

Influence of Culture on Decision Making in Organizations: Applying Hofstede's Value Dimensions

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Abstract

Quite often, the decision making process has been understood from the quantitative approach; highly influenced by, inter alia, game theory, decision trees and linear programmes. Moreover, there is a preoccupation with rational and economic explanations, political dimensions, procedures, and the institutional framework of public organizations. Yet organizations and the people that work in them have emotions, feelings and context. Thus there is the need for analyzing the decision maker and decision making in the cross-cultural context. This paper seeks to draw the relationship between culture and decision making. I explain the process through which policy subsystem arrives at a decision of recommending policy options. The article argues that there is a fruitful intellectual dimension linking culture to decision making an area which is not usually preferred in public administration, on the pretext that culture has limited explanatory power since culture could be broadly considered to mean everything.

Key words: Decision making, Game theory, Institutions, Organizations, Culture, Hofstede

Introduction

A number of studies have been done concerning decision making in organizations. However, most efforts have been geared towards the rational and economic explanations, political dimensions, procedures, and the institutional framework of public organizations. Stewart (1985) remarks that theorists in behavioural and statistical decision making have carried out research within the scope of game theory, whereby the main interest is to analyze rational action. Thus there is the need to analyze the decision maker and decision making in the cross cultural context.

This article presents the argument that culture cannot be ignored as we labor to understand and explain decision making. The value in this idea arises from the thinking that using culture as an explanatory variable is scarce in public administration; on the pretext that culture has limited explanatory power.

Karyeija (2005) contends that decision making may be a result of either one or a combination of these three perspectives;- a) rule - following, b) compromising preferences, c) consensus. I intend to show how culture underlies these three components of decision making. The paper operates on the premise that these three perspectives are present in any decision making process. More so, these perspectives are influenced by different cultures, and in particular organizational culture. Schein (1997, pp.12) offers the formal definition of organizational culture as :

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has learned as it solves its problems of external and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Organizational culture is closely related to societal culture, and culture may be looked at as weak or strong (Hofstede, 1997). Schein (1985) looked at it from four different dimensions, i.e. a) power distance, b) collectivism versus individualism, c) masculinity versus femininity, and d) uncertainty avoidance. As for Trompenaars (1993) culture is seen from seven dimensions: universalism versus particularism; collectivism versus individualism; neutral versus emotional; specific versus diffuse; achievement versus ascription; attitudes to time; and, attitudes to the environment.

Other scholars have an advanced analysis of culture by drawing the close relationship between organizational culture and administrative culture (Jamil, 1995; Ouchi, 1981; Tayeb, 1988). This paper, therefore, examines not only the relationship between organizational and societal culture, but also explores the impact of culture on the public decision making process. It seeks to understand the process of decision making by analyzing the key actors, and the way they interact to establish policy decisions. Particularly, it explores the cultural dimension to these three formulated decision making processes, i.e. contextual, strategic and communicative.

At the same time, it is understood that there are basic features that define particular cultures. For example, Munene, Schwarz and Kibanja (2005) note is the need to examine how the basic features of the African culture influence decision making. They further suggest that there is sufficient evidence to show that the African culture emphasizes hierarchy, embeddedness and mastery, in contrast to egalitarianism, autonomy and harmony. As such, African decision makers stress reliance on formal rules and superiors in reaching decisions, as predicated by their cultural profile. Therefore, culture may either enhance the effectiveness of decision making or frustrate it.

Organizational culture became a prominent paradigm in the early 1980s triggered off by scholars such as Ouchi (1981). They suggested that culture was very important to organizational performance and that organizational culture could be managed to improve a company's competitive advantage. Emphasis was moved from the technical and functional aspects of management to the interpersonal and symbolic aspects of management that required in-depth, qualitative studies of organizational life.

From the above discussion, it is clear that culture could be critical to decision making. Jamil (1997) notes that although cultural theories argue that organization variables such as decision making, learning capacity, power and authority relations, loyalty group orientation and motivation, innovation and change are culture-specific, not culture-free, they contrast with theories which stress universality of organization structure and behaviour across cultures.

Conceptual Framework

Karyeija (2005, pp. 46 - 48) proposes and analyses possible modes of decision making. He argues that people interaction is an integral part of decision making. He further notes that

when rules are followed, decisions tend to reflect prime objectives. Secondly, decisions reflect compromise; and thirdly, they reflect consensus. This paper draws a further relationship of how culture can influence these decision making patterns. Although many scholars agree that culture is an integral aspect of decision making, very few efforts have been made to study it systematically such as Hofstede (1997), Schein (1985) and Trompenaars (1993) did. Instead, it is taken for granted or handled as a residual category (Melberg, 1997).

Culture affects decision making through the broader context of the nation's culture and through culturally based value systems which affect each individual decision maker's perception or interpretation of what is going on. The extent to which decision making is influenced by culture varies among countries. The ways that culture influences an individual's decision can be studied by looking at the variables involved in each stage of the rational decision-making process. These stages are: (1) defining the problem, (2) gathering and analyzing relevant data, (3) considering alternative solutions, (4) deciding on the best solution, and (5) implementing the decision. It is however imperative, at this point, to have an understanding of what a decision is.

Meaning of Decision

A decision is a course of action, a position or judgement reached following a game or contest. It is a solution to a problem. Decision making involves human associations, events, and words, leading to, and including, any conclusion for a programme or policy. A decision results from one of the following; a) identifying relevant goals, b) searching for alternative courses of action, c) evaluating alternatives, or d) selecting the best course of action (Anderson, 1983; Blankenship and Miles, 1968). A decision is choice, goal discovery and avoidance of failures.

Value systems influence the overall approach that decision makers from various cultures take to their task. Particularly, I wish to apply Hofstede's cultural dimensions to elaborate that a country's orientation influences the level at which decisions are made. Since the decision-making procedures described above concern a group and not an individual, this paper will dwell more on how broad value systems influence decision making amongst organizations and policy-making bodies.

What is culture?

Culture, as a concept, is both complex and elusive. However, a number of scholars have made attempts to define it variously and, at times, vaguely. Some have even argued that the concept has come to mean everything and nothing (Diagne and Ossebi, 1996). This definition from UNESCO well illustrates this particular point:

Culture is a ...set of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. Other than arts and the humanities, it covers modes of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 1982:3).

Such and related definitions have been dismissed as incapable of allowing systematic conceptualization, in favour of an approach that provides concrete variables (Gilbert, 1989; Segall, 1984). Further still, Jahoda (1984), and Munene et al (2005, pp.44) contend that this approach is

problematic because of the sheer number of potentially relevant variables and the absence of a theory for understanding their interrelations, organizing them, and choosing among them.

According to Tayeb (1988, p.42) “culture is a set of historically evolved learned values, attitudes and meanings shared by members of a given society”. Hofstede (1997) refers to culture as the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of the people from another. Fays (2003) considers culture as “... a complex set of shared beliefs, values and concepts which enable a group to make sense of its life and provides it with directions on how to live”. Fays posits that in order to understand human behaviour; we must pay particular attention to the inner logic which orders the various elements that comprise the social system as a whole.

Therefore, culture could mean shared views, perceptions, beliefs, values, and practices that characterize a given society. Taken a step further, culture provides the tools and the environment for learning how to function in society (Geertz, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978), the how and the why (Hofstede, 1997). People reproduce their culture as they learn how to function, and transform their culture as they learn why they should function in particular ways.

A lot of studies have been carried out concerning culture in order to come up with clear variables. Some of the major ones that have sought to identify a comprehensive set of cultural value dimensions are Hofstede (1997), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Trompenaars (1993).

Decision making approaches in Organizations

This section attempts to draw a relationship between actors and how they arrive at decisions. The underlying assumption is that for a decision to take place, people must interact, and the way they interact determines the nature of the decision established. Karyeija (2005) notes that when rules are followed, decisions tend to reflect prime objectives. Secondly, decisions reflect compromise and, thirdly, they reflect consensus. The difference between compromise and consensus is that actors give different reasons as to why they adhere to a compromise, and identical reasons as to why they adhere to a consensus (Habermas, 1996).

Patterns of communication within a decision-making body can be partly explained through rationality. Rationality may be defined as action based on reason, good sense, values, desired ends, openness to argumentation, and an assumption on how we view the world. There are three types of rationality: contextual, strategic and communicative. These forms of rationality inform communication processes, especially in the context of decision making (Eriksen and Weirgard, 1993; Zey, 1998).

Contextual rationality refers to actions that are compatible with norms. We can only know what is rational through situational and normative contexts of action. Contextual rationality is based on rule following. It responds to the question: what is appropriate?

Strategic rationality refers to action oriented towards maximizing goals or preferences. It is based on means-ends calculus, taking other actors' strategies into consideration. The basis of discussion is threats and promises, and the negotiation strategy is either competition

or cooperation. It also exhibits instrumentalism where purposive-oriented actions within predictable and stable environments are done. The standard is the degree to which actors choose the best means to achieve some preconceived goals. It is based on calculation and the concern is to solve problems effectively.

Communicative rationality proposes that people coordinate actions through significant symbols and mutually respecting validity claims. People argue in relation to inter-subjective standards of truth, rightness and sincerity. Actors reach a consensus and judge reasonable choices through the force of better argument (Eriksen & Weirgard, 1993, pp.8 -23).

From these forms of rationality, I propose three processes to help understand the nature and structure of interaction between actors and their decisions; a) contextual rationality goes with rule-following-oriented decision making, b) strategic rationality goes with compromise-oriented decision making, while c) communicative rationality goes with consensus-oriented decision making. When the rule-following process is dominant, decisions reflect context and specific objectives. The dominance of compromise orientation reflects narrow preferences. While the consensus inclination produces a well-reasoned decision.

Rule-following decision making: From this perspective, decision making occurs according to objectives and by following rules, procedures, and routines (Scott, 2003, pp.27). This mode of decision making could be explained by contextual rationality, which is concerned with fairness and justice. Actions are compatible with norms, and rationality is perceived by relating an action to the situation and normative context. Rules decide the type of participants: who will do what and what kind of resources to be deployed (March and Olsen, 2003). Rules are responsible for shaping and modifying an actor's interactions. Rules help allocate time and give occasion on how to express dissent. It can be emphasized that the nature of rules determines a decision. Different rules shape decisions differently. The outcome is likely to reflect objectives.

Allison (1999, p.14) argues that decisions are organizational outputs. Organizations come up as a response to problems. They are designed to handle specific problems and in order to perform tasks; members have to be well coordinated. Standards of procedure are developed for sectors to do what they ought to do. Organizational routines, rules and standards of procedure constrain behaviour and optimal choice to achieve efficiency. Organizations strive for legitimacy and status. As people within organizations interact, organizations develop a distinct culture that shapes individual behaviour. Organizations derive their preferences from within themselves. They are aggregations of interests where problems of cooperation and collective accountability are resolved.

March and Olsen (2003) argue that the logic of appropriateness is rule-based. Rules are followed and roles fulfilled while an individual is taking action. The logic of appropriateness is contextual; actors emphasize social obligation in specific situations. Behaviour is intentional and action stems from necessity. One relies on intuition rather than calculation to take action. Intuition is informed through training, education, socialization and experience. Choice is based on morality and obligation. This is a clear manifestation of cultural underpinnings in decision making.

Decision makers may maintain consistency between behaviour and a conception of self in their roles. This provides an opportunity for actors to execute standards of procedure, fulfil role expectations, satisfy commitments, and define virtue and truth (March and Olsen, 1976, pp.10 -12). Actors develop the ability to conform to prevailing rules and inter-organizational influences. Interest groups emerge and foster cliques or other interactions responsible for informal structures and new power centres. Organizations relate to the environment geographically and also with the sector involved. In order for a decision to be rule-following, the actors require an identity to make collective decisions. The ultimate situation is to create a “we” feeling. Membership is based on shared values; and since values are a cornerstone of culture, the role of culture cannot be underestimated.

Compromise-oriented decision making: This process is characterized by division of labour, threats, sanctions and rewards. This process may be partly explained by instrumental rationality which denotes that actions are purpose-oriented. Actors choose options by evaluating likely consequences for what they stand for. Lipset (1960) cited in March and Olsen (2003), claims that decisions result from calculations designed to maximize given preferences. Decision making is a narrow-interest-gaining process which could be viewed as a composition of groups pursuing particular interests where each group attempts to impose its preferences with none determining the final goal (Scott, 2003, p. 296).

Decisions are driven by preferences and expectations about consequences. Behaviour is wilful, reflecting an attempt to make outcomes fulfil subjective desires, to the extent possible. The actor chooses among alternatives by evaluating their likely consequences for personal or collective objectives, conscious that other actors are doing likewise. Actions and outcomes are products of rational calculating behaviour designed to maximize a given set of preferences. However, one may ask a question as to where preferences actually come from. As Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990, p. 63) noted, it is culture that teaches people what to prefer and what to abhor. Decision makers are motivated to act according to the consequences of their preferences. Key questions an actor asks him/herself are: What are my alternatives? What are my values? What are the consequences of alternatives to my values? In the final analysis an actor chooses alternatives with the best consequences (March, 1989, pp.23).

The second aspect of the compromise-oriented decision making is based on bargaining and negotiation. The typical outcome of bargaining is a compromise. Compromise is established by giving and taking. None of the parties get exactly what they want, but each regards the result as better than no agreement. How much the various actors have to deviate from their opening position depends on the strength of their bargaining power (Eriksen & Weirgard, 1993; Rintala, 1969, pp.326 – 332).

According to Allison’s third conceptual model, governmental politics, an actor pursues a single strategic issue. Decisions result from interactions of competing preferences and bargaining games. These games include coalition building, actions and speeches. Actors play according to various conceptions of national, organizational, and personal goals. Decisions do not follow single choice but haggling (Allison and Zelikow, 1999, p.225).

For one to clearly explain why certain decisions are taken, it is of great value to identify games and players, coalitions, bargains and compromises, and convey some feel of the confusion within their deliberations. Decision makers have specific preferences that determine priorities, perceptions, and positions. Action channels and not peoples' positions matter (Eriksen & Weirgard, 1993). Decisions are affected by the way in which they are framed and put on the agenda, by the nature of actors, and their numerical strength. Actors possess preconceived ideas based on their mother organizations. Mother organizations have clear tasks, missions and preferences (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, pp.282). These organizations also have distinct cultures. There could be better or worse cultures, stronger or weaker cultures, and the right kind of culture will influence how the organization behaves.

However, despite the agreement on the agenda and policy choices, conflicts emerge and cannot be ignored. Symptoms of conflicts may include vacillation, feelings of uncertainty, and emotional stress. Stressed actors resort to defensive avoidance by exaggerating favourable consequences, downplaying unfavourable consequences, and denying uneasy feelings (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, pp. 283-285). This scenario is well captured thus:

Society deals with the fact that time only runs one way; that is we are all caught in the reality of past, present and future, and we have to live with the reality because the future is unknown and always will be. Some societies socialize their members into accepting this uncertainty and not becoming upset by it....such societies can be called weak uncertainty avoidance society...other societies socialize their people into trying to beat the future...such societies can be called strong uncertainty avoidance societies...Because the future remains essentially unpredictable. (Hofstede,1983, p.81).

Consensus-oriented decision making: In the third process an agreement is reached through consensus. Consensus denotes free discussion, purposeful deliberation, discourse, as within the logic of communicative rationality. Buzan(1981, p.236) claims that consensus-based decision making means consent that does not involve recourse to voting. Consensus is a process for group decision-making. It is a method by which ideas of an entire group are collected and synthesized to establish an acceptable decision. Collective ownership of a decision and trust, are promoted as a better solution is sought.

Decisions are based on arguing. Arguing, which dominates communicative action is diametrically opposed to power-based interaction patterns that dominate strategic action. In a pure bargaining process, power is the only asset that matters. Bargaining is the device that exchange signals about power resources available to participants. Agreement is established as a compromise, dependent on external conditions of a bargaining situation (Eriksen & Weirgard, 1993, p.11; Gehring, 2003, p.71).

Communicative action is affected exclusively by speech. A communicative utterance is true by corresponding to a state of affairs in the objective world; it is right by appealing to legitimate norms in society; and it is sincere by accurately representing the inner state of a speakers' subjective world. The only way to find reasonable solutions to practical questions is through a free discussion among concerned actors without force, so that the better argument

prevails. An argument must be subjected to public scrutiny and an actor must be able to apply a norm as equal to him as to others (Tonheim, 2003). In the event that there are many parties involved, members must be able to represent their interests appropriately. All actors must have opportunity to speak and be heard. There should be no form of discrimination about who should talk and who should not talk, or about who should be listened to and who should not.

Gehring notes that for a speech act to be effective, it must have valid contents, and provide reasons to support a claim (Gehring, 2003, p.73). Convincing reasons replace sanctions that accompany strategic action. Rationality in communicative action denotes the provision of convincing reasons for one's claims, and not the best pursuit of one's preferences. Claims must be subjected to public scrutiny and the actor must be able to defend his choice against criticism. Conflicting validity claims are resolved through the creation of a common conviction based on reason. This process of allowing collective judgment is discourse. In a discourse, actors agree on the criterion for judging conflicting validity claims and engage each other until at least one party changes his/her original position to achieve consensus. Within a discourse, the power to convince others relies immediately on the free compulsion of the better argument (Gehring, 2003, p.74).

However, in itself, discourse does not validate claims. The driving force of communicative action is to convince others on the basis of reasons, and not threats or sanctions. It is also not concerned with power and its dispensation. Therefore, by applying communicative rationality, actors obtain a standard based on common interest and not individual preferences. Individuals represent various interests and have to be involved in the decision-making process.

A variety of actors ought to have sufficient information on the subject matter. Information should be shared, available to all and sufficient to make reasonable presentations. Deliberations must be carried out according to good reasons for better arguments to prevail. Whatever issues actors raise should be scrutinized and assumptions critically investigated. Actors must speak sincerely and honestly; and ought to be in a legitimate position to do so; they ought to speak comprehensibly and factually. Finally, consensus must be sought. The decision will be consensual to the degree that the above conditions are met. The closer actors are to meeting these conditions, the more likely communicative action is achieved. An attempt to approximate deliberations to a communicative process helps ensure that decisions take into account important knowledge and perspectives.

The above described decision-making patterns may lead into two general categories: incremental and radical decisions. Incremental decisions are close to the existing and past decisions. On the other hand, radical decisions are new and novel. It is therefore imperative to analyze how the three patterns of interaction relate to incremental and radical decision making.

Incremental and novel decisions

Incremental decisions

To be incremental suggests adding a little to the existing /past decision or adjusting the previously made decision. This implies that the amount of change involved is low. The new decision will not have a fundamental departure from the previous one. Second, the level of available knowledge and information is equally low and “decisions thus arrived at are usually only marginally different from those that exist, thus, changes from the status quo in decision-making are incremental” (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p.171). Incremental decisions are characterized by small-scale and less risky policy options because the constraints on decision makers are high.

The instrumentalism perspective claims that decision making is determined by time. Previously made decisions are crucial determinants of present policies. Incremental decisions work on the logic that the future is a linear function of the past. This means that policies are heavily constrained by past commitments. In addition, policy making is understood as the application of rules and standards of procedure which are hoped to reduce complexity, calculation and uncertainty (Lane, 1993, pp.73). Within incremental decision making, actors continually build out from the current situation by small degrees. Lindblohm (1965) suggests that there are two reasons why decisions are incremental: a) it is easier to continue the existing pattern of distribution, rather than impute new values through bargaining; b) the standard operating procedures tend to promote the continuation of existing practices.

Incremental decisions are criticized for lacking goal orientation because they “have us cross and recross intersections without knowing where we are going” (Forester, 1984, p.23). Still, conservative ideas emerge because of the restraint to have new ideas. Further, it promotes undemocratic practices by confining decision making to a small group of people. Lastly, it focuses on short-sighted decisions that can be of negative consequences to society in the long run (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p.172). However, despite the above-mentioned short-comings, incremental decisions exist and policies may reflect these tendencies.

Novel decisions

On the other hand, novel decisions may be referred to as radical or revolutionary. Lindblohm (1965) argues that with revolutionary decisions, there is a high level of available knowledge. This means that actors have a lot of information concerning the subject matter and are therefore not prisoners of the past as is the case in incremental decisions. Second, the level of change from earlier decisions is high. New options are radically different from the old ones. They may not even have traces of the old and existing decisions.

Novel decisions are characterized by new options and major changes. Because of low constraints there is a high chance of having large-scale, high risk options. One may therefore ask: So what would a novel decision-making process look like? To begin with, novel decisions emphasize cooperation and not competition. Actors use competition not to win or dominate; but rather, to generate the best option that is agreed upon by all the actors involved. In addition, cooperation recognizes that it is not necessary to attack another’s efforts in order to do your

best. Within group interactions, cooperation allows the group's best to be better than the sum of its parts. Novel decisions may enable actors to cope with future challenges. They create standards on issues on how to do things when such actions are unavailable.

While taking novel decisions, actors seek to understand another's point of view. By appreciating each other's points of view and focusing on the common good, a new perspective emerges. This process involves creativity, synthesis, open-mindedness, trust, better communication and understanding. Dominance of ideas and individuals is also minimized through participatory democracy, information sharing, and equal access to power. Access to power means that leaders are accountable and share skills and information. As such, any or all of the members can fill any of the leadership roles, and therefore cannot be easily dominated. Dominating attitudes and controlling behaviour is not tolerated because actors show respect and expect to be shown respect (Lindblohm, 1965).

Every actor is motivated to do their personal best to reach decisions which are in the best interest of society. Posturing and taking sides is not evident in the decision-making process. Conflicts would be seen as an opportunity for growth, expanding people's thinking, sharing new information, and developing new solutions which include everyone's perspectives. The policy subsystem enables actors to participate, conflict is freely expressed, and decisions are established in the best interest of everyone involved.

The Influence of Culture on Decision Making: an application of Hofstede value dimensions

In order to link culture with decision making, this paper assumes that culture has a vital, although not exclusive, influence on decision making. Hofstede notes that values are the core of culture. They are feelings which lead an individual or group to prefer a certain state of affairs against another. As such, therefore, they both constrain and determine the decisions a given community takes. Given the confusion and controversy brought about by the definition of culture, this paper shall mainly focus on the Hofstede framework.

Hofstede's Value Dimensions of Culture

Hofstede suggests that five cultural value dimensions could be derived from the ways members of a particular society typically cope with societal problems. He calls these dimensions: power distance; individualism/collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity/femininity; and short-term/long-term orientation. While widely employed, the Hofstede dimensions have been subject to several criticisms, including the fact that he provided little data on sub Saharan Africa.

His dimensions could be summarised thus: power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism is the opposite of individualism, and stands for a society in which people, from birth onwards, are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which through people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. Masculinity stands for a society in which emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focussed on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity on the other hand, stands for a society in which emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life. Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift, whereas short-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present -- in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face" and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp.399-444).

Individualism/Collectivism and decision making

With this dimension, one can note that it is not only behaviour that is influenced by this dimension, but also decision structures may be constrained by it. Gaenslen (1986) proposes that an emphasis on either individualist or collectivist value orientations will affect the level and attention given to the structural aspects of group composition and forum for decision making. He asserts that individualists will pay less attention to such aspects, often even placing them to chance, whereas collectivists should lay greater attention to such details and expend much more time and energy on making sure they uphold the expected norms.

In his study of the Czech and Slovak policy making bodies, Sobotka (2003) found that among the Czechs, decision-making procedures are left to chance and emphasis is placed on task rather than on social relationship. On the contrary, for the Slovak commission, when dealing with unexpected problems they appear to pay more attention to decision forums and group composition, with social relationships playing an important role in decision making. He also found out that within the Slovak body, there was competition because

this conforms to expectation, since group harmony is not a priority within individualist orientations. Instead, individuals are free to act as advocates for opinions and budget allocation and conflict resolutions should occur through argumentation, persuasion and the competition of contending viewpoints (Sobotka, 2003:p.10).

He also concludes that amongst the Czech, conflict is acceptable; whereas conflict is downplayed amongst the Slovak as an indication of the emphasis on harmony within the organization that is consistent with a collectivist value orientation. Actually, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) remind us that the general norm amongst people from a collectivist bias is to maintain harmony and avoid direct confrontations, whereas speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.

A number of implications may be drawn from these illustrations: first of all it seems that the individualist culture emphasizes decisiveness, speed and individual selection of alternatives. The other influence is on the decision-making style. In instances where conflict avoidance is high (collectivist cultures), there is a possibility that the decision-making style will be strategic. This is because within the strategic mode of decision making, there is a lot of negotiation and show of power, and such kind of decision making is heavily influenced by

tendencies towards the collective dimension. On the other hand, in the case of low conflict avoidance, there is a tendency for the decision-making style to be consensual, because the individual is free to speak his / her own mind and sees it as an issue of honesty. It may be noted that management is management of individuals and decision makers are trained to be honest in sharing feelings as opposed to the collectivists who prefer management of groups (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.104).

As far as the institutional decision-making process is concerned, one may argue that it is highly influenced by the individualist kind of culture. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p.104), hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only, and the following of rules and set procedures is the hallmark of institutional decision making. Decision makers have a high affinity for taken-for-granted-scripts, rules and classifications (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, pp.155 - 157; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Collectivism will affect the need for stable relationships between negotiators. For example assuming two parties are negotiating, in a collectivist setting, the new negotiator will take long to be accepted whereas in the individualist culture progress will be less hindered.

Power Distance and decision making

Power distance denotes attitudes towards authority, where there is an extent to which there is willingness amongst members of a culture to accept unequal distribution of power. It is also related to conformity and its opposite, encouragement of intellectual independence and a readiness to challenge alternative interpretation. In terms of decision making, cultures with low power distance allow for disagreements and competition of ideas. Multiple opinions have opportunity to be explored and consultative decision making takes place in a collegial atmosphere. This tendency will most likely promote consensus-oriented decision making, where one or more actors are convinced by an argument or mutually adjust to each other's views in order to reach an agreement (Eriksen & Weirgard, 1993, pp. 10 - 11).

However, on the other hand, cultures that exhibit high power distance are highly centralized. Decision-making processes are a preserve of those at the top; subordinates are reluctant to participate in decision making and organizations are very hierarchical. The decision making responsibility is therefore generally left to those in the higher echelons of the organization. The superiors take decisions and subordinates are just involved in implementation. Conflicts are not resolved; instead attempts are made to suffocate them.

In his study, Sobotka (2003) found that among the Czech, there were high levels of responsibility and participation, which is an indication of small power distance. Power distance in terms of negotiation will affect the degree of the control and decision-making structures and the importance of the status of the negotiators. Therefore, if it is a culture, it will influence the strategic decision-making process in way that the underdogs will lose in case the decision is about getting a compromise. Compromise may be a strategy to settle differences by consent through mutual concessions. It involves horse-trading to overcome conflict and struggle. It involves power. It is politics. In societies with high power distance, therefore, it is much more likely that they will lose in the conflict since they will allow the powerful to prevail (Rintala, 1969, p. 255).

Munene et al (2000, p.347) also found out that the emphasis on hierarchy and embeddedness at the expense of egalitarianism and autonomy values in Africa is expressed appropriately in decision making only with the consent of superiors, which is the most strongly preferred decision-making mode reported by managers in Uganda and Zimbabwe. They further discovered that African managers tend to be reluctant to consult their juniors, although there may be some variations. This therefore indicates that areas with high power distance tend to favour the concentration of power in a few hands, and especially at the top.

Uncertainty avoidance and decision making

This dimension is concerned with how different cultures solve the problem of uncertainty, ambiguity and the accompanying anxiety. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), societies with low uncertainty avoidance have few (and general rules) and standards of procedure characterizing organizations. However, communities with high uncertainty avoidance have authority vested in rules and standards of procedure that are many and precise throughout the organization. This is because laws and rules try to prevent uncertainties in the behaviour of other people. In their study on African managers, Munene et al, also discovered that

African managers will often seek guidance from their superiors and from formal rules and procedures. A tightly organized hierarchical system embodies and expresses hierarchy and embeddedness values and to follow the formal guidelines that constitute the role expectations shared by all organizational members. (Munene et al, 2000, p.346).

Hofstede & Hofstede further observes that people from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures may come across as busy, fidgety, emotional, aggressive and suspicious; whereas people from weak uncertainty avoidance countries may give the impression of being dull, quiet, easygoing, indolent, controlled and lazy (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.172). These levels of emotionality also affect the decision making procedures. One may conclude that a person who is aggressive and suspicious will prefer to have decisions taken through clear procedures so that there is evidence of what transpired in contrast to a person with low uncertainty avoidance. This is because the person from the low uncertainty avoidance is likely to trust the other partner and will be more willing to listen to the alternative views than the person from high uncertainty avoidance. It is also probable that one who seems indolent will process information differently from a fidgety and busy person. This in turn affects how they take decisions: the former is likely to take time making decisions and will tend not to be very strict with deadlines as opposed to the latter.

Such conditions are most favourable for the institutional mode of decision making because it is all about rules, and the type of rules used have an impact on the decisions taken as well. The decision maker's behavior is driven by rules. Actions are seen as matching of a situation to the demands of a position in society. Actions are based on what the actor is supposed to do and the self-awareness of one's role (March & Olsen, 1989).

Another possibility is that decision making which is rule-based gives decision makers limited room for discretion as opposed to an arena of general rules. More so, there is a likelihood that a subordinate will agree with a decision taken whereas he is not convinced about it and,

worse still, does not express his disagreement. Hofstede and Hofstede go on to say that under weak uncertainty avoidance, societies' results are attributed to a person's ability and there is a fast acceptance of new technologies like the internet. This implies that an individual's contribution is well recognized in the decision-making process than in the strong uncertainty avoidance circumstances where results are attributed to luck. This may serve as a motivator for the innovative and creative decision makers and, at the same time, decision making across geographical boundaries may be easier and cheaper to conduct amongst the weak uncertainty avoidance situations because of the ease in adapting new technologies (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 181). This cultural dimension is consistent with characteristics of a consensus-oriented decision-making strategy which leads to novel decisions.

Hofstede actually identifies that in organizations where there is strong uncertainty avoidance, there is tendency to focus on decision content and experts for answers whereas weak uncertainty avoidance cultures focus on decision process and generalists and common sense for answers (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.188). This may indicate that in the former, there is systematic decision making and a decision is influenced by those who have expertise and therefore participation is limited to knowledge of the subject matter; whereas in the latter case, the chance that a logical and sensible argument may affect the decision-making process is high. In terms of the earlier perceived decision-making modes, it highly influences the strategic mode because it involves power relations. In this case, the powerful are the knowledgeable and the experts; whereas in the weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, the chances for consensus-oriented decision making to flourish is high because it is the force of the better argument through generalists and common sense. This means that the most logical and acceptable proposal is likely to be taken instead of insistence on experts. It is therefore indicative of a contextual structure that will support the consensus-oriented decision-making style to prevail.

Masculinity/Femininity and decision making

This value dimension may not provide much insight into how culture affects decision making. However, a few assumptions could be made since it deals with assertive behaviour versus modest behaviour. Hofstede notes that in masculine cultures conflicts are resolved by a good fight where the best man must win, whereas in the feminine cultures there is a preference for resolving conflicts by compromise and negotiation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp.143). Implications to decision-making are such that within the feminine culture, there is a tendency to seek consensus and work-related decisions are made to favour better livelihoods; whereas in the masculine societies, the decision-making mode is characterized by decisiveness and aggression, where it is the logic of the strongest that takes the day. Therefore the possibility of having a feminine culture tolerate the force of the better argument is high, and hence a promising atmosphere for the consensus-oriented decision-making process, and the opportunity for novel decisions to arise.

Masculinity will affect the need for ego-boosting behaviour and the sympathy on the part of negotiators and the superior. A study of decision making in a leading Dutch firm led consultants to criticize its decision-making style for being intuitive and consensus-based, which in actual sense shows that such a firm is feminine-oriented (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.269). Munene et al also noted that there was a stronger reliance on colleagues at one's

level amongst African managers and those cultural values generally affected what managers chose to ignore, overlook and take aboard by virtue of the cultural blinders (Munene et al, 2000). This further indicates that the masculine-oriented culture supports more of the strategic decision-making strategy. With strategic decision-making processes, it is more about struggle where the mighty take it if they can manage to do so.

Long-term and short-term orientation and decision making

Institutional and strategic decision-making styles may lead to incremental decisions and the consensus-oriented decision-making style may lead to novel decisions (Karyeija, 2005, pp. 31 - 33). Given that assumption, there is need to underline how incremental and novel decisions may be influenced by culture.

According to Hofstede, in short-term-oriented cultures, the results of the past period are very important. Present decisions are dependent on past decisions, and therefore decision-making processes are path dependent and, by implication, incremental. Incremental decisions usually provide little improvement and the standards of procedure encourage such a situation. Therefore, the cost of short-term decisions in terms of pecuniary considerations, myopic decisions, work process control, hasty adoption and quick abandonment of novel ideas is high (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, pp.219). Therefore, this cultural belief system leads managers to be judged by results of decisions that may have been taken by others in the past. This may have dire consequences for the decision-making process and decisions made thereof because incremental decision-making is understood as the application of rules and standards of procedure which are hoped to reduce complexity, calculation and uncertainty (Lane, 1993, p.73). This draws us to the understanding that as a cultural dimension, uncertainty avoidance will affect the level of tolerance of ambiguity and trust in opponents who show unfamiliar behaviour, and also the amount of structure and procedure during negotiations. Therefore, in settings with high uncertainty avoidance, there will be a high tendency to rule application in the decision-making process.

Novel decisions are usually a reflection of consensus and free will in the decision-making process. It is therefore probable that the feminine culture may have a great influence on this kind of decision-making style. Therefore we might also find that weak uncertainty avoidance will lead to this kind of decision making because such cultures actually find emphasis on rules 'horrifying'.

Key Observations and Implications

There are three key lessons that can be learnt from this study. First, that culture is a very important explanatory variable as far as decision making processes are concerned. Individuals' ability to establish decisions and implement them is largely connected to the different cultural backgrounds. This in turn has a bearing on their expectations, norms and values, which then translates into the kind of decisions that they make. For instance, people with high uncertainty avoidance will tend to come up with decisions that try to minimize the likely negative consequences arising out of the decision. They will tend to come up with decisions that incline to create more rules, procedures guidelines and institutions, while those with low uncertainty avoidance will tend towards emphasizing behavioral change.

Second, we also learn that when decision makers are coming up with a decision, the context within which they are deciding triggers the cultural norms and values that they espouse. The effect of this is that while dealing with information, they are not operating as robots, who are predicted with precision based on their cultural profile, but they are reflective, based and within a particular context. As they reflect, their reflections are influenced by their cultural profile and the extent to the prevailing circumstances triggers the expectations, norms and values to the mind of the decision makers.

Last, the forms of interactions between individuals in the decision among process create a platform whereby the cultural profiles either converge or diverge. These forms of personal interaction result into particular normative actions and responses. The actions and responses are either made to elicit support or win a debate. But whichever way it takes, frames of mind represented publically by individuals through ideas and arguments they propound is very relevant in decision analysis and culture researcher.

Conclusions

This paper has been concerned with two broad issues, i.e., a) to examine the extent to which societal culture is isomorphic to organizational culture, and b) to draw a relationship between organizational culture and decision making. Though the analysis is largely theoretical, there are indications that a viable relationship exists between decision making and culture in organizations. An empirical study on the subject may not only shed more light on the subject matter, but may also reveal that decision-making styles, and decisions themselves, differ from one organization to another, not only because of leadership, age, technology, etcetera, but maybe also due to the diverse organizational cultures.

From the above discussion, we have noted that there are some types of decision-making styles which may be adopted by decision makers at whatever level. However, it is also imperative to note that, among other things, cultural profiles constrain and influence the art of decision making and decisions taken thereof.

The paper has also demonstrated that for each chosen cultural dimension, based on the dimensions by Hofstede, there is an influence on decision making. This implies to us that for an organization, members find themselves developing a shared cultural value system, which in turn influences the way they think and make decisions. It is also pertinent to note that these values are a reflection of the dominant cultural values in society. Therefore since decisions are products of thought processes and these thought processes are dependent on schema and scripts embedded within the minds of decision makers, it plausible to suggest that culture has an important, albeit contributory, role in influencing decision making in organizations.

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