

Analysis of Culture:

Sub-culture: the Portland Metropolitan Area

This is an analysis of the personal culture I have been exposed to all my life living in the Portland Metropolitan Area of Oregon. It should be understood when reading these value rankings that I am a second generation American born in a family of naturalized citizens, and a member of the “young adult” or “early 20’s” demographic culture. Each value is ranked according to its importance and how operant the value is. The source of each value is explained using the cultural dimensions described by Fons Trompenaars, Geert Hofstede and Shalom Schwartz. The culture & subculture which I am describing here is of young adults of similar age as me (25) and living within the Portland Metropolitan Area.

Ten Key Operant Values:

Education: 1

Behavioral example: People in my culture place great importance on having a good education. This has the highest ranking because it takes people away from friends, family and even puts some out of work. This value takes the top spot because people in my culture are willing to give up so much to attain a proper education. The importance placed on education as an investment in one’s future success could be linked to a long-term orientation as well as a small power distance cultural characteristic (Hofstede). This could also be rooted in Hofstede’s ideas of individualism and uncertainty avoidance. The culture is individualistic in that individuals are willing to sacrifice time for interpersonal relationships in exchange for education. This culture is also exhibits weak uncertainty avoidance because it is very tolerant and accepting of personal risk. This is exemplified by the culture’s willingness to acquire student loans during a period of long-term high unemployment and in one of the worst job markets in the country. If there was strong uncertainty avoidance then the cost-benefit of such loans would prove too risky and thus the decision would be to wait for the labor market to recover before investing in an expensive degree. Income level and prosperity in general is also correlated with education; thus it may be associated to Trompenaar’s achievement dimension.

Individualism: 2

Behavioral example: People in my culture are very focused on their own individual projects, goals and accomplishments rather than that of others. This is related to individualism versus collectivism under Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. Individuals in this culture focus on themselves instead of on the group. This characteristic is exemplified by the rationale which individuals typically make within this culture. For example; when scheduling non-critical meetings it is very common for individuals to make non-committal

responses to invitations. Placing greater importance on one's own time than that of others directly reflects individuals primarily looking after their own interests (Hofstede).

Loyalty: 3

Despite the individualistic characteristics of this culture there is still a small collectivist-oriented loyalty that endures. This is exemplified through the immense popularity of local sports teams in which a strong kinship is expressed among the spectators. This characteristic may have its roots embedded within the region's local history. The region which this culture calls home has earned a reputation of sports team loyalty dating back to before this particular culture's generation. While this value may be rooted in tradition, it also can be related to both Trompenaars' as well as Hofstede's dimensions of collectivism.

Friendship: 4

Friendship carries a key importance to the happiness and success of people in this culture. Hofstede regards friendship as a feminine cultural however in this culture it is mainly with respect to the value it places on interpersonal relationships. Close, long-lasting friendships are very tightly knit and highly valued. While people in this culture are generally open to forming new friendships, it can be difficult for people new to this culture to make new friends. This could be a sign that this culture takes on Trompenaars' idea of a neutral culture instead of affective approaches at showing emotion. This in turn gives outsiders the impression that people within this culture are disinterested or apathetic when in fact they may actually be engaged fully.

Environmental Stewardship: 5

The importance of environmental stewardship cannot be over-emphasized. This culture integrates environmentally conscious behaviors in all practical senses. This relates to Trompenaars control of nature dimension in which a society can either control nature or think of it as important for survival (Trompenaars). The root of this cultural characteristic may lie in the way this group was raised. This generation was exposed in school from an early age to the ideas of recycling, composting as well as early global warming theories. On average this has had a lasting conscious impact on the viewpoints many in this culture view their impact on the environment. This value takes a higher ranking than frugality, as people within my culture are generally willing to spend extra in the face of more frugal alternatives.

Frugality: 6

People do not advertise their personal wealth; instead they value practicality, savings and value. An example of this trait can be observed by the sheer popularity and pervasive acceptance of thrift-stores and second-hand boutiques. This may be evidence of a long-term

orientation (Hofstede) in the respect that this culture is not only fiscally responsible, but forward thinking. Given this region's median income and high-unemployment this fiscal responsibility may also be a minor expression of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance.

Politeness: 7

People from my culture are very polite and in many cases go out of their way in the name of politeness. One example is that people when entering or exiting a building more often than not will stop after entering or exiting and make sure the door does not close on anyone who may be following behind. Another example is that typically drivers from my culture are known to forfeit their right of way, in effect giving away their right of way as an act of politeness. Politeness takes greater precedence over compassion because it is more operant. People are likely to be polite for politeness sake even when they could offer true compassion. This can be related in Schwartz's cultural dimension of harmony, and as less assertive (femininity under Hofstede).

Compassion: 8

The plight of others is not ignored by this culture. The less fortunate typically recognized and rarely looked down upon for their economic situation. This is a feminine cultural characteristic (Hofstede) and is deep-rooted in a tendency to be empathetic towards others. This characteristic under the Schwartz cultural dimensions falls under egalitarianism. The recognition of socio-economic disequilibria and empathy towards others is a classic social egalitarian characteristic. This value is important to this culture because it serves to define the identity of the culture as not having a die-hard individualist orientation but also a consciousness of all participants. It is operant because compassion influences option weighting and biases towards certain choices versus others.

Good Health: 9

Good health is an important operant value in my culture because people are passionate about maintaining their health. People prefer to choose healthy alternatives to what would typically be the utilitarian's optimal choices. Examples include riding one's bicycle for miles and miles to work, or going for a run during one's lunch hour. People in my culture place a great value on having a functional work-life balance. This cultural characteristic may be related to masculinity as per Hofstede's dimensions. The desire for people to be physically healthy through exercise could stem from a root competitiveness and desire for strength. This may be a root of the relationship of work-life balance that this culture tends to prefer as well.

Pride: 10

People in my culture are very proud of their careers, independence, neighborhoods and generally hold a high regard for their lifestyles. People in my culture really pride themselves in doing what they love, are proud to live where they live and how they live. This pride exists at the individualist (Trompenaars) level with respect to work, and more communitarian (Trompenaars) with regards to non-work-related aspects of their lives. According to Hofstede pride is a symptom of high uncertainty avoidance. In the workplace this translates into a resistance to change as well as higher degree of risk avoidance.

Espoused but not operant values:

Multiculturalism:

This culture espouses a great appreciation of multiculturalism however this value conflicts with the culture's individualistic tendencies and as a result fails to be as much of an operant value as individualism. It is often a low-priority with regards to decision making similar to how Hofstede's Individualists look after the interests of themselves and immediate family.

Broadmindedness:

People within my culture are very closed minded with regards to socio-economic and political issues. Despite being compassionate and individualistic they tend to favor a collectivist viewpoint with regards to public policy issues. It is likely a result from a combination of collectivism overtaking individualism as well as pride and loyalty. It may also be rooted in an affective culture (Trompenaars). A general feeling of general unanimity among people in this culture with regards to this issue has helped form pockets of resistant sub-cultures. An example in my culture is a growing group of so-called "closet conservatives" who only share their inner viewpoints on public policy once they've ascertained that an agreement of beliefs is pre-existing between them. This can be seen according to Trompenaars as a Universalist cultural trait.

Conclusion:

As evidenced above, my personal culture has many individualistic traits but at the same time espouses values that have some collectivist tendencies. While this hierarchy is not easily quantifiable, its relativity helps the reader understand how culturally operant these values are relative to each other.