



# Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

## JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism  
Iasi, Romania  
[www.csesm.warter.ro](http://www.csesm.warter.ro)



**TABLE OF CONTENT**

Editorial.....	3
Liviu Warter	
Management Education and Duff McDonald's Report on the Harvard Business School.....	7
J.-C. Spender	
Culture, Vuca and the All-Encompassing Unrest. What Will Happen? .....	25
Huib Wursten	
The Erosion of Multiculturalism in the Western World.....	31
Jorge Diener	
Accounting and Statistical Methods for a New Ethic of the History. Case Study for Romania's Recent History .....	37
Băluță Aurelian Virgil	
How to Integrate Nature & Nurture in Coaching? .....	47
Philippe Rosinski	
Sacred Rituals, the Body's Religious Symbolism and Human Trafficking .....	57
Cristina Gavriluță, Nicu Gavriluță	

## CULTURE, VUCA AND THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING UNREST. WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

Drs. Huib Wursten  
Hofstede Insights Group, Netherlands (\*)

### Abstract

Worldwide we can identify three accelerating changes: digitalization, globalization of the market (without control by a specific Government) and climate change.

A lot of people have an acute feeling that their world is accelerating away from them, but they can't understand why.

In this paper two main reactions to these changes will be explored and some other possible reactions will be discussed by looking at the various cultural mental images that we have identified. Mental images are defined here as the picture people have in their minds as a result of the various combinations of the first four "Hofstede" national value dimensions.

What we see in the news and the media is people seem to be becoming more and more angry. Two seemingly opposite explanations are explored:

1. Resistance against the **need** for self-control
2. Anger because of **the loss** of control

**Key words:** culture, Vuca, mental images, self control

It is stating the obvious to say that the world is in turmoil.

Some people predicted in the past that globalization would mean that cultural differences would disappear as a faster, ubiquitous communication and more people traveling created the same values and norms everywhere.

Hofstede showed by his continuing research spanning 50 years that this expectation is naïve. He showed that fundamental value differences do not diminish as a result of them being confronted with each other. One can even go as far as to say that confrontation is strengthening these differences as people become more conscious of their own background. Recent research by Beugelsdijk et al. (2015) showed that the Hofstede findings are still valid in spite of many global changes. However, this does not mean that "culture" is static. The world is changing rapidly and the way that the different cultures of its nation-states are adapting to these changes is being "driven" by the same values that existed when Hofstede first started measuring them some 50 years ago. This means that it is true to say that culture is not static, but rather it is consistent over time.

Worldwide we can identify three accelerating changes: digitalization, globalization of the market (without control by a specific Government) and climate change.

John Micklethwait (2016) says: "One thing unifying an unhappy West is a profound sense of mystery. Across Europe and North America, people have an acute feeling that their world is accelerating away from them, but they can't understand why. There is no narrative to explain it."

In this paper two main reactions to these changes will be explored and some other possible reactions will be discussed by looking at the various cultural mental images that we have identified. Mental images are defined here as the picture people have in their minds as a result of the various combinations of the six "Hofstede" national value dimensions. For an

explanation of the Hofstede model and the mental images see a previous paper written by Huib Wursten (1999).

What we see in the news and the media is that in the Western world people seem to be becoming progressively angry and there are two seemingly opposite explanations:-

1. Resistance against the **need** for self-control
2. Anger because of **the loss** of control

Both reactions have to do with the need in the western world for people to have autonomy. The psychiatrist Frank Koerselman said in an interview (NRC, 2016) that autonomy is one of the three basic needs of adult human beings along with safety and competition. Autonomy is translated as the freedom to make your own decisions and to determine your own future. Today in the West this is felt to be under siege from the two directions as listed above:

### **Resistance against the need for self control**

Norbert Elias in his book: “The Civilizing Process” (Elias, 2000) described the process of civilization in terms of the development of self-controls. The higher the level of civilization the higher the level of restraint, stability and flexibility.

As an example in 1546 Erasmus in his book, “Goede manierlijcke seden” (Erasmus, 1546) recommended the following as correct social behavior:

- When you spit, turn your back so that you do not dirty anyone else
- Do not spit on the table. Do not blow your nose in the tablecloth; it is to wipe your greasy fingers
- Do not blow your nose with the same fingers with which you reach into the shared dish;
- Do not put your hands in the dish. Do not dip half eaten morsels in the common sauce for the second time;
- Vomiting is no disgrace provided one does not dirty others.

We have come a long way since that time in what is regarded as acceptable in the areas of restraint, stability and flexibility.

According to Sigmund Freud this is however creating an insoluble tension between an individual and that community and culture of which he is part. In 1930 Sigmund Freud in his book “Das Unbehagen in der Kultur” applies some of the principles of his psychoanalysis. He focuses on what he sees as the fundamental tensions between civilization and the individual. He asserts that the primary friction stems from the individual's quest for instinctive freedom battling against civilization's contrary demand for conformity and repression of instincts. Freud (2002) states that when any situation that is pleasurable is prolonged, it creates a feeling of mild contentment. However, many of humankind's primitive instincts (for example, the desire to kill or unlimited sexual gratification) are clearly harmful to the well-being of the community. As a result, civilization has created laws that prohibit killing, rape, and adultery and severe punishments are levied if these rules are broken. In this way our opportunities for happiness are restricted by the law. This process, argues Freud, is an inherent quality of civilization that gives rise to perpetual feelings of discontent among its citizens.

Freud's theory is based on the notion that humans have certain characteristic instincts that are immutable. Most notably, sexual libido and the predisposition to violent aggression towards authority figures or sexual competitors, who obstruct the individual's path to gratification. This is inherent to what we call culture. The basic human instincts of a sexual and violent nature are being kept at bay by what is termed as civilization and this

civilization creates a habitable social environment with its rules and norms. This in turn provides protection for the for humans in that civilization, but in so doing it also creates new psychological problems such as neuroses, inhibition and repression.

The most important “drive” in human beings is aimed at maximizing pleasure and happiness. We want to have it all! However, at the same time we are acutely aware that we are limited in our desires and actions because in reality we might do ourselves and others harm. Freud calls this the ‘**reality principle**’, not everything we want is possible.

In the human psyche another drive can be found in the **tendency for destruction**. This partly results from the frustration of being restrained, but also as an independent motivation as sometimes violence “just feels good”. Pain and acts of destruction are seen to be giving satisfaction. We all know the example of a child destroying a sandcastle after taking hours to build it at the beach. In his paper on unrest, Bas Heijne (NRC, 2016) refers to the main figure in a book by Dostojevski saying: “sometimes it just feels good to destroy something.”

This tendency for destruction has been apparent for some time in the European Union.

Sanders (2016) (Note 6) compared this to the violent youth in the “banlieus” in France who destroy their own “hood” and then set on fire the cars of their neighbours. Sanders says “we cannot all walk away from this European continent, but we can all say that European cohesion is broken and one by one withdraw from the Union”. “The destruction certainly ‘feels good’ if you are borne and raised within the safety of the Union and ‘peace’ is a word that you only hear from priests and welfare workers.”

Alternatives? Who cares? We’ll cross that bridge when we are there.

It is amazing that so many people don’t realize what is at stake and from a cultural perspective, it is amazing what has been achieved. Europe is the culturally most diverse continent in the world, with different democratic systems, different levels of development and with different ideas about decision making. Actually 5 of the 6 main culture clusters can be found within the EU. As such it is an amazing experiment in democracy, rule of law, human rights and social protection as this has never been done before. It is no surprise that we have had to muddle through, but the EU could be a positive example for the whole world if we are able to build acceptable bridges between the different value systems.

We discussed this in another paper: Culture and the EU (Wursten & Lanzer, 2012).

### **Anger because of the loss of control**

During the recent Brexit in the UK one slogan rounded up the majority of the people to vote to leave the EU: “**take back control**”

This was so effective because we live in a world where there is a growing feeling of loss of control.

The reason for this loss of control is frequently summarized by the term used to describe the world as VUCA or “VUCA World”.

It stands for a world that is:

- Volatile
- Uncertain
- Complex
- Ambiguous

Continuous change is making it increasingly difficult to make plans for the future.

The term “VUCA World” was introduced by the US Army War College, to describe the complexity and unpredictability of today’s world. It is now used by many global politicians and business leaders.

This VUCA World is in sharp contrast to the message from parents, educators and marketing guru's, especially from the "contest countries" that "you can be whatever you want to be" or as Nike says: Just do it!

The message here is that if you set your mind to anything you can be successful, it is "all up to you!" Reality though is that talent and background often determines the chances you get in life. The individual gets the message that that they are autonomous, but in reality in the VUCA World, he or she experiences less and less autonomy.

People are angry because instead of being autonomous they feel that the real decisions are made way above their heads in a world of facts and knowledge that they cannot grasp. They see that they seem to be reduced to "deplorables" by people in power who decide about their future and that of their children. These same people do not have to live the consequences of their decisions. The VUCA environment thereby helps explain the popularity of politicians who provide seemingly simple solutions for these complex problems. Trump in the US, Farage in the UK, Le Pen in France and Wilders in the Netherlands.

By giving simple solutions for the complex problems they give back to their electorate a feeling of being in control.

"Do something about (illegal) immigrants taking your jobs"; "be firm towards criminal North African Muslims or drug smuggling Mexicans and send them back to the home country of their (grand) parents" and everything will be alright, they promise.

### **Mental images and possible future scenario's.**

We formulated at the beginning of this paper that the problems are similar in the different countries, however, the approach to solutions will need to be different.

A few expected scenario's:

**In the Contest model** polarization will continue, in the USA it will be visible by the "culture war" between liberals and the new "right". The liberals will probably be consumed by "identity politics", where different groups will fight for recognition and respect and will do so by emphasizing their rights. The right wing will, after Trump's victory, be the majority in both houses and will use their winning democratic right to pursue their own agenda. In this polarized atmosphere "truth" is becoming the victim amidst the "framing" of messages. The media will be under pressure by the "winners" and will increasingly be accused of "lying" by online social media. Mis-information will be a weapon of all partisan contestants.

In this environment it will be difficult to develop a new narrative. All attempts to change society with a focus on more equal rights and protection of so called "losers" or "underdogs" are framed as at best "socialism" and at worst "communism". This labeling may mean an early end to the credibility of otherwise promising proposals. This also comes in a climate where academics are treated with suspicion. In the USA Barack Obama was considered, even in the so called quality newspapers, to be professorial, a synonym for being indecisive and impractical. In the UK, Michael Gove, former secretary of education and one of the prominent Tory politicians, said in several speeches that people are sick and tired of so called "Experts". These are seen as people full of theoretical knowledge, but without a feel for the real world or being "streetwise".

In the **Machine model** experts will try to develop a new systematic approach to the problems, they will take time to study to ensure that they arrive at a principled discussion, having evaluated all options. The biggest fear in such countries, including Germany and Austria is that of societal chaos. It is not a coincidence that most elections in Germany, beginning with the election of Adenauer in 1949, were won by parties using slogans like: "keine Experimenten" (no experiments please) or variations thereof.

It will be a necessity in the “machine cultures” to go back to realizing the core values of their own culture and to risk starting from there. Germany for example has to overcome its embarrassment with the past and the reasons behind the rise of national socialism in what is known in the country as “Historiker streit” (the fight among historians). As a result the people have become tired of the continuous discussions about the “Leitkultur” or “dominant culture”. As a result the leading politicians and thinkers like Joschka Fischer and Habermas have had a tendency towards an alternate forward looking escape and talk about a European or even a Global culture.

For the future it will be necessary to understand the German core values and what that means for coping with a Vuca World. It will need some time, but it will pay to wait and see what the Machine “experts” come up with especially on mid and long term approaches.

In the Solar system the tendency will be to emphasize more centralized approaches.

It is not a coincidence that the day after the Brexit decision, Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian politician and leader of the faction of liberals and democrats for Europe (ALDE) of the Euro parliament called for even faster and stronger integration within the EU.

The danger is that the real worries of the population are not heard by the people at the top. It is a known feature of high Power Distance cultures (PDI+) that they frequently fail to be in touch with the lower levels in society. They have a tendency to neglect gathering any possibly negative feedback from the bottom up. Historically, this has led to tensions when they fail to observe the issues before it is too late. Being too late can mean serious insurrection, riots or even revolutions.

In the Network countries solutions will be found by identifying where the dissatisfaction is coming from and trying to find groups representing that dissatisfaction and to invite them into the decision making process. The traditional solution is to look for ways to “make everybody happy” and in this way to get “the enemy” onboard. The resistance towards more immigration from inside as well outside the EU, the negative feelings about the over-representation of third generation Dutch Moroccans in the crime statistics, the resistance towards more delegation upwards into the EU and the uncertainty about what the future brings for their (grand) children are all part of a complex mix. Any solution will not be as pragmatic as in the Contest countries and it will not be as principled as in the Machine countries. However, it will be sought by finding “shared interest” between the societal stakeholders.

#### Notes:

1. Beugelsdijk, S., Maseland, R. & van Hoorn, A. (2015). Are Scores on Hofstede's Dimensions of National Culture Stable over Time? A Cohort Analysis. *Global Strategy Journal*, 5, 223–240. doi: 10.1002/gsj.1098
2. Elias, N. (2000). *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Revised edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
3. Erasmus, D.(1546). Goede manierlijcke seden. Hoe de ionghers gae[n], stae[n], eten, drincken, spreken, swijghen, ter tafelen dienen, ende de spijsse ontghinnen sullen. Steuen Mierdmans.
4. Freud, S. (2002). *Civilization and Its Discontents*. London: Penguin.
5. Micklethwait, J. (2016, November 22). The message of Thomas Friedman's new book: it's going to Be O.K. *NY Times*.
6. NRC (9 sept. 2016). Bas Heijne. Iets kapot maken is lekker.
7. NRC (18 december 2016). Een leven zonder angst is ongehoord saai.
8. Sanders, S.( 2016, December 15). De drift der vernietiging. *Volkscrant*.

9. Wursten, H. (1999). Mental images. The influence of culture on (economic) policy. Retrieved from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan002455.pdf>
10. Wursten, H. & Lanzer, F. (2012). The EU: the third great European cultural contribution to the world. Retrieved from <http://www.clubofamsterdam.com/contentarticles/86%20Europe/itim%20eu%20report.pdf>

(\* ) The views expressed in this article are of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Hofstede insights. Copyrights: © HofstedeInsights 2018/ Huib Wursten.

Huib Wursten is the intellectual father of the 7 mental images. The system builds on a quadrant in chapter 7 of the 1980 book of Geert Hofstede **Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values**. 475 pages. Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1980, hardcover, ISBN 0-8039-1444-X.