

Original

## Portuguese cultural standards from an Austrian perspective



António Robalo<sup>a,\*</sup>, Astrid Kainzbauer<sup>b</sup>, Inês Durão<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> ISCTE Business School, Lisboa, Portugal

<sup>b</sup> College of Management, Mahidol University, Thailand

<sup>c</sup> Consultant, Lisboa, Portugal

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 14 July 2013

Accepted 8 September 2015

#### JEL classification:

F23

M14

#### Keywords:

National culture  
Cultural standards  
Portugal  
Austria

### ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to identify Portuguese cultural standards from the perspective of Austrian culture.

The Cultural Standards Method is based on interviews with members of one culture who have extended working experience in a different culture. This method, based on a qualitative research approach, seeks to identify cultural differences on a subtler level than more traditional methods, such as cultural dimensions.

The Portuguese cultural standards identified through interviews with 20 Austrians are as follows: fluid time management, relaxed attitude towards professional performance, importance of social relationships, bureaucracy and slow decision-making processes, indirect communication style, and flexible planning and organisational skills.

© 2013 INDEG/PROJECTOS- Inst. para o Desenvolvimento da Gestão Empresarial/Projectos. Published by Elsevier España, S.L.U. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Globalisation and the dramatic increase in international business over the last few decades have meant that more and more people are experiencing cross-cultural contacts and need to be effective when dealing with partners from different cultural backgrounds within the context of their working environment.

People are usually unaware of their cultural dissimilarities until they are actually faced with another culture. Therefore, in order to be more effective at conducting business and managing across cultures, it is necessary to learn about other cultures and their characteristics. Cultural factors have progressively acquired significance as a topic of management research studies (Dahl, 2004). Many researchers and authors have written about culture models and developed cultural frameworks that provide extensive information that can be used as a basis for managers and other people to develop cross-cultural competences (Neyer & Harzing, 2008). According to Adler (1991:10) cross-cultural management focuses on studying “the behavior of people in organizations around the world. . . It describes organizational behavior within countries and cultures; compares organizational behaviour across countries and cultures; and, perhaps most importantly, seeks to understand and improve the inter-

action of co-workers, clients, suppliers, and alliance partners from different countries and cultures.”

Although an outsider might consider European cultures to be very similar, the differences among them should not be underestimated when representatives of those cultures interact.

The goal of this research project is to study the differences between Portuguese and Austrian cultures in order to identify Portuguese cultural standards from an Austrian perspective. The cultural standards are developed from an examination of intercultural encounters between Portuguese and Austrians based on the experience of Austrians living and working in Portugal. The current paper uses a relatively new methodology for researching cultural differences, called the “Cultural Standards Method”. Cultural standards are based on a qualitative research approach that seeks to identify the guidelines relevant for cross-cultural interactions. This concept is directly linked to interactive patterns and is mainly derived from the works of Boesch, Habermas, Heckhausen and Piaget (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

The main difference to highlight when comparing cultural dimensions (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) and cultural standards is the more differentiated picture that the Cultural Standards Method provides regarding the impact that culture has on observed and experienced behaviour. Research into cultural standards includes actual problems that appear in concrete business-related encounters, how these encounters are perceived, and how and why individuals (managers, staff, etc.) react in a specific way (Fink & Mayrhofer, 2009). It is important to stress that the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [Antonio.robalo@iscte.pt](mailto:Antonio.robalo@iscte.pt) (A. Robalo).

cultural standard method looks at differences that are only valid when comparing two cultures, while the use of cultural dimensions makes it possible to compare a wider range of countries (Kainzbauer & Brueck, 2000; Fink & Mayrhofer, 2009).

### Cultural Standards Method

Cultural differences have mostly been analysed using quantitative methods. The best-known categorisation of cultures is Hofstede's (1980) study, which aimed to identify cultural differences in predefined 'dimensions'. This 'macro perspective approach' (Dunkel & Mayrhofer, 2001), using quantitative research tools, has been criticised because it is seen as focusing on differences between cultures on the basis of predefined categories and searching for variables 'out of context' (Landis and Bhagat, 1996, p. 26). Such methods focus on how people perceive themselves, but do not cover how people are perceived by others from different cultural backgrounds. What is "normal" behaviour in culture A may be perceived as being rude in culture B. In an intercultural context, however, B's perception is as important as A's intention.

The cultural standards method (Thomas, 1993), a qualitative approach to cross-cultural research, provides a way of including mutual perceptions in cross-cultural studies. According to Thomas (2007), culture can be understood as a complex system of meaningful signs and symbols that, as a whole, form a system of orientation that allows us to perceive, interpret and interact with people within the same culture in a certain manner. The core elements of this orientation system are cultural standards, which Thomas defines as follows:

"Cultural standards combine all forms of perception, thinking, judgement, and behaviour which people sharing a common cultural background rate as normal, self-evident, typical and binding for themselves and for others. Thus cultural standards determine the way we interpret our own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others. (...) Furthermore, they are highly significant for perception-, judgement- and behaviour mechanisms between individuals." (Thomas, 1993, cited in Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002: 3)

Cultural standards are not a complete description of a culture. They are ways of seeing and interpreting the cultural experiences that certain individuals, as members of specific target groups in specific circumstances, encounter when interacting with partners from a foreign culture. However, it is also important to consider that these cultural standards are developed from what was indeed routinely experienced; that is, from what were regarded as "typical" intercultural interactions (Thomas, 2007).

Individuals who have undergone the process of socialisation in one particular culture are not conscious of their cultural standards when they interact with members of their own culture (Thomas, 1993, cited in Dunkel & Meierewert, 2004:152). Therefore, cultural standards can only be identified in a cross-cultural context, where interaction between members of different cultures occurs.

When an individual interacts or communicates with another from a foreign culture, he or she may experience unfamiliar situations that he or she is not able to interpret or understand and finds surprising. These situations are described as "critical incidents" and help to identify different cultural standards (Thomas, 1993, cited in Dunkel & Mayrhofer, 2001:5). Contrary to what the word "critical" might suggest, critical incidents do not necessarily mean negative experiences, only ones that are "not compatible with our own familiar orientation system" (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002:5).

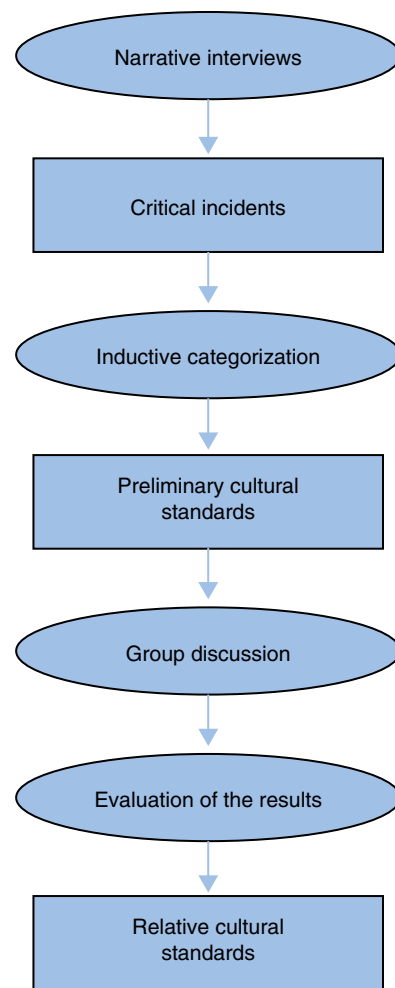


Fig. 1. Cultural standard methodology (Brueck and Kainzbauer, 2002:8).

Interviewing members of one culture who have experienced encounters with members of another culture makes possible to collect critical incidents and related information. This material is then analysed and the most frequently reported incidents are collected and categorised as preliminary cultural standards. The results are then validated through the use of feedback (from experts and representatives of both cultures) and, thus, relative cultural standards can be identified (Dunkel & Mayrhofer, 2001; Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

The complete research process is illustrated in Fig. 1.

The main source of information for the cultural standards method is the narrative interview. According to Brueck and Kainzbauer (2002), this special interview technique created by Fritz Schuetze (1977) avoids the normal question-and-answer interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. Instead, this type of interview has no "leading" questions. Respondents are encouraged to talk more freely and to control the interview flow and the subject content. The role of the interviewer is that of an audience for the respondents' narrative. Thus, this technique encourages respondents to share more information than would be the case in a normal question-answer format. The interviewer assumes a passive role that makes it possible to gather almost uninfluenced information and text material.

The literature about narrative interviews discusses different steps of the interview. According to Lamnek (1995), narrative interviews usually involve the five stages outlined below (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002):

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/997857>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/997857>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)