. Intercultural communication and value differences were identified which sometimes affected the success with which Malaysian and American colleagues were able to interact and problem-solve together. These differences related, as well, to Hofstede's 1984 findings which describe fifty countries according to their relative emphases at the societal level on four dimensions:

Social differentiation by gender ⇔ MASCULINITY - FEMININITY
Desire for certainty ⇔ UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE (Strong - Weak)
Acceptance of unequal power distribution ⇔ POWER DISTANCE (Large - Small)
Interdependence between individuals ⇔ INDIVIDUALISM - COLLECTIVISM

Hofstede studied employees of 67 countries, all of whom worked for the same multinational business enterprise, controlling for occupation. Subjects responded to 32 value statements which were collected by psychologists within the company's subsidiaries. The 50 largest subsidiaries were included in Hofstede's 1984 rankings.

When comparing only Malaysia and the U.S.A., we find they rank similarly on the two dimensions of "uncertainty avoidance" and "masculinity." However, they are widely divergent regarding "power distance" and "individualism." Figure 1 in Appendix

A provides a comparison of Malaysia and the U.S.A. on Hofstede's dimensions. Each dimension is discussed in more detail in the section which follows, first defining each dimension and offering descriptors, then relating the dimensions to decision and communication differences noted in Malaysian/American interactions.

Masculinity versus Femininity

This dimension relates to the degree to which a society emphasizes competitiveness over solidarity and equity over equality. Societies with maximum social differentiation by gender, termed by Hofstede "masculine" societies, value performance, feel that competitiveness is good and that the strong should win. High achievers are rewarded and work is made more challenging in order to stimulate a worker. People in these societies (e.g. Japan, Austria) typically have higher ambitions concerning "making a career" than people in more "feminine" societies (e.g. Switzerland, Norway).

In feminine societies, solidarity is considered good and there is an emphasis on helping the weak and reward according to need. Hofstede used the term "welfare" society when describing a feminine society. The stress is on relationships and, to stimulate a worker in this society, social units in the work setting may be developed.

The U.S.A. rated 36th of 50 countries (62nd percentile) on this dimension, indicating a stronger orientation toward masculinity than Malaysia, which rated 26-27, exactly midway between a performance-oriented versus welfare-oriented society. Competitiveness, performance, and achievement, then, are emphasized more in the U.S.A. than in Malaysia. Table 1 in Appendix B.1 provides a summary of descriptors related to the masculinity dimension.

Strong versus Weak Uncertainty Avoidance

Societies which are concerned about controlling the future and "the extent to which behavior should follow fixed rules" (p. 92) are strong in uncertainty avoidance. This type of society (e.g. Greece, Portugal) desires conformity and certainty. Rigid codes of behavior and belief are imposed so as to maintain emotional equilibrium. Law and order are "important symbols" in these societies, which are intolerant of deviants. Ritualization of words, dress, and actions "satisfy deep emotional needs" in these societies. Meetings, reports, etc. may serve ritual ends as much as decision-making ends. There is often a strong belief in fate.

Societies with weak uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Singapore, Jamaica) tend to believe in luck as a factor and that a person can positively influence his or her own future. Strategic planning and preventive maintenance are more popular in these societies. There is also less top-down management for short- and medium-term planning. There tends to be less emphasis on punctuality and precision and, while there are unwritten rules of conduct, they are considered to be mostly for convenience and can be broken. Practice counts more than principles. In weak uncertainty avoidance societies it is easier to get people to relax and life tends to be less hurried. However, perhaps due to less overt societal stress, it is less acceptable to express emotions in this type of society.

Both Malaysia and the U.S.A. are weak in uncertainty avoidance, with Malaysia a bit weaker (Malaysian rated 8th of 50 and the U.S.A. 11th of 50). Descriptors associated with uncertainty avoidance are provided in Table 2, Appendix B.1.

Large versus Small Power Distance

Hofstede defined power distance as "the extent to which the members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally" (83). Societies which accept that power is distributed unequally, or "large" power distance societies (e.g. Malaysia, Panama, Guatemala), are more accepting of hierarchical order. An individual's status is often ascribed on the basis of a subordinate's respect for the superior's power and authority, which are commonly linked to ancestry and wealth. Rulers are less likely to consult with their citizens.

In the work setting, a superior is expected to make and pass down decisions, acting in a "paternalistic" role. Similar to a good mother or father, the superior has a great deal of power and control, but is expected to be benevolent and to not abuse his or her power. Unfortunately, if the superior does abuse his power, grievance channels are generally missing. A subordinate who complains about his superior would be putting himself at risk and showing disrespect. More indirect communication channels (e.g. use of a third person as a "go-between" or withdrawal of a favor) are used to express complaints or reprimands, thereby preserving "face."

In a stratified, hierarchical society, expectations of the individual emphasize obedience and conformity. According to Hofstede (p. 90), respect and loyalty are considered "supreme virtues" in a large power distance society. Individuals are expected to honor parents and teachers throughout their lifetimes. Students show respect by never openly disagreeing with teachers, treating them always as highly respected "sources of wisdom." Exam success is considered very important as it is viewed as "an entry certificate to a higher status group (ascription)."

On the other hand, in a small power distance society, one which promotes power equalization, differences in power are associated with power abuse and there is typically a system of checks and balances in place to guard against such abuse. In other words, there are usually channels by which subordinates can complain about superiors with protection against reprisal. The small power distance society, Hofstede explains, "demands justification for power inequalities" (83) and is more relaxed hierarchically. In this society, rulers are more likely to consult with citizens. In the work setting, open, two-way communication, directness, and relative independence of subordinate to superior are expected so that the two can "act as genuine negotiation partners" (91). Individual status in the small power distance society is based on personal merit. Success in achievement, with corresponding credentials, indicates that the individual has proven his or her mastery of a subject or skill. Countries which were most oriented toward small power distance in Hofstede's study were Austria and Israel.. Table 3, Appendix B.1, provides descriptors used by Hofstede when describing large versus small power distance societies, with Malaysia rating highest of all countries ranked in orientation to large power distance. Conversely, the U.S.A. was 16th of 50, indicating an orientation toward small power distance.

Malaysian/American Teacher Differences Related to the Power Distance Dimension

Societal orientations toward interdependence and power seemed to influence the effectiveness with which Malaysian and American teachers were able to make decisions and communicate together during fifteen months of field testing and evaluating a new curriculum model. Of the twelve instructors involved, four were American and eight Malaysian, with the curriculum developer an American and the director a Malaysian. The developer worked closely with an American coordinator and a Malaysian teacher liaison during the implementation and evaluation stages, on-site two to three days a week and during weekly teacher meetings. Immediately following the teacher meetings, the developer, coordinator, and liaison met for debriefing. As an outcome of those meetings and listening to audio tapes of two major curriculum meetings held 10 weeks apart, cultural differences were identified which seemed to reflect differences in communication patterns between the Americans and Malaysians (Wilhelm & Pereira, 1993).

Power distance seemed to influence teachers' views of themselves as instructional decision-makers or "experts." Malaysian teachers seemed uncomfortable with solicitation of "bottom-up" decision making, saying that it's "not my place" or "you're the expert" when asked to problem solve with management. In meetings, Malaysian teachers were much more reticent than American teachers, often giving opinions only when called upon directly. Criticisms about the curriculum, usually offered only when solicited, were stated using tentative language and were paired with praise for the developer. It was considered impolite and disrespectful to criticize the curriculum with the developer present. This linguistic and social behavior seemed to reflect an attitude that "You are what you produce. The plan and the person are one and the same." It also reflected a discomfort with a management style that differed from the "top-down" style typical in Malaysian settings.

For those teachers who had taught in Malaysian settings, the curriculum had always been imposed by the Ministry of Education, with little control over texts, materials, or methods. Many teachers expressed the desire that the curriculum developer "just tell me what to do" with great detail provided. Conversely, managers wanted the teachers to act as instructional decision-makers and to take ownership of the curriculum, but it became clear that the Malaysian teachers were uncomfortable when asked to function in these roles. The majority of Malaysian teachers preferred to have management be responsible for decision-making.

Subsequently, it was difficult to institute a "bottom-up" communication flow about the curriculum prototype. A problem with the curriculum was often perceived of as the individual teacher's own problem, seeming to reflect a fear that teaching skills were inadequate (rather than that the curriculum needed revision). This was most obvious when trying to get the teachers to respond to the scheduling of instructional content. Teachers felt "bound" to keep up with the schedule, for example, despite repeated reminders from the developer that some activities and chapters may require additional time and the schedule may need to be adjusted. There seemed to be a need to conform individual behavior to the group schedule, rather than to work together to revise the schedule so that it better reflected what individual teachers were able to accomplish.

This need for detail and a set" program of instruction surfaced in the classroom setting and in teachers perceptions of themselves as content experts. The teachers were asked to teach English through Earth Science content which included video documentaries and rather scientific concepts (e.g. tectonic plates, ocean floor rifts, hypotheses regarding the age of the Earth). The focus was on teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills to better enable students to learn how to study and remember information for academic purposes. American teachers and the younger Malaysian teachers seemed comfortable with this teaching/learning style and were able to set up group activities and take the role of "facilitator" of instruction, orchestrating the classroom to create a learner-centered environment. The majority of Malaysian teachers, however, were very uncomfortable with this teaching context, feeling they were losing "face" by not conducting a teacher-centered class. They expressed the fear that the students would report back to their parents that they were being asked to "learn on their own." This is consistent with an orientation in strong power distance societies toward the teacher as the source of wisdom and reflects a more traditional, teacher-centered system of education.

There was also an emphasis on formal testing and a great fear that students would "not know the answers to the test. Teachers wanted to know test questions and answers well in advance of the testing date so that they could "prepare the students to answer correctly." This was a big problem, since the tests were designed to assess the students' abilities to apply language and study skills by decoding content. Malaysian teachers routinely expressed the fear that poor performance by their students on the final exam would result in poor teaching evaluations or even dismissal by management. It was obvious that they felt a lack of power and control in the employment situation.

It soon became clear that tests would have to be revised to test both skill application and content knowledge. Teachers worked closely with developers to come up with test questions and teachers took turns identifying major concepts to be taught/learned for each text presented to students. While managers made no attempt to compare test outcomes by teacher, the Malaysian teachers themselves made comparisons and sought out managers to explain final exam results.

It was meant for the final exam to be a learning experience for students, so time was built into the schedule for individual debriefing over the exam with students. After scoring the final exam, teachers were expected to meet individually with students to go through the test, discuss progress in the course, and identify strengths and weaknesses together before the student left the program. Only the American teachers conducted these "debriefing sessions." The American teachers, in general, were more concerned with student progress over time, student motivation and recognition of their learning needs, and daily attendance and participation. The Malaysian teachers were more influenced with student performance on the final exam and were less concerned about daily participation, weekly quizzes, or homework scores. These findings are consistent with Hofstede's descriptions of the roles of exams in strong versus weak power distance societies.

On an interpersonal level, problems with individuals were dealt with using a paternalistic management style and third party "go-betweens." For example, if a group member was being difficult, confrontational, or incompetent, the Malaysian strategy was to "Let it be... give it time." The prevailing attitude seemed to be that people will (hopefully) come to their senses on their own, without anybody having to embarrass them by pointing out the problem. It was considered the duty of their closest friend/colleague to point out the problem to them in private. If that didn't work, it then became the supervisor's responsibility to work with the difficult person in order to solve the problem. (Intervention by the supervisor meant loss of face for the employee, however, so it was desirable to resolve the problem through friends.) Praise, solidarity, and status were expressed very indirectly, through special invitations, small gifts, or inclusion with a higher status group. Similarly, reprimands or problems were also expressed indirectly, typically through questioning (e.g. "Aren't you quite hot wearing blue jeans?" which really means "Blue jeans are not considered acceptable dress for a teacher."). Other ways to indirectly express disapproval included the omission of favors or avoidance which let everyone know that the person had been (temporarily) excluded from the status group. It took the American teachers quite a long time to "catch on to" these indirect hints as to inappropriate behavior. Even if they did catch on that something was wrong, the American was more likely to directly confront in order to clarify or discuss the problem (which typically resulted in the Malaysian denying that a problem existed). The Malaysians were very forgiving of these social blunders and, as a consequence, many Americans were generally insensitive or uninformed as to the mistakes they were making. Americans who were most successful at "fitting into" Malaysian society learned to decode the indirect language and to go through friends/colleagues to clarify problems and to get advice as to how to apologize or "fix" the blunder. Table 5 in Appendix C.1 provides a summary of differences between the teacher groups which relate to power distance differences at the societal level.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Hofstede concluded that less economically developed countries versus more economically developed countries ranged at opposite ends of the continuum when considering the degree to which their societies valued collectivism or individualism. Hofstede defined this dimension as "the degree of interdependence a society maintains among individuals" (p. 83). According to Hofstede, collectivist societies (e.g. Guatemala, Ecuador) emphasize loyalty to the clan or "in-group," with a focus on "WE." There is a tightly knit and ordered social framework, with importance placed on proper form so as to avoid loss of "face." Group interests dominate and self-effacement is common. Harmony is sought and conflict suppressed, with indirect communication strategies employed. In these societies, the group watches out for the individual and it is common to have extended family involved together in business ventures. Business and private life are integrated, with relationships having priority over task accomplishment. Employment relationships have a moral component and are typically long-term, with loyalty and benevolence expected on the part of employee and employer.

In contrast, societies which are individualistic in orientation (e.g. the U.S.A., Australia) emphasize independence, a focus on "I." Self interest dominates and self-promotion is common. The social framework is more loosely knit and employee/employer relationships are viewed as being more equal. Business relationships are maintained only as long as there is mutual advantage so are often calculative in nature. Tasks take priority over relationships and there is a separation of business and private life. Loyalty and responsibility are to the immediate family but, even so, individuals are expected to take care of themselves. Direct communication is valued, with disagreements expressed more openly in an attempt to resolve conflicts expeditiously.

As you saw in Figure 1, Malaysians and Americans were found by Hofstede to have divergent trends when comparing the degree to which their societies maintain interdependence between individuals. Malaysia ranked seventeenth on the "individualism" index scale, toward the collectivist side of the continuum. The USA , on the other hand, was most oriented toward individualism of all the countries measured, ranking fiftieth out of fifty. Table 4 (see Appendix B.2) provides a sample of descriptors used by Hofstede when discussing collectivist versus individualist societies.

Malaysian/American Teacher Differences Related to Individualism versus Collectivism

In the Malaysian setting, differences along the dimension of individualism versus collectivism were evidenced in the teachers' preparation for and personal role in meetings, how the decision-making process was conducted, and the teachers' willingness to share classroom materials and methods. The American meeting style used by the curriculum developer was to distribute the meeting agenda and venue ahead of time so that everyone would come to the meeting on time, with materials in hand, having considered and come to a stance on the issues under discussion. At the close of the meeting, it was expected that the issue would be resolved, a decision reached, or a plan of action agreed upon. Individuals were expected to present and support their personal opinions as a means to discuss the issue and reach a decision. The American view of a meeting seemed to be "Come to the meeting ready to hear everyone's point of view, discuss and decide. Then we can get on with it," with an expectation that all members will freely and openly offer their opinions, stay on task, and negotiate together a plan of action to be implemented after the meeting. Decision-making in U.S.A. society is often according to majority rule, with those in the minority expected to "agree to disagree" and at least try out the plan to see how it works. In this way, the plan can be implemented more quickly.

The Malaysian style was quite different, reflecting a view of meetings as social, interactive opportunities with colleagues (refreshments and socializing usually held before or after the meeting). Malaysian teachers were less likely to view themselves as participants in the meeting, often taking the view that meetings were conducted so that management could announce decisions. Meetings were to be endured , not participated in. It was common for Malaysian teachers to arrive late or unprepared with materials needed for the meeting. At first, some teachers made other appointments during the meeting times, asking that others just "tell me what they said." There seemed to be a perception that meetings (held Friday mornings, when everyone was supposed to be working) were cutting into the teachers' "free time." This behavior was confusing to the Americans, who viewed meetings as a time for individuals to share their ideas and express opinions openly. It soon became clear that cultural values were influencing the teachers' perceptions of the purpose of meetings.

The Malaysians seemed to view meetings as initiating events in the decision-making process or cycle. At the meeting, issues were identified and management's positions made known. After the meeting, friends met to discuss the issues and to express opinions privately. Once it was fairly clear what the main opinions were, delegates or "friendly surrogates" went to managers to inform, negotiate, and then report back to the group. This process continued until the entire group had reached consensus, at which time another meeting was often called in which the decision was passed "down" from management. This style reflected a view that "You should take time and make sure that everyone agrees. That way you ensure that everyone will implement the decision whole-heartedly."

There were times when a decision or policy was stated as having been resolved, but it later became clear that the decision was still up for discussion. If strong disagreement occurred during a curriculum meeting, it was common for Malaysian teachers to talk privately with their friend/colleague (sitting next to them) at such length that the meeting virtually stopped until everyone was ready to pay attention again. To find out what the disagreement were, however, it was usually necessary to meet more socially to clarify and compare views. Often a question-answer session was all that was needed, with details discussed in small groups or handled by memo as a means to reach consensus. If it became clear that the decision was actually still an unresolved issue, friendly "surrogates" were typically sent to managers to reopen the issue and begin negotiation toward a solution. Most of the decision-making process, therefore, took place outside of the meeting context, with the follow-up meeting providing a forum whereby decisions which had already been agreed upon by all members of the group were publicly announced by management. It was considered desirable to take the time to make a good decision and to ensure that everyone was in agreement. Inability to quickly reach consensus did not cause as much stress and frustration as it normally would in an American context.

While extremely time-consuming, an important benefit of this decision-making and communication style was that the people who felt most comfortable interpersonally were the ones put into the roles of negotiators, with positive interpersonal relationships maintained throughout the process. The importance of friendship was overtly recognized and there was an expectation that business colleagues would draw upon their personal relationships as a means to further business endeavors. It was unusual to have a business relationship with someone who was not your friend or known to you through introduction by a friend. Business commonly took place in a context of mutual trust and a recognition of ongoing commitment to one another. There was a long-term view and awareness that providing a good business "deal" to a friend would ensure not only the friend's business, but also the friend's recommendation and subsequent business of others.

An overriding concern within personal and business relationships was the desire to preserve dignity or "face" among group members. Protection of face meant not openly criticizing others, their plans, or their policies. The result of this value was a reluctance on the part of Malaysian teachers to provide constructive criticisms of the new curriculum plan, especially in meetings. This was a problem since, from the American developer's point of view, the purpose of the meetings was to conduct formative evaluation of the new curriculum prototype so as to identify problems and improve the model. Teachers were asked, for example, to compare the amount of content they were able to comfortably complete that week, to discuss testing and instructional needs, and to identify problems so that the curriculum and schedule could be adjusted accordingly. American teachers volunteered criticisms freely, solicited opinions from others, and were active in working with managers to decide upon changes. Malaysian teachers were very reluctant to criticize the curriculum, feeling that "the plan and the person are one and the same." For the Malaysian teachers, it was impossible to criticize the plan without implying that the person was at fault. Respect for the individual, a recognition of the time and effort put into developing the plan, and a reluctance to hurt the developer's feelings impinged upon their ability to offer helpful criticisms. The prevailing attitude was "everything is personal."

The Americans were also surprised at the Malaysian teachers' reluctance to share instructional materials in a common file. The Malaysian teachers felt very strongly that impromptu, public sharing of classroom stories, methods, or materials was a form of "showing off." It was only considered OK to offer ideas and materials when explicitly asked by a close friend/colleague. The American teachers' attitude, conversely, was that "If you have something that worked well in class, it's your duty to share it with others."

An anonymous system of materials' sharing was developed to help deal with this self-effacement issue. In addition, the teachers themselves initiated an extra teachers' meeting at the beginning of each week during which they took turns presenting (in friend/colleague pairs) their instructional ideas and plans for the upcoming week of instruction. Having a scheduled time to present ideas made it clear to everyone that they had been asked to perform in that leadership role, gave everyone ample preparation time, and allowed them to self-select instructional content and methods to share with the group. Table 6 in Appendix C.2 provides a summary of teacher values which seemed to be influenced by collectivist versus individualist orientations. These values also influenced decision-making and communication effectiveness between the teacher groups.

The Possibility of a Fifth Dimension - Oral versus Written Language

Hofstede chose to focus on culture from a cognitivist point of view, indicating that culture is an outcome of the "collective programming of the mind," with "patterns of thinking" transferred, for example, from parents to their children (p. 82). The link between culture and cognition is thereby recognized, but the role of language is omitted. A possible "fifth dimension" that may warrant research is the extent to which a society transmits information through written versus verbal communications.

In this case, it seemed that American teachers were more literate-based than Malaysians, who seemed more "oral-aural based." For the Malaysian teachers, what was "real" (what could be believed) was what they heard. American teachers, on the other hand, needed to see it in writing before it could be believed. An example from Malaysia was the day the national soccer team won the Southeast Asian championships and we "heard" that a holiday had been declared and classes canceled for the afternoon. This "rumor" went around the halls at about 11am and the Malaysian teachers were gone by noon. The American teachers, however, had received no written notification and remained on site until after 1:30pm, when no students showed up to their classes. Nobody ever did receive confirmation of any official sort that classes were canceled; what was heard through the grapevine was "real." This difference in the perception of communication importance on the basis of language medium (written vs. verbal) occurred regularly, with Malaysian teachers often discounting the importance of written communications and American teachers discounting the importance of verbal communications. This has great implications for management contexts in which written-based societies typically communicate via memo, E-mail, or reports, while oral-based societies rely on verbal messages and may require verbal confirmation or ignore written communications.

In the American context, an official message (e.g. contract) is not "real" (to be believed) until it has been confirmed in writing. For a Korean businessman visiting Illinois who wishes to lease a car, however, the message is "real" (is believed) once a price has been verbally agreed upon. It is considered dishonest to change the price a day later, despite not having the verbally-agreed-upon price in writing. The verbal contract is considered binding and "believable" because negotiation between individuals has been completed. For the American car dealer, who must process the paperwork and deal with computer programs and supervisors who question his verbally negotiated contract, the price may not be considered "binding" until the papers are actually signed. Cultural conflicts and misunderstandings can easily result when one communicator believes verbal messages and the other believes written messages.

Similar trends can be noted with Malaysian and other Asian students, who often ask for verbal confirmation of information already provided on a syllabus or handout. For these students, the message is not "real" unless it's been heard. Not only do instructors need to be aware of the need to supply verbal confirmation, but they should also teach skills which can help students from oral-based cultures succeed in more written-oriented societies.

Conclusion

Hofstede stated that "Effectiveness within a given culture, and judged according to the values of that culture, asks for management skills adapted to the local culture" (p. 98). Similarly, effectiveness in inter-cultural communications requires that communicators be aware of differences in decision-making processes and communication purposes. Within the Malaysian context, Americans needed to understand that meetings were not decision-making events, but rather decision-initiating events. In addition, the roles and purposes of friendly surrogates had to be understood so that negotiation and consensus-reaching processes could be carried out smoothly. Americans needed to be aware of stress and seek methods to alleviate it when soliciting open, direct communications and constructive criticisms. The Americans also had to learn communication techniques and forms of behavior which enhanced and protected others' dignity or "face." Similarly, the Americans needed to learn how to listen to indirect communications in order to sort out the true message. Lastly, the importance of the medium of communication (oral versus written) needed to be considered along with the effects on communication and management effectiveness in verbal versus written-based cultures. It is hoped that these concepts and examples will be of use to managers, educators, and students as they communicate and interact interculturally.

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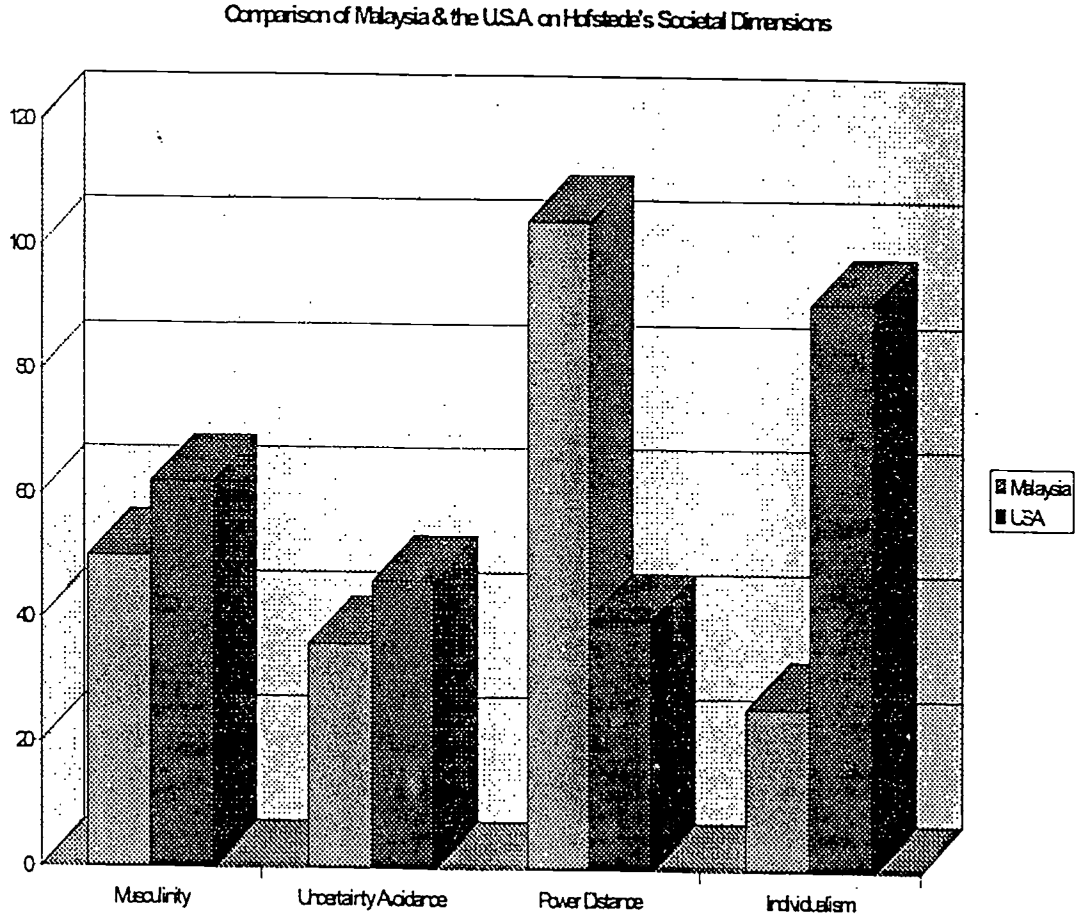
Appendix A Comparison of Malaysia & the U.S.A. on Four Societal Dimensions

Figure 1: Societal Dimensions- Comparison of Malaysia & the U.S.A.



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Appendix B.I Hofstede Descriptors of Societal Dimensions

Table 1 Masculine versus Feminine Societies

Masculine	Feminine
* Competitiveness is good; the hero is the high achiever.	* Solidarity is good; reward according to need
* The strong should win; performance is stressed.	* Help the weak; relationships are stressed.
* Stimulate workers through challenging work.	* Stimulate workers through social units.

Table 2: Descriptors - Strong versus Weak Uncertainty Avoidance

Strong Uncertainty Avoidance	Weak Uncertainty Avoidance
* Desire for "law & order." Emphasis on certainty and conformity.	* Tolerance for ambiguity. Are prepared to change the rules.
* Intolerant of deviants.	* Practice counts more than principles.
* Maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior.	* More relaxed; less hurried.
* Feel a need to control the future.	* Time runs one way. The future is unknown.
* Expression of emotions.	* Hiding of emotions.
* Ritualization of words, dress, actions.	* Unwritten rules of conduct, but mostly for convenience.

Table 3: Societal Descriptors - Large versus Small Power Distance

Large Power Distance-oriented	Small Power Distance-oriented
* acceptance of unequal power distribution & hierarchical order	* strives for equal power distribution; more relaxed hierarchically
* individual status based on perceived power & authority	* individual status based on personal merit
* "paternalistic" management	* superior/subordinate as "genuine negotiation partners"
* indirect communication * (use of "go-betweens")	* direct, two-way communication
* parents/teachers as "sources of wisdom"	* success in achievement due to individual's mastery of a subject
* exams as an entry certificate to a higher status group	* exams as a means to prove mastery

Appendix B.2 Hofstede Descriptors of Societal Dimensions

Table 4: Descriptors - Collectivist versus Individualist Societies

Collectivist-oriented	Individualist-oriented
* emphasis on interdependence - "WE"	* emphasis on independence - "I"
* tightly knit (ordered) social framework	* loosely knit (equal) social framework
* group interests dominate; self-effacement	* self interest dominates; self-promotion
* relationships have priority over the task	* tasks have priority over relationships
* employment relationships have a moral component (loyalty)	* business relationships are calculative (mutual advantage)
* integration of business & private life	* separation of business & private life
* maintenance of harmony; conflict suppression	* conflict resolution; disagreement expressed openly
* conformity to proper forms; avoid loss of face	* emphasis on equality and informality; openness as a virtue
* indirect communication	* direct communication

Appendix C.1 Malaysian/American Decision-Making & Communication Differences (Based on those identified by Wilhelm & Pereira, 1993)

Table 5: Differences Related to Large versus Small Power Distance

Malaysian Teachers	American Teachers
* "Another meeting with the boss." Meetings seen as information-sharing from the top-down and for identification of issues to be considered.	* "I'm glad you brought that up. In my opinion..." Meetings are for open discussion and collaboration.
* "You're the expert; you decide & let me know." Top-down management.	* "We're all experts; let's decide together what to do." Bottom-up management.
* "Teachers transmit knowledge and, as content experts, must have all the answers." Teacher-centered classrooms.	* "Teachers model how to learn. You should be able to show students how to find the answer." Learner-centered classrooms.
* If you're a good teacher, your students will get good grades on the exam. Teachers are responsible for their students' learning.	* Good teachers sometimes have unmotivated students. Students have to take responsibility for their own learning."
* "Teach to the test." Focus on mastery of (often memorized) content. Focus on product.	* "Can you work this problem?" Focus on extended & applied learning. Focus on process and progress.
* "Good morning, Professor." More formal classroom style. Rigid codes of behavior exist between management, teachers & students.	* "Call me Bob." Informal style and more equal social interactions are acceptable between students/teachers and managers/teachers.
* "You're friends... you could tell her that..." Protection and enhancement of "face." Use of friendly surrogates to point out problems or difficulties.	* "If you don't like it, just let me know." Expectation of direct, two-way communication and explicit discussion of unhappiness between individuals.

Appendix C.2 Malaysian/American Decision-Making & Communication Differences (Based on those identified by Wilhelm & Pereira, 1993)

Table 6: Differences Related to Collectivism versus Individualism

Malaysian Teachers	American Teachers
* "Some people think this .... but we don't have to decide right now." Private negotiation until all members reach consensus. If everyone agrees, there is more chance of success	* "Here's the agenda. We hope to get this decided as soon as possible." Public discussion of personal opinion. Majority rules. Eagerness to get started.
* "Everything is personal." You show respect for someone's work by not criticizing it. It's better to be less than frank than to hurt someone's feelings. Focus on keeping friends as colleagues	* "Don't take it personally, but... " Work is divorced from personalities. You show respect for the person's work by helping to improve it. Focus on tasks.
* "If you take more time, you will make a better decision."	* "The sooner the decision is made, the better."
* "Don't show off. It's only OK to offer ideas or materials when asked. Don't imply that you know more than your colleagues.	* "If you have something that worked well in class, your duty is to share it with others."