

DISC and DISC lifestyles in an international cultural framework

Undoubtedly the comparison of DISC profiles between countries has to take into account the cultural differences between countries¹. On the one hand the DISC profile in itself is consistent² within a country, but cultural differences could be dominant in understanding the behaviour and communication of people³ belonging to different cultures. We explore other models, related to the explanation of the human behaviour, if they could assist in bridging the cultural DISC gap.

DISCvision developed a combination between research outcomes from different models to bridge the gap. To ensure that other researchers could copy the research to check and discuss the findings no new data is used in the research. Consequently the falsification of the used data does have a serious effect on the outcome of our explorative research.

This article is a remake of chapter 2 and 3 in the DISCvision / The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies publication “Divided We Stand? Towards Post-Corona Leadership” (June 2020). The Covid-19 crises will be used to give examples of the consequences on a country level of the described differences between nations. We suggest to read this publication if you also are interested in the estimated behaviour of the leaders at the moment of writing this study.

The starting point of our analysis is the observation that the world order that regulates international relations is largely the result of the interaction between major states with a predominantly liberal culture on one side, and major states with a more government-controlled culture on the other. Our approach is to explain behaviour by combining two models.⁴ The first and leading model is the DISC model of William Moulton Marston, which describes the preferred behavioural and communication style of an individual.⁵ The second model is the Culture’s Consequences model of Geert Hofstede, which describes the differences in cultural context in which the leaders operate.⁶ Both models are used throughout the world. This last model is fed with data from the World Values Survey, as explained in the next Section.⁷

¹ DiSC Classic Validation Report, Inscape publishing, 2008

² Prediction Hiring Data Statistical Validation Study, PeopleKeys 4D

³ Extended DISC Validation report 2015

⁴ The merger of the World Value Survey, the DISC model and the Cultural Consequence’s has been done by DISCvision.

⁵ Marston, The Emotions of normal people, Taylor & Francis, 1928.

⁶ Hofstede, Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organisations across Nations, ThoUSnd Oaks, Sage Publications, 2001.

⁷ World Values Survey, 2020, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>

World Value Survey

The Inglehart–Welzel cultural map, based upon the World Value Survey (WVS), depicts closely linked cultural values between societies.⁸ Two dimensions are used to map the differences between values. Traditional versus secular-rational values on the vertical Y-axis and survival versus self-expression values on the horizontal X-axis. Moving upward on this map reflects the shift from traditional values to secular-rational ones and moving rightward reflects the shift from survival values to self-expression values.

A factor analysis based on questionnaires with large numbers of respondents, and updated every 5 years since 1981 (the next update will be in 2021), determined these two 'key cultural dimensions'. Areas covered are ecology, economy, education, emotion, family, gender, sexuality, government, politics, health, happiness, leisure, friends, morality, religion, society, nation, and work.

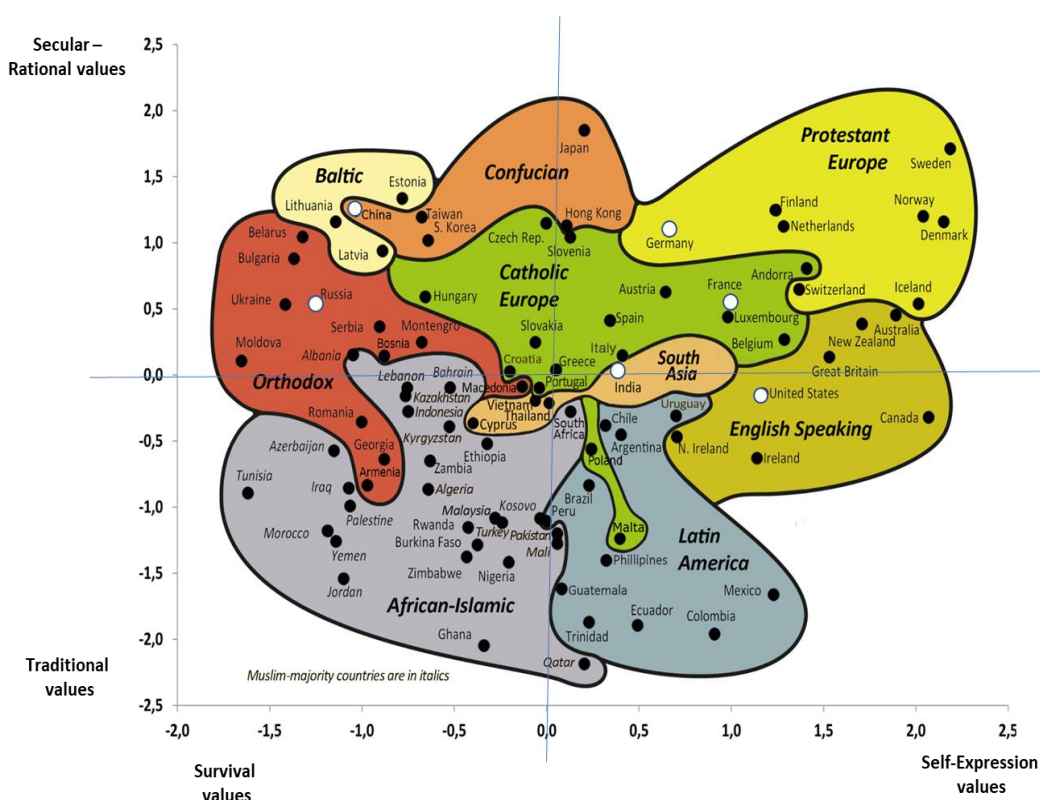


Figure 1. World Value Survey Map 2010/2014 Inglehart & Welzel

The WVS describes the changes in cultural values up to the present and can be visualized in 5-year time laps. In order to explore the future behaviour of leaders within

⁸ *Ibid.*

the cultural context they operate in, we will use the 2010-2014 clustering of countries. These nine clusters are: the English-speaking, Latin America, Catholic Europe, Protestant Europe, African-Islamic, Baltic, South Asian, Orthodox and the Confucian cluster.

Hofstede's cultural consequences model

Geert Hofstede, working closely together with the World Value Survey organisation, established a major research tradition in cross-cultural psychology from 1970 onwards. His theory has been widely used in several fields as a paradigm for research, particularly in cross-cultural psychology, international management, and cross-cultural communication. Cultures, especially national cultures, are extremely stable over time.⁹ Hofstede shows the effects of a society's culture upon the values of its members, and how these values relate to behaviour, using a structure derived from factor analysis. Insights in the cross-cultural communication delivers additional insights, to the World Value Survey, in the behaviour of people and their leaders.

Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others".¹⁰ He examines culture from a value-based perspective.¹¹ These cultural values do not describe the cultural values of an individual but the culture of a society or a country. Hofstede's cultural dimensions reflect cultural values of a group of individuals that share the same national culture. Hofstede's observation that "culture is to a collective what personality is to an individual"¹² bridges the gap between a national culture and a person's psychological profile, which can be described by distinct models. With this in mind, the nine WVS country clusters will be used within the Hofstede dimensions.

Nowadays, Hofstede's notion of culture is expressed in six dimensions. For this essay we will use five of the six dimensions. These dimensions are valued with the following Indexes:

Power Distance (PDI): the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations.

Individualism (IDV) vs Collectivism: Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose. Everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism, its opposite, pertains to societies in which

⁹ Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organisations across Nations*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2001. P. 34

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 9

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 5

¹² *Ibid.* p.10

people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which exist throughout their lifetime.

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) vs Short-Term Orientation. Long-Term Orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards, and in particular of persistence and thoughtful (re)use of resources. Its opposite pole, Short-Term Orientation, stands for fostering of virtues related to the past and present, like respect for tradition, preservation of “face”, and fulfilment of social obligations.

Indulgence Versus Restraint (IVR): Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

Masculine Versus Feminine (MAS): A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focussed on material success, whereas woman are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women can be modest, tender and concerned with quality of life. This dimension is of a different order and is not used in this paper.

In our analysis we combine Inglehart's and Welzel's use of the WVS data with Hofstede's cultural dimensions model as they have previously shown to be strongly correlated.. 'Well-being versus Survival' correlates strongly with the 'Individualism index' (IDV) and the 'Secular-rational versus Traditional Authority' correlates negatively with 'Power distance index (PDI).¹³ Clustering Hofstede's findings by using the WVS factor clustering gives us extra insight into the cultural correlations between countries. This combination also allows the use of the WVS actualization in 5 year intervals.

Based upon the correlation findings, we can combine dimensions. Let us take the 'individualism versus collectivism' dimension as the X dimension and the 'Power Distance Index' as the first Y dimension to be set. The position of the other dimensions of Hofstede, UAI, LTO, IVR, will be explained after we have introduced the DISC-model of personality types in the next Section.

¹³ *Ibid.* P. 33

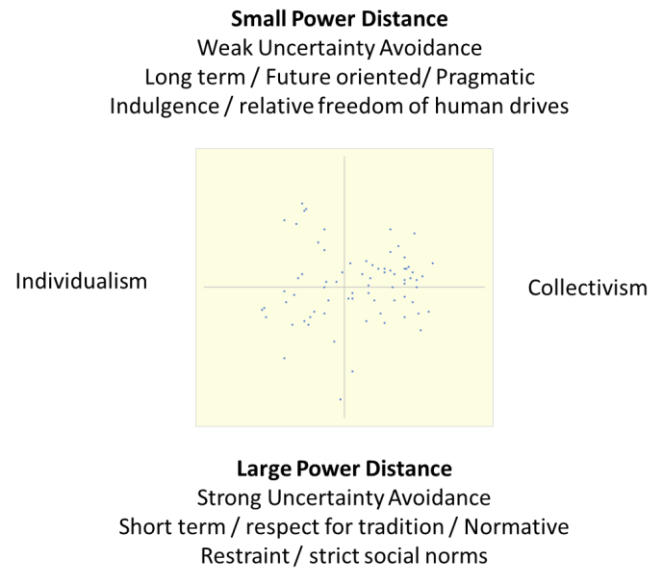


Figure 2. Culture's Consequences Dimensions Hofstede

The DISC-model of personality types

DISCvision proved that the DISC-model, determining the preferred behavioural and communication patterns of individuals, also provides insights in the personal behavioural economics on other topics of interest. Topics that are related to preferences people do have in their daily life. Consequently, we combine the WVS clustering and Hofstede dimensions with the DISCvision behavioural economics model.

DISC identifies predictable traits and behaviours of people in different (cultural) environments. DISC styles are a combination of four behavioural personality types.¹⁴ These composite styles are known as personality style blends, each with their own characteristics, preferences, fears, strengths and limitations. These four dimensions are: Dominance (D), Influence (I), Steadiness (S) and Compliance (C).

Dominance: People with a strong D personality style like to be in the position of authority or just do things on their own terms. These people tend to be risk-takers, extremely goal-oriented and competitive. The D-style has high ego strength, which could be perceived positively as confidence or negatively as pride. Others may see them as arrogant, stubborn, tactless, pushy and ruthless. These characteristics express themselves more evidently if the D-person is found to have ignored risks and appears to have overlooked important problems.

Influence: People with strong I-personality style are talkative, enthusiastic, and optimistic. They tend to be both trusting and optimistic. The I-style is known to be both persuasive and influential. I-persons tend to be somewhat emotional and spontaneous or impulsive

¹⁴ DISCvision is cooperating with DISC Factor BV Benelux.

at times. The I-person has a positive attitude and is more focused on the future. The biggest fear of the I-person is rejection by others. The I-person can seem uncritical, unrealistic, exaggerated, impulsive and not focused. I's tend to make agreements that they cannot keep or change their minds about.

Steadiness: People with strong S-personality styles are more predictable and prefer safety. They are peacemakers, good listeners and loyal friends. The S-person finds the loss of certainties the greatest fear. The present is the most important time frame. S's are focused on long-term relationships. The communication about decisions that the S-person is confronted with are often non-verbal and typically expressed by delaying the implementation of decisions. To others the S-person can seem insensitive, carefree, indecisive, dependent, slow and hesitant.

Compliance: People with strong C personality styles are described as perfectionists. The C-person tends to think in a logical, analytical and systematic way. C's are careful and the familiar rituals of the past will not be replaced quickly by new ideas. The biggest fear, which can lead to blocking action, is being criticized. The C-person prefers to act independently without interference from others and to be in control of circumstances. C's do thorough research and are not usually influenced by trends. They take low risks and do not go along with speculation. The C-person can come across others as picky, curious, antisocial, distrustful, fixated, inflexible, theoretical and evasive. The pursuit of low risks and the asking of many questions lead to suspicion of one's real motives.

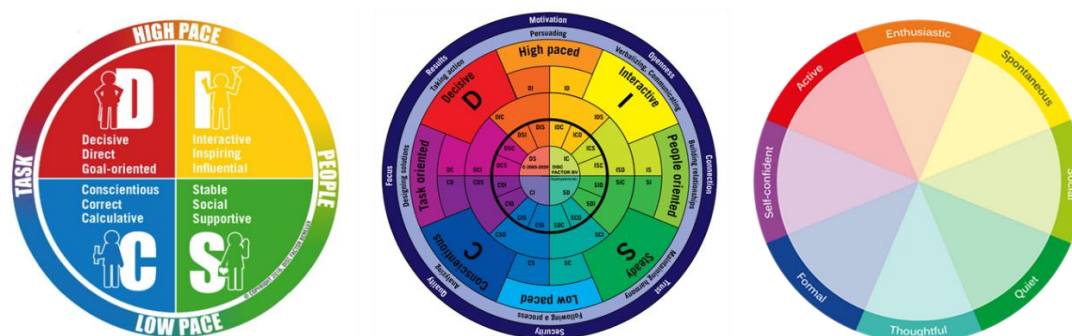


Figure 3. The Behavioural Personality Types and the eight DISCvision Behavioural Economics profiles

All countries within the Hofstede measurements have data on most of the six dimensions. The Individualism versus Collectivism dimension (IDV) is used within both the DISC-model and the Hofstede Model. As previously stated, this IDV dimension has a strong correlation with the WVS findings. These correlations reoccur in/for the DISC model between the Task/Individualistic versus People/Collectivistic dimensions. The Power Distance Index (PDI) has also been tested. The High Pace/Extrovert in the DISC model is corresponding with a low power distance. On the opposite side, low

pace/introvert corresponds with a high power distance. This gives a firm insight in the 'do' and 'do not' considerations of cultures.

All other dimensions of Hofstede are also strongly connected to the Y-dimensions. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance, Future Oriented and Indulgence are connected to risk taking, fast, outspoken, extrovert and explorative behaviour of individuals (D and I from the DISC-model). On the other side of these dimensions, Restraint, Tradition, Uncertainty and Avoidance are connected with thoughtful, introvert, risk avoiding and following behaviour by individuals (S and C from the DISC-model). These insights provide more depth to the 'do' and do 'not's' previously observed (Figure 2).

Relating the models

DISCvision behavioural economics deliver insights in the why, how, what and when questions. The DISCvision behavioural economics frame combines personal leadership profiles with the country profiles, stipulated on whether the Hofstede country findings can fit into the DISC frame. According to Hofstede, this is possible; to re-iterate: "Culture is to a collective what personality is to an individual". If Hofstede's findings can be fitted to the DISCvision behavioural economics frame, the same will apply to the WVS.

Following this, the next step is to relate the models into a single workable framework without compromising their findings. All countries can be placed within the DISC behavioral economics frame alongside the X and Y dimensions outlined above. As such, none of the original three models - WVS, Hofstede and DISC - or research findings have been changed; the data is simply collated within one model.

Power Distance inside and between cultures

The power of leaders is strongly connected with the perceived power distance of citizens towards their leaders and the government. In this essay we therefore examine Hofstede's Power Index of (PDI). Our analysis will focus more closely on the US, China, Russia, India and the European countries France, Germany and The Netherlands. France representing Catholic Europe and Germany representing Protestant Europe (WVS). In Figure 4 we combine the WVS culture valuations ¹⁵ with the Hofstede data and show the outcome inside the DISC model.

¹⁵ World Values Survey, 2020, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>

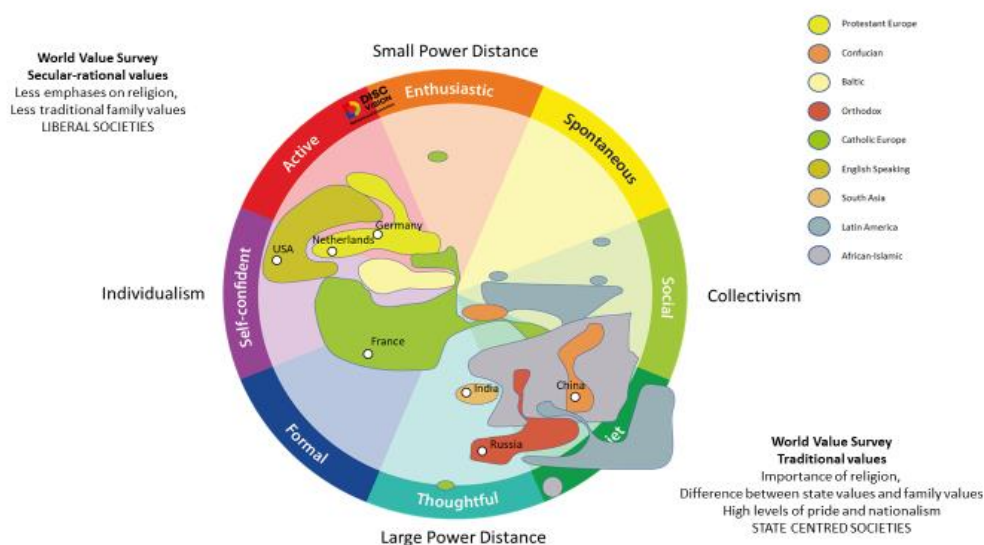


Figure 4. The PDI positioning of countries and WVS clustering within the DISC behavioural economics frame

The cultures of China and Russia are positioned within the collective category. India is approximately at an interim position. The other cultures tend to be more individualistic. The Power Distance is large in Russia, China and India. Within the European national cultures, only the French experience a relatively large power distance. In general, however, EU member states' citizens experience a relatively small gap between politicians and their own position in society. In general, Leaders in EU member states often face stronger opposition to their decisions and need to explain their actions to the population in more depth. Politicians in northern Europe do not hesitate to voice their opinions on proposed solutions or decisions already taken. Proposing solutions in itself is already quite different from conveying the chosen solutions made by the leaders of more state centred societies.

If we look to this division, liberal societies will easily be seen by the inhabitants of state-centred societies as being authoritarian, competitive, arrogant, tactless and ruthless. We have to consider the fact that they see themselves, in the DISC language, to be less secure and more fearful of uncertainties. They desire, of course, to be treated as equals despite their recognition of their own higher degree of dependency and hesitancy. The trend emerges that the stronger Liberal societies exert themselves, the stronger State Centred societies will reunite and present a united front, out of a desire to maintain their pride and self-respect. The combination of strong and powerful behaviour embodied by Liberal Societies, and the relative 'lagging behind' of State Centred Societies, are the ideal circumstances for a strong leader. In essence, the only delivery required of a strong leader is the restoration of the self-respect. The self-confident behaviour of Liberal

Societies does have one significant risk, in that they tend to overlook important problems. Consequently, a strong leader of a State Centred Society only has to prove the failure of their opponent (Liberal Societies), and thus shift focus away from their own defects – a relativist display of deflective performance.

A large PDI makes strong governmental measures more feasible, e.g. total lockdown measures are considered to be a fact of life during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Russia). Hence, in states with a small PDI the tendency is to lean more on societal resilience and responsibility (e.g. The Netherlands). A strong top-down (e.g. hierarchical) leadership style is incomparable with a collaborative societal culture. During a global crisis we expect a temporary increase in PDI. Controlling mass-psychology and setting out a strategy in a short period of time, requires a more top-down directive approach. This approach is further accepted in countries with a small PDI, stipulated on whether the government can lean upon political credits.

We assess that leaning towards collectivism (e.g. China), the society is expected to behave in a collaborative mindset if ordered to do so by the authorities. Stronger individualism (e.g. US) lead to behaviour where individuals tend to position and guard their own interests. During a crisis we expect collective operating states to be faster to coordinate and reach out to others than states that reflect a more individualistic culture. The latter will have to invest more time and resources in aligning its own population compared to its collectivist neighbour. Subsequently, the process of reaching out to other states will take more time. Besides the timeframe, the decision to reach out in collectivistic societies is typically taken only by the leader; comparatively, a similar effort in a liberal society it will likely require a time consuming internal discussion.

Uncertainty differences inside and between cultures

The Covid-19 pandemic is synonymous with uncertainty. In dealing with the economic aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, more insight is required into the manner societies cope with uncertainty regarding the future. To get an impression of the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations, we examine specific countries through the lens of the Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) framework, provided by Hofstede. If we compare the previous power difference graph with the ability to deal with uncertainties, important differences become apparent. China and India are responding spontaneously in an ad hoc fashion, and accept a less certain environment as a result. By contrast, liberal European societies are moving towards a position of reducing risks and uncertainties. Consequently, the European countries may become less flexible.

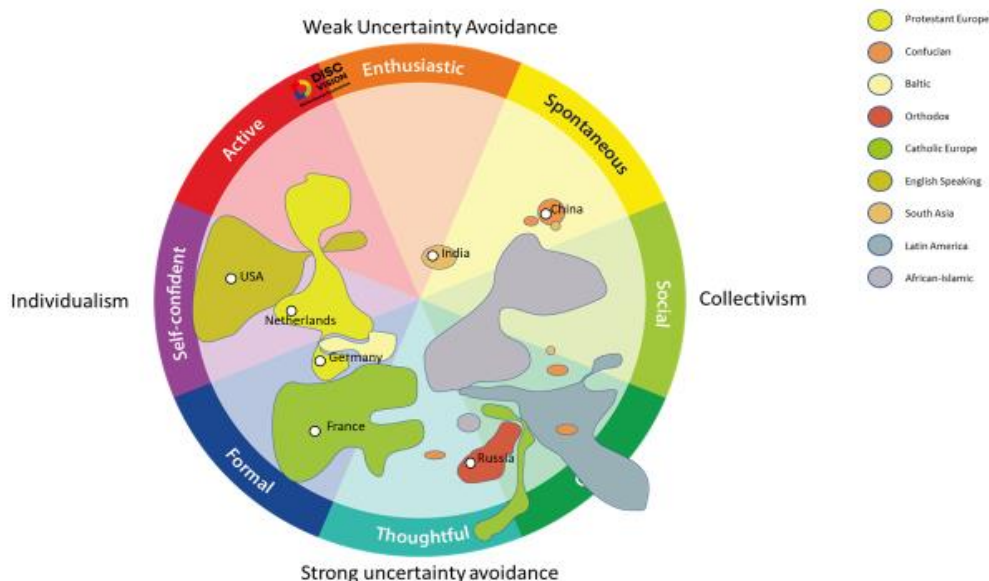


Figure 5. The UAI positioning of countries and the WVS clustering within the DISC behavioral economics frame

Having a large UAI results in less tendency toward rapid collaboration with foreign or unknown countries, or to work in adherence to long-term strategies (e.g. Russia). This aspect is exacerbated in cases of an absence of shared values with these countries. Collaboration may be possible only after a multitude of assurances are aggregately linked to topics to which the uncertainty is connected. Low UAI leads to an openness to explore easy methods to establish trust-based collaboration. During the first stages of a global crisis, the position of cultures/countries will increase in the direction of avoiding uncertainties; the countries that normally are used to a weak uncertainty avoidance will be, temporarily, more cautious than they usually are.

Pragmatism and Indulgence differences between cultures

Our observation is that countries with a large long term orientation (LTO; e.g. China) are better positioned to collaborate with other countries towards achieving future goals. Low LTO countries (e.g. US) can cooperate with well-known countries based upon shared traditions and beliefs. During the first stages of a crisis we expect a decrease in LTO in order to minimize the negative and direct consequences of a crisis, and to maintain trust in the social contract between the leaders and their constituents. Being confronted with an (international) crisis, the high PDI-index of a collectivistic culture overrules the normally large LTO position of the countries involved. The PDI-index is more important in times of crisis than the LTO-index is.

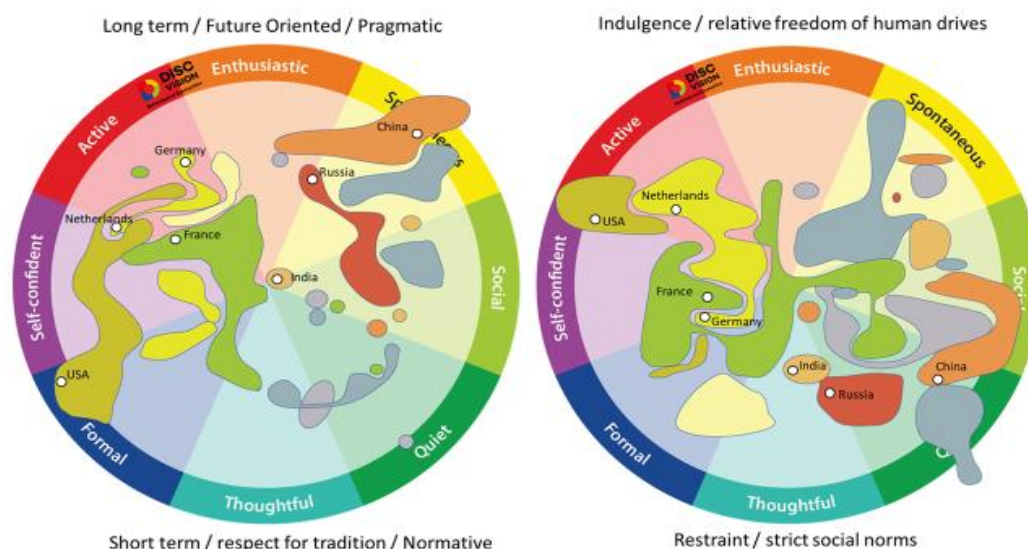


Figure 6. The LTO (left) and IVR (right) positioning of countries and the WWS clustering within the DISC behavioral economics frame

We assess that a low Indulgence vs Restraint (IVR e.g. Russia, India and China) leads to a prevalence to cooperate with likeminded countries based upon collectivism and social norms (trust). Interstate or global cooperation is therefore difficult or restricted. A decrease of IVR is expected during a crisis; a sea change focus towards survival-over-happiness takes hold.

Concluding remarks

This explorative study has been completed in June 2020. The findings are used by DISCvision in assessing investment risks in real estate projects between countries and several medical studies. In both areas the cultural insights were received as extremely valuable. Cultural DISC lifestyle differences, suspected cause problems in some projects and treatment procedures, could be pinpointed to be the actual problem.

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