

What should *Our* School Culture be?

by

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My second *expat contract* was in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. While teaching there, I also became an *international learner*¹ at the Dubai Campus of Australia's University of Wollongong.

As students, we all very quickly discovered that our differing national cultures sometimes clashed with that of our work places and the institute where we studied. Dr. Lynnette Hardie-Wills, a New Zealander, introduced us to the research of Geert Hofstede, a Dutchman, revealing six *dimensions of culture* evident in work places around the world. Though intrinsically interesting, an *adaptation* of the original dimensions of culture could help us understand, define and create a desired (target) school culture.

Dimensions of School Culture	
Power Distance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is power based on position or expertise?• is power centralized or distributed?• are authority and responsibility split?• are formal titles or first names used?	Task vs. People Focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• achieve, be assertive, seek material rewards for task completion and success regardless of human cost• focus on quality of life, cooperate, be modest, care for the weak, collaborate
Individualism vs. Collectivism: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• seek personal rewards, take care of only of themselves and their immediate families• expect that group members will look after each other	Risk-taking vs. Uncertainty Avoiding: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• take risks, make assumptions when faced with uncertain, incomplete, ambiguous or conflicting information, control the future, growth mindset• sit back with arms folded, <i>I can't do this</i>, let the future unfold, it is what it is, fixed mindset
Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• rubber time, meetings don't start on time, people are late, attendees are unprepared• Swiss-German precision, meetings start on the dot, meetings stick to a well-timed agenda, attendees are well prepared	Indulgent vs. Restrained: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• seek instant gratification and having fun, focus on grades, spends freely• invest effort <i>now</i> for higher payback <i>later</i>, focus on learning and future success, saves but spends to invest in future success

By now you're probably already asking yourself the **WIIFM**² question.

¹ Here I was, a Canadian, in the UAE studying in an MBA program at an Australian University with fellow students from each continent (except, of course, Antarctica) – you can't get much more international than that!

² *WIIFM* is an acronym of *what's in it for me?*

Let's consider these dimensions when we collectively define our school culture. An example follows.

Power Distance



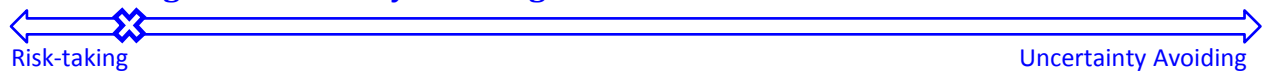
Task vs. People Focus



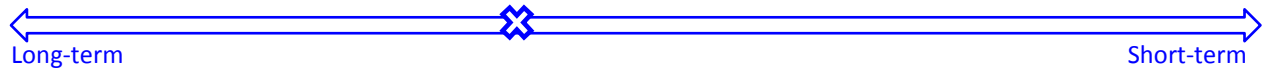
Individualism vs. Collectivism



Risk-taking vs. Uncertainty Avoiding



Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation



Indulgent vs. Restrained



Students and faculty are respectful and collegial, on a first-name basis within the school. A respectful degree of formality should be exercised with visitors, only referring to them by first name when invited to do so. Collaboration is encouraged. Thought-leaders and mentors share their expertise for the benefit of all. There is balance between *task* and *people* focus -- yes we need to safely complete tasks but *not* on the backs of others, practicing *gracious professionalism*. We are inclusive and equitably concerned with the good and welfare of all (*others* and *ourselves*) and don't engage in behaviours that exclude or put down others.

Equitable is not necessarily equal. →

In our changing world some may need our understanding and compassion more than others. Uncertainty is not an obstacle! We dig under, climb over, walk around or push through with *grit* – *passion* and *persistence*. We take measured risks and find ways to *improvise, adapt and overcome*, whether these be academic or life challenges, seeking guidance, advice and mentoring when needed. We make and learn from errors. We track commitments to meet or exceed our obligations *on-time* and with *high quality*. We purposefully use the tools that we are given. We invest effort in education *now* for a greater payback *later* – resisting immediate but short-lived quick fixes.



Challenge: What are *your* expectations of school culture? Try to weave the Hodinohso:ni` values and expectations into school culture. Share.

Your feedback is very welcome!

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References

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