

Cultural diversity awareness

Having to do with people from different countries means having to deal with **cultural diversity**. Being aware of such differences, and respecting what in a country is considered appropriate and decent behaviour is fundamental to establishing fruitful relations. But, first of all, what is culture?

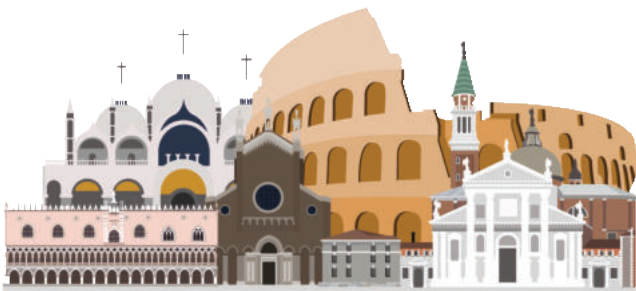
According to Geert Hofstede, famous Dutch anthropologist and psychologist who conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture, culture is “how you were raised. It developed while you grew up. [...] It] is the software of our minds. We need shared software in order to communicate. So, culture is about what we share with those around us.”

From 1967 to 1973, while working at IBM as a psychologist, Geert Hofstede collected and analysed data from over forty countries. From those results, and later additions, Hofstede developed a model that identifies four primary dimensions to differentiate cultures. He later added two other dimensions, but, since dimensions are imagined, he says there could be many more. The six dimensions he identified are:

- **Individualism**, which focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. A High Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are fundamental within the society. A Low Individualism ranking characterises societies with close ties between individuals.
- **Power Distance**, which focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people. A High Power Distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow. A Low Power Distance ranking indicates the society de-emphasizes the differences between citizens' power and wealth.
- **Masculinity**, which focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. A Low Masculinity ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders.
- **Uncertainty avoidance**, which focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society - i.e. unstructured situations. A High Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance. A Low Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has more tolerance for a variety of opinions.



- **Long-term orientation** which focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values. High Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition. A Low Long-Term Orientation ranking indicates the country does not reinforce these concepts.
- **Indulgence**, which focuses on the degree the society favours the pursuit of the good things in life. A High Indulgence ranking indicates a society where it is good to be free and doing what your impulses want you to do. A Low Indulgence ranking indicates the country has a restrained culture, where the feeling is that life is hard, and duty, not freedom, is the normal state of being.



Intercultural communication has now become a crucial element in this globalised world, and one of the key elements for successful exchanges may just be the understanding and respect for cultural diversity, thus a knowledge of Hofstede's parameters and analysis may result in a better comprehension of the social context necessary for successful cross-cultural contacts.



1 BEFORE READING. Try and define what culture is. Then, work with a classmate and make a list of the top most features that define Italian culture, keeping to the given parameters.

Food ■ Family ■ Friends ■ Values



- 2** Read the results of Hofstede's analysis on Italy. Say whether the sentences are *true* or *false* and correct the false ones. Then, discuss with your classmates about whether or not you recognise yourself in such an analysis.

Power Distance: With a score of 50, Northern Italy tends to prefer equality and a decentralisation of power and decision-making. Control and formal supervision is generally disliked among the younger generation, who demonstrate a preference for teamwork and an open management style. The high score on Individualism accentuates the aversion of being controlled and told what to do. In Southern Italy all the consequences of PDI are often high, quite the opposite of Northern Italy.

Individualism: At a score of 76, Italy is an Individualist culture, especially in the big and rich cities of the North, where people can feel alone even in the middle of a big and busy crowd. So family and friends becomes an important antidote to this feeling; but the word "friend" in business has a slightly different meaning: someone that you know and can be useful for introducing you to important or powerful people. For Italians, having their own personal ideas and objectives in life is very motivating and the route to happiness is through personal fulfilment. This dimension varies in the South, where less Individualist behaviour can be observed: the family network and the group one belongs to are important social aspects.

Masculinity: At 70, Italy is a Masculine society – highly success oriented and driven. Children are taught from an early age that competition is good and to be a winner is important in one's life. Italians show their success by acquiring status symbols such as a beautiful car, a big house, and travelling to exotic countries. As the working environment is the place where Italians can reach their success, competition among colleagues for making a career can be very strong.

Uncertainty Avoidance: At 75, Italy has a high score, which means that Italians are not comfortable in

ambiguous situations. Formality in Italian society is important and the Italian penal and civil code are complicated with clauses, codicils etc. What is surprising for the foreigner is the apparent contradiction between all the existing norms and procedures and the fact that Italians don't always comply with them. In work terms, high Uncertainty Avoidance results in large amounts of detailed planning. In Italy, the combination of high Masculinity and high Uncertainty Avoidance makes life very difficult and stressful. To release some of the tension that is built up during the day, Italians need to have good, relaxing moments in their everyday life, enjoying a long meal or frequent coffee breaks. Due to their high score in this dimension Italians are very passionate people: emotions are so powerful that individuals cannot keep them inside and must express them to others, especially with the use of body language.

Long Term Orientation: Italy's high score of 61 in this dimension shows that Italian culture is pragmatic. In societies with a pragmatic orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt traditions easily to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results.

Indulgence: A low score of 30 indicates that Italian culture is one of Restraint. Societies with a low score in this dimension have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. Also, in contrast to Indulgent societies, Restrained societies do not put much emphasis on leisure time and control the gratification of their desires. People with this orientation have the perception that their actions are restrained by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong.

Adapted from: <https://geert-hofstede.com/italy.html>

- | | T | F | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Both Northern and Southern Italians prefer working in a team and don't like being told what to do. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. To avoid the stress caused by the complicated civil and penal codes, Italians don't comply with all their rules. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Italy tends to be ego-centric. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Italians are very good at hiding their emotions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Friends have important roles both in the North and in the South of Italy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Italians believe in their traditions but are ready to modify them, should the need arise. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Italian society isn't very ambitious. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Italians tend to be pessimist and cynical. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Italians tend to prefer clear-cut situations. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Italians feel they are free to do what they want and get what they desire. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |