The Relationship Between national Culture and Organisational Effectiveness: The Case Iranian Private Sector Organisations

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between National Culture (NC) and Organisational Effectiveness (OE) in the context of private sector organisations in Iran and is relevant to current debates about the transferability of management theories from one part of the world to another. Data was collected using survey methodology and 353 questionnaires were completed. Regression analysis showed that most of the dimensions of national culture have a significant correlation with organisational effectiveness. However, the relationship between Power Distance (PDI) and organisational effectiveness is insignificant. Additionally, a significant correlation was not found between PDI and organisational effectiveness, while significant correlations were found in all other cases. Furthermore, an initial linear regression analysis was conducted which only included national culture as a predictor of organisational effectiveness, with a second linear regression analysis conducted which also included education level and position as controls. This analysis was shown to significantly improve the prediction of organisational effectiveness.

Key Words: National Culture, Organisational Effectiveness, Iran, Private Sector

1. Introduction

Managers are aware that organizational culture has an impact on organizational effectiveness and there has been a good deal of research and discussion on this topic among practitioners and researchers (Denison, 1990; Denison & Mishra, 1995). However, there has been little attention given to the relationship between organizational effectiveness and national culture (Dastmalchian & Javidan, 2003). The attention which has been given to the matter includes suggestions that organizational effectiveness should be developed with the values of the national culture of all employees, at all levels, in mind (Denison et al., 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010; Marković, 2012). This paper investigates national culture in order to increase our understanding of it as a factor which might have an impact on organizational effectiveness.

The issue of the relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness is especially significant in the context of the debate about the transferability of management techniques and theories between different parts of the world, for example, techniques and theories of western provenance often have western ideologies and values implicit in them (Gonzales and Macmillan, 1961; Myers, 1959). This uncritical transfer from a western context to developing countries has contributed in many ways to organisational inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Kanungo & Jaeger, 1990; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). An understanding of the relationship between organizational effectiveness and national culture would help managers to better adopt western techniques and theories.

There are a considerable number of organizational effectiveness studies that argue for the impact of organisational culture differences on organisational effectiveness (Denison, 1990; House, Javidan & Dorfman.,

2001; House, Hanges, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2003, Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Because organizational culture is affected by national culture, it can be deduced that national culture values have an impact on organisational effectiveness. However, there is a lack of studies on the direct relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness.

This paper aims to demonstrate the role of national culture in shaping management strategies when aspiring to improve organisational effectiveness (Fey & Denison, 2003; Baruch & Ramalho, 2006; Shilbury & Moore, 2006; Papadimitriou, 2007; Sayareh, 2007; Yeganeh & Su, 2007; Martins & Coetzee, 2009).

2. National Culture and Cultural Orientation

According to Trompenaars (1993:13) 'culture is a shared system of meaning. It dictates what we pay attention to, how we act and what we value.' Furthermore, Hofstede (2001:9) defines culture as '… the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.' Hofstede distinguishes between culture and human nature or an individual's personality. Hofstede believes that human nature is what all humans have in common while individual personality is something that is a unique, personal set of mental characteristics for each person (Hofstede 2001:10), whereas Schien (2010) defines culture with respect to solving problems and adaptation to the environment.

Researchers in the field of culture have tended to divide the subject into four levels: national culture or societal culture, organizational culture, professional culture and individual culture (Hofstede, 1984; Dorfman & Howell, 1988; McCoy et al., 2005; Ali & Alshawi, 2004). Culture at the national level is the culture that is shared between people in a society or a country (Hofstede, 1984), whereas culture at the organisational level is the culture that is shared between people in an organisation (Schien, 2010). At another level, there is a culture that is shared among people within the same profession or occupation, "professional" or "occupational" culture (Myers and Tan, 2002). At another level still, individual culture can be defined in terms of how different individuals are orientated to the national culture that they are part of (Dorfman & Howell, 1998; Karahanna, Evaristo, & Srtie, 2005). National culture and organizational culture depend on the individual level, for example, when people form an organization they adapt a model which they are familiar with, sometimes the family (Trompenaars 1993 p.138)

National culture or societal culture is the highest level of culture studied and this level corresponds to primary socialisation (Trompenaars, 1993). Therefore, national culture consists of those values and beliefs that are acquired in childhood which are deep seated during each person's life (Hofstede, 1994). The national culture literature provides us with a number of different frameworks, based on different dimensions, through which culture can be studied such as Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1993), Trompenaars (1993), and GLOBE project (2003).

According to these definitions and models of culture, it is a multi-level and complex notion that is difficult to study. In order to overcome this challenge, scholars have attempted to isolate some of its dimensions which can be measured, compared and analysed.

A useful and comprehensive framework for cultural analysis is Hofstede's model (1980), which describes national culture using four, and later five or six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, individualism vs. collectivism, long term vs. short term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. The empirical validity of Hofstede's framework has been extensively critiqued in the cross-cultural literature (McSweeney, 2002; Shackleton & Ali, 1990; Dorfman & Howell, 1988; McCoy, Galletta & King (2005). Objections to Hofstede's work have included the nature of the sample in the original study, that assumptions are made about the static nature of culture and that there are more cultural influences at work than just national culture.

The generalisations of Hofstede's research findings have been questioned because the study's sample was drawn exclusively from one large multinational company (McCoy, 2005; McSweeney, 2002; Triandis, 1982) and it has been argued that differences between countries may be confounded by the homogenising influence of a dominant corporate culture (Shackleton & Ali, 1990; McCoy, et al., 2005). McSweeny (2002) has also criticised Hofstede's findings as he argues that believing that all the differences between respondents are only the result of national culture differences is questionable. He further argues that the differences also could be as a result of differences in sub-culture among the sample.

Another criticism of Hofstede's work is that it assumes that culture is stable and static. However, according to Myers and Tan (2002), culture is something that can be interpreted and re-interpreted over time and constantly

produced and reproduced in social relations. Therefore, culture is, in its nature, dynamic. Assuming that Hosftede's cultural scores still hold true after 30 years could be incorrect (McCoy, 2005).

Yet another criticism of Hofstede' work is based on his focus on the nation as the sole level of cultural analysis. Critics have pointed out that national culture is not the only type of culture that could influence managerial and work behaviour but that organizational culture and professional culture also have an effect (Hoftsede, 1991; Karahnana, et al., 2005).

In view of these criticisms, Dorfman and Howell (1988) have proposed another framework for cultural analysis based on Hofstede's work which focuses on national culture at the level of individual behaviour. Their instrument analyses the national culture dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity at this level. They argue that individual subjectivity may influence an individual's behaviour even more than societal culture, and possibly in the opposite direction. Thus, Hofstede's work reflects the ecological level of analysis whereas Dorfman and Howell's work reflects the individual level and they argue that the results of analysis at these two levels may differ. The authors show that the usefulness of scales for researchers who operate at the micro level analysis may be severely restricted at the ecological level of analysis.

2.1 Hofstede's National culture study on Iran

Hofstede categorises Iran alongside Turkey and Greece in the Near Eastern cluster. His results show that Iran scores very highly on the 'collectivistic' dimension of National Culture, implying that Iranians co-operate well in a team. Considering that Iran has been greatly influenced by Islamic principles for the last three decades, which place a strong emphasis on justice, harmony, and generosity in the workplace, this result might be expected. On the other hand, Tayeb (1979) argues that Iran's culture could be better viewed as 'individualistic' rather than 'collectivistic.' She further argues that team co-operation and group work do not generally fit well with Iranian culture. In support of Tayeb's argument, Ali's (1996) findings show that Middle Eastern countries were generally individualistic. As Iran is located in the Middle East and shares many cultural aspects with Arab countries, Iranian managers are included in this statistic. This result has been supported by Ali and Amirshahi (2002) and Javidan and Dastmalchian (2003). The Table 1 presents Hofstede's scores for the country of Iran.

Table 1: Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions Scores on Iran

country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
Iran	58	41	43	59	(36)*

Source: Hofsetde website (Source: www.geert-hofstede.com)
* Minkov & Hofstede, 2012

Namazie (2003) uses Hofstede's model to examine Iran and compares it with Hofstede's findings. Namazie's findings indicate that Iranian national culture has been coming closer to western culture on three dimensions but not collectivism and long-term orientation. That could indicate how the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war have influenced some aspects of Iranian national culture, an effect which is called by Iranian leaders the "Cultural Revolution" (Sadri & Sadri, 2008).

3. Oranisational Effectiveness

The competitiveness and complexity of the modern business environment requires firms to raise their standards of effectiveness and achieve excellence in all the important areas including productivity, acquisition of knowledge, implementation of change management process and the building of core competencies (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Organisational effectiveness has come to emphasize the development of employee skills because the knowledge, skills and capabilities of employees are key to business success (Berson & Linton, 2005).

3.1 Approaches to Organisational effectiveness

There are different approaches to organisational effectiveness which have been discussed in the organisational effectiveness literature. In this section of the paper, the researcher has discussed some of the common approaches to organisational effectiveness. The approaches to organisational effectiveness are helpful in adopting different criteria in order to measure organisational effectiveness (Robbins, 1990). There are four popular approaches of evaluating organisational effectiveness: Goal Attainment; Systems Resource; Strategic Constituencies and Competing Values Framework.

The Goal Attainment approach is one of the most widely discussed approaches to organisational effectiveness. This approach states that organizations are specific entities which are created to achieve specific goals (Lusthaus, et al., 2002). According to this approach, organisational effectiveness is viewed in terms of its objectives and business performance. However, this approach has been widely criticised, for example, Hofstede (2001) criticised it by arguing that goals should be used as a standard of evaluating organisational effectiveness.

The Systems Resource approach views the organization as an open system (Maiga & Jacobs, 2003). It assumes that an organisation consists of interrelated systems which acquire inputs, engage in the transformation process and generate the outputs which are the final products of the organisation. The systems approach examines the various variables such as relations with the environment, organisational efficiency, employee satisfaction and level of conflicts among the different groups within the firm (Minor, et al., 2001).

The Strategic Constituencies approach to organisational effectiveness reflects the view that every organisation has several constituencies with different degrees of power (Steensman & Corley, 2000). Therefore, effectiveness is defined in terms of the degree by which the expectations and requirements of the strategic constituencies are satisfied by the management of the firm. In order to ensure the survival of the firm, it is first important to identify the constituencies which can cause a threat to the organisation survival (Weber & Manning, 2001).

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) assumes that there is no single criterion which can be used to measure organisational effectiveness (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). This approach shows that people within the organisation have different goals which are based on their preferences, personal values and interests, therefore, there is less chance that they can develop a consensus about which goal should be given preference (Yeung, et al., 1999). Salzainna (2004) identified three criteria which can be used to create basic sets of competing values: flexibility versus control, people versus the organization and means versus ends (Brown & Duguid, 2000).

3.2 Organisational Effectiveness using the Competing Values Framework

This study defines organisational effectiveness in terms consistent with CVF in terms of organisational goals and target achievement (Heffernan & Flood, 2000), maximum return through economics and technical efficiency (Kaplan & Norton, 2001), profit maximisation through employee performance and satisfaction (Kellogg, et al., 2006), ability of the firm to meet demand and expectation (Chenhall, 2005) and resource acquisition and market share (Dixon, 1992).

CVF assumes that organisational effectiveness is dependent upon an organisation's capability of reaching its desired results in every cultural type. If it can, this shows that it is performing effectively (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000). While designing an organisational development intervention, a diagnostic model needs to be used to visualize the organization where the CVF can be utilized to evaluate the impact of the organisation's culture on organisational effectiveness. CVF indicates an organisational stakeholder's view about organisational effectiveness. The views of the key stakeholders are crucial because without ensuring the satisfaction of its stakeholders, the organisation cannot achieve effectiveness (Fedor, et al., 2001).

The dimensions used in this study to measure organisational effectiveness are, "employees job satisfaction", "managers and supervisors satisfaction", "organisational health", "reward and punishment", "employee's job development and customer's satisfaction", "professional development and quality of development", "employee's personal development", "teamwork, trust and communication", "system openness and community interaction", and "ability to acquire resources" (Cameron, 1978, 1986; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Based on the literature, this study explores the relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness by testing the following hypotheses:

Table 2: Proposed Hypotheses

Hypothesis-1:	**There is a positive relationship between dimensions of NC and OE**
	     a. **There is a positive relation between PDI and OE**
	     b. **There is a positive relation between UAI and OE**
	     c. **There is a positive relation between MSI and OE**
	     d. **There is a positive relation between IDVI and OE**

Hypothesis-2:	The controls of education and position will serve as substantial control measures with regard to the association between NC and OE.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Sampling and Data collection

Convenience random sampling was employed to collect data from managers working in small, medium and large size organisations in Iran. Out of 1000 questionnaires distributed 365 replies were received of which 353 were completed and could be used for analysis. Due to various operational difficulties, researchers had to use convenience samples. Although convenience sampling may reduce the representativeness of the sample, it can be justified when there is a limitation on accessing resources (Sekaran 1983). Iranian government rules and regulations for conducting research and collecting information from different organisations in Iran are very strict and it becomes even more difficult in the case of some sensitive issues such as culture and effectiveness.

4.2 Instrumentation

The researcher adopted the scale from Dorfman and Howell's work on national culture and the CVF work of Cameron and Quinn (2011) on organisational culture. Information related to four dimensions of national culture were extracted from the questionnaire designed by Dorfman and Howell (1988) having 22 questions from managers and senior managers in each of these organisations, while the organisational effectiveness section which includes 41 questions was taken from the competing value model (CVM), the Organisational Effectiveness Questionnaire (OEQ) and previous studies, aiming to measure organisational effectiveness. In order to confirm the researchers' authenticity, a covering letter from the researchers together with a supporting letter from Brunel University and stamped envelope was attached to each questionnaire. Moreover, in the case of Iran, the researcher had to seek permission from the Ministry of Education.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the data show that the percentage of male participants was 47.6%, while the percentage of female participants was 52.6%. Most of the respondents were above 45 years of age (52.4%). The proportion of respondents with a post graduate education level was 53.8%, followed by those with undergraduate level (39.1%). There were few respondents with a PhD as their highest qualification (6.8%). The participation of middle and senior managers was high, while the percentage of chief executives was only 7.1%.

5.2 Reliability of the constructs

The following table presents the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities associated with all four scales included in this study. Alpha scores were found to approximate or above 0.70 in all cases, which is considered the threshold for acceptable internal consistency reliability (Hair, et al., 2010). Overall, these results indicate acceptable reliability with regard to all four scales.

Table 3: Reliability of all Constructs

Measure	Cronbach's Alpha
UAI	.680
IDV	.689
PDI	.790
MSI	.897

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

Initially, analyses were conducted in order to test this study's first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between dimensions of national culture and organisational effectiveness

- There is a positive relation between PDI and OE
- There is a positive relation between UAI and OE
- There is a positive relation between MSI and OE
- There is a positive relation between IDVI and OE

In order to test the hypothesis, regression analysis was employed. For Hypothesis 1, the results show that UAI (B=0.289, P<0.01), and IDV (B= 0.137, P< 0.01) are significant in predicting organisational effectiveness, while PDI (B= 0.027, P> 0.05), and MSI (B= 0.023, P> 0.05) is not a significant predictor of clan culture. A value of R-square of 30.0 percent implies that the dimensions of national culture are a good predictor of organisational effectiveness.

Additionally, a series of Pearson's correlations were conducted in order to test these relationships. A significant correlation was not found between PDI and organisational effectiveness, $r(351) = .044$, $p = .408$, while significant correlations were found in all other cases. First, a significant, positive correlation of moderate strength was found between UAI and organisational effectiveness, $r(351) = .397$, $p < .001$. After the removal of several outliers, the strength of this correlation was increased, $r(347) = .491$, $p < .001$. Additionally, a significant though weak correlation was found between MSI and organisational effectiveness, $r(351) = .149$, $p = .005$. This correlation was also found to be positive. Finally, a significant, positive correlation of moderate strength was found between IDVI and organisational effectiveness, $r(351) = .343$, $p < .001$. Diagnostics conducted found no large departures from normality or linearity in these analyses.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Conducted on Organisational Effectiveness

Measure	B	S.E.	Beta	t	p
UAI	.289	.035	.412	8.195	.000
IDV	.137	.036	.194	3.824	.000
PDI	.027	.027	.050	1.049	.295
MSI	.023	.017	.060	1.329	.185

Notes: R^2 = .548, Adj. R^2 = .548, F- Statistics = 37.331, p < .001.

Next, a linear regression analysis was conducted in order to test this study's second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The controls of education and position will serve as substantial control measures with regard to the association between national culture and organisational effectiveness.

An initial linear regression analysis was conducted which only included national culture as a predictor of organisational effectiveness, with a second linear regression analysis conducted which also included education level and position as controls. The difference between these two models was found to achieve statistical significance, indicating that the addition of education and position as controls serve to significantly improve the prediction of organisational effectiveness, F Change(2, 349) = 9.847, $p < .001$. The results associated with the final model conducted are summarized in the following table. These results indicated that national culture had a negative impact upon organisational effectiveness which approached significance at the .05 alpha level, while higher education was associated with higher organisational effectiveness. Finally, position was found to achieve significance at the .10 alpha levels with individuals in higher positions having higher organisational effectiveness. Diagnostics conducted did not indicate substantial violation of the assumptions of linear regression.

Table 5: Final Regression Analysis Conducted on organisational effectiveness

Measure	B	S.E.	Beta	t	p
national culture	-.114	.058	-.101	-1.949	.052
Education	.129	.052	.152	2.495	.013
Position	.067	.037	.110	1.810	.071

Notes: R2 = .064, Adj. R2 = .056, F(3, 349) = 8.003, p < .001.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research has focused upon the relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness, for example, one study found that national culture differences are associated with functional integration and organisational effectiveness (Marks & Mirvis, 2010). Thus, differences in national culture have been shown to affect corporate cultural differences, which in turn affect the physical integration of firms. However, it has also been suggested that differences in national culture between parent and target firms can impact organisational synergy and sales growth (Marks & Mirvis, 2010). Other researchers have posited an association between national culture and organisational effectiveness, for example Punnett (2009) suggests that national variables, as

well as societal variables, influence national culture while current events can also impact national culture. National culture was also posited to impact cultural values, which in turn impact individual and group needs, attitudes, and norms which consequently impact organisational effectiveness.

Hofsted et al (2010) lead us to expect that there will be a correlation between PD and IDV and UA and Mas and our results show these correlations, however, regression analysis shows that only the relationships between IDV and UA with organisational effectiveness are significant. This result demonstrates that national culture is not endogenous to organisational effectiveness and suggests that there may be an indirect relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness through another dimension such as, for example, organizational culture.

The area of the relationship between national culture and organisational effectiveness is underdeveloped and requires much further research. Since the data is only from Iran it may make problematic to generalise from this research, and therefore we can only indicate a direction for further research.

To conclude, this research shows that UAI and IDV were the only dimensions of national culture that did have a significant relationship with organisational effectiveness and the other two dimensions either have a weak or no effect on organisational effectiveness. We hope that future research will examine these dimensions to provide deeper understanding of our results.

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