

Arab Culture Dimensions in the International and Arab Models

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Abstract

This paper explores the dimensions of Arab culture through a rich comparison of the Arab culture as seen from the international and Arab models of national culture. The paper also put emphasis on the gap between the two. It proves that national culture plays an important role in supporting or rendering the effective organizational culture. Arab culture is a complex collective whole of people's self-perceptions, values and attitudes that can help us understand how Arab individuals and organizations function in different circumstances and how they prefer to respond to them. The study includes eleven international models and six Arab models of national culture. This study presents a beneficial analysis of these models and emphasizes that international models do not tell the whole story, and that they are insufficient to explain many of the decisions made by Arab managers. It also shows the need to enhance the stereotypical image that can emerge from international models through considering national models. The study provided a broad vision of Arab culture to combine Schein's three levels of Culture with the main components of the Arab culture.

Keywords

Arab Culture, Islamic Work Ethic, Arab and International Models of National Culture

1. Introduction

Culture is the society's superstructure embodied in its beliefs, values, customs and traditions, which are classified as relations of production. Machinery and technology, on the other hand, represent the factors of production. Different views have been given regarding the role that culture plays in production. For instance, according to Karl Marx (K. Marx), culture plays a secondary role compared to material factors of production, while according to L. Althusser, culture has a significant impact on the other components of the superstructure, as well as the economic base (factors of production) (Yee et al, 2008, p874).

The roots of culture can be found in anthropology, which is why it is considered an early anthropological innovation. In 1873, Sir Edward Taylor introduced the concept of culture as an explanation to the differences between human societies. He defined it as: "The whole complex that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities acquired (learned) by man as a member of society" (cited in Nanda and Warms, 2007, p86). Culture is

the collection of concepts, shared values and common rules of behaviour in any group or society. It is a way of life for any group or society (Adler, 2002, p16). This suggests that culture lies at the heart of ethnography. However, from an intercultural perspective, culture is just another name of the national identity. Consequently, culture is the programming of the collective mind that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2. The Arab Culture

The Arab culture is based on two main factors: the Arabic language, and Islam (the religion of the vast majority, as 90% of the population are Muslims). The Arabic language unites the Arab (an Arab is one who speaks Arabic), and Islam unites thinking, values and behaviors of Arab people. This is mainly due to Islam being the politics, law, and social behaviour (Nydell, 2002, p102). Confucianism in China is the guiding philosophy of action in social and business life. Islam, as an analogy, is the guiding religion for the work and lives of Muslims (Hutchings and Weir, 2006, p146). The

values of Islam are the heart of the Arab culture. The Arab culture, then, can be defined as the set of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours common to all Arabs and is partially common to ethnic and religious minorities that live in the Arab countries.

Despite the cultural differences and dialects among Arab countries, these countries have many common factors. They share a common set of perceptions, values, and attitudes that far surpass the differences and disparities between them. This is mainly due to the long Islamic era that prevailed in these countries for more than fourteen centuries, which contributed to the unification of Arabs and founded common factors based on Islamic values and concepts. The extensive interaction with the Western culture since the beginning of the twentieth century contributed in the development of education institutions, health, the use of modern methods of management and organization, the industrial, information and communication technology. In addition, to escalating business demand for technical and professional skills, it is clear that these developments started to compete with the Arab and Islamic values in the impact on the Arab culture.

The Arab culture received a lot of attention on the international and Arab levels represented in three main trends: the international models, the Arab models, and the ethics of Islamic business.

3. International Models

International models of the dimensions of the national culture started from a basic assumption that the national culture of a country has an effect on business and individuals in that country, and as a result it helps in explaining their way of thinking. One of the best-known international models is the Hofstede model. The Hofstede model distinguishes cultures according to four dimensions: power distance, individualism or collectivism, masculinity or femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). In addition to these four dimensions, Hofstede and Bond added a fifth cultural dimension called long-term orientation or "Confucian dynamism" (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). In 2008, Hofstede and others added a sixth cultural dimension, called indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, et al, 2008). Other researchers have developed other models for the dimensions of national culture, such as: Schwartz, 1992, 2006.

Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck, House, et al., 2004 (Globe Project), Trompenaars, 1993, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998), etc.

Anthropologists are credited with raising the interest in society's culture and their cultural diversity. Hofstede is credited in stirring the interest of researchers to provide other models related to national culture dimensions. Today, there are a significantly higher number of international models providing important contributions to the study of differences in national cultures in the world. Eight cultural regions and clusters were identified to be homogeneous in their cultural dimensions. The Arab countries are considered one of these clusters (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985, p445) (Gupta et al., 2002, 13).

Considering the Arab countries (including Gulf Cooperation Council: GCC) a cultural cluster indicates that the Arab culture is homogeneous and provide the cultural cluster determinants: language, religion, ethnicity, migration, and geography, work values system, and similar dimensions of national culture. (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985, p447, Kwon and Kim, 2013, p3).

The Arab culture was studied in the international models. Hofstede study in 1980 (Hofstede, 1980) included seven Arab countries which are: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, and UAE. Trompenaars's study (Trompenaars, 1993) included (28) countries (5) of which were Arab countries: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, and Bahrain. Casel and Blake's study (Cassel and Blake, 2011, p1054) the dimensions of Hofstede model were applied in Saudi Arabia. The study of Bjørn, (Bjørn 1999, pp231-244), used an extended domain of national culture which included (15) dimensions. In these models and international studies, the Arabs are characterized by long power distance/high hierarchy, collectiveness, masculinity (according to Hofstede's model), relationship orientation, high avoidance of uncertainty, humane orientation, tribal and family receptiveness, gender discrimination, past orientation and long power distance (according to Globe project). Due to these characteristics, the Arabs were attached to the eastern cultures in Southeast Asia as the assessments were similar between the Arabs and this region (Steers, 2010, p64). Table 1 presents a collection of these models and their dimensions and the characterization of Arabs according to these models.

Table 1. The Arab in the international models of national cultural dimensions.

Author	Dimensions	Characteristics of the Arabs
* Multiple-dimensional models		
G. Hofstede, 1980,1988	- Power distance	- Long power distance
	- Uncertainty avoidance	- High avoidance of uncertainty
	- Individualism/collectivism	- Strong collectivity
	- Masculinity/femininity	- Masculinity
	* Hofstede's five dimensions	- Short term orientation
Hofstede and Minkov, 2008, 2010, 2013	- Long/short term Orientation	
	* Hofstede's six dimensions	
	- Indulgence vs. Restraint	- Indulgence
	* Hofstede's seven dimensions	
	- Monumentalism vs. flexumility	- flexumility

Author	Dimensions	Characteristics of the Arabs
* Multiple-dimensional models		
Edward T. Hall 1981, 1990	-Context - Space - Time: Monochronism/polychronism	- High context - Strong Particularism - Strong polychronism (P-time)
Globe Project, House et al., 2004	- Performance orientation - Uncertainty avoidance - Humane orientation - Institutional collectivism - In-group collectivism - Assertiveness - Gender egalitarianism - Future orientation - Power distance	- Relationship orientation - High avoidance of uncertainty - Humane orientation - Tribal collectivism - Family collectivism - Receptiveness - Gender Discrimination - Past orientation - Long power distance
S. Schwartz, 1992, 1999, 2006	- Embeddedness/autonomy - Hierarchy/egalitarianism - Mastery/harmony - Relationship vs. deal focus - Low vs. high context	- Embeddedness - Hierarchy - Harmony - Relationship-oriented - High context
R. Gesteland, 1999	- Formal vs. informal - Monochronic vs. Polychronic - Expressive vs. reserved - Universalism vs. Particularism - Individualism vs. Communitarianism - Neutral vs. Emotional	- Informal orientation - Polychronism - Expressive culture - Strong Particularism - Communitarian orientation - Emotional orientation
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, Trompenaars and Woolliams 2003	- Specific vs. Diffuse - Achievement vs. Ascription - Time: - Sequential vs. Synchronous - Present vs. Future - Internal vs. external control - Affluence	- Diffusion-oriented - Ascribed Status - Synchronous/past and present orientation - External control, outer-directed - Moderated orientation
Georgas, et al., 2004	- Religion	- Strong orientation
* Uni-dimensional models		
F. Fokoyama, 1995	- Trust/non-trust	- Trust-focus (family/kinship)
I. Nonaka, 1991	- Implicit/explicit knowledge	- Implicit/tacit knowledge
Dumitrescu, 2012	- Eloquence: the rhetorical use of understatement vs. overstatement	- The rhetorical use of overstatement

4. Arab Models

In these models there are three aspects to be discussed. First: Arab Studies that used the national culture dimensions of international models. Second: Arab studies that suggested dimensions for the Arab culture depending on the values and habits of Arab and Muslim communities. Third: Arab studies that addressed Islamic work ethic.

Arab studies that relied on the national culture dimensions in international models (Sabri, Rasheedi, Obeidat et al., 2012). This section also includes the studies that considered the relationship between the national culture (Arab-Islamic) and corporation culture (concepts and principles of western management). The study (Branine and Pollard, 2012, p712) revealed that influence of the western management thinking on management in the Arab countries surpasses the influence of the Islamic principles and values.

The results of these studies were consistent with the results of international studies. The characteristics of Arabs in table 1 (above) can be used to draw the dimensions of the Arab culture.

The Studies that addressed the exclusiveness of the Arab (and Islamic) culture, focused on the Arab customs and traditions in order to provide recommendations for international investors who might be interested in investing in the Arab world. Some of these studies focused on the (how to do business in Arab countries) the procedures and the initial cost of starting a business in the Arab world (IFC, 2011, p3) as in the case of the study of Communicaid Group in 2009, which was carried on in Oman. Other studies have shown interest in identifying the dimensions of the Arab culture in accordance with the teachings of Islam and traditions of Arab communities. Table 2 presents a set of these models.

Table 2. Dimensions of Arab culture.

Author	Dimensions of Arab culture
Ibn Khaldun, 788 H 1377 G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus of kin relationship - High purpose orientation (great impact of religion) - Tendency to simple things - Collectivism (tribalism)
Ali & Camp, 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stress on guidelines - Stress on group - Stress on father-figure - Stress on the importance of knowledge - stress on action - stress on intentions
H. Barkat, 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fatalism vs. free will, shame vs. guilt, conformity and creativity, past-oriented vs. future-oriented values, culture of the mind vs. of the heart, form vs. content, collectivity vs. individuality, open- vs. closed-mindedness, obedience vs. rebellion, charity vs. justice, vertical vs. horizontal Values.
Hammad et al., 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dependency on God - Fear of God's punishment on earth as well as in the hereafter - A deep-seated-respect for tradition and for the past - Politeness to all and generosity
Malik Ibn Nabi, 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moral constitution - Aesthetic taste - Scientific logic - Craft (technique)
Jehad Al-Omari, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collectivism - power distance - High context - Polychronism
Salem and Agil, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shura (consultation) - Justice - Dependence on Allah - Sincerity - Dignity of Labour - Esprit de corps

The international models contributed to provide a comprehensive framework for a broad and complex subject such as the national culture and its dimensions. However, the international models, particularly Hofstede's model (the earliest and most influential), were faced with some important criticism including: the national culture dimensions vary from one model to another, the dimensions of Hofstede model changed with time (starting with four dimensions in 1980, to five in 1988, and six in 2008), it considers geographical boundaries as the limits of culture (this does not apply to the Arab culture as it is a model of culture across borders), statistical problems and non-representing sample (especially in Hofstede's study which was based on a single industry and a single multinational company), (Hollensen, 2011), with the diversity of countries and regions, these models fall into the trap of standardization (one size for all, small number of dimensions for all cultures), and finally these models contribute to the formation stereotypes and prior classifications for ethnic groups, and their cultures. In the relationship with the Arab culture, the international models may be criticized for neglecting some dimensions that are considered of great importance in the Arab models.

The Arab models can contribute in the international models which represent to a certain extent a western perspective of world's cultures. The Arab culture seems to be most influenced by two main dimensions which are: 1) the religious dimension (or faith) and 2) family and tribal relationships. The religious dimension is an important cultural value in the Arab world although it is valued differently from one Arab country to the other (Weaver, 1997, p9). This dimension is based on the acceptance of fatalism while the relationships are based on the priority of family and tribe over work and work responsibilities. Despite the fact that the international models covered the relationships dimension in human orientation (Globe project), ingenuity and harmony (Schwartz's 3-dimensional model), relationships versus deals (Gesteland, 1999). While the religious, which is very influential in the Arab culture, is missing in the international models, it is strongly emphasized in the Arab models. Table 3 presents a comparison between Arabs and Americans from an Arab Islamic culture perspective. These comparisons are beneficial in identifying and understanding the dimensions of the Arab culture, however, it emphasizes the dissimilarities between the models under consideration.

Table 3. Comparison between Arabs and American.

Ali and Camp		R.S.Zaharna,1995	
American	Arab	American	Arab
- Stress on market process	- Stress on guidelines	- Low context	- High context
- stress on the individual	- Stress on group	- Direct	- Indirect
- Focus on managers rather than workers	- Stress on father-figure	- Doing (activity- oriented)	- Being (identity-oriented)
- Focus on privilege of knowledge	- Stress on the importance of knowledge	- Literal	- Oral
- Focus on action	- Stress on action	- Non-linear	- Linear
- Focus on results	- Stress on intentions	Cultural Preferences	
		- Simplicity	- Repetition
		- Accuracy	- Imagery
		- Understatement	- Exaggeration
		- Actions	- Words
		- Specific	- Vague

5. Islamic Work Ethic

From an anthropological perspective, culture can be defined as a set of rules and standards of conduct (Prato, 2009, p3). Similarly, in business the organizational culture is defined as the values, beliefs, and common trends among the educated members (Hellriegel and Slocum Jr, 2011, p478). In this sense, culture can be strongly reflected on business ethics as a set of values to determine what is right or wrong at work. According to Weber, Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) stimulated the spirit of capitalism through emphasizing a set of virtues such as: work is a calling from God, success is a sign of salvation, hard work and good deeds will bring rewards in life and afterlife, diligence economic activities as God-given duties, negative attitude toward leisure times, punctuality and loyalty to work, pride in work, honesty, and need for achievement (Furnham, 1990, Hill,1996). Confucianism, on the other hand, stimulated the spirit of discipline and hard work through its values: perseverance, thriftiness, having a sense of shame, and prioritizing relationships according to status (Mitsis and Foley, 2005, p4). Confucianism is a guiding philosophy of action for social and business lives for Chinese people. In the Arab world however, Islam is also a guide to action in which religion and politics interact to determine the action in all aspects of a Muslim's life (Hutchings and David, 2006, p154).

Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) in any Arab country is a part of the national culture where culture is the combination of values, norms and attitudes that are shared by a particular group. The study of Ali in 1986 (Ali, 1986) showed that Islam and IWE formed the system of Arab values, whereas Yousef's study (Yousef, 2001, p106) emphasized that there is a balanced relationship between impact of IWE on organizational loyalty and satisfaction at work. These ethics represent a much comprehensive concept and have economic and social dimensions besides being ethical (Ali and Al-Owaihnan, 2008, p5). In the analysis to this direction, Arab researchers believe that IWE like work ethic Max Weber's Protestant Ethics, stimulate hard work, thrift, and contribute to economic development. It is important to stress that IWE:

The Capitalism Soul' as religion, and everything connected to it in terms of rational values, can be a motivation for economic development.

6. Toward a Broad Vision of Arab Culture

The previous sections clearly uncover that the dimensions of the Arab culture have been studied through the international models, which represent the standard and most common perspective worldwide, the Arab models, which represent the local perspective often the closest but also the least used, and the Islamic work ethic which provides perspective to the Arab culture based on the Islamic values. However, in all these studies, these perspectives were treated as parallel lines and have not been combined in many of the studies that dealt with the subject. Thus, to provide a wider vision, Figure 1 shows a proposed way of connecting the three models. The proposed vision connects the international and Arab models with Schen's three levels of culture. This can be summarized as follows:

1. National culture has massive impact on two main levels of culture: shared values, and main assumptions. It is the core of the Arab culture and contributes to forming the main assumptions and shared values through the Islamic work ethic. The main assumptions formed by Islamic teachings are:

- a. Faith: it is based on monotheism and belief in God and his teachings.
- b. Fatalism while doing what is possible: A Muslim believes that everything is from God and that nothing happens without God's will. However, this belief is tightly coupled with the belief that one is required to do what can be done to the extent of his/her potential. This in fact can be seen in twofold: the first part is about believing in fate and destiny which is related to accepting the outcomes of one's actions rather than being passive. The latter however is concerned with doing what is possible (to one's potential).
- c. Deeds are by intentions: a right purpose is a necessary

condition upon starting work or project. Deeds justify work even if the outcomes were associated with mistakes.

- d. Islamic work ethic: it is a set of values that define what is right or wrong at work from an Islamic perspective according to (Al-Sharia or Islamic law). The Islamic perspective is based on the following principles:
 - 1) Ward off evil and avoiding harm has priority.
 - 2) Bring benefits for society and people.
 - 3) Good ethics and dealing: represented by the set of Islamic values such as Halal, honesty, truthfulness, no cheating, no-bribery, and promise keeping, etc.
 - 4) Seeking the best work over the better and upon necessity seek the least damage over the less.

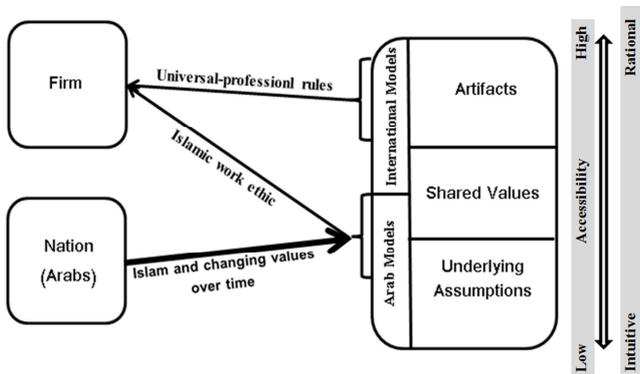


Figure 1. A broad vision of Arab culture.

These underlying assumptions and common values face massive pressure from the many developments that the Arab society is subjected to. The secular directions exercise pressure to separate religion from civilian life and that business are more adaptive and responsive to the business rules and less bound by the Islamic work ethics. The interest rate-based banks (which is contradicts with the teaching of Islam of no interest) coexist on a large scale with the Islamic banks (non-interest rate-based) in the Arab societies.

Generally speaking, artifacts, which are represented by the laws, guidelines, and the organizing principles of business, are similar to the laws, guidelines, and organizing principles in other non-Islamic societies. The principles, accounting and management methods, IT systems, salary systems, performance evaluation systems, approaches and systems of modern management are almost the same as what is being applied in the western companies.

2. The three levels of culture represent the company’s culture which is a mixture of the dimensions of the Arab national culture, the international managerial methods and principles that are applied to achieve the organizational effectiveness and operational efficiency, and the unification of professional principles and guidelines that unifies the members of same professions such as medicine, accounting, engineering, and management to some extent.

3. The studies that have been carried out on company’s culture in the Arab societies haven’t provided any empirical evidence such to confirm that the decisions and practices in

companies are only affected by the company’s culture. The same in fact applies to the national culture as it does not tell the whole story. (Braine and Pollard, 20012) uncovered that management in the Arab countries is in fact not affected by the principles of the Islamic management or national culture, but rather by the western management and the western managerial mentality.

(Ali, 1986) emphasized that Islam and Islamic work ethic both have shaped the system of Arab values, and (Yousef, 2001) confirmed the existence of a moderate relationship between Islamic work ethic and organizational loyalty and satisfaction at work. The Islamic work ethic had a positive relationship with work satisfaction, organizational loyalty, organizational citizenship, performance at work, and lack of labour turnover (Khan et al., 2012). The Communicaid Group Ltd in 2009 performed a study in Oman that focused on the Arab culture dimensions (the Omanis culture) represented by Islam, hospitality, dignity, and family.

7. Discussion

The Arab culture has been studied depending on both international and Arab models, however it still needs more study and analysis to understand the perceptions, values, and behaviours that clearly reflect this culture. Despite their contribution to stir the thread about the subject, the national models face the following challenges:

There is disagreement on a single model to study the dimensions of the national culture. Existence of more models raise the question of how well the dimensions of these models represent the national culture? Moreover, different models and dimensions necessarily mean multiple properties, and it is totally reliant on researchers (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011, p17). Although Hofstede’s model is the most widely used, it faced the challenge of recurrent suggestions to add more dimensions. In the original model, there were four dimensions (Hofstede, 1980). In 1988 a fifth dimension was added (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Littrell in 2012 added a sixth dimensions which is strictness and indulgence (Littrell, 2012, p4). Then in 2013, Monumentalism and flexumility were added as the seventh dimension (Hofstede and Minkov, 2013). Eloquence (an effaced vs. an enhanced self-image, and the rhetorical use of understatement vs. overstatement) was also added as an eighth dimensions by Virginia Dumitrescu in 2012 (Dumitrescu, 2012, p163).

Dimensions of the national culture in these models raised the problem related to any of the following four levels (cluster, country, organization, and individual) can be applied. According to Brewer and Venaik, the dimensions of (Hofstede and Globe) cannot be relied on at both the individual and organizational levels (Brewer and Venaik, 2012, p673, p469). Dumitrescu (Dumitrescu, 2012, p163) pointed out that the countries of the Anglo-cluster vary in the applicability of the different dimensions. For example, in long-term orientation (LTO), there is a big difference between the UK, which scored (51) and the US, which scored (26).

These international models represented a western perspective of culture and have been generalized for different regions and countries. For this reason, they are biased at the expense of other groups or countries (Neyer and Harzing, 2008). The Arab culture, like other cultures, is not represented well in these models. Michael H. Bond, believes that these models are biased to the Western perspective of culture. Tony Fang (Fang, 2003, p353) argued that the Chinese value survey (contains forty Chinese values) would serve the aim of counterbalancing the Western biases.

Islam in its values and teachings is one of the most influential factors in Arab thinking and behavior. It has a similar influence in the Arab culture as rationality to the Western culture and Confucianism in the Chinese culture. Max Weber emphasized that Protestantism is based on inner worldliness, while Islam is based on the extra-worldliness meaning that life on this planet is but a preparation for life after death (Lane and Svante, 2005, p158). The Hofstede model added a sixth dimension (Confucian dynamism), and the Arab culture can contribute to add a new dimension, which is the religious dimension or faith. This dimension is found in most Arab models, as with Ibn Khaldun in "high-purpose orientation (impact of religion)", Barakat in "fatalism vs. free will", Ali and Camp in "stress on guidelines (teachings)", Hammad et al. in "dependency on God and fear of God", Salem and Agil in "dependence on Allah", and Shura in "Islamic law" (See Table 2).

Finally, further applied and comparative studies are required to investigate and evaluate the dimensions of Arab culture which are of great importance and the impact on organizational performance.

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