Crossing Borders: an Analysis of the Experiences of Dutch Bachelor Students Working on the Community Outreach Project in India and Zambia

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January 23, 2012

Abstract

In the Community Outreach Project course, Hofstede's theory of cultures is used to explain cultural differences. This paper evaluated Hofstede's theory by comparing its theoretical predictions of cultural disequilibria with actual experiences of COP students. It concludes that Hofstede's theory is only useful on a macro scale, enabling rough predictions of cultural phenomena, but it in itself is not enough to explain the complexity of culture as experienced by students. This paper also looked into the effects of a long-term partnership, but unfortunatly not enough information was collected for a significant result. Lastly, the paper mapped the strategic responses to cultural disequilibrium as applied by the students of the COP.

Contents

1 Introduction

Since several years, the Faculty of Science, Mathematics, and Informatics of the Radboud University Nijmegen has been offering a course to graduate students called Community Outreach Project (COP). The goal of this course is to teach students, among other things, to work together in a multicultural team[1]. To this end, at the end of the course, all participating students will visit a developing country in pairs, for at least three weeks during the summer, after exams. Common countries to be visited are India and safe sub-Sahara African countries, like Uganda and Zambia. There, they will cooperate with a local organization to achieve a goal, set during the course. Usually, they help set up or improve on the local (IT) infrastructure. In this thesis, these students, who worked in groups of 2-5, will be referred to as 'COP crews'.

Cultures differ significantly from each other and this may cause a wide variety of problems. In their book, Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov suggest a model in which cultures are defined along five axes: Power Distance; Individualism vs. Collectivism; Masculinity vs. Femininity; Uncertainty Avoidance; and Long vs. Short Term Orientation. Also in this book, they suggest that these cultural differences have a major impact on negotiations and communications between intercultural parties, also on a business level [Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010]. It seems likely that communication problems also arise between the students of COP and the local employees of NGO's in these developing countries during their stay.

A recent research paper [Pollet, 2010] also suggests that people from "the South" (50% respondents came from Africa, 25% from Asia and 25% from Latin America) have a different outlook on business meetings than Europeans. They view these to be smaller steps towards the goal of a long-term, friendly relationship, whereas Europeans are more focused on the current goal of the joint effort. Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov describe a likewise effect in several anecdotes in their book, in that non-Western parties are slow to trust, and inclined to long-term relationships. This implies that, as a business relation stretches on and a friendship is built up, there may be a shift in behaviour of the African, Asian or Latin-American parties.

This in turn could reflect on the Community Outreach Project. Each year, new students are sent out to various locations abroad, but some of these locations are long-term partners for the COP. Every year, a new crew of students goes to the same location another crew has been to a year prior to them. It could be assumed that, as these students are part of the same group (COP), they could be seen as a recurring party in an extended business relationship with these local organizations. Perhaps the nature of their business communication changes over the years.

This research will look at Hofstede's model of culture and evaluate whether or not the theory is useful in predicting cultural phenomena. Also, this paper will look into the idea of a dynamic intercultural partnership, which changes over the years. Lastly, it will research how students react to the circumstances of foreign emergence.

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[1]http://www.studiegids.science.ru.nl/2011/science/course/24926/?mark=community+outreach+project

1.1 Main Research Question

Is Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions an accurate and useful predictor of cultural disequilibria, when applied in the Community Outreach Project course?

1.2 Hypothesis

Hofstede's theory is a useful preparation for the students before they go abroad, and a fairly good predictor of cultural differences and phenomena. As such, it is a useful tool, which students can use to further their goals in the Community Outreach Project.

To come to a structured conclusion, the problem is dissected in six sub-questions. Firstly, a theoretical prediction will be made as to which cultural differences should stand out in India and Zambia, when compared to The Netherlands. Then, the actual experiences of the crews will be researched by interviewing them about their experiences. The results are then to be compared to the predictions according to the theory of Hofstede. Lastly, this paper will look into coping mechanisms (sub-consciously) utilized by the students to handle their experiences and how the interplay of disequilibrium and response affect the projects.

1.3 Sub-questions

1) What are the cultural differences which are to be expected, for Zambia and India respectively, according to the theory of Hofstede? 2) What were the actual cultural disequilibria encountered in separate years by the separate COP crews during their stays in Zambia and India? 3) Do the predictions derived from Hofstede's theory match the experiences of the COP crews? 4) Is there a notable development in these issues over the course of three years of COP? 5) What strategic responses did the COP crews use to cope with the intercultural experience? 6) How did these disequilibria and the responses thereon reflect on the project?

2 Theory

2.1 Hofstede Model

As stated before, there are, according to Hofstede, five axes along which a culture can be viewed and defined. Below is given a brief summary of each of them, with a focus on the effects of that particular dimension on intercultural negotiations.

2.1.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

In essence, PDI depicts the level of hierarchy and importance of status in a culture. A high score means power and status are very important, a low score means they are not so important. For example, in The Netherlands it is often no problem to go to your boss and make suggestions to him. In India, this is much less accepted.

Communications with cultures that have a high PDI are very dependent on the status and rank of the other party. If this party is not high in ranking, they will often have to consult their superiors before they can commit to anything. If the party is high in ranking, they will expect to be treated with a certain amount of respect uncommon for societies with a low PDI.

2.1.2 Individualism (IDV)

A low score in this dimension indicates a collectivist society, whereas a high score indicates an individualist view of society. Collectivists prioritize long-term loyalty to a specific group, such as family or company. It's important to place the group interests above the individual interests and to take responsibility for other group members. For countries with a high score in individualism, the opposite is true. The U.S.A. are an example of a very individualist country, whereas Taiwan and Venezuela are very collectivist.

In cultures that are collectivist, parties should be referred to as a group. For example, a teacher in class should not address a question to a specific student, but rather to the students as a group [Hitchcock, Vu & Tran]. When students reply, they will do so by speaking for the entire group. In individualist countries, people are used to being treated as a separate entity, do not share responsibility for actions of others and state their own opinions rather than the collective's.

2.1.3 Masculinity (MAS)

This dimension represents emancipation between men and women, and the division of roles between them. Important to note is that a culture with a low masculinity score is not a feminine culture, but an emancipated culture. This means that all roles in society can be filled by either a male or a female. In societies with a high masculinity score, there is a strict division between 'male' and 'female' activities.

Masculine societies tend to displays of power in negotiations and competitive behaviour. Ego is quite important. Contrary, feminine societies are more bend on harmony and adept to the other party.

2.1.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

This scale signifies how prone a culture is to try new ideas (low UAI) or to stick to the 'well worn path' (high UAI). Essentially, cultures with a low score wish to leave things open to interpretation and flexibility, whilst cultures with a high score wish to formalize agreements.

A high UAI implies that parties negotiations are slow to trust, and quick to lose it [Hofstede, Jonker & Verwaart, 2008]. Therefore, communications with a high UAI party should be cautious and well-prepared, and no unexpected moves should be made. Precision is important. Parties low on the UAI will prefer to talk about strategy, rather than details, are more flexible in their agendas and care less for etiquette.

2.1.5 Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

This dimension concerns itself with the capability of a culture to plan ahead and keep track of a larger goal. A high score indicates that a culture is willing to

make sacrifices for the purpose of achieving some goal, is concerned about the education of children and strife towards little economical and social differences. Low scores cultures, being short-term oriented, plan ahead less, are meritocratic, and concern themselves with the problems and matters of that moment.

In communications, the same holds. Short-term orientation parties will mainly wish to talk about matters at hand and solve those first, whereas parties with a high LTO score will wish to make deals that not only satisfy their current goal, but future goals as well.

2.2 Hofstede Dimensions per Country

[All scores for the Hofstede dimensions were found on www.geert-hofstede.com and http://www.urbanministry.org/wiki/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions.htm]

2.2.1 Hofstede Dimensions for The Netherlands

Dimension	Dutch Score	World Average
PDI	38	56,5
IDV	80	40
MAS	14	52
UAI	53	65
LTO	44	48

2.2.2 Hofstede Dimensions for Zambia

Dimension	Zambia Score	World Average
PDI	64	56,5
IDV	27	40
MAS	41	52
UAI	52	65
LTO	25	48

2.2.3 Hofstede Dimensions for India

Dimension	India Score	World Average
PDI	77	56,5
IDV	48	40
MAS	56	52
UAI	40	65
LTO	61	48

2.2.4 Main Differences

The Netherlands has two extreme scores: a very low masculinity, and a very high individualism. Zambia has a very low individualism, and a below world average masculinity. India has higher than world average individualism, but is still nowhere near the Dutch score. India is slightly more masculine than world average, but with the low Dutch score, there is still a significant difference.

Other large differences lie between the power distance scores of both The Netherlands and India and The Netherlands and Zambia, the Dutch score being significantly lower than the others'. Also, the difference in long term orientation

between Zambia and India is quite large, Zambia having a low score and India having a high one. The Netherlands is about in the middle of their scores, near the world average.

When the COP crews visit Zambia or India, these scores should be most noticeable. Especially Zambia's collectivist culture, short-term orientation and masculinity should be apparent in daily life. For India, the high power distance, collectivist culture and long-term orientation should be most observable.

2.3 The Community Outreach Project

According to the model presented by [Peltokorpi & Schneider], the COP crews can be categorized as novices in terms of cultural and language competence. In effect, this means that they are dependent on locals to speak a language they know (commonly English) and are largely unaware of cultural differences, leading to cultural blunders. Again, this makes them dependant on locals to inform them of these differences. As most locals, even in the participating NGO's, are also novices in terms of intercultural experiences, this may not go smoothly.

2.3.1 Communications with the Locals

Before going to their respective sites, COP crews had to prepare their stays. Part of this preparation were preliminary communications with the local teams to get a preview of the local situation. Most of this communication happens through e-mail, or occasionally phone calls. The preparatory communication therefore takes place as either text-only or voice-only.

2.4 Strategic Reactions to Other Cultures

Hamel et al. recognize eight distinct strategic responses to 'cultural disequilibrium', a state where someone from one culture is transported into another, new culture. These strategic responses are all ways of coping with the uncertainty involved in being emerged in another culture and include: reframing; managing emotions/self-assurance; taking initiative; experimentation/ adaption; openness to new things; observing and mimicking; defensive walls; and affirming one's own beliefs and practises.

Note that these strategic responses are strategic in that they help accommodate a person in a new culture, but not necessarily increase effectiveness at work. In fact, some responses appear to possible be even counter-effective at working with other cultures.

2.4.1 Reframing

This is defined as recognizing an "unproductive assumption" and drop it in favour of a new perspective on the situation. With this new perspective, a subject then tries to move forward or continue to pursue her's goals. In some sense, it is also accepting that things are different in the new cultural environment and may not go as expected. Reframing however also includes moving on from that acceptance and creating a new frame of reference.

2.4.2 Managing Emotions/Self Assurance

Applicable whenever a subject is actively paying attending to their emotions or confidence. Whenever a subject feels down and tells herself "to man up", this is managing emotions. Also, whenever a subjects gives herself a pep talk, this is considered part of this category.

2.4.3 Taking Initiative

When there is a stalling in progress of any kind, be it that getting to know the locals is going slow or that a project seems to have grinded to a halt, a subject can choose to go after the matter. She then takes initiative in trying to find out what is going on, and/or actively tries to get something started.

2.4.4 Experimentation/Adaption

If a subject actively changes her behaviour to see if the new behaviour works better than the old, she is experimenting. If the new behaviour is seemingly an improvement, she is adapting. It implies an active exploration of the new culture and its features, quirks and possibilities. When a particular method doesn't seem to work and the subject switches to another method, this is also experimentation/adaption. It differs from reframing in that reframing concerns itself with assumptions, and experimentation/adaption is about methods and behaviour.

2.4.5 Openness to New Things

As can probably be deduced from the name, this category is about subjects showing willingness to experience things they've not experienced before. This could range from anything simple, such as exploring new cuisine, to driving on the other side of the road or getting to know an entirely new way of project management.

2.4.6 Observing and Mimicking

Strange or unfamiliar tasks, situations or people can be unsettling. In a completely foreign culture, it's not strange that sometimes, a subject doesn't know what to do. If, in such a situation, the subject looks towards other who in her opinion are able to perform the task, such as the local project partners, and imitates their behaviour, it falls into the category of observing and mimicking. It's also a form of adapting into a new culture, but seems a 'safer' option than experimentation/adaptation. There has to be somebody to mimick, though. If a subject has to do something which she hasn't seen anybody do in the new culture yet, this option is unavailable to her.

2.4.7 Defensive Walls

People can build metaphorical walls around themselves to shield them from unfamiliar circumstances. For instance, a subject could decide to buy only products she knows in the supermarket, or eat at a restaurant with a cuisine she knows. It could also mean to not venture out physically, or do things that

seem unknown. In effect, the subject created a 'comfort zone' of relative safety and familiarity around herself, taking active measures to sustain this zone.

2.4.8 Affirming One's Own Beliefs and Practices

This does not mean a subject isn't open to others' beliefs or practices. This category implies that, when confronted with others' outlook on things, and their way to handle it, the subject actively decided that her way of looking at and dealing with situations and experiences is better, or superior. Although it may seem a bit like defensive walls, a subject who affirms her own beliefs doesn't necessarily have to have a defensive wall as well. She can submerge herself in this foreign culture, and still feels her own culture handles things better.

3   Method

In order to find out what problems where encountered during their short stay abroad, several COP crews were interviewed.

The decision to use interviews instead of questionnaires is mainly based on lack of a priori information. Although questionnaires would yield a higher group of participants, interviews were used because there was not enough information about which questions should be asked and which answers could be expected. Therefore, a satisfactory questionnaire could not be produced and the choice was made to perform interviews with a smaller group of participants.

3.1   Participants

All participants in the interviews have been a member of a COP crew either in the summer of 2009, 2010 or 2011. None of the participants were a project member in multiple years. Several project members went to multiple locations, but they were asked to answer the interview questions for only the location where they spent the greatest amount of time.

Other than that, all participants are students at the Radboud University, from a broad range of studies, from education sciences to mathematics. There were 4 female and 6 male interviewees. Of these, 3 went to India (2 men, 1 woman) and 7 went to Zambia (4 men, 3 women).

3.2   Interview Procedure

The interviews were simple and straightforward. The interviewer and intervie-wee would meet, a brief explanation would be given about the nature of the interview and they would then proceed to a quiet room, where the interview could be held without other people interfering or listening in. The explanation given included that the interviewer had been a COP participant in 2009, and was now researching students' reactions to foreign culture for his bachelor thesis. The interviewee would also be informed of the fact that the interview would be recorded, all recordings to be deleted after being processed.

Upon arrival in the room where the interview was to take place, a laptop was set up to record the interview, and the interview would commence. An interview guideline was made to give structure to the interviews. The sequence of the questions was in no way compulsory, as sometimes the interviewees would

address a subject early on in the interview, whereas question about such subject were further down the list. The interviewer would then let the interview take its course, and not pull the interviewee back to the original question.

Interviews ranged from 25 minutes in length to almost an hour, but would typically last about 40 minutes.

The Interview Guideline (in Dutch) is included in Appendix I.

4   Results

4.1   Student Experiences

The interviews were analysed for indicators of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Here is a list of indicators, derived from the interviews, and which Hofstede dimension they indicate.

Indicator	Dimension	Why?
Always answering questions in the confirmatory	IDV	Trying to preserve harmony by not confronting people is collectivist behaviour.
Addressing men instead of women	MAS	Indicative of distinct, separate roles of gender in society.
Different treatment of persons viewed as 'high status'	PDI	When certain people receive privileges over other people, this indicates a ranking within society.
Getting permission from 'high status' people gives privileges	PDI	If permission from certain people is worth more then from others, this is also indicative or a societal ranking.
Difficulty with becoming ingroup rather than outgroup	IDV	Collectivist cultures are keen to preserve their ingroup, and slow to give trust.

At first, it was also thought that lack of planning would be indicative of a short-term orientation, but this was doubted after this seemed to be the case in both Zambia and India. Therefore, it was not counted. In the end, no indicators for LTO or UAI were found.

4.1.1   Zambia

There were 7 interviewed COP participants who went to Zambia.

Hofstede Dimension	Number of mentioned indicators
PDI	2
IDV	4
MAS	4
UAI	0
LTO	0

Overall, students certainly noticed aspects of collectivism and masculinity. Most notably, Zambians are inclined to always answer in the confirmatory, rarely ever answering 'no'. Zambians do, however, seem to be very accepting of the COP crews, actively taking them into their ingroup. On the subject of masculinity, most female participants felt like they were treated differently from the men. Some of the male participants agreed to this, others didn't perceive it as a problem. The division of roles mainly expressed itself in that responses, less in conversation, but more so per e-mail, were directed at male COP crew members.

The Zambian crews noticed quite little in terms of power distance. The best example however is when one of the COP members became ill. The crew, together with their local hosts, rushed towards the hospital, where they were allowed to skip the queue for immediate treatment, because they were in the company of their hosts.

4.1.2 4.1.2 India

There were 3 interviewed COP participants who went to India.

Hofstede Dimension	Number of mentioned indicators
PDI	4
IDV	3
MAS	1
UAI	0
LTO	0

Although there were fewer Indian crew members than Zambian, they seemed to either run into more intercultural encounters, or to be more perceiving of them. This explains the relatively high number of mentioned indicators, compared to the Zambian scores.

Crews in India noted foremost that status seems to be everything. One student reports: "At one point, we were offered tea by [the vice president of the school they resided and worked at]. This was by phone, mind you. We could have easily walked down and got tea in the kitchen, a place where we came daily. But she said no, she'd take care of it. Some 30 seconds later, we hear the phone ring in the guard house, and the man inside walks out and into the school. A minute later he is upstairs, asking if he can bring us some tea." They also report that, if they wanted something done, they could just walk to the person in charge, and if she would give the go-ahead, that was it. Nobody questioned that.

Another student reports that the caste system is unofficially still at work. The couple in charge of their project was now looking for a suitable man for their daughter to marry. They did so by a special 'dating site', which not only stated his occupation, but also his dad's, and sported several other more or less subtle indications to his rank and status.

As in Zambia, India COP crews reported that people never say 'no', or admit they do not know something. As with the Zambian crews, this led to some minor frustrations, mainly because they had to ask everything tenfold before they approached an answer they found sufficiently honest.

The crews mentioned less indications that women seemed to be treated very differently, although clear distinctions could be made between larger towns and the rural areas.

4.2 Student Reactions to Cultural Disequilibrium

During the interviews, no indication was found that suggested the students' applied strategies depended on the project's home nation. Furthermore, as the strategic responses seemed to differ per individual, no division based on country, sex, or project year was made. As before, the total number of participants is 10. Students could mention more than one strategy.

Strategic reaction	Applied by
Reframing	4
Managing emotions/self-assurance	1
Taking initiative	3
Experimentation/ adaption	2
Openness to new things	1
Observing and mimicking	5
Defensive walls	1
Affirming one's own beliefs and practises	3

Only one of the interviewed students apparently had to manage her emotions, stating "we got so little feedback, because everybody just kept saying we did a good job." After they found out Zambians are disinclined to ever say 'no', she immediately started doubting whether they were actually doing such a good job at all. She had to push aside these feelings of doubt, reassuring herself that they were doing okay. Likewise, only one student actually had a 'defensive wall', expressing nervousness and some anxiety at leaving their place of residence - and thus rarely leaving it alone.

Observing and mimicking and taking initiative seem to mutually exclude each other. Students who took initiative were less accepting of the way things went, and made an active effort to exert control over the flow of the project. Those who observed and mimicked usually sat and waited out situations, arguing that "apparently this is how they work here".

Several students commented that they didn't want to take initiative, as they felt they didn't know the culture enough. Two students expressed a sort of middle way, in which they wished to "adapt to the culture, and then actively steer [the project] from within".

Most interestingly perhaps, is that several students sought motivations from the alien behaviour of those around. They were prone to explain everything Western motivations. In one example, when a student told an anecdote of a bus driver being over two hours late because he'd been drinking the night before, he remarked: "And no one was angry at him. Like everything was okay. [...] But perhaps this was because they still needed him to drive the bus." Although this utilitarian explanation might still be partially true, it does not hold with Hofstede's theory of collectivist society, with its harmony-preserving values.

Only one student seemed more fundamentally interested in the inner workings of the Zambian culture. However, or perhaps because of this interest, she was also the only student to assert that "Western culture is superior".

4.3 Long Term Effects of Repeated Visits

Unfortunately, there weren't enough COP crews interviewed to find results on long term relations for more than one location. However, for this one location, the Bwafwano Women's Central Board in Mporokoso, Zambia, there seems to

be some decline in intercultural problems. In the interviews, the 2011 crew mentioned significantly less frustrations about the project than did the 2009 or 2010 crew.

The 2009 crew had a relatively short visit, only staying for 8 days. It was, during this period, sort of unclear what their actual goal was. They would teach, but there were also questions of helping with the design of a new local area network - something the group was unprepared for. However, there were very little communication problems when they were actually on location and started the project, according to the crew.

The 2010 crew seemed to have a clearer image of what it was they came to do. Unfortunately, they had expected to continue with the same group of people who'd been trained by the 2009 crew, but this appeared not to be the case. Communications with the project management wasn't always efficient, mainly because of problems resulting from the difference between Dutch individualism and straight-forwardness and Zambian collectivist confrontation-avoiding harmony based behaviour.

The 2011 crew had hardly any frustrations or problems to report. Their most telling anecdotes involved the ever-recurring issue that Zambians always answer positively, making it hard to gauge whether the answer really is 'yes' or perhaps something else. Other than this, there seemed to have been no significant troubles.

5 Discussion

5.1 Hofstede's Theory in Practice

Based on Hofstede's theory, several Zambian and Indian cultural features should stand out to Dutch students. In Zambia, this would mean its collectivist culture, short-term orientation and masculinity. In the interviews, both collectivist indicators and masculinity indicators were mentioned several times. No indicators were found for the short-term orientation of Zambia. India, likewise, showed clear indicators or the power distance and collectivist culture, but not of its long-term orientation. From this we can conclude that not all Hofstede's dimension are readily translatable into communication phenomena, especially the long-term orientation (LTO) and uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) dimensions.

The interviews also made clear that the Hofstede model can only predict so much. As to be expected of a model which generalises culture within the boundaries of entire nations, there are many exceptions to its rules. Also, many of its dimensions translate differently across different cultures. For instance, Zambia has a PDI only slightly lower than India's, but students mentioned far fewer indicators in the Zambian interviews. A total of 2 times, with 7 interviewees who'd been to Zambia, as opposed to 4 mentions of PDI indicators from the 3 India interviewees. Assuming the data of Zambia's Hofstede dimensions is correct, this implies that Zambian power distance is much more subtle than Indian power distance.

Also, there are indicators which can't be clearly linked to one dimension in particular. Some important aspects of culture, such as hospitality, can't be expressed in the Hofstede model at all. This is interesting, because these could

be very useful indicators of how hard it would be to get acquainted with locals. For instance, Zambia's low individualist score would imply a strong ingroup culture. But the students in Zambia were heartily welcomed in every instance, and if there ever were such a thing as an ingroup, they were - seemingly - quickly accepted into it.

Students were often skeptic about the Hofstede model, claiming that it was a "self-fulfilling prophecy" or "too much of a macro model to be of any practical use". Although this research suggests that there is some practical merit to the Hofstede model, the initial hypothesis can be largely rejected. In itself, the Hofstede model is not a sufficient preparation for the cultural disequilibrium students will find themselves in.

5.2 Student Responses

The interviewed COP students seemed surprisingly able to cope with the experience of being thrown into a foreign culture. Only one student mentioned actively shielding himself from the experience. One student mentioned having to put her feelings of insecurity aside to continue with the project. Most students were able to either reframe their point of view, or had no need for a specific strategy, as they felt at ease with the experience.

When confronted with issues which were in the way of the project, often such things as local partners arriving (very) late, not keeping their word or giving unsatisfactory answers to relevant questions, students often handled it through 'mimicking'. Half of the students seemed to decide that, as this was apparently the way to work, that they too should not worry about such things. Some other students actively took action, walking themselves to where they needed to be if their ride did not appear in time, for instance. That said, it seems to be the case that students can be roughly divided in two groups: those that let things come as they may (the 'passive group'), and those that actively try to impose on the course of events (the 'active group'), the passive group being the larger.

Lastly, students seem disinclined to try and understand the other culture, or at least accept that they might have another point of view. Actions of the local people are still justified in ways which are understandable and recognizable for the student. In essence, they ask themselves: if I would just have done that, why would I have done so? It seems to be hard to let the own culture be, and try and look at the locals in an entirely new perspective, namely that of their own culture.

5.3 Limitations

Naturally, the first thing to keep in mind when reading this research, is the limited number of interviewees upon which the results are based. Moreover, these interviewees had their intercultural experience either 4, 16 or 28 months ago, making details sometimes hard to remember. Adding to that, none of the interviewees had gotten specific instructions on what to keep in mind or look for, concerning cultural indicators, so they were asked about something they'd never given real attention to.

Also, all participants were inexperienced Dutch university students. Few had ever visited comparable countries before. It would be wrong to apply the

results of this research to other groups - be they professional, semi-professional, or amateur in nature - than the one mentioned.

Of all the countries which can be visited through the COP, only Zambia and India were researched. It was assumed these countries were representable enough for the rest of the COP countries, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. As the research has shown, some things, which seem similar in Hofstede's dimensions, can have different implementations in different cultures, making it hard to compare them.

In the research for the effects of long-term partnership, there were only interviewees from three different years for one location. As this is only one location, it can't be generalized in any way, and is of little significant importance.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

One great step forward would be to have questionnaires made, and to have these distributed at the end of the COP course. The two main advantages of this would be a larger number of participants and the freshness of the information.

Another thought could be to brief students about cultural indicators before they actually go to the projects. This will enable them to observe these indicators more keenly, thus improving the accuracy of the response on the suggested questionnaire. It would also have the added effect of making the student more aware of the 'otherness' of the visited culture. This could be beneficial to the intercultural learning process of the students.

Furthermore, what would be interesting is to find a way to measure, somehow, 'project success'. If this could be defined, the strategic reactions of the students could be researched for effectiveness, which is interesting in a broader frame than just the COP. Namely, such information could be useful for managers or participants of other intercultural projects as well.

6 Conclusion

This paper aimed to answer the question whether or not the theory of Hofstede was a good and accurate predictor of cultural disequilibrium within the context of the Community Outreach Project. The hypothesis being that it was, several sub questions have been answered to determine if this was true.

Firstly, a theoretical predication about cultural disequilibrium was made, using Hofstede's theory. The predictions were made by comparing Dutch Hofstede scores with Zambian and Indian ones, respectively, those being the countries used to check the validity of the Hofstede model. This was manageable, even though the predictions lacked detail.

Next, students who'd participated in the Community Outreach Project in either Zambia or India were interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to discover what the actual experiences of cultural disequilibrium were, according to the students. Most notably, no indicators could be found for the Hofstede dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation.

Upon comparing theoretical predictions to practical experiences, it became apparent that Hofstede could be used to roughly predict the cultural disequilibrium students actually experience. However, it was rough in such a way, that

it's actual value as a tool of precise prediction is debatable. As such, it does not seem to be in itself a sufficient preparation for a COP.

There was also a question of disequilibria decreasing as a project went on, and students came to visit a location year after year. Unfortunately, there was only one location for which all three COP crews - 2009, 2010, 2011 - could be contacted. This one location showed a slight decrease in cultural disequilibrium, but this isolated result can hardly be generalized in any way.

Lastly, an analysis has been made on the different reaction strategies students have to the cultural disequilibrium resulting from sudden emergence in a foreign culture. In general, the COP students are confident and excited about the project, with little self-defense reactions. Interestingly, students seem to be divisible in a passive and an active group. The former tends to take things as they come, the latter - smaller - group takes initiative to have some influence on the process of the project.

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APPENDIX I

Interview Guide
Bachelorscriptie Informatiekunde

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<u>Opening</u>
Openen met voorstellen, korte uitleg over het onderwerp van de scriptie en aankaarten dat het interview opgenomen wordt. De opnames worden vernietigd. Vragen of er nog vragen zijn. Daarna, beginnen met interview.

<u>Body</u>
Onderstaande vragen dienen niet per se in deze volgorde beantwoordt te worden. Het is belangrijker de student zijn/haar verhaal te laten doen, aangezien de meeste informatie uiteindelijk uit de anecdotes gehaald wordt.

Vraag 1: Zou je voor het interview nog eens kort kunnen vertellen waar je geweest bent, en wat je daar zou gaan doen?
Welk jaar?

Vraag 2: Wat waren je verwachtingen, wat betreft de andere cultuur?
Doorvragen:
Wat kun je je herinneren van het Hofstede model van de landen?
Was die heel verschillend van Nederland?

Vraag 3: Had je vantevoren al een idee over hoe je met die andere cultuur om zou gaan?
Doorvragen:
Wat was dat idee dan?
Waarom specifiek zo?

Vraag 4: Is er vantevoren contact geweest tussen jullie en de lokale projectleiders?
Doorvragen:
Hoe communiceerden jullie voornamelijk? (telefoon, e-mail?)
Hebben jullie het toen gehad over het project en hoe jullie het aan gingen pakken?
Hielp dit contact met het leren kennen van elkaar?

Vraag 5: Wat denk je dat het belangrijkste punt was van die communicatie? (voor jullie, voor hen?)

Vraag 6: Hadden jullie na die communicatie een beter idee over de situatie daar en wat jullie zouden gaan doen?

Vraag 7: Klopte het beeld en de verwachting die je had van het project met hoe het was toen je daadwerkelijk daar was?
Doorvragen:
In welk opzicht wel/niet?
Wat was de grootste verassing?
Wat was het grootste verschil?

Vraag 8: Wat viel op als een duidelijk cultureel verschil toen je daar was?
Doorvragen:
Had dat effect op de communicatie met de locals van het project?

Vraag 9: Hoe was het om als Westers persoon mee te helpen aan dat project?
Doorvragen:
Werd je anders behandeld dan de locals?
Luisterden mensen meer of beter naar je?
Vertrouwden mensen je meer of minder?

Vraag 10: Maakte het uit dat je een man/vrouw was?
Doorvragen:
Hoe merkte je dat?
Hoe ging je daarmee om?

Vraag 11: Vond je dat de communicatie over het project beter ging naarmate je er langer was?