Human Resources Management In Context

Lecture Title :-
Social and Cultural Influences on HRM

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**Human Resources Management**

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the foundational theories surrounding national culture

- Analyse the impact of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on international HRM

- Evaluate how institutional theories shape HR systems across countries

- Apply cross-cultural frameworks to real-life global HRM scenarios

Group discussion

How do you define culture?
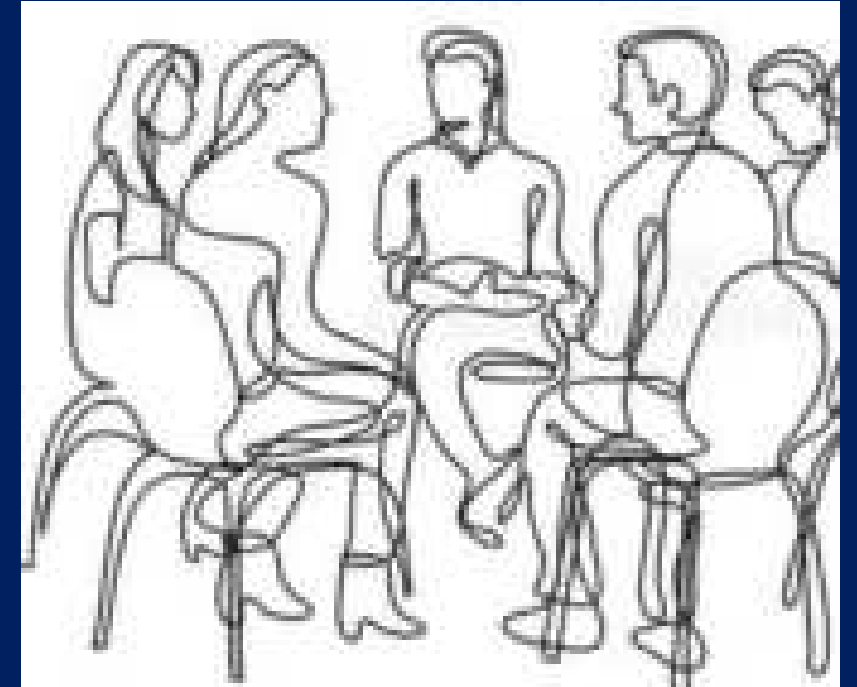
Definition of Culture

"Culture or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". (Tylor, 1871)

"Culture is the framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their feelings and make their judgements."
(Geertz, 1957)

"Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another."

(Hofstede, 1991)

Cross Cultural Theoretical Models
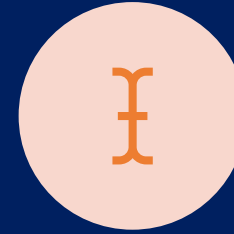
- Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

- Trompenaars' Seven Dimensions of Culture

- Hall's Cultural Context Model

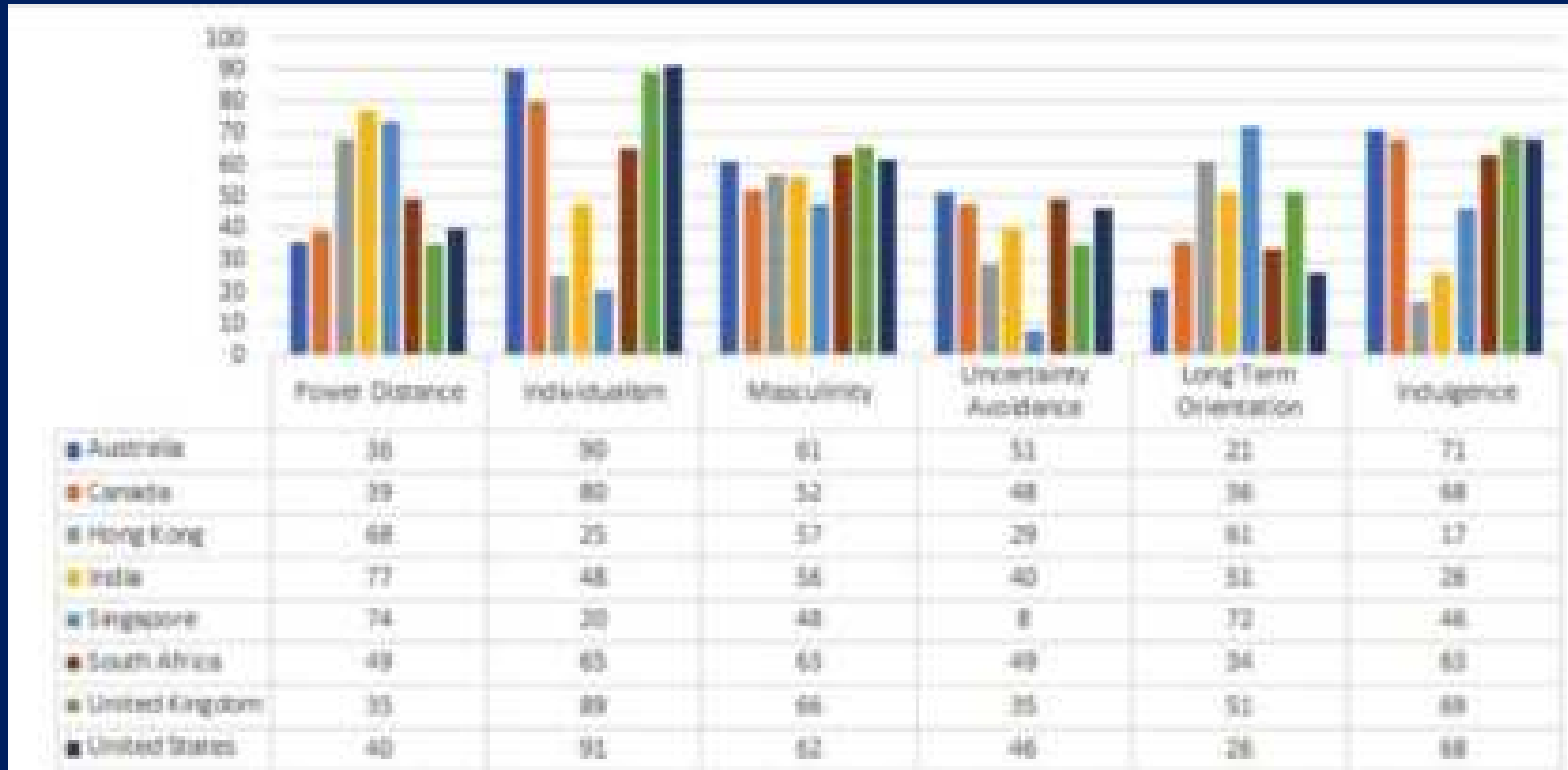# Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is one of the most influential frameworks in understanding how cultural values affect workplace behavior and organizational practices across countries.

Geert Hofstede's Dimensions of Social Culture

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Across Selected Countries

Trompenaar's Seven Dimensions of Culture

Expert Program Management. (2017). Trompenaars Cultural Dimensions – The 7 Dimensions of Culture. Retrieved from https://expertprogrammanagement.com/2017/10/trompenaars-cultural-dimensions/

Hall's Cultural Context Model

This model was developed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall. The model distinguishes cultures based on their communication context, dividing them into high-context and low-context cultures.

1.   **High-Context Cultures**

Communication: Indirect, implicit, and relies heavily on context (body language, tone, shared understanding).

Relationships: Long-term, trust-based, and often built before business can take place.

Information: Much is conveyed through non-verbal cues and assumed shared knowledge.

Examples: Arab Countries, China, Egypt, France, Italy, Japan, Latin American Countries, Spain.

2.   **Low-Context Cultures**

Communication: Direct, explicit, and clear. Words are the primary carriers of meaning.

Relationships: More task-oriented and can be formed quickly.

Information: Needs to be spelled out clearly and thoroughly.

Examples: Austria, Canada, Denmark, England, Findland, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, United States.

Cultural Dimensions Exercise

Instructions:

- Read each scenario in the worksheet carefully.

- Identify and write down which cultural dimension(s) you think are most relevant. (Use Hofstede's, Trompenaars' or Hall's frameworks to justify your answer).

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Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains how organizational practices are shaped by rules, norms, and beliefs within a society (Scott, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Scott's Three Pillars of Institution:-

Pillar	Definition	Example in HRM
Regulatory	Formal rules, laws, and sanctions imposed by governments or authorities.	Employment law, minimum wage, health & safety standards.
Normative	Social norms, values, and expectations about "appropriate" behavior.	Expectations around work–life balance, fairness in recruitment.
Cognitive	Deeply held beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions shared by society.	Beliefs about hierarchy, authority, or the meaning of "leadership."

DiMaggio & Powell's Institutional Isomorphism

Institutional isomorphism is the process by which organizations become similar over time to survive and obtain legitimacy in their institutional surroundings.

DiMaggio and Powell discovered three isomorphic mechanisms that explain this convergence.

- **Coercive Isomorphism** – Legal or political pressures (e.g., compliance with labor laws).

- **Normative Isomorphism** – Professional standards and education (e.g., HR certifications).

- **Mimetic Isomorphism** – Imitation in uncertainty (e.g., Companies copy Google's HR policies (e.g., flexible working, campus culture).

Institutional Isomorphism In Practice

U.S. Retail Chain Expands into France

| Isomorphism Type	Source of Pressure	HR Adaptation in France
Coercive	Legal & regulatory systems	- Must follow 35-hour workweek regulations - Implement works councils and union input
Normative	Professional education & HR standards	- Employ HR staff trained in French HR norms - Adopt formal appraisal & training models
Mimetic	Imitation of successful competitors	- Copy team leader model from Carrefour - Use localized customer service practices

Institutional Theory Case Study -

Refer to the Institutional Theory Case Study worksheet.

Apply Institutional Theory to analyse how national institutions influence HR practices and explain why "global best practices" may not always work across contexts.

Group Discussion -

What do you understand by the terms cultural blindness and cultural intelligence?
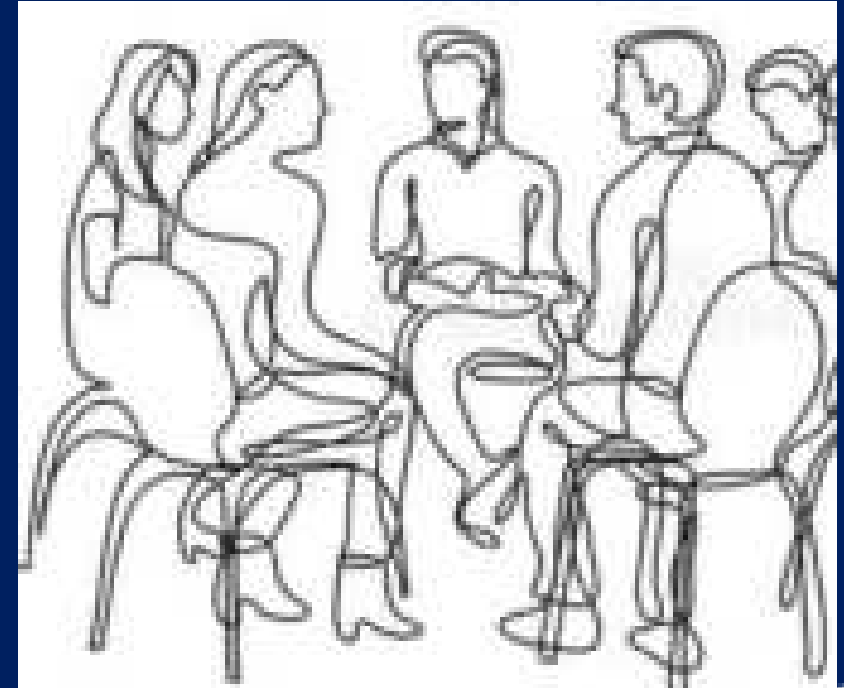
Cultural Blindness

Cultural blindness is the inability or refusal to recognize cultural differences, which is often caused by the notion that treating everyone **"the same"** is fair and effective.

Characteristics:
•Assumes all people are alike, regardless of culture.
•Ignores the influence of culture on behavior, communication, and expectations.
•Often reflects a dominant cultural perspective.
•Can lead to unintentional **discrimination** or **exclusion**.

Cultural Blindness Example :-

A German manager is leading a multinational project team that includes several Japanese engineers. The team has just completed a product development cycle, and the German manager calls a meeting to conduct a frank performance review and identify areas for improvement.

The German manager opens the meeting by **directly pointing out** what went wrong and **asks specific individuals** (including Japanese team members) to explain mistakes or delays.

From the German perspective, this direct, critical feedback is seen as **constructive and necessary** for professional growth—a cultural norm rooted in low-context, individualistic communication.

However, the Japanese employees become visibly uncomfortable. They avoid eye contact, remain silent, or offer vague responses. Some feel publicly embarrassed.

The Cultural Blindness:
The manager fails to recognize that in Japanese culture, group harmony (wa), saving face, and indirect communication are critical. Public criticism, especially in front of peers or superiors, is deeply uncomfortable and often considered shameful.By applying German norms universally, the manager assumes that open criticism is always effective, ignoring how cultural values shape behavior and feedback expectations.

Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence is the **capability to function effectively across various cultural contexts** (Earley & Ang, 2003).

Components (Earley & Ang, 2003):
- **Cognitive CQ** – Knowledge of cultural norms and systems.
- **Motivational CQ** – Interest and drive to engage with other cultures.
- **Behavioral CQ** – Ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviors.
- **Metacognitive CQ** – Awareness and strategic thinking about cultural interactions.

Cultural Intelligence Example:-

A German automotive company is working with its Japanese partner to co-develop a new electric vehicle component. The German project lead, Anna, is based in Munich, while her Japanese counterpart, Mr. Tanaka, is in Tokyo. Both are responsible for managing their respective engineering teams and ensuring alignment across locations.

Challenge:
In early project meetings, Anna notices that her Japanese colleagues are very quiet during decision-making discussions. In contrast, her German team prefers direct, fast-paced debates to evaluate ideas. Anna initially interprets the Japanese team's silence as lack of preparation or commitment.

Culturally Intelligent Response:
Instead of making assumptions, Anna draws on her cultural intelligence training and does the following:

• She reflects on how cultural norms around communication differ.
• She recalls that in Japanese business culture, employees often prefer to process information carefully and avoid open disagreement in public settings.
• She learns about the Japanese value of **nemawashi** – the practice of building informal consensus before formal decisions.
• She also notes that **hierarchy and seniority** play a bigger role in decision-making than in Germany.
• She reaches out to Mr. Tanaka to learn more about how his team prefers to communicate.
• She expresses genuine curiosity about how to better align the teams.

Why is Cultural Awareness Essential in HRM?

- Enhances Communication and Reduces Misunderstandings

- Improves Recruitment and Retention

- Fosters Inclusive and Equitable Work Environments

- Supports Global Talent Management

- Strengthens Teamwork and Collaboration

- Reduces Legal and Ethical Risks

- Drives Organizational Success in Global Markets

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Video links

Geert Hofstede

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=geert+hofstede+introduces+dimensions+of+societal+culture+2013

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Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Across Selected Countries