

# WHAT IS CULTURE?



at [pppst.com](http://pppst.com)

**a:** the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group *also* : the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time

**b:** the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization

**c:** the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic

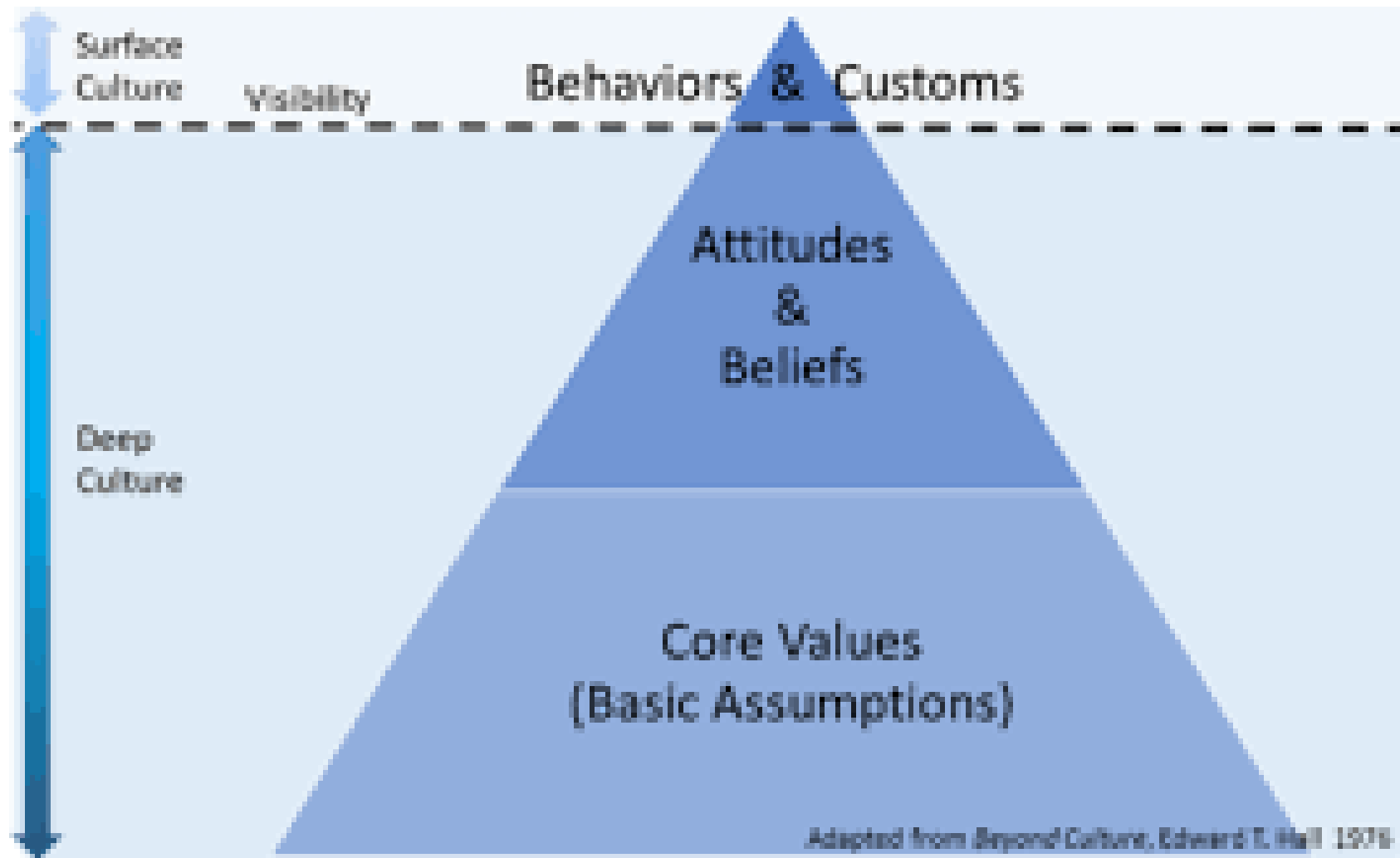
**d:** the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations

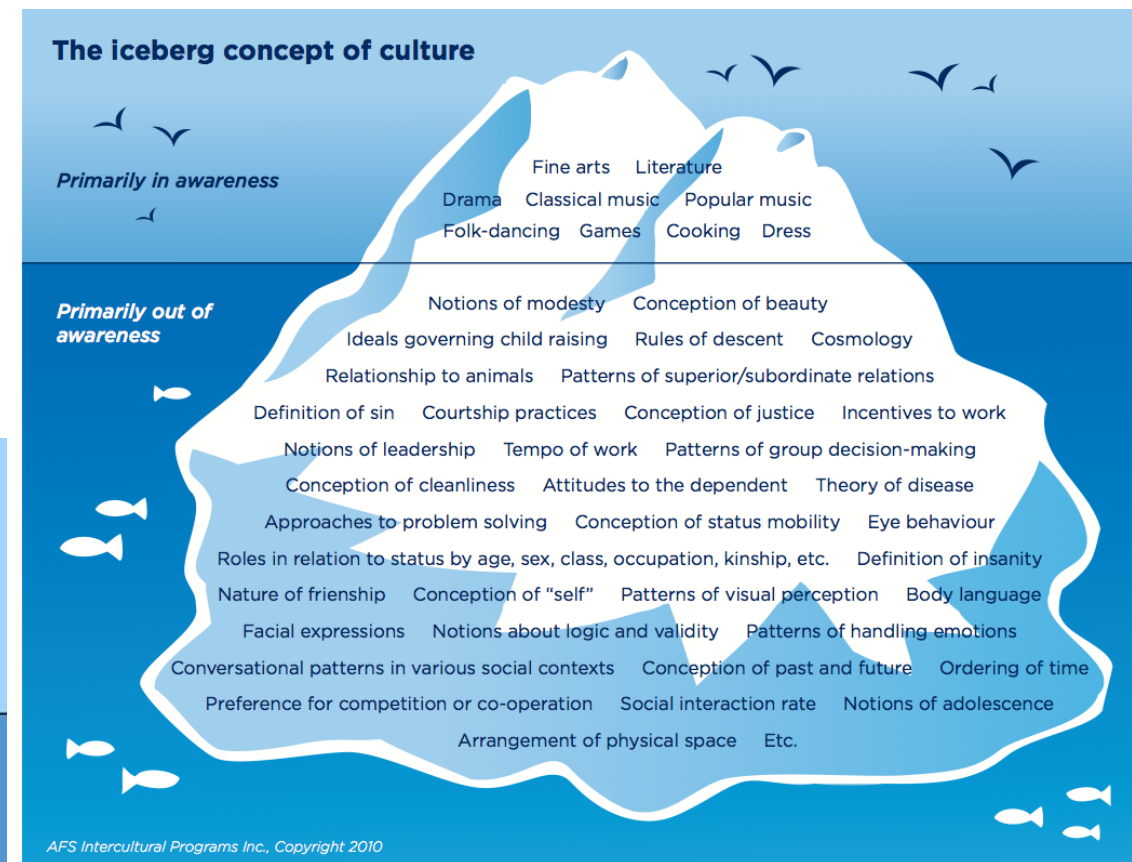
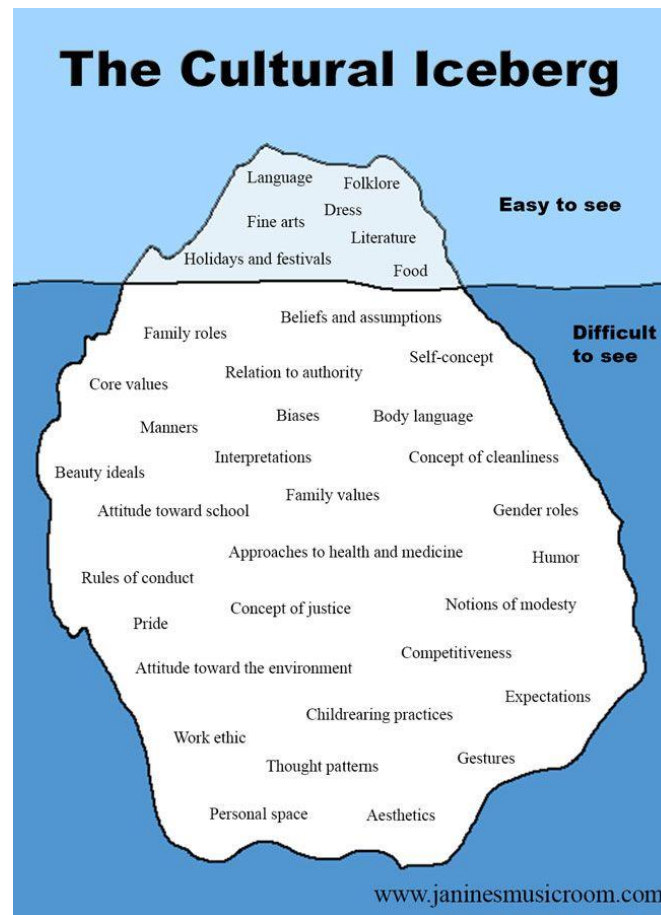
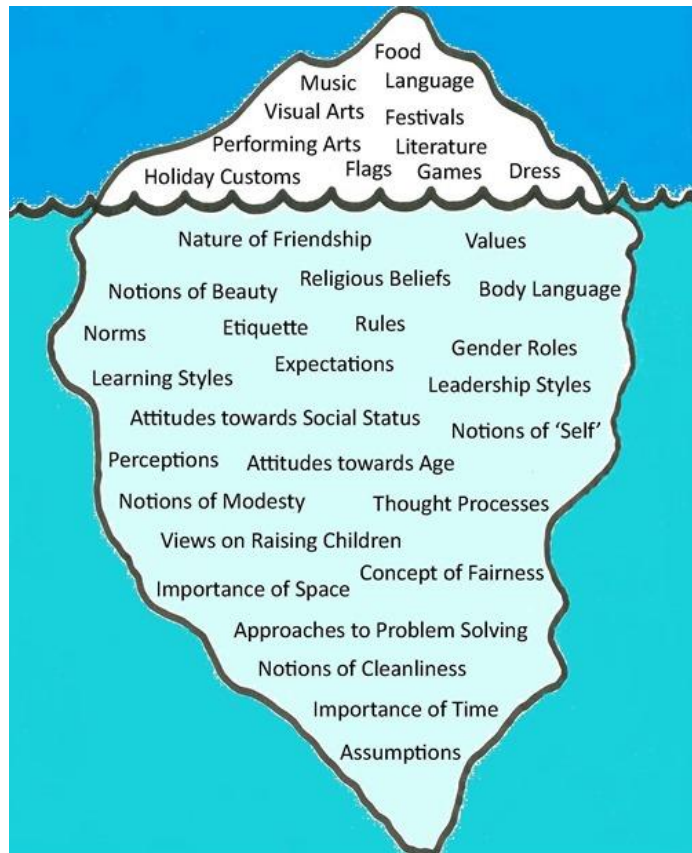
*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

A photograph of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The visible tip of the iceberg is jagged and white, rising from a calm blue sea under a clear sky. The much larger, submerged portion of the iceberg is visible below the water line, showing a dark blue, textured underside. The text "Culture is like an Iceberg." is overlaid on the left side of the image, with "Iceberg." in a larger font.

Culture is like an  
**Iceberg.**

# Hall's Iceberg Model of Culture





Edward Twitchell Hall Jr. (1914-2009)

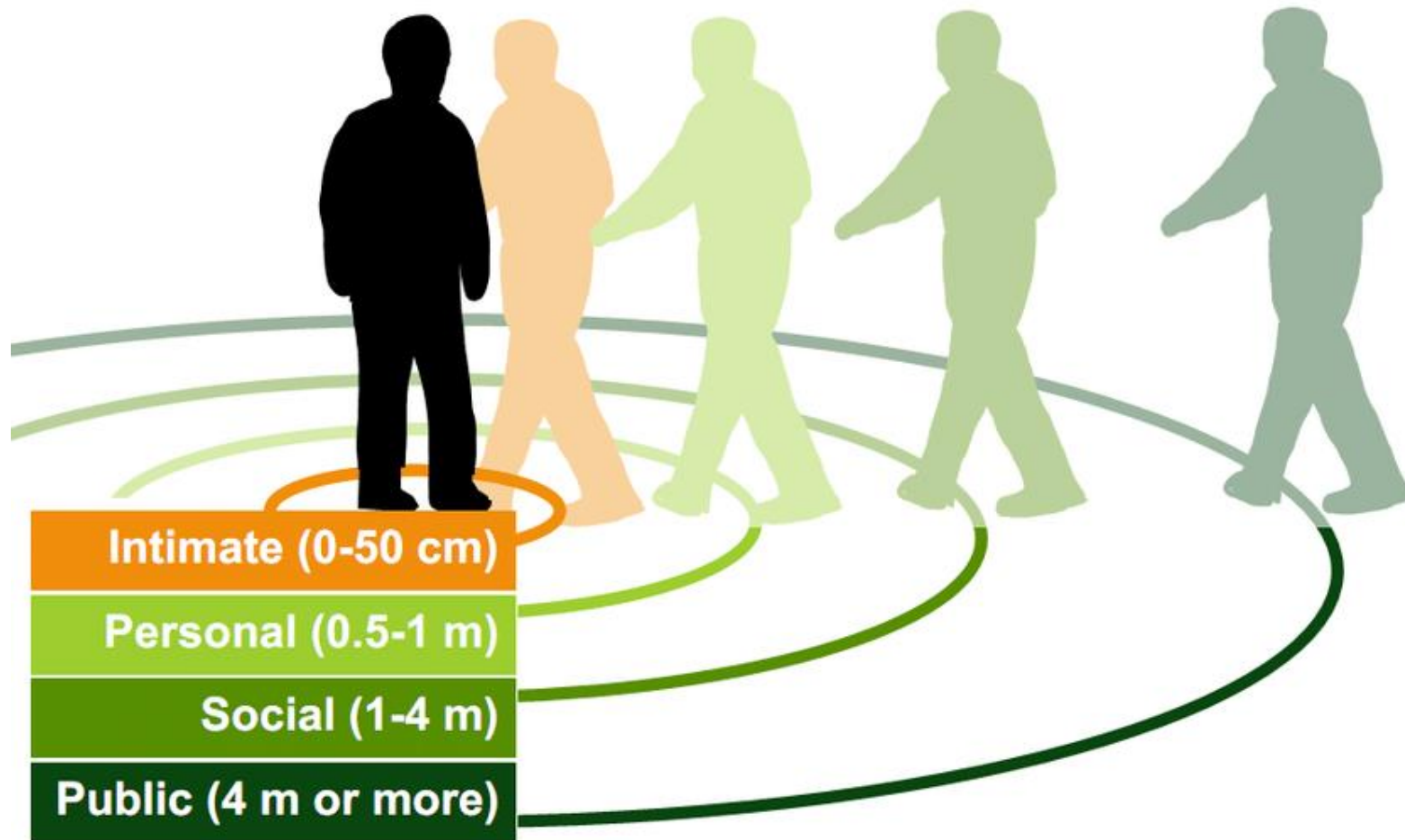
American anthropologist & cross-cultural researcher

Concepts of Cultural Difference 1950s

High Context Culture vs Low Context Culture



# Proxemics





Monochronic people	Polychronic people
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously	Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible
Are low-context and need information	Are high-context and already have information
Are committed to the job	Are committed to people and human relationships
Adhere religiously to plans	Change plans often and easily
Are concerned about not disturbing others, follow rules of privacy and consideration	Are more concerned with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
Show great respect for private property, seldom borrow or lend	Borrow or lend things often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Are accustomed to short-term relationships	Have strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

Source: Based on Hall and Hall ([1990](#))



# Main Cultural Differences

## High Context

- How things get done depends on relationships with people and attention to group process.
- One's identity is rooted in the groups they are in i.e. family, work, culture.
- Social structure and authority are centralized; responsibility is at the top. Person at top works for the good of the group
- Space is communal; people stand close to each other, share the same space.

## Low Context

- Things get done by following procedures and paying attention to the goal.
- One's identity is rooted in oneself and one's accomplishments.
- Social structure is decentralized; responsibility goes further down (is not concentrated at the top).
- Space is compartmentalized and privately owned; privacy is important, so people are farther apart.

# What is High Context Culture?

- Many things are left unsaid within the communication, the meaning of the message is only understood through the filter of the speakers culture.
- **Relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative.**
- Word choice, tone and facial expressions have great impact on the meaning of the message.
- A few words can communicate a very complex message effectively, but may only be understood by people within the speakers own culture.

# Examples of High context Cultures

- African
- Arab
- Brazilian
- Chinese
- Filipinos
- French Canadian
- French
- Greek
- Hawaiian
- Hungarian
- Indian
- Indonesian
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Latin Americans
- Persian
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Southern United States
- Spanish
- Thai
- Turkish
- Vietnamese

# What is Low Context Culture?

- Communication is explicit and straight forward.
- Less importance is placed on word choice.
- **Individualism and independence are valued.**

## Examples—

- Australian
- English Canadian
- English
- Finnish
- German
- Irish
- New Zealand
- Scandinavia
- Switzerland
- United States (excluding the Southern United States)

# **Polarity Items:**

## **The ‘High Context – Low Context’ Continuum**

HC

Listening

Attention via Silence

Implied Understanding

Internal Processing/

Thinking to yourself

Slow Consideration

Community Identity

Hierarchy

‘Intelligent’ Approach

LC

Speaking

Attention via Questioning

Certainty by Repeated  
Explanation

External Processing/

Thinking out loud

Fast Action

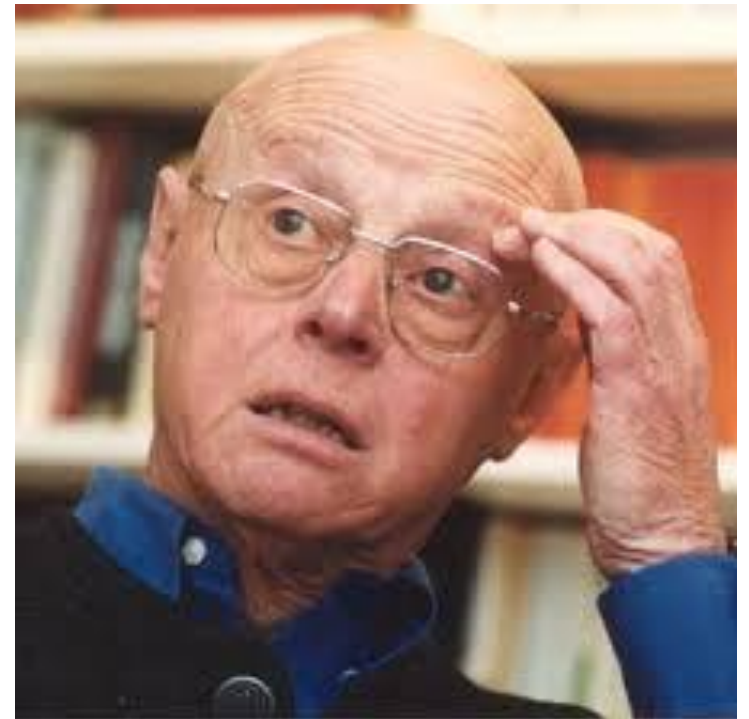
Individual Identity

Equality

‘Kindergarten’ Approach



Geert Hofstede (b. 1928)  
Dutch social psychologist  
IBM  
1980 research  
Cultural dimensions theory



# Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

a **framework** for cross-cultural communication, developed by Geert **Hofstede**. It describes the effects of a society's culture on the **values** of its members, and how these **values** relate to behaviour, using a structure derived from factor analysis

*Wikipedia*



# Hofstede: What Distinguishes Different National Cultures

---

**Individualism v Collectivism**

**Power Distance**

**Short-termism v Long-termism**

**Masculinity v femininity**

**Uncertainty avoidance**

**Indulgence v Restraint**

---

# Hofstede's Culture Dimensions

Individualistic / Collectivistic	How personal needs and goals are prioritized vs. the needs and goals of the group/clan/organization.
Masculine / Feminine	Masculine societies have different rules for men and women, less so in feminine cultures.
Uncertainty Avoidance	How comfortable are people with changing the way they work or live (low UA) or prefer the known systems (high UA).
Power Distance	The degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards. Accept of inequality in distribution on power in society.
Time Perspective	Long-term perspective, planning for future, perseverance values vs. short time past and present oriented.
Indulgence / Restraint	Allowing gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun vs. regulating it through strict social norms.

# Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions



## Power Distance Index (PDI)

High: Acceptance of a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification.

Low: People strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.

**PDI**

## Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

Individualism: As a preference for a loosely-knit social framework

Collectivism: Tightly-knit framework in society.

**IDV**

## Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

Masculinity: Preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success.

Femininity: Stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life.

**MAS**

## Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

High: Maintains rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas.

Low: Societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.

**UAI**

## Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation (LTO)

High: Pragmatic approach, they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

Low: Societies prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion.

**LTO**

## Indulgence versus Restraint (IND)

Indulgence: Societies that allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun.

Restraint: Societies that suppress gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

**IND**

Power Distance

small or large?

Uncertainty Avoidance

weak or strong?

Individualism or Collectivism?

Masculinity or Femininity?