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## The Cultural Specificity of Arabian Countries

### **Introduction**

Geert Hofstede presents the suggestion that all Arabian countries are grouped into one cultural category regardless of territorial borders. His research provides significant insight into various cultures within the Arab world. His justification for suggesting cultural hegemony for Arab nations is based primarily on his assumption that the Muslim faith plays a fundamental role in the lives of Arab people in all Arabian nations. Hofstede also mentions that caste systems associated with Islam are present in all Arab nations. Despite the fact Arab countries present a diversity of cultures and religions, Hofstede remains determined to group them into one.

The grouping of Arabian countries under a single cultural heading is quite dubious, despite Hofstede's arguments about the benefits of such a practice. His are unjustified given the historical and political realities of the Middle East. Hofstede conveniently ignores the cultural potential and characteristics of each separate country in the region. In addition, a number of Arab countries (Somalia and Sudan, for example) need to be excluded from this suggestion simply because Arabic is not the official language in these countries. The objective of this paper is to provide a relevant discussion of the appropriateness of Hofstede's cultural model as related to countries in the Arab world.

### **Literature Review**

The emergence of various social structures and cultural perceptions across the Middle East is evident in the vibrant and dynamic business environment in the Arab world. Numerous

studies have been undertaken to provide a relevant explanation of different attitudes towards women in the Arabian Gulf region as well as to explain the dominance of individual cultural systems and values present in these countries. In a study by Abdalla (1996), the argument presented states that attitudes to women's roles in the specific regions have become more liberal over time. Abdalla's research incorporates a short version of the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS) among a substantial number of Kuwaiti and Qatari professional males and females (Abdalla, 1996). In addition to this metric, the participants are asked essential questions from Bem's Sex Role Inventory, along with a demographic questionnaire. The scores in the study indicate that the majority of Qatari and Kuwaiti professionals hold quite conservative attitudes about the roles of females in the region.

Regardless of the notion of conservatism expressed by certain individuals in the Arab world, female leadership is considered quite important in the region. In a study conducted by Elgamal (2012), evidence is presented to suggest that there is a current rise of female leaders in the Arab world and that their specific mechanisms for achieving success in the long term include a greater acceptance of diversity and individualism in Arab countries. The sample of this study includes 101 female leaders representing the countries of Egypt, Kuwait, and Tunisia. Elgamal (2012) claims to find a meaningful paradigm shift in the Arab world. From this perspective, female leaders are considered as possessing significant potential to lead others by manifesting the characteristics of extensive cooperation, acceptable aggressiveness, and competitiveness. This implies that female leadership has acquired completely new dimensions in the Arab world.

Undoubtedly, social structures and perceptions are subject to certain changes in Arab nations. Robertson, Al-Khatib, and Al-Habib (2002) argue that the cultural values and work-related beliefs of employees from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman are adequately reflected in their behavior in the workplace. Findings indicate that the aspects of individualism and masculinity are associated with personal beliefs about the degree of organizational commitment and work ethic. It is apparent that the Arabian culture is different from particular Western models of culture. Thereofre, demonstrating a holistic approach to the culture in the Arab world is required, according to Obeidat, Shannak, Masa'deh, and Al-Jarrah (2012). These researchers explore the various meanings of culture in the Arabian context by adopting Hofstede's model. Another advantage of the mentioned study is that it presents emerging managerial problems

encountered in organizations based in the Middle East. Therefore, the researchers argue that Arab managers need to demonstrate awareness of their own cultural dimensions in order to succeed. These facts contradict the idea of a uniform culture that permeates all Arab nations.

In specific terms, Ali, Taqi, and Krishnan (2013) describe the parameters in the work of Kuwaiti managers, as the focus is on the dimensions of individualism, collectivism, and decision styles. The majority of the participants in this study tend to demonstrate collectivist organizational culture, as the commitment to individualism is predominantly ignored. Furthermore, Ali, Taqi, and Krishnan (2013) argue that the participants are more likely to select consultative and participative decision styles. The collectivism manifested by Kuwaiti managers implies a sense of cooperation and acceptance that is important for group identification.

### **Evidence and Analysis**

The Geert Hofstede analysis done for countries of the Arab world relates to the countries of Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and the United Arab Emirates. There has been reported an emerging tendency for extensive rule orientation in the social systems of these countries (Hofstede, 2001). The preoccupation with various laws, regulations, and mechanisms for ensuring control indicates individuals' determination to decrease the amount of uncertainty prevailing in Arabian societies. Furthermore, the Geert Hofstede analysis provides a specific framework for arguing that the combination of large power distance and uncertainty avoidance has prompted the emergence of ultimate authority and power on the behalf of Arabian leaders (Hofstede, 1980).

The high level of inequality of power implies that such leaders obviously separate themselves from the group, which is accepted as something normal in the business environment in Arabian countries. It has been shown that Arabian societies have a low level of tolerance for uncertainty (Hofstede, 2001). The utmost goal of the respective populations is to ensure strict control upon all aspects in society, but this means that such societies rarely accept change. In this way, dimensions of creativity and innovation are inadequately developed in Arabian countries (Hofstede, 1980). Another essential finding based on the Geert Hofstede analysis is associated with the limited rights of Arab women, as this could be explained with the legacy of the Muslim religion rather than with the premise of a dominating cultural paradigm.

## **Discussion**

As has been previously mentioned, the application of Hofstede's framework to the context of Arabian countries in the sense of grouping them as one is both justified and problematic. It is justifiable on the grounds of evident cultural similarities among Arab nations irrespective of relative power or proximity; for example, in the business environment in Arabian countries (Hofstede, 2001). Based on the findings of the Geert Hofstede analysis, Arabian countries could be identified as long-term oriented cultures (Hofstede, 2001). The lowest Hofstede dimension for Arabian countries is that of individualism, as previously outlined. In this way, individuals from these nations tend to be members from a highly collectivist, uniform society (Abdalla, 1996). Their collectivism orientation is manifested in a persistent commitment to a particular group, or in the formation of extended social and family relationships. Loyalty in the collectivist societies available in Arabian countries is fundamental in all aspects of life (Elgamal, 2012). The grouping of Arabian countries as one is inappropriate from my personal perspective because I support the belief that each country has its unique characteristics and cultural specificity. Therefore, each country from the region can develop in a rather distinct way.

## **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates a comprehensive discussion of the application of a framework reflected from the Geert Hofstede cultural analysis of Arabian countries. Although Hofstede's argument of grouping Arabian countries as one is considered justified to a certain extent, the application of this suggestion in practice seems inappropriate given the cultural differences and characteristics of each country (Hofstede, 2001). Nevertheless, the section on evidence and analysis presents sufficient information on common cultural characteristics of Arabian countries (Abdalla, 1996). Likewise, the literature review section of the paper provides important details of distinct features of Arab cultures, with emphasis on attitudes towards Arab women. In conclusion, the application of the Hofstede framework in the context of Arabian countries is quite subjective and specific in the sense that it depends on different factors and interpretations of cultural phenomena occurring in the collectivist societies of the Arabian Gulf region.

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