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Forward from a critique of Hofstede's model of national culture

Dermot Williamson

ABSTRACT McSweeney's critique (2002) rejects Hofstede's model and finds national culture implausible as a systematically causal factor of behaviour. His critique is examined for its useful warnings to those who follow Hofstede's research and for its logical consistency. A paradigmatic perspective identifies where McSweeney argues against Hofstede's logic and where he rejects Hofstede's paradigm and premises. This indicates that both the functionalist and other paradigms are needed for future research into national culture and for understanding social behaviour in different national cultures.

KEYWORDS Hofstede ■ methodology ■ national culture ■ paradigm

Introduction

Crucial warnings for those who would use Hofstede's model¹ of national culture are raised by McSweeney (2002). Although this model has been used extensively in empirical research and explanations of interaction between national culture and management,² McSweeney's critique maintains that the methodology of the model is fundamentally flawed. He questions whether culture can systematically cause differences in behaviour between people from different countries. In doing so, he throws a challenge to all who use Hofstede's model or similar cultural models from the functionalist paradigm, such as those of Schwartz (1992) and Trompenaars (1993).

Unfortunately, McSweeney's own argument is flawed. Many of these

flaws arise from the omission to distinguish between errors of logic within the standards of the functionalist paradigm in which Hofstede chose to do his research, and constraints from choosing this paradigm. They raise the serious danger that, if unopposed, Hofstede's research may be disregarded, as may other cultural models in the functionalist paradigm. The considerable knowledge built on these models may be rubbished. If, however, commentators rebut McSweeney's argument for its flaws, use of Hofstede's model may be strengthened. This would be unfortunate for the warnings raised by McSweeney, and for well-founded criticism of over-reliance on Hofstede's model (e.g. Bhimani, 1999; Harrison & McKinnon, 1999; Redding, 1994).

This article starts by considering the paradigmatic premises for McSweeney's critique. It then seeks to go to the heart of McSweeney's argument, to the five assumptions that he claims are essential to Hofstede's model. McSweeney's rejection of the plausibility of national culture as a systematically causal factor is considered next. Constraints of a single article curtail examination of the numerous other claims in his critique. However, useful warnings by McSweeney are identified about the use of Hofstede's model. The article concludes with implications of paradigms for cross-cultural research.

Methodologies and paradigms

McSweeney (2002) aims his critique at Hofstede's methodology. For this, it is well to distinguish methodologies from research methods. The latter are techniques used by researchers in gathering and analysing data. Methodology is concerned with the choice and justification of research methods. Methods should follow logically from the nature of a study and its methodology. In contrast, methodology is based on premises of the researcher. These are assumptions that should be consistent with assumptions about epistemology, ontology and human nature (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). 'Methodology is fundamental in the sense of being dependent on the values and beliefs of those engaged in the research process. . . . The assumption that pragmatic choices can be made between methodologies is inappropriate and masks the essentially political nature of the selection' (Llewellyn, 1992: 18).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) classify assumptions of methodology, epistemology, ontology and human nature as relatively objective or subjective, grouping them into alternative functionalist and interpretive paradigms for

social science research.³ This classification draws attention to how opposing assumptions underlie attacks between rival schools operating in different paradigms. Commitment to a paradigm determines not just methodological choices, but also criteria by which research methods can be evaluated (Kuhn, 1996).

Burrell and Morgan's classification is potentially useful for identifying whether McSweeney and Hofstede view national culture from different paradigms, and therefore start from different premises, or whether, working within the same paradigm, their differences are in logic.

Hofstede researches national culture as a given regularity that shapes shared values. He adopts realist and deterministic assumptions. His research into national culture is through careful collection of data from large stratified samples, which he analyses with statistical techniques designed to suppress subjective interpretations. The dimensions of his model purport to be universally applicable. He may safely be described as working within the functionalist paradigm.

McSweeney's paradigm is unclear. This article shows how he both criticizes Hofstede's logic within evaluative criteria, and also challenges the functionalist assumptions adopted by Hofstede. Each of these approaches is feasible, but together they are incompatible. The former requires adoption of evaluative criteria of the functionalist paradigm chosen by Hofstede. The latter is a rejection of this paradigm. Without clear premises, his conclusions are difficult to assess.

Readers may legitimately ask what paradigm I assume in examining McSweeney's critique of Hofstede's model. In my opinion, each paradigm has advantages and disadvantages. A researcher may select a paradigmatic position appropriate to the study. That is, appropriate in the sense of being both consistent with his or her assumptions about its ontological nature and capable of being communicated to the intended research audience. It may also be appropriate to his or her assumptions about human nature and aptitudes as a researcher. My own view of human nature is of individuals being victims of their social situation and simultaneously influencing their social world. I see someone's balance between victim and free agent as depending upon both personal attributes and their social, economic and historical circumstances. Selection of an appropriate paradigm may require taking a metaparadigm perspective (Gioia & Pitre, 1990), with an overview of the constraints and possibilities offered by alternative assumptions. In contrast to McSweeney, who does not consider alternative paradigms, I take a metaparadigm position in evaluating his critique against both the functionalist and interpretive paradigms.

Assumption 1: National, organizational and occupational cultures

The five assumptions, identified by McSweeney as underlying Hofstede's model, are illustrated in Figure 1. He argues that each of these assumptions is flawed, and that Hofstede's model should, therefore, be rejected.

The first assumption refers to the levels or components of culture, such as national, organizational, occupational, professional or religious.

McSweeney claims that Hofstede in reaching his findings has assumed his results, for example, that national culture is distinguishable from organizational and occupational culture, and that it is measurable. He maintains that Hofstede's logic is therefore circular.

This objection does not itself negate Hofstede's measurement of differences between average responses by people from different countries. These measurements were controlled with samples from a single organization, IBM, and a narrow occupational range of sales and marketing staff. Making assumptions *ex ante* of what might be found *ex post* is not dissimilar to

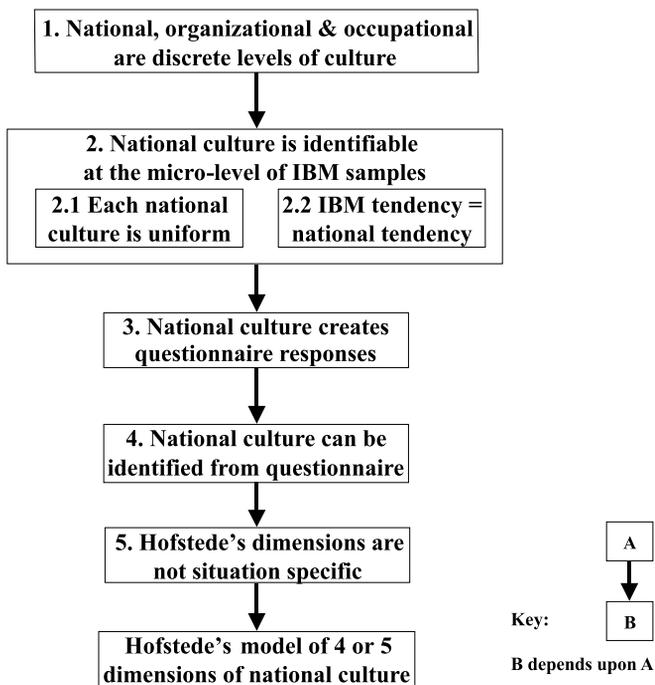


Figure 1 Five assumptions claimed by McSweeney to underlie Hofstede's model

setting a priori hypotheses, which is a widely respected method within nomothetic methodology. However, questions, typical of positivist⁴ epistemology, may remain concerning first, the reliability of these measurements, and second, the validity of Hofstede's interpretation that he controlled for organizational and occupational cultures. Both questions are raised by McSweeney. The first, concerning reliability, is considered later in terms of whether the questionnaire responses reflected gaming, and whether they tapped equivalent meaning in each culture.

McSweeney raises the question of validity in his objection that Hofstede could not have controlled for organizational and occupational culture when measuring national culture, because national, organizational and occupational cultures are not discrete, independent phenomena. However, the relevance of *independence* between levels of culture is not apparent: it is when there is some degree of *interdependence* between national culture and other levels of culture, or interdependence between their measured manifestations, that controlling for these extraneous variables becomes critical. Conversely, if no distinction could be drawn between national, organizational and occupational levels of culture, there would be no need to control for organization and occupation as extraneous variables. When there is some effect of organizations or occupations on measurements of national culture, then holding employing organization and occupation constant can only reduce the effect of these variables.

However, there remains a possibility that the combination of country with either the particular organization or occupations affected Hofstede's measurements of culture. For example, an apparent tendency of national culture among say IBM staff in Singapore relative to IBM staff in the USA, might have arisen from traits of the IBM organization in Singapore, or of Singaporean marketing and sales staff, or of marketing and sales staff working for IBM in Singapore, rather than of Singaporean national culture. This is an issue of whether national culture can be identified from Hofstede's instrument, and of whether findings from Hofstede's samples of IBM staff are representative of national populations. Both of these are examined later. The possibility that Hofstede's findings reflect combinations of national culture with either organizational or occupational cultures is reduced by evidence from Trompenaars' research (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). This research of responses by 30,000 managers from multinational and international companies and from 55 countries, tested its results of significant differences between national cultures for the effect of extraneous factors such as gender and occupation (Woolliams, 1997).

McSweeney's critique has been examined until now from the functionalist paradigm. Circularity does not necessarily invalidate logic in other

paradigms, in which internal consistency and contextual relationships may be more important than linearity of logic (Maruyama, 1974). Some within the interpretive paradigm reject criteria of reliability and validity altogether as being incompatible with reflexivity between researcher and research subject, and replace them with criteria of plausibility and credibility (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Others reinterpret reliability and validity from perspectives of the research purpose, of those researched and of the research audience, rather than from the perspective of an objective unbiased observer (Hammersley, 1992; Kvale, 1996).

Assumption 2: National culture is identifiable at the micro-level of IBM samples

McSweeney attributes to Hofstede two alternative versions of this assumption, each depending upon a different definition of culture. Either version would support Hofstede's interpretation that differences by country in responses of IBM staff would represent differences between national cultures. The critique argues that both versions are untenable.

Version 1: Each national culture is uniform

McSweeney claims that Hofstede sometimes assumes that all members of a national community uniformly carry the same national culture. This is based upon culture in the sense of uniform characteristics, carried by everyone in a nation. Accordingly, Hofstede assumes that questionnaire responses from each country represent the values of that national culture. McSweeney dismisses this position as being inconsistent with the existence of organizational and occupational cultures, and with variety of values within nations.

However, uniform national cultures are inconsistent with Hofstede's findings.⁵ First, Hofstede found considerable variety of responses among individuals in a country, and considerable overlap in responses of individuals from different countries (Hofstede, 1980, Figure 2.3, p. 65). He illustrated this as shown in Figure 2.

Second, Hofstede found that responses by individuals did not correlate in the same ways as average responses for countries (e.g. Hofstede, 1980: 104, 2001: 64). The model is based on the *average* response for each national group of respondents. Hofstede warns of the dangers of the ecological fallacy, which is interpreting differences between populations as if they applied between individuals (Hofstede, 1980: 29, 1991: 112, 2001: 16).

McSweeney's interpretation may follow from seeing a paradox in

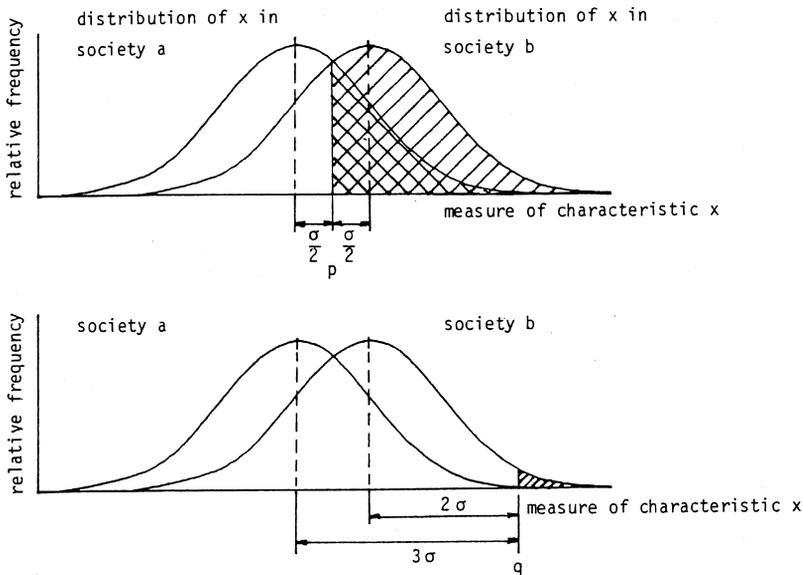


Figure 2 Ratios between the frequencies in two societies of those exceeding an average and an extreme value of a normally distributed, culturally influenced characteristic

Source: Hofstede (1980, Figure 1.5, p. 40). Copyright © Geert Hofstede. Reproduced with permission from the author and copyright-holder

common cultural characteristics being shared within a population that also displays internal cultural variety. Such commonality among variety can arise in at least two ways. First, the cultural dimension along which members of a national culture share attributes may differ from the variables by which there is sub-national variety. For example, dimensions of organizational culture such as loose or tight control may differ from those of national culture such as uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 1990). Second, a sample of respondents measured on a single cultural dimension may segregate into two cultural levels such as national and organizational cultures. This can be illustrated with a hypothetical example of respondents from two countries and two organizations, giving survey responses that are measured on an ordinal or interval scale, as shown in Figure 3. Members of Company X can tend to respond lower than those from Company Y, while at the same time responses from Country A can tend to be lower than from Country B.

Although cultural uniformity is inconsistent with Hofstede's research, McSweeney's objection gives a useful warning to researchers who ignore intranational variety of cultural values. An assumption of cultural uniformity diverts attention from 'the richness and diversity of national practices and institutions' (2002: 112). It can lead to the ecological fallacy of predicting an

	<u>Country A</u>	<u>Country B</u>
Company X	1	6
Company X	2	7
Company Y	3	8
Company Y	4	9
Company Y	5	10

Figure 3 Significant variation in responses by respondents between two countries and two organizations⁶

individual's values from his or her national culture. Turning to the interpretive paradigm, it offends voluntarist assumptions of individual volition.

Version 2: Tendency of an IBM sample is the national tendency

The second alternative version of this assumption is based on culture in the sense, not of shared uniformity, but of a shared central tendency in traits. McSweeney challenges Hofstede's findings on the grounds that, if national cultures exist as tendencies within their populations, these are not the same tendencies as within the IBM samples surveyed by Hofstede. He does so on two grounds: first, that IBM employees are unrepresentative of their respective national cultures because of the company's selective recruitment. Unfortunately, this confuses the phenomenon of culture with its measurement. Culture is a construct, for which there can be no direct measure. Scores for Hofstede's dimensions are not absolute measures, but relative positions by which nations can be compared (2001: 73). A score say for power distance, measured from three questions in Hofstede's instrument, gives only an indication of the rich cultural variety by which values concerning social distribution of power in society tend to vary. 'Cultural dimensions were never intended to provide a complete basis for analyzing a culture' (Hofstede & Peterson, 2000: 404). If these dimensions are seen as approximations for constructs of cultural values, and if these cultural values affected IBM staff in their survey responses, the issue is not whether the samples are

representative of national populations, but whether differences between their responses are representative of differences in cultural values.

Hofstede's findings therefore depend upon national culture affecting IBM staff in one country to the same extent that it affects IBM staff in other countries. This is the second ground on which McSweeney challenges whether national culture can be identified from the IBM samples. The extent to which the values for IBM staff are unrepresentative of their national culture no doubt differs between nations. In countries such as Taiwan, with cultures very different from that of IBM's home country of the USA, IBM staff may be expected to be generally more unrepresentative of their national culture than are US staff of IBM. However, if IBM selected local staff atypically attuned to US norms, Hofstede's research would have underestimated differences between national cultures. Therefore, although McSweeney raises a strong challenge to the accuracy of Hofstede's measurement of differences between national cultures, the challenge is that the differences are underestimated. It strengthens, rather than diminishes, Hofstede's claim to have identified dimensions of national culture.

However, McSweeney's critique serves as a warning not to confuse Hofstede's scores with the cultural constructs for which they are only approximate measures. Hofstede's scores can only be a very rough indication of tendencies in the rich variety of cultural values. Researchers looking for greater precision than what is offered by Hofstede's four or five dimensions, may look to models with a greater number of dimensions developed by other researchers such as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) who use seven dimensions, or Schwartz and Sagiv (1995) who identify 10 value types. Furthermore, much of what distinguishes cultures cannot be captured in universal variables: besides variety between cultures in universal variables for etic attributes, there are emic attributes that are unique to a culture.

McSweeney's objection to Hofstede's claim, to have identified national cultures from a survey of IBM staff, falls within the functionalist paradigm. The first version, which misattributes an assumption of cultural uniformity to Hofstede, is a strongly deterministic view: it assumes that culture applies uniformly to all members of a population to the extent that membership of a nation is inconceivable without full conformity to the national standard. The second version, which challenges whether samples are representative, is based on concerns of positivist epistemology. In contrast, the interpretive paradigm would reject determinism and universal rules implied by uniform national culture. Its anti-positivist epistemology would not be concerned with whether samples are representative of wider populations, but with validity in the sense of findings being representative interpretations of the world of the research subjects (see Hammersley, 1989).

Assumption 3: National culture creates the questionnaire responses

McSweeney raises three objections to the validity of Hofstede's interpretation that patterns in responses to his questionnaire arise from differences between national cultures. He states his objection in terms of an extreme interpretation of Hofstede's deterministic view, that questionnaire responses were 'created' by respondents' national cultures.

Any stratification would have produced cultural differences

McSweeney points out that any number of stratifications of Hofstede's questionnaire responses could have produced apparent cultural differences, and that therefore Hofstede's dimensions do not necessarily arise from national culture. However, McSweeney does not discuss Hofstede's analysis of the questionnaire responses by other stratifications. This found that differences in responses between countries were more significant than those between sex or age (Hofstede, 1980: Figure 2.4). Also, his factor analysis of organizational cultures produced different groupings of dimensions than his factor analysis of national cultures (Hofstede et al., 1990).

Working with nomothetic methodology and positivist epistemology generally requires some assumptions that sampling methods lead to representative results. McSweeney's objections do not demonstrate failure by Hofstede to identify cultural dimensions, although he may have indicated a reason why Hofstede's measurements understate differences between national cultures along these dimensions. McSweeney might have attempted to falsify Hofstede's model by presenting confounding empirical findings. Validity of Hofstede's interpretation that he found differences between national cultures is supported by his own data gathered at IMEDE business school (Hofstede, 1980), by corroborative studies (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; P. Smith, 2002; P. Smith et al., 1996; Sondergaard, 1994), and by other cultural surveys that found significant differences in values between people from different countries (e.g. Woolliams, 1997).

With anti-positive epistemology, the criterion of generalizability from representative samples might be replaced by transferability from study to other situations (Kvale, 1996).

Respondents assumed to be 'cultural dopes'

McSweeney claims that Hofstede's model is based on an assumption that people are 'cultural dopes'. That is, as mere relays of national culture, their

values are wholly determined by their national culture. This strongly deterministic view follows from the first version of assumption 2, that each national culture is uniform.

If, however, culture is represented by central tendencies, people's values may be seen as reflecting a wide variety of factors, including non-cultural factors, even under determinist assumptions of human nature. It is clear that Hofstede, taking a less strongly determinist view of human nature, sees sharing of traits within a country as the consequence of a wide variety of cultural and non-cultural factors (see, for example, Hofstede, 1980: Figure 1.4, pp. 120–36). Social scientists within the functionalist paradigm, with assumptions of determinism, can find greater explanatory power than provided by a single factor such as national culture. Wider determining factors may include institutional influences, social structures and economic conditions.

If one moves away from extreme assumptions of determinism towards the border ground with the interpretive paradigm, factors may be seen as constituting a mutually interacting web, with the result that determination of human values and behaviour is no longer through linear causal relationships. This determination would still, in theory, be quantifiable, although prediction of outcomes might become problematic as the web of determining and potentially interacting factors widens.

If McSweeney's argument against 'dopes' is extended beyond cultural factors, it serves as a warning against consequences of seeing human nature as wholly determined by external forces. Such extreme determinism denies the possibility of individual free will. It may be contrasted to people responding to, contributing to, and participating in the construction of their social environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), and voluntarism of the interpretive paradigm.

Questionnaire responses reflect gaming

McSweeney points out that responses to Hofstede's questionnaire may have reflected gaming by IBM staff. This is a challenge to the reliability of Hofstede's data as a nomothetic measure of cultural values. If the data are unreliable, then the validity of Hofstede's interpretation of cultural scores based on them is overturned. It is therefore well for cultural researchers and users of cultural research to consider how respondents may react to being research subjects, and how this may affect research findings. Equally, however, it should be questioned to what extent gaming by Hofstede's respondents differed between countries, and whether this gaming might have led to significant distortion of his data. It should also be questioned to what

extent empirical studies that corroborate Hofstede's model were also compromised by respondents' reactions to being researched, and whether any of these reactions had the same effect as gaming by IBM staff. This is a potentially valid objection within the functionalist paradigm to Hofstede's findings, but without empirical evidence to challenge both his model and studies that corroborate it, a case has still to be made.

Within the interpretive paradigm, gaming by respondents takes on a different significance. Respondents' reflexive reactions to being researched would be expected. Instead of seeking to exclude reflexivity by nomothetic methods, an interpretive researcher would attempt to identify, understand and interpret it. This is not done by either Hofstede or McSweeney.

Assumption 4: National culture is identifiable from Hofstede's questionnaire

I count seven objections raised by McSweeney to Hofstede's derivation of cultural dimensions from the questionnaire. These objections are of two varieties, that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are too simplistic to capture the richness of national cultures, and that nomothetic research is inappropriate for identifying cultural dimensions.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions are too simplistic

National culture is a complex social phenomenon. It can be argued that to capture it in just four or five quantified dimensions misses much of what is essential to, or claimed to be represented by, national culture.

Each of Hofstede's dimensions are bipolar

McSweeney points out that values may not necessarily be bipolar. This is illustrated in functionalist research by Levenson's analysis (Kaufmann et al., 1995) of locus of control among three poles of inner directed, outer directed due to more powerful others, and outer locus control due to chance. Schwartz (1992) portrays 10 value types in a circle. Although each value type may measure values along a single bipolar dimension, it is related to its neighbour across a fuzzy boundary. These 10 value types are themselves grouped into two dimensions. Although each of these dimensions is bipolar, they are also multipolar in comprising a variety of interrelated value types.

McSweeney's objection therefore serves as a warning to those who may assume that Hofstede's model provides more than a rough approximation for complexities of cultural worlds.

Cultural dimensions may interact

McSweeney portrays Hofstede as claiming that his dimensions are largely independent, whereas cultural dimensions may interact as shown by Schwartz (1992). Yet Hofstede found strong negative correlation between his measurements of individualism and power distance (1980: 221, 2001: 216). McSweeney's objection is an important warning to those who see Hofstede's model as definitive, rather than an approximate indication of complex multi-cultural variety.

Hofstede's dimensions are blind to co-existence of incompatible views

McSweeney objects that, although each person has the ability to hold apparently incompatible opinions, this ability is not reflected in Hofstede's model. However, Hofstede bases each dimension on answers to at least three different questions. The data for each respondent may therefore capture apparently contradictory opinions across three or more situations. Furthermore, data for individuals are averaged by country. This represents further aggregation for each national culture of potentially incompatible individual views. This objection does not therefore correspond to Hofstede's model.

Such an objection raises more fundamental questions of what is incompatibility, how it can be identified and against what criteria. Each culture has emic values that can appear to be contradictory to people of another culture. It would be problematic within the functionalist paradigm to identify incompatibility without being ethnographic. Alternatively, it could be argued that emic values, which appear to be contradictory from outside a culture, require ideographic research methods.

Hofstede's dimensions are not comprehensive in capturing cultural values

Hofstede admits that his dimensions are not comprehensive (1980: 313). McSweeney objects that incomplete measurement of national cultures lead to inaccurate descriptions. This objection applies to not only what is emic to each culture, which is considered later, but also to what is etic and thus potentially identifiable from other cultures. The wider range of dimensions found by Trompenaars and by Schwartz indicate that Hofstede's five dimensions are not comprehensive for etic features of national cultures that can be measured in universal dimensions. However, correlations found for some of Hofstede's dimensions with other surveys (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; P. Smith et al., 1996) suggest that there are some relatively comprehensive dimensions,

with which much measurement of cultural variety correlates. Therefore, even if there are comprehensive dimensions that can be measured universally, these may embrace a variety of values that tend to distinguish people from different countries.

McSweeney's point that Hofstede's dimensions may not be comprehensive underscores the choice among models and dimensions that has to be made by those studying national culture within the functionalist paradigm. The choice is between what is comprehensive or specific, and between what more closely measures whatever attributes are to be studied.

Hofstede's dimensions are not the dominant dimensions

Although McSweeney queries whether Hofstede identified the dominant dimensions, he does not explain what he means by 'dominant'. Dominance may refer to explanatory power for a particular situation, such as in a classroom or a manager consulting her subordinates. This requires specification of situations that are to be explained or predicted. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) show how national tendencies can vary considerably between questions that contribute to the measurement of a single dimension. For example, 'French and Italian managers, who were particularist on the (question concerning a) traffic accident, believe that when writing on a subject as important as food you have a universal obligation to truth' (1997: 36). It is clear from Hofstede's lists of examples (e.g. 1991: 37, 67, 96, 125) that he sees different dimensions as important to behaviour in different situations.

Lachman et al. (1994) argue that the importance of a particular value may vary between cultures in being core or peripheral. Accordingly, what is a core value for one culture may be peripheral for another. Similarly, cultural dimensions measuring an array of values may be more or less core or important. Therefore, it is not clear what a search for dominant dimensions would seek to achieve.

However, McSweeney makes an important point for those selecting Hofstede's model as most appropriate for the attributes that they wish to study. Particular values that the model purports to measure may vary in importance between cultures. This importance may also vary between particular situations.

Parsimony

Objections that Hofstede's model of four or five dimensions is too simplistic to capture variety in values between nations can be contrasted with a desire for parsimony. A parsimonious theory is relatively easy to explain, communicate

and apply. Within the functionalist paradigm, the clarity and tidiness of a parsimonious theory have the aesthetic appeal of Occam's razor (Russell, 1961). Resemblance to parsimonious theories of physical science may enhance plausibility (Kuhn, 1996).

Hofstede's factor analysis sought to identify a limited number of variables that could explain much multicultural variety. Identification of cultural variety along a few purportedly universal dimensions avoids attempts to describe and compare what is emic to cultures. The model therefore omits what is apparently contradictory or even incomprehensible from other cultures. Bipolar dimensions may overlook complexities of the cultural world, but they facilitate quantitative analysis. Inclusion of variables for interaction of factors, and introduction of core and peripheral values, might have increased the model's power to explain cultural differences in more detail, but it would have reduced the model's parsimony.

Hofstede's model has the beauty of parsimony. This may be a large part of its appeal and success within the functionalist paradigm. McSweeney's objections highlight the choice faced by researchers and students of national culture of an appropriate balance between parsimony for powerful communication and power of explanation. They may find this balance in Hofstede's model, in other models within the functionalist paradigm, or by moving outside this paradigm.

Nomothetic research is inappropriate for cultural research

McSweeney raises two objections that, because Hofstede's cultural survey fails to meet requirements for nomothetic research, national culture is not identifiable from his questionnaire. In so far as Hofstede did all that might be expected of nomothetic cultural research, these are objections to using nomothetic methods for cultural research.

Equivalence of meaning of questions in a questionnaire

McSweeney reminds us of the problem that a survey question may have different meaning in each culture. Yet Hofstede was aware of this problem (1980: 34–7, 2001: 21), and of the limitations of the back translation methods that he used (1980: 63). However, total equivalence is never attainable, because much that distinguishes a culture is emic, as it has no exact equivalence in other cultures, and may be accessible only to those who can use language and references of the particular culture. Nevertheless nomothetic cross-cultural research, such as performed by Hofstede, requires universal variables that can be measured and compared between cultures. This presents the Malinovskian dilemma for researchers, whether to research cultures from the outside so that

they may be compared, or from inside a culture so as to gain depth of understanding (Adler, 1983; Lammers, 1975). This objection, to Hofstede's methods for controlling reliability of meaning equivalence, could be levelled at all nomothetic cross-cultural research. It may be contrasted to problems for inquiry into emic meanings through ideographic research (Evered & Louis, 1981), such as difficulties of comparing subjective accounts from different research settings.

Hofstede's dimensions are not a direct measure of national culture

McSweeney objects that Hofstede's instrument is not a direct measure of national cultures. However, culture is a construct, and as such has no direct measure. Hofstede's dimensions may be seen as manifestations of national culture, rather than as direct measures of national cultures. This objection by McSweeney serves well as a warning to those who use Hofstede's model not to confuse dimensions of culture with the constructs that they purport to measure. The problem of construct validity is well known to those concerned with positivist epistemology (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). But to reject Hofstede's model because it does not provide a direct measure of national culture, is to reject all nomothetic research of culture, including research by Schwartz and by Trompenaars.

Assumption 5: Hofstede's dimensions are not situation specific

This fifth assumption is that Hofstede's four or five dimensions are not situation specific, that they purport to describe pervasive cultures of whole nations irrespective of situation. McSweeney reminds us that Hofstede's data gathering was restricted in who was surveyed, where they were asked to complete the survey, and what questions were asked.

The first arm of this objection is a repetition of arguments that Hofstede's sample were not representative of nations. It is met by a reminder that the model is based on relative, not absolute, measures of cultural values, that Hofstede's analysis checked the significance of differences between countries, and that selection bias in IBM recruitment is more likely to have understated than overstated differences between national cultures.

While alerting us to a possible problem that the venue where Hofstede's respondents were asked to complete his survey might have affected his results, McSweeney does not demonstrate that the results were compromised. Surveys administered in schools and universities, that support some or all of Hofstede's findings (e.g. Chinese Culture Connection, 1987;

Jackson, 2001), suggest that the venue has not restricted the applicability of Hofstede's model.

McSweeney points out that Hofstede's survey almost exclusively concerned workplace issues. He reminds us that values, such as those indicated by the power distance dimension, identified in the workplace may be more or less pronounced for other issues in other situations, for example within the family at home. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's findings (1997) for responses to dilemmas concerning traffic accidents and food illustrate such variability of survey responses between situations.

There is, however, evidence to suggest wider applicability. Hofstede's individualism–collectivism, power distance and long-term orientation dimensions correlate with some of Schwartz' and Trompenaars' dimensions (P. Smith et al., 1996). Whereas Trompenaars includes some non-workplace issues in his survey, Schwartz' survey was designed for students and teachers not for business staff. Furthermore, the Chinese Culture Connection (1987), which surveyed university students, correlated with Hofstede's individualism–collectivism, power distance and masculinity dimensions.

McSweeney's objections to this fifth assumption are that Hofstede's model is less universally applicable than it purports to be. Although positivist and nomothetic grounds given for these objections do not hold up, they indicate the general dilemma of choosing between a parsimonious model that approximately describes, or even predicts, phenomena across a wide range of situations, and a more precise description that is only narrowly applicable. This parallels the contrast between the functionalist paradigm, which seeks universal prediction, and specific understanding sought in the interpretive paradigm.

Plausibility of systematically causal national culture

McSweeney concludes by arguing it is implausible that national culture might systematically cause human action. He points to other factors for human behaviour besides national culture. There are cultures of sub-national regions, and other levels of culture such as organizational and occupational cultures. There are also non-cultural influences such as institutions and physical constraints. He concludes that it is unhelpful to attribute actions and institutions to national culture.

To object that something is implausible, indicates nominalist criteria. An equivalent realist criterion might be correspondence with reality (J. Smith & Deemer, 2000). However, it is not entirely clear if what McSweeney finds implausible is national culture, or it being a systematically causal factor. It

would be problematic, while assuming realist ontology, to object that national culture does not have an objective reality despite the evidence of some anthropological (Geertz, 1973; Mead, 1943) and other studies of national culture, whether founded on Hofstede's model or not (e.g. Child, 1981; Hall, 1977; Horovitz, 1980). Objection to a causal factor would be to assume voluntarist human nature. In either case, this objection suggests a move into the interpretive paradigm.

McSweeney appears to doubt that national cultures can be measured explicitly. 'It requires an equally contestable act of faith to claim that the underlying national culture or cultural differences can be discerned through the explicit and recordable' (2002: 108). Inability to measure national culture would sit uncomfortably with positivist epistemology.

He instead calls for knowledge about the rich diversity of national practices and institutions, about the interplay between cultural levels and between the cultural and non-cultural. He warns that 'We need to engage with and use theories of action which can cope with change, power, variety, multiple influences – including the non-national – and the complexity and situational variability of the individual subject' (McSweeney, 2002: 113). This well-founded call, for study of complex social phenomena subject to an indeterminate variety of factors, would be very difficult to meet with research using nomothetic protocols for carefully controlled variables.

Objections to deterministic human nature, realist ontology, positivist epistemology and nomothetic methodology are a rejection of the functionalist paradigm adopted by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Schwartz. Such rejection is consonant with those who argue that research into national culture needs to move away from the functionalist paradigm (Bhimani, 1999; Harrison & McKinnon, 1999; Redding, 1994).

Conclusion

McSweeney argues mainly from the functionalist paradigm, but fails to falsify Hofstede's model. For example, his arguments about reliability and validity do not quite stick, or are insufficient to refute empirical studies that corroborate the model. His view that Hofstede's model might assume uniform national culture is inconsistent with Hofstede's research. An a priori assumption about national culture is not incompatible with positivist epistemology. However, this is not to deny that Hofstede's model could be challenged from within the functionalist paradigm. The reliability or validity of Hofstede's research could be refuted. Empirical findings could confound its predictions. Another model may give a better explanation for empirical findings.

McSweeney's critique illustrates the confusion that can arise from a lack of clarity about the paradigm from which cultural research is debated. He steps into the interpretive paradigm, for example, in objections to implausibility, and when rejecting cultural survey instruments for their inevitably limited equivalence of meaning. Yet he does not acknowledge the necessary shift in assumptions. Nor are the consequences recognized of changes in relevant research criteria. Consequently, there is confusion of using logic in trying to challenge premises, and of trying to challenge logic with argument based on assumptions of a different paradigm. This illustrates difficulties of examining a social phenomenon, such as culture, without acknowledging assumptions about ontology, epistemology and human nature. Unless the flaws in McSweeney's argument are recognized, there is a danger that readers may reject all functionalist models of national culture, including those of Schwartz and of Trompenaars. They may reject the phenomenon of national culture.

McSweeney's cloak of an apparently unbiased observer conceals his switch of allegiance between paradigms. This is a political choice between assumptions and how they can be negotiated. Within a subjective paradigm, such as the interpretive, interests and biases become central. They need to be declared, or the research audience cannot identify from what perspective a study is made, or assess how it speaks to their viewpoints. They do not know where a researcher such as McSweeney is coming from.

To reject totally Hofstede's or similar functionalist models of national culture, before more satisfactory models have been developed, would be to throw away valuable insight. For social scientists working within the functionalist paradigm, quantification of national culture opens up what is otherwise a black box of cultural factors. For social scientists working outside the functionalist paradigm, Hofstede has named and described attributes of national culture that may be either used to describe social phenomenon or put up as a comparative yardstick for other cultural attributes.

Nevertheless, McSweeney's critique raises important warnings for those who would follow Hofstede's research or use his model. These fall into three areas. First, there is the danger of assuming that all members of a culture homogeneously carry the same cultural attributes, that a culture can be uniform. The second warning is about seeing individuals as 'cultural dopes', about expecting individuals' values or behaviour to be wholly determined by their cultural background. These warnings relate to the ecological fallacy of attempting to predict individuals' values or behaviour from data about their culture. The third danger is of confusing scores for cultural dimensions with cultural constructs for which they are but approximate measures. These warnings can be consistent with the functionalist paradigm: culture may be assumed to be an objective phenomenon shared to a variable

extent by members of a group; individuals may be assumed to be largely determined in their values and behaviour by a range of cultural, other social and physical factors; quantitative dimensions can be seen as useful, if crude, measures for rich cultural variety.

A challenge to Hofstede's model could be made from the interpretive paradigm. For example, ideographic methodology would be more feasible than nomothetic methodology for research into emic values. Moving research of national culture outside the functionalist paradigm would enrich its findings by facilitating inquiry into complex dynamic interrelationships among cultures, institutions, histories and social adaptation (Bhimani, 1999; Harrison & McKinnon, 1999; Redding, 1994).

However, a shift away from the functionalist paradigm comes at a price of losing the objectivity, the precision of nomothetic methods, the credibility of large studies focusing on a few controlled variables, and the comparability of quantitative studies using positivist epistemology. Parsimony of functionalist theories using universal variables may be easier to communicate to major sections of the academic and practitioner audience for research into national cultures. For these reasons, it is not yet time to abandon either functionalist research into national culture or the great advances it has made in unbundling the black box of culture. We still need multiple methods from several paradigms for researching national culture (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999).

Notes

- 1 Hofstede's model, with its four, or later five, dimensions of national culture, is expounded in his books of 1980, 1991 and 2001, and more briefly in numerous articles, such as those referenced by McSweeney. His 2001 edition re-examines in some depth the reliability and validity of the model.
- 2 Examples of the extensive empirical research based on Hofstede's model include Birnberg and Snodgrass (1988), Chow et al. (1999) and Jackson (2001). Studies replicating and corroborating the model have been reviewed by Sondergaard (1994), and by Chanchani and MacGregor (1999). The model is probably the dominant explanation of behavioural differences between nations.
- 3 Burrell and Morgan's (1979) other two paradigms, the radical humanist and radical structuralist, are not immediately relevant to McSweeney's critique of Hofstede's model.
- 4 'Positivist' has been used as a derogatory epithet (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), or to mean an epistemology outdated by Popper's views on falsification (Tschudi, 1989). It is used here as a category of epistemological assumptions that underlie the functionalist paradigm. Those who object to the term 'positivist' may prefer the term 'postpositivist' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).
- 5 Unfortunately, McSweeney's references to support his claim, that Hofstede assumes uniformity of each national culture, do not mention cultural *uniformity* but *traits* (Hofstede, 1980: 38, 1991: 19).
- 6 Differences in responses between the two countries and the two organizations are

both significant at the level of $p < .01$, using the Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney test. Significant differences along one dimension among three or more levels of culture could be found with more respondents.

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