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Interpreting GLOBE Societal Practices Scales

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Some of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Societal Practices scales ask for descriptions of typical personality traits that might be interpreted as judgments of national character. Ratings of national character reflect cultural identities and social dynamics, but previous research suggests that they are unrelated to the mean personality traits of the culture's members. Analyses at the culture level comparing GLOBE scales with aggregate assessed personality traits ($n = 34$) and with measures of perceived national character ($n = 33$) showed that these GLOBE scales are better construed as unfounded stereotypes than as actual depictions of the society members' personality traits.

Keywords: *personality traits; national character; cultural identity; stereotypes; GLOBE scales*

Culture can be interpreted as a system of shared meanings (e.g., Kashima, 2000), and one important set of shared beliefs concerns the personality characteristics of culture members. Beliefs about national character are stable over time and affect a range of phenomena, from humor to foreign policy (Terracciano & McCrae, 2007). They are not, however, necessarily accurate, in the sense that they describe the personality traits of the statistically average culture member. In this article we consider whether recently developed scales are better construed as shared beliefs about a culture or as accurate reflections of what the culture members are like.

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Program is a large-scale study of organizational leadership in cultural context (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Parts of the survey gathered in 62 nations were intended to characterize the culture as a whole in terms of typical practices and values. GLOBE thus joins a small list of studies (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Leung & Bond, 2004; Schwartz, 1994) that assign scores to cultures with regard to beliefs and values. One of the earliest and

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most influential of these was Hofstede's (1980) depiction of four dimensions of culture. GLOBE researchers were heavily influenced by Hofstede's work in their choice of variables to assess, and some of their nine societal scales share labels with the Hofstede dimensions.

In a recent critique, however, Hofstede (2006) argued that GLOBE researchers had misinterpreted their own scales and failed to represent his constructs adequately. One major difference in methodology between GLOBE and Hofstede approaches concerned the phrasing of questions. Hofstede, like most other researchers in this field, asked respondents about their own beliefs, feelings, and values, and then aggregated these responses to characterize the culture. By contrast, GLOBE researchers "used respondents as informants to report on the *gestalt* of their cultures" (Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2006, p. 900). For example, respondents were asked if, in their culture, parents live with their adult children, and if people in their society are aggressive or nonaggressive. The former question relies on the informant's knowledge of local family customs, whereas the latter requires a judgment of typical personality traits.

Judgments about traits are potentially problematic. In a commentary on the Hofstede critique and response, Smith (2006) pointed out that "such perceptions have typically been studied by social psychologists in terms of stereotypes" (p. 916) and noted that perceptions of national character have been shown to be unrelated to assessed personality traits (Terracciano et al., 2005). It is possible, therefore, that some of the GLOBE scales assess unfounded stereotypes rather than objective features of the society. Because many of the nations in the GLOBE survey were also included in Terracciano et al.'s study of national stereotypes, it is possible to test Smith's interpretation directly: Are GLOBE Societal Practices scales related to assessed personality traits, or to national character stereotypes?

Four of the nine Societal Practices scales seem, directly or indirectly, to assess features of personality. Assertiveness asks if people are tough or tender, whereas Humane Orientation asks if they are generous or unfriendly. These two scales appear to tap opposite poles of the personality dimension of Agreeableness, one of the broad traits of the Five-Factor Model (FFM; Digman, 1990). Future Orientation asks if people plan ahead, and Uncertainty Avoidance asks if they emphasize order and consistency over innovation. Both of these scales appear to assess aspects of another FFM factor, Conscientiousness, which is defined by such adjectives as *planful* and *organized* (John, 1990). Uncertainty Avoidance also seems related to low Openness to Experience (*inventive*).

The other Societal Practices scales are more clearly related to features of culture that people may be able to judge with relative accuracy. Prior research (McCrae et al., 2005) relating aggregate personality scores to Hofstede's (1980) dimensions suggest that GLOBE Collectivism and Power Distance scales should be inversely related to Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness, and GLOBE Uncertainty Avoidance should be related to Neuroticism.

Method

Secondary analyses were conducted on data from four sources. Response-bias corrected country scores on the GLOBE Societal Practices scales were taken from appendix B in House et al. (2004). The nine scales are intended to represent actual characteristics of the

societies, in contrast to desired characteristics, which are assessed by separate Societal Values scales.

Assessed personality traits were taken from the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project (McCrae & Terracciano, 2008; McCrae et al., 2005). Informant ratings of native-born members of 51 cultures were provided by approximately 200 college student informants in each culture who knew the targets well. Each informant completed the observer-rating version of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992), which assesses the FFM factors: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Culture-level scores for the five factors were calculated as the unweighted average of age- and gender-normed factor scores for adult and college-age male and female targets. To replicate findings, aggregate self-report data from earlier studies of the NEO-PI-R (McCrae, 2002; McCrae & Terracciano, 2008) were examined. The validity of these culture-level scores was demonstrated, in part, by agreement of observer rating and self-report data in characterizing cultures (McCrae et al., 2005).

National character stereotypes were assessed with the National Character Survey (NCS; Terracciano et al., 2005). This instrument consisted of 30 items, six for each of the FFM factors. In each of 49 cultures, respondents (mean $n = 81.4$) were asked to describe the typical member of their culture. In the full sample, the reliabilities of aggregate scores for the factors were high, intraclass correlations [$ICC(1, k)s = .96$ to $.97$]. Factor analysis at the individual level yielded a fair replication of the FFM structure. However, there was no significant agreement between assessed NEO-PI-R factor scores and NCS scales.

A total of 34 cultures were found in common between GLOBE and NEO-PI-R projects: 14 from Europe, 11 from Asia, 5 from the Americas, 2 from Africa, and 1 each from Australia and New Zealand. For the NCS data, 33 cultures were shared: 15 from Europe, 10 from Asia, 4 from the Americas, 2 from Africa, and 1 each from Australia and New Zealand.

Results and Discussion

The first five data columns of Table 1 show correlations between GLOBE scales and aggregate observer-rated personality, and they provide no support for the view that GLOBE scales of Assertiveness, Humane Orientation, Future Orientation, and Uncertainty Avoidance reflect mean levels of Agreeableness or Conscientiousness. Uncertainty Avoidance is related to Openness, but in the wrong direction. Analysis of self-report data does show significant correlations with Agreeableness for Assertiveness ($r = -.43$, $n = 24$, $p < .05$) and Humane Orientation ($r = .46$, $n = 24$, $p < .05$) in the predicted directions, but Future Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance are unrelated to Conscientiousness and Openness in self-report data.

The last five data columns in Table 1 show correlations with NCS scales. Four of the hypothesized associations are found, and they remain significant after partialling per capita gross domestic product (GDP). The hypothesized negative correlation of Uncertainty Avoidance with Openness would be significant using a one-tailed test. There are also significant correlations of perceived Conscientiousness with both Institutional and In-Group Collectivism (though in opposite directions), and with Performance Orientation, although

Table 1
Correlations of GLOBE Societal Practices Scales With Aggregate Scales
From the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R)
and the National Character Survey (NCS)

GLOBE Scale	NEO-PI-R Factor					NCS Scale				
	N	E	O	A	C	N _{NCS}	E _{NCS}	O _{NCS}	A _{NCS}	C _{NCS}
Assertiveness	-.23	-.08	.20	-.12	-.13	.35* ^b	.01	-.14	-.59***^b	-.09
Institutional Collectivism	-.17	.09	.20	.10	-.19	-.33	-.21	-.12	.40*^b	.38*
In-Group Collectivism	.05	-.50***^a	-.54***	-.50**	.16	.26	.16	.20	.16	-.51**
Future Orientation	-.21	.24	.55***^b	.43*	.18	-.21	-.30	-.32	.04	.65***^b
Gender Egalitarianism	.26	.12	.13	.09	-.10	.01	-.14	-.06	-.27	.05
Humane Orientation	-.09	-.05	-.20	-.15	-.05	-.36*^b	.13	.23	.50***^b	.01
Performance Orientation	-.39*^b	.08	.44***^a	.21	-.04	-.28	-.11	-.21	-.05	.40*
Power Distance	.16	-.30	-.23	-.25	-.19	.28	.11	.14	-.07	-.34
Uncertainty Avoidance	-.25	.20	.59***^b	.50***^b	.04	-.31	-.31	-.32	-.10	.64***^b

Note: $n = 34$ cultures for NEO-PI-R, and $n = 33$ for NCS. Hypothesized correlations are in boldface.

a. Replicated, $p < .05$, one-tailed, in self-report data from 24 cultures.

b. Significant, $p < .05$, after partialling per capita gross domestic product.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

these effects are reduced to non-significance when GDP is controlled. The most understandable of these correlations is with Performance Orientation: In societies where respondents perceive their compatriots as being conscientious, they also believe that achievement is rewarded.

The Assertiveness and Humane Orientation scales appear to be chiefly stereotypes of low versus high Agreeableness, and although self-report personality data suggest that these stereotypes may have a grain of truth, observer rating data from a larger sample do not. There is no support for the accuracy of stereotypes of high Conscientiousness associated with Future Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance.

Several correlations between other GLOBE scales and NEO-PI-R factors are significant. The hypothesized associations between In-Group Collectivism and Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness were all significant, but correlations with Institutional Collectivism were not. The hypothesized negative correlations for Power Distance were in the right direction, and that with Extraversion would be significant using a one-tailed test; the correlations with Openness and Agreeableness did not reach significance. The hypothesized positive correlation of GLOBE Uncertainty Avoidance with Neuroticism was non-significant but in the wrong direction. This is not surprising, because GLOBE Uncertainty Avoidance is negatively related to Hofstede's scale of the same label (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). None of these hypotheses was supported using NCS scales.

Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and Uncertainty Avoidance are also associated with NEO-PI-R Openness. These four GLOBE scales are themselves closely related, all being definers of a single factor (Hofstede, 2006, table 2). In the present sample, cultures that score high on the sum of these four (with Collectivism reflected) include Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, and New Zealand; cultures that score low include Russia,

Thailand, Kuwait, and Argentina. These scales thus appear to represent aspects of modernity versus traditionalism, and their association with Openness is understandable.

One of the peculiar findings of the GLOBE study is that the Societal Values scales that parallel the Practices scales are generally negatively related to them. Thus, societies that are described as being low in Humane Orientation tend to put a high value on that orientation. GLOBE researchers have offered a “deprivation hypothesis,” (Javidan et al., 2006), whereby societies lacking a desired characteristic are the most likely to want more of it. The results of the present study suggest a modification of this hypothesis: Values are perhaps determined not by what is actually lacking, but by what is perceived to be lacking. A perceived deprivation hypothesis may be more appropriate.

This is a reminder that stereotypes can be powerful social forces even when they are unfounded (cf. Wan et al., 2007). Future research should examine reasons for the dissociation between intersubjective and objective reality in perceptions of national character.

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