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HRM304 · SESSION 2 OF 11

# Cultural frameworks, and their limits

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# Today, in three parts

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## Chunk 1 测量文化

**The frameworks.** Hofstede, GLOBE, tightness–looseness. Why people tried to measure culture, and what they found.

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## Chunk 2 应用

**Applying them.** A prediction game: can the numbers tell you what's going on in the room?

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## Chunk 3 局限

**What frameworks miss.** Critiques, the institutional lens, and a Brazil case to test what we've learned.

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# Before we begin

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## Reflection 1 反思

**Have you started?** You only need to submit three at the end – but writing about every session gives you choice and helps you learn.

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## Presentations 小组报告

Groups and case topics are distributed at the **end** of today's session.

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## The waterline 水线

Remember the iceberg? When we discuss HR practices, ask: **above or below?**

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*CHUNK 1 OF 3 · ~45 MIN*

# Can we measure culture?

*Three attempts — and what each one was  
actually trying to do.*

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# Why try to measure it at all?

**Comparison.** If two countries differ, by how much on what?

**Prediction.** Will this HR practice transfer — or will it break?

**Diagnosis.** When something fails abroad, which difference might explain it?

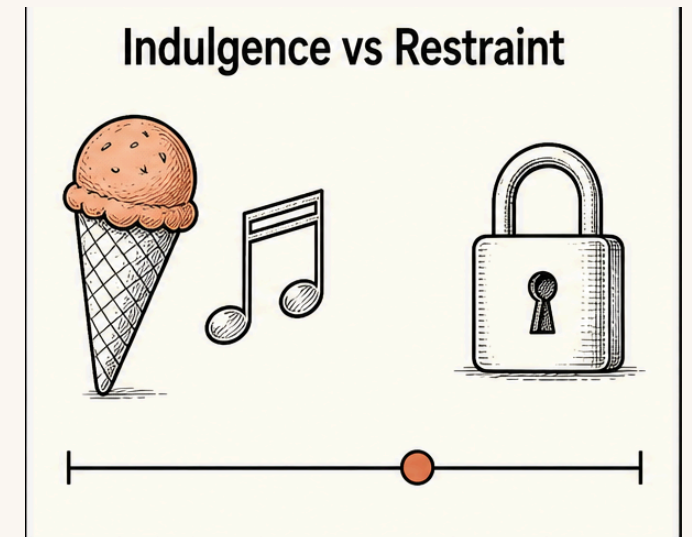
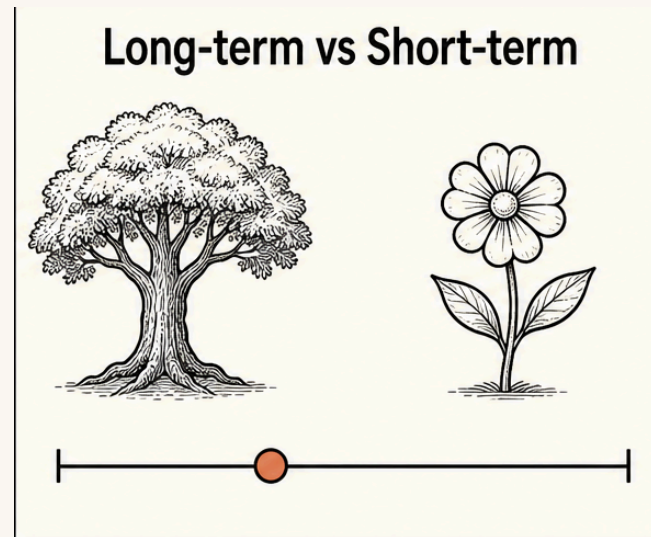
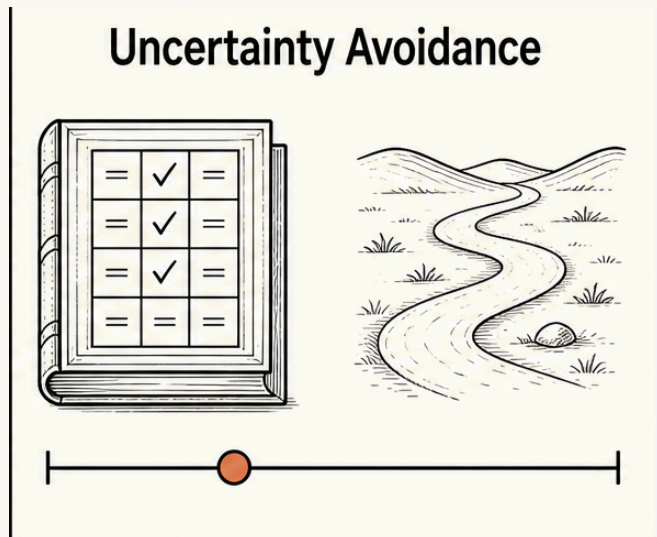
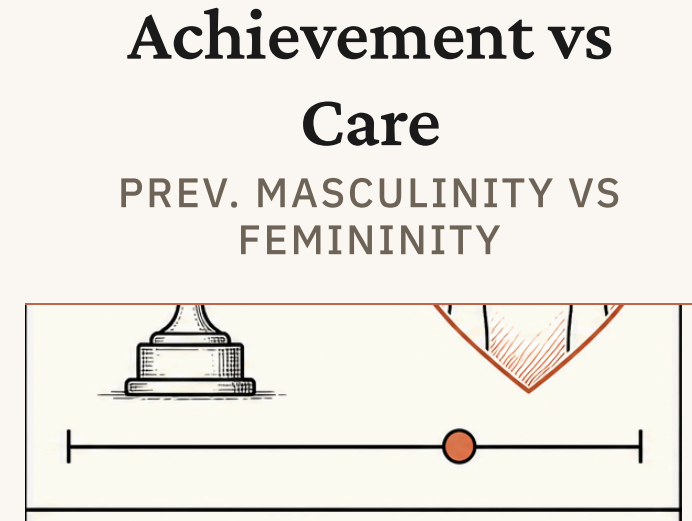
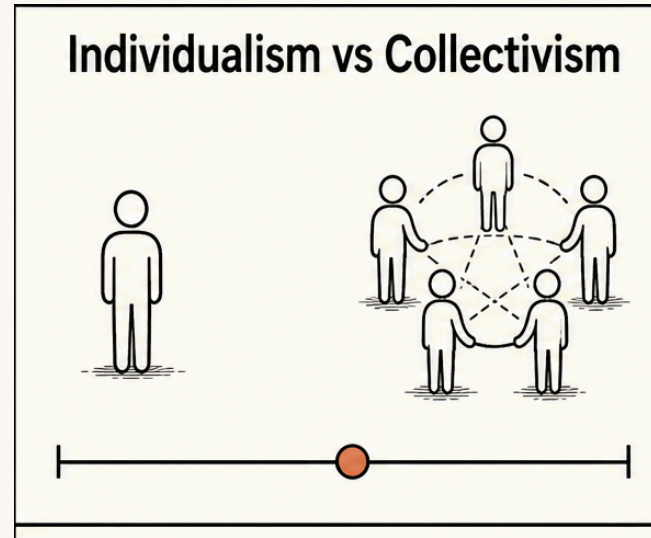
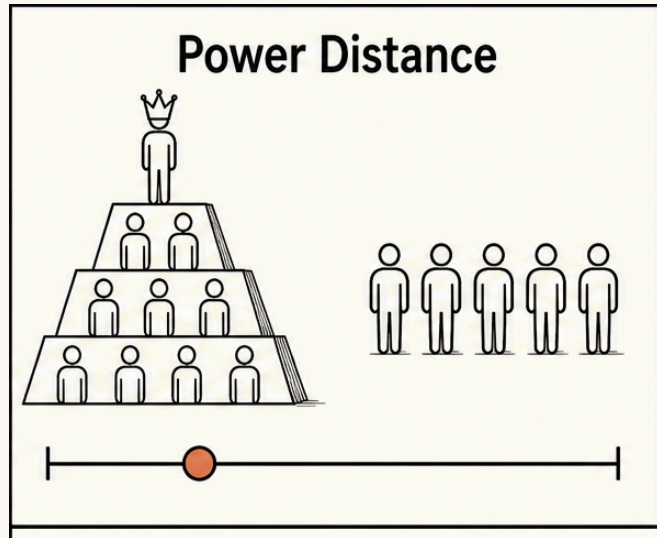
*Every measure is a simplification. Always consider what it misses.*

# Cultural dimension

## 文化维度

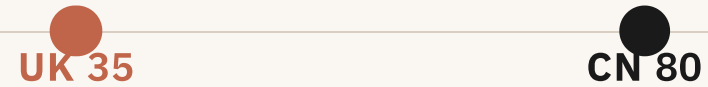
A continuous axis along which national groups are claimed to differ **on average** — e.g., how much hierarchy is expected, how comfortable people are with ambiguity. A way of turning a fuzzy concept into a number you can compare across borders.

# Hofstede's six dimensions

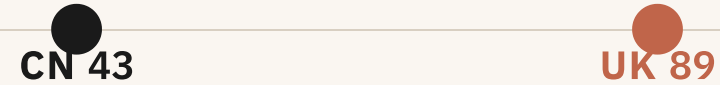


# What Hofstede says about us

Power distance



Individualism



Achievement

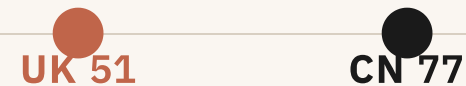
(prev. masculinity)



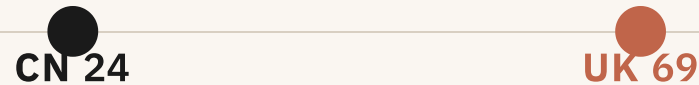
Uncertainty avoidance



Long-term orientation



Indulgence



*Scores from [theculturefactor.com](http://theculturefactor.com), retrieved May 2026 · scale 0–100.*

# GLOBE — what counts as good leadership?

Anglo	Germanic Europe	Confucian Asia	Southern Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>Autonomous</b>	<b>Self-protective</b>	<b>Self-protective</b>	<b>Humane</b>
<b>Participative</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>Team-oriented</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>
Humane	Participative	Humane	Humane	Team-oriented
Team-oriented	Humane	Charismatic	Team-oriented	Participative
Autonomous	Team-oriented	Autonomous	Autonomous	Self-protective
<i>Self-protective</i>	<i>Self-protective</i>	<i>Participative</i>	<i>Participative</i>	<i>Autonomous</i>

**Charismatic** — inspires through vision and values.

**Humane** — supportive, generous, considerate.

**Team-oriented** — builds cohesion and shared purpose.

**Autonomous** — independent, self-reliant decision-maker.

**Participative** — involves followers in decisions.

**Self-protective** — status-conscious, face-saving; shields leader and in-group.

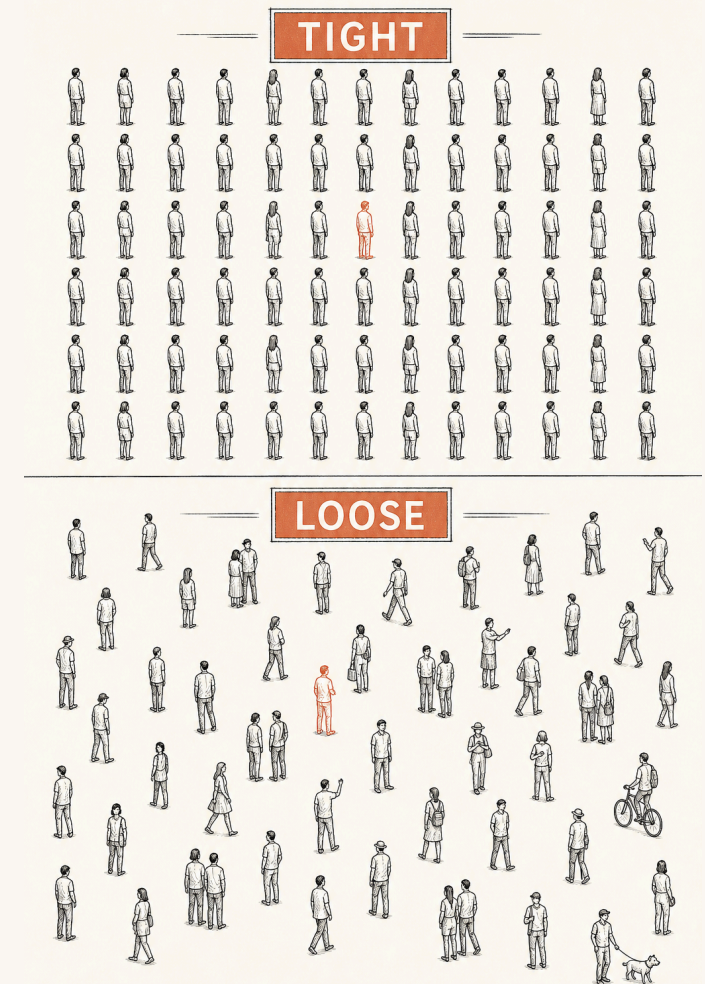
*Rank ordering within each cluster, from House et al., Culture, Leadership and Organizations (2004). 5 of 10 clusters shown.*

# Gelfand — how much room is there to deviate?

**Tight cultures** enforce social norms strongly; deviance is sanctioned quickly. (e.g., Japan, Singapore, Pakistan)

**Loose cultures** tolerate a wider band of behaviour. (e.g., Netherlands, Brazil, New Zealand)

China scores relatively **tight** — but the data is from before 2015. Is that changing in younger urban cohorts?



# Three frameworks, three vibes

## Hofstede

霍夫斯泰德

Six numbers per country.

Comparable, blunt, ageing.

## GLOBE

全球研究

Focused on leadership.

Practices vs values. Directly HR-applicable.

## Tightness–looseness

紧–松

How much variation a society tolerates. Newer, narrower.

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*CHUNK 2 OF 3 · ~45 MIN*

# The Hofstede prediction game

*Can the scores tell you what's happening in the  
room?*

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# What you'll have in front of you

## **A scenario**

One paragraph describing a workplace miscommunication or HR failure in a specific country. Every group gets a different one.

## **A score sheet**

Hofstede scores for the country in the scenario, side-by-side with China. Six dimensions, scale 0–100.

## GROUP TASK

## 小组任务

20:00 · 4 per group

### YOUR TASK

Use the Hofstede scores to predict what's happening in the scenario — and what the scores can't explain.

### WHAT TO DO

- 1 Read the scenario and the score sheet. Underline anything that surprises you.
- 2 Write two short paragraphs: **(a)** what the scores predict, **(b)** what they miss.
- 3 Choose a spokesperson for a 90-second share-back.

## REPORT-BACK

反馈

~90s per group

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### SHARE

What did the scores get right? What did they miss?

### HOW WE'LL DO IT

- 1 Spokesperson: 90 seconds. Country + one prediction + one limit.
- 2 I'll cluster recurring limits on the board.
- 3 Other groups: build on patterns you also saw.

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*CHUNK 3 OF 3 · ~45 MIN*

# What the frameworks miss

*And why culture is only half the story.*

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# Ecological fallacy

## 生态谬误

Treating a group average as if it applied to every individual in the group.

**Saying "Chinese employees are collectivist" because the country score is 43 — when an individual in front of you might well be at 80.**

# Four limits of frameworks

## One number per country

Within-country variation is huge — regional, generational, individual.

## Frozen in time

1970s IBM data. Cultures move; the scores don't.

## A Western lens

Built from Anglo/Dutch academia. What was not asked?

## Culture ≠ institutions

Many "cultural" differences are really legal or political.

# Culture is one lens. Here are three more.

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## **Law** 法律

Mandatory works councils in Germany. At-will employment in the US. Dual-track unions in China. HR cannot opt out of legal frames.

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## **Labour markets** 劳动力市场

Tight or loose? Surplus or shortage? Do workers get to choose? Shapes what HR can demand and what it must offer.

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## **Political economy** 政治经济

Liberal vs coordinated vs state-influenced capitalism. Influences whose interests HR is permitted to serve.

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**SCENARIO**

A Chinese tech company expanding to São Paulo hires a consultant who tells them: "Adapt to high power distance and collectivism – Brazilians will respond like Chinese employees do." What's wrong with this advice?

**WHAT TO DO**

- 1 List three specific problems with the consultant's reasoning. Each must use a concept from today.
- 2 Suggest one thing the company should do instead .
- 3 Pick one problem to share in 30 seconds.

## REPORT-BACK

反馈

30s per group

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### SHARE

One problem with the consultant's advice — your sharpest one.

# Group presentations — your groups and your case

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## **How groups formed**

Randomly assigned, 5–6 per group. List will be online by end of day.

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## **Your case**

Each group has a multinational HR scenario. Case details will be online by end of day.

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## **First milestone**

A 1-paragraph problem statement, due before Session 5.

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*NEXT SESSION*

# Communication & feedback

*If **performance** means different things in different places — what happens when you sit down to tell someone how they're doing?*