

But we're not all Vikings!

Intercultural Identity within a Nordic Context

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Abstract

The concept of 'Scandinavian culture' is not new: the implicit understanding is that all Nordic states have similar cultural values (Smith et al. 2003). Nevertheless, disturbing cultural differences may still surface even when representatives from similar cultures work together. The purpose of this paper is therefore to understand the intercultural landscape of the Nordic region today and to appreciate the unique cultural values of each nation. The hallmark of Norwegian cultural practices within a Nordic context is seen to be higher gender egalitarianism. The most pronounced Danish cultural trait within a Nordic framework is low power distance. The Finnish culture on the other hand is seen to be the most hierarchical and formal culture in the Nordic region, whereas the Swedish culture is said to mirror values such as 'socially concerned individualism'. Indeed, a subtle equilibrium seems to pervade the Swedish way of behaving – a balance between individualism and social concern.

Keywords: *cultural values, nordic region, project globe*

Introduction

In Nordic business and management practices today our 'espoused' and also our 'lived' cultural values are implicitly mirrored in both our societal and organizational operations. Consequently, they colour our everyday lives. A better understanding of the way business people from different Nordic regions communicate, manage, make decisions and manage risk is clearly essential in both **inter**-national and **inter**-regional enterprises. Even if the differences in each intercultural dimension are small, their combined effects may have severe consequences in specific situations. Consequently, this paper will 1) review the intercultural dimensions developed by project GLOBE (House et al. 2004) to compare their findings of Danish, Swedish and Finnish research with the new Norwegian data (recently collected by this author) in order to identify cultural differences in the Nordic region; and 2) review how practitioners might manage such intercultural differences. As a Nordic cluster we clearly share many cultural traits, yet – as the title of this article reminds us – we are not all Vikings as we have different historical roots and societal values.

The Nordic Cluster: Contextual Setting

The Nordic countries make up part of Northern Europe and the North Atlantic region which specifically consists of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden plus their associated territories. This paper will focus on GLOBE research findings from the respondents in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden who represent 96% of the population in the Nordic cluster. Data has not yet been collected from the remaining 4% of the Nordic societies in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland; hence a discussion of these societies lies beyond the scope of this paper.

All the Nordic regions' societies share much common history. As long ago as the 14:th century Denmark, Norway (with Iceland) and Sweden (with Finland, which was incorporated into Sweden in 1155) were united under one Danish regent and remained so until Sweden (with Finland) re-established itself as a separate kingdom in the early 16:th century. Denmark's domination over Norway lasted even longer – until 1814 when Norway was ceded to Sweden. Norway's national independence was finalized in 1904. Finland's independence came even later, in 1917. Before this, Finland's history was marked by the dominance of another nation: in 1809 today's Finland became a Grand Duchy under the Russian Tsar before emerging in the midst of the Russian revolution as an independent nation in 1917. Finland never became an integrated part of Russia, yet 100 years of 'Russification' (Lindell and Sigfrids 2007) did not pass without leaving its mark.

All Nordic societies also share a common linguistic heritage with their continental North German languages of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (with Swedish being an important second language in Finland from the 12:th

century until today). A further common cultural element in these regions is having the same indigenous people, the 'Sami', in all the northern areas. These people remain an important part of the cultural fabric of each Nordic society's past and present. In terms of other common traits of their respective contemporary societies, the Nordic countries also share similar political policies implemented during the post World War II period, especially in the socio-economic area. All the Nordic countries have large tax-funded public welfare sectors and varying degrees of socialist legislation. Hence, with a combined population of approximately 25 million people and a nominal GDP of \$1559.736 billion (OECD 2008; Wikipedia, 2010), the Nordic cluster is a significant trading partner in international business today.

Methodology

The Research Aim and Theoretical Perspectives

The aim of the study has been to discover to what degree societal cultural practices differ in the Nordic cluster. To do this, an empirical approach was applied. This researcher recognizes the strengths of combining etic and emic approaches to cultural studies. In this way the statistical findings can be supplemented with rich data from focus group interviews and archival data. A mixed method approach with a predominantly quantitative element has therefore been used in this study for two key reasons. Firstly, in relation to the community of practice: a precedent in comparative societal cultural studies has been a positivist standing (Schwartz 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998; Hofstede 2001; Grennes 2003). A valuable philosophical insight offered to us by Stier 2010, however, reminds us that 'as with other evolving fields within the realms of science, the ontological assumptions and epistemological aspirations of intercultural communication studies are matters of debate and disagreement'. Thus, the second reason this researcher has combined the quantitative data with rich qualitative findings from focus group interviews and archival data has been to complement and annotate the statistical findings in response to such philosophical debates. Indeed, as Taras et al. (2009) conclude in their valuable meta-analysis of 121 instruments for quantifying, our ability to measure culture both quantitatively and qualitatively is critical to our progress in cross-cultural studies (370).

Project GLOBE

The methodology and quantitative instrument applied in this present study are based on Project GLOBE's (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) methodology. The theory that guides the GLOBE research programme is an integration of implicit leadership theory (Lord and Maher 1991), value belief theory of culture (Hofstede 1980; Triandis 1995), implicit motivation theory (McClelland 1962), and structural contingency theory of organizational form and effectiveness (Donaldson 1993; Hickson et al. 1974). This on-going research is a multi-phase, multi-method project examining the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture and leadership. A total of 170 social scientists and management scholars from 62 cultures representing all major regions of the world are engaged in this long-term programmatic series of inter-cultural studies. GLOBE defines culture as shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (Brodbeck et al. 2002:1).

Clearly, when evaluating the GLOBE project's research in relation to Hofstede's seminal work, it can be seen that despite the use of different terms to identify cultural dimensions in the GLOBE project many of the cultural dimensions identified by House et al. are related conceptually and correlate empirically to Hofstede's dimensions (Leung et al. 2005, 366). The GLOBE model, however, offers a set of nine cultural dimensions that is more comprehensive and rigorous than Hofstede's. These are linked to extensive theoretical underpinning in relation to key cultural studies carried out during the last 60 years (see Table 1). In addition, a valuable contribution now made to the field of intercultural studies by project GLOBE (House et al. 2004; Chhokar et al. 2007) has been the inclusion of qualitative data from observations, focus group interviews and media analyses, correlated with their quantitative data. This can be seen as an important methodological contribution which responds to the critique given to the 'blind spots' of traditionally quantitative intercultural studies.

GLOBE dimensions	Definition	Statistical analyses	Theoretical linkages to previous cultural research
Performance Orientation societal practices	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence	*A comparison of mean scores from the Norwegian dataset with the secondary data from project	Weber 1904; Parsons and Shils 1951; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; McClelland 1962; Rokeach 1968; Bigoness and Hofstede 1989; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998

		GLOBE (House et al. 2004).	
Future Orientation societal practices	The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviours such as delaying gratification, planning for the future	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Bond 1983; Trompenaars 1993; Inglehart et al. 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998; Hofstede, 2001
Gender Egalitarian societal practices	The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Rokeach 1968; Hofstede 1980; Schwartz 1999; Coltrane 1996; Inglehart et al. 1997
Assertiveness societal practices	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Kluckhohn and Strodbeck 1961; Trompenaars 1993; Schwartz 1999; Inglehart et al. 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998; Hofstede, 2001
Collectivism societal practices	(Institutional) The degree to which institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action. (Group) The degree to which individuals express pride and cohesiveness in their organizations / families	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Parsons 1949; Kluckhohn 1956; Hall 1960; Hofstede 1980; Trompenaars 1993; Smith and Bond 1993; Schwartz 1999; Triandis 1995; Gudykunst, et al. 1996; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998
Power Distance societal practices	The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Haire et al. 1966; McClelland 1962; Haire, Ghiselli and Porter 1966; Mulder 1977; Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede 1980; Schwartz 1994
Humane Orientation societal practices	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others.	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Kluckhohn and Strodbeck 1961; Rokeach 1968; Schwartz 1994; Espen-Anderson et al. 1987; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998
Uncertainty Avoidance societal practices	The extent to which a collective relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.	*A comparison of mean scores as above.	Frenkel-Brunsvik 1949; Budner 1962; Hall 1959; Hofstede 1980; Inglehart et al. 1994; Triandis 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999

Table 1. Summary of empirical data, statistical analyses and established cultural theories in the study

* Reliability and validity descriptives, T-tests, and CFAs for goodness of fit were carried out on each data set at the individual societal level to ensure reliability and validity. House et al. confirm that the GLOBE scales are all unidimensional and demonstrate significant and non-trivial within-culture response agreement between culture differences and respectable reliability of response consistency (Gupta et al. 2007).

Table 1 above summarizes the theoretical underpinnings of project GLOBE's cultural dimensions. This exemplifies the theoretical links between seminal research of culture during the last 60 years and GLOBE's cultural dimensions. A review is also offered of the statistical analyses applied in the quantitative element of this present study. No statistics have been published to confirm significant between-society differences. However, precedence has been set in published papers for cross-country comparisons without ANOVA tests (Hofstede 1980; Brodbeck 2002). Future researchers should be given access to the raw country-level GLOBE and Hofstede data in order to test for significance of differences between cultures with ANOVA.

Data Collection

The sampling method generally applied in this survey is one type of systematic stratified sampling (Bertsch 2009). The target population from which the sample is taken can be described as a sample that is representative of the complete group of elements and objects relevant to the research project (Remenyi et al. 1998; Churchill and Iacobucci 2005; Holt 2007; Hair et al. 2008). For the Norwegian survey, the target population was Norwegian individuals who manage privately-owned Norwegian companies. The sampling frame was representatives of the target population who are part of the Norwegian research organization Perduco's business research panel. Project GLOBE's sampling methods followed the same guidelines: managers who work and live in each respective country of the target population. Approximately 17,300 middle managers from 950 organizations took part in the original study of 62 societies by House et al. (2004). A total of 710 middle managers took part in this researcher's study of Norwegian societal cultural practices for the Norwegian quantitative data.

Ideally the sample is chosen so that no significant differences exist between the sample and the sample population's important characteristics. In other words, the sample serves as a model for the population. From a statistical analysis of the sample data it is then possible to generalize to the whole population with a specified degree of confidence. Strictly speaking, in this research we are studying the cultures of middle managers in each society. Thus, we must be cautious when making generalizations about cultures. Nevertheless, the core GLOBE societal practice and value orientations are strongly and significantly correlated with unobtrusive measures that reflect the broader society (Gupta et al. 2007). The core GLOBE measures are also significantly correlated with independently collected indicators of societal values in the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al. 1998). We can therefore estimate that the GLOBE questionnaire responses reflect the broader culture in which the middle managers are embedded rather than the cultures of middle managers alone (House et al. 2004; 20).

The societal practices in this study were measured quantitatively by responses to the 39 self-report questionnaire items from section one of the GLOBE instrument. Secondary quantitative and qualitative data for the Danish, Finnish and Swedish societies were obtained from project GLOBE (House et al. 2004, Chhokar et al. 2007).

The quantitative questionnaire items use a seven-step rating scale in the value surveys. For example, each dimension is conceptualized and depicted as a continuum between two extreme poles. Taking 'Assertiveness' as a dimension, '1' is greatly non-assertive, '4' is neither non-assertive nor assertive and '7' is greatly assertive. Cross-cultural literature indicates that a systematic bias may occur if respondents complete a survey that is not written in their native language (Brislin 1986). Thus, the items written in Norwegian/Swedish/Danish and Finnish were applied in this study, using back-to-back translation protocol. Table 2 below offers a descriptives summary of the means and standard deviations for GLOBE cultural practices statistics with data from 61 societies.

GLOBE Cultural Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Uncertainty Avoidance practices	2.88	5.37	4.16	.60
Future Orientation practices	2.88	5.07	3.85	.46
Power Distance practices	3.89	5.8	5.17	.41
Institutional Collectivism practices	3.25	5.22	4.25	.42
Humane Orientation practices	3.18	5.23	4.09	.47
Performance Orientation practices	3.20	4.94	4.10	.41
In-group Collectivism practices	3.53	6.36	5.13	.73
Gender Egalitarianism practices	2.5	4.08	3.37	.37
Assertiveness practices	3.38	4.89	4.14	.37

Table 2: Means and Standard deviations for GLOBE cultural practices (House et al. 2004:31)

As noted above, the means for the nine cultural practices scores for all 17,300 respondents range from 3.37 (Gender Egalitarianism) to 5.17 (Power Distance), on the seven-point scale.

A total of 37 Norwegian managers took part in focus group interviews for the qualitative element of the study in 2010. Secondary qualitative data for this study were also gathered from previous studies of Swedish, Danish and Finnish culture (Lindell and Arvonen 1996; Grennes 2003; Smith et al. 2003; Holt and Bruun de Neergard 2007; Holmberg and Åkerblom 2007). The following section now summarizes the GLOBE cultural dimensions and findings for performance orientation, collectivism, assertiveness, humane orientation, power distance, gender egalitarianism, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation within a Nordic framework.

1. Performance Orientation within a Nordic setting refers to the extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence (Holmberg and Åkerblom 2007:36). Norway's mean score: 4.18, seen within the context of the GLOBE survey of 62 countries, shows a moderate level of performance orientation for Norway as a whole. In terms of Sweden's lower mean score in performance orientation (3.72), Holmberg and Åkerblom (2007) review this score in the light of the political policies implemented in Sweden. They note that Sweden's development as a welfare state was to a large extent due to its middle-of-the road strategy between capitalism and socialism, a strategy accomplished in a joint effort by a triad consisting of the state, the labour unions and employers (Chhokar et al. 2007:37). Such balance between capitalism and socialism has impacted this performance orientation. Norway's and Denmark's development as welfare states correlates closely to that of their neighbour Sweden in also following a path between capitalism and socialism where the edges of performance orientation are also somewhat softened by collectivist values. In Finland the current level of performance orientation is the lowest in the Nordic cluster. Lindell and Sigfrids (2007) posit that an explanation for this is that although business results are stressed in Finland, there are many counteracting factors, especially at society level. There is a desire to even out differences in earnings through a re-distributive taxation system, and the social security system is constructive and guarantees a minimum standard of living for everyone.

A seminal text on the 'Jante Law' published by the Danish/Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose in 1933 promotes modesty as an important cultural value in the Nordic region (Rudnick 2003), i.e. don't believe that you are better than anyone else. Consequently, traditional values in the population today still clearly mirror Sandemose's cultural construct of egalitarian, modest behaviour where no-one should try to show themselves as being better than anyone else. This stands in strong opposition to performance-focused values. Nevertheless, during the last decade initiatives have been made to move away from the 'Jante Law' as many Norwegian, Swedish and Danish companies have introduced performance appraisal measures and reward initiatives. However, what counts in career development in the Nordic region is still competence in the performance of duties rather than self-promotion of one's self. To conclude, performance orientation mean scores in the Nordic region are highest in Denmark at 4.22, followed by Norway: 4.18, Finland: 3.81, Sweden: 3.72.

2. Gender Egalitarianism within a Nordic framework is the extent to which a society minimizes gender role differences. With a high mean score (4.03), Norway can be described as the Nordic society that attributes most equal status to men and women. Since Norway's first female Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland was in office, Norway has worked actively towards gender equality in both the public and private sectors. In 1986, Brundtland's Cabinet was made up of 44% females (8 posts) and 56% males (10 posts). In 2005, after the general elections, 64 out of the 169 seats in Parliament were won by females, ranking Norway as fifth in the world in terms of the percentage of women MPs (Odin.no 2009).

In the workplace in Norway today, according to recent surveys carried out by Statistics Norway (2009), 75% of all women aged between 25-66 are at work (82% of men in the same category are at work). Altogether 72% of women with children under the age of three are at work, and 82% of women with children between the ages of three and six are at work (Odin.no 2009). Pre-requisites for the success of the equal opportunities situation in the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish workplace have been 1) government subsidized pre-school day care centres, 2) shared maternity/paternity leave, with parents choosing to share up to one year's paid leave, and 3) flexible working hours: a typical working day in the Nordic region is from 8.00am to 4.00pm, with the opportunity to use flexitime, some home office hours and paid time off when children are sick (Espen-Andersen and Korpi 1987). Mean scores for all 62 societies (House et al. 2004) was 3.37. Within the Nordic region, however, gender egalitarian mean scores were much higher and highest for Norway: 4.03, followed by Denmark: 3.93, Sweden: 3.84, Finland: 3.35.

3. Assertiveness refers to the degree to which individuals in a society are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others (Holmberg & Åkerblom 2007). The mean scores in all Nordic region countries are low and are lowest in Norway: 3.37. Indeed foreigners often regard Nordic societies as somewhat reserved and 'cold-hearted' due to the fact that many Nordic people are non-dominant and do not reveal their emotions openly. This way of showing feelings is very culture-specific. A Norwegian person's insular approach does not mean that individuals do not feel emotions: it is an indication of the sense of order and of keeping control in an interdependent society such as Norway. In the Nordic region it is rare to have a heated argument or strong disagreement at work or in private life.

In traffic it is unusual to blow your horn or to push into a queue. A sense of order and fairness is prevalent from the time one starts in nursery schools and learns to take turns to the custom of patiently waiting in line in the company canteen. Country mean scores for Norway and her Nordic partners are as follows with Finland showing slightly higher scores: 3.81, followed by Denmark: 3.80, Sweden: 3.38, Norway: 3.37. The mean scores for Assertiveness in all 62 societies is 4.14. All Nordic countries thus fall into the lowest band of countries in terms of assertiveness in their social relationships.

4. Institutional Collectivism: elements of collectivism on a societal level in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, impact conformity and interdependence among groups of individuals. The strong support for the labour unions is a good indicator of this dimension as their political influence and high level of membership represent the ethos of supportive collective interests in a society. For example, almost nine out of every ten wage-earners in Norway are members of a union. Some comparable figures are one out of three in the UK and one out of four in Japan (Holmberg & Åkerblom 2007). Institutional collectivism is also seen in the high tax levels in all Nordic countries. The public sector has consequently assumed extensive responsibility for many services such as education, the labour market, care of the sick and elderly, pensions, social insurance and pre-school child care. Thus the high level of tax supports institutional collectivist goals. To conclude, mean country scores for institutional collectivism show rather high levels for most Nordic nations compared to the Globe mean scores: Sweden: 5.22, Denmark: 4.80, Finland: 4.63, Norway: 4.07 (GLOBE mean scores: 4.25).

Scores for **Group Collectivism** indicate the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their families and community/organizations. Pride is an important element of the Nordic culture – national pride and also pride in the achievements of the local community and the achievements of children. Children in many areas of the Nordic region are encouraged to take part in numerous after-school activities such as sports, theatre clubs, music schools and bands, and water sports. Parents are strongly encouraged to voluntarily take part in the organization and running of many such clubs. Pride in the children's participation in such a wide range of activities can be seen as an extension of national pride. Even though Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland have collective school systems based on the philosophy of one state-run school system for everyone, the sense of pride in extra-curricular activities, the sense of responsibility and inclusion in local communities is a Nordic trait.

A specific anomaly in the Nordic region's group collective culture, however, lies in the Norwegian tradition of expecting the state to take care of old people and the sick rather than expecting the family to take this collective responsibility. A culture which scores high on in-group collectivism is traditionally a culture which values a home where many generations live together and where the family collectively assume responsibility for the elderly or infirm within the home and where young people at work and university traditionally stay at home until they start their own family. In the Nordic region, the high taxation system supports a comprehensive welfare state which in turn provides state care for the elderly or sick – thus the collective responsibility is not to provide a home for all generations but to contribute to the welfare state via paying one's taxes. It is not therefore the norm to take care of elderly parents personally. The state provides a certain financial support in the form of grants or state loans for young people wishing to take further education. This provides opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to study. Furthermore, the state pension scheme lessens the financial responsibility of taking care of the elderly, and the social security payment system alleviates the burden that many cultures carry for caring for those unable to work. To sum up, the mean group collectivism scores for the Nordic cluster are as follows: Norway: 5.34, Finland: 4.07, Sweden: 3.66, Denmark: 3.53.

5. Power Distance is defined as the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power is unequally shared (Chhokar et al. 2007). Norway's mean score of 4.13 in the power distance dimension depicts Norway as a low power distance society, in keeping with her Nordic cluster profile. Such low power distance values in the Nordic region are manifested in certain aspects of business practices such as little use of formal titles, dress codes and practical attitudes to tasks in the workplace. Most organizations do not adhere to strict dress codes in order to show status. Even in institutions such as parliamentary offices and legal institutions, a senior member may be dressed as informally as a junior staff member. Titles or last names are rarely used when addressing others, even if they are of senior rank. Another element of power distance – the roles and hierarchy within a society – is mirrored in the egalitarian practices at work in the Nordic region, especially in Denmark, Sweden and Norway: in company canteens, for example, all staff, whether directors or junior staff, pick up their food themselves in the staff canteen in an orderly manner and dispose of uneaten food and used plates themselves in the kitchen return area. Canteens are almost never segregated on the basis of position in the Nordic countries.

As societies that expect and agree that power should be equally shared, the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish progressive and comprehensive tax systems, the high union membership and the generous welfare states exemplify systems that are in place to protect and promote egalitarian values. Holmberg and Åkerblom (2007) discuss elements of low power distance seen outside the workplace in Sweden. Burial grounds for instance, are generally similar for everyone, regardless of family wealth or social status in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Nor is the ability to gain priority over others to get on a bus or any other public transportation helped by personal status in Norway, Sweden,

Finland or Denmark: everybody is obliged to queue. Also significant in this context is the absence of pictures of living political leaders in any public place or on symbolic artefacts such as stamps (apart from members of the royal family, who have no political influence). In general, if a street name acknowledges an individual in Norway, Sweden or Denmark, it is most likely to be of historical origin (Holmsberg and Åkerblom 2007:46). Thus, egalitarian values are promoted on a national and company level. To sum up, the mean scores in power distance for the Nordic countries are lowest in the whole 62-nation study. Indeed, the mean scores for project GLOBE was 5.17, compared to Denmark: 3.89, followed by Norway: 4.13, Sweden: 4.85, with Finland showing the most hierarchical tendencies with 4.89. Hence these results support the findings from Lindell and Arvonen (1996) that a dominant feature of the Scandinavian management style in general is delegation of responsibility.

6. Humane Orientation is the degree to which an organization or society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others (Chhokar et al. 2007). The social concern that is characteristic of Norway, Sweden and Denmark is captured in part by this dimension, where Norway scores rather high (4.81). The Nordic region is known for generously supporting aid work and refugee programmes, and also for working as brokers in peace negotiation initiatives. Such initiatives may be seen to indicate a sense of humane orientation towards others. At an institutional level, the welfare state discussed earlier in this paper quantifies the fairness and care that can be expected in the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Danish societies. At a regional level, historically, as predominately agricultural and fishing nations, local communities living in harsh climates have traditionally helped each other in times of need. Even today, the philosophy of ‘civic duty’ and taking part in a ‘*dugnad*’ (voluntary local help projects) remains a part of daily life in many regions in the Nordic region, but to a lesser extent in large cities. To conclude, the scores in humane orientation for the Nordic countries are highest for Norway: 4.81, followed by Denmark: 4.44, Sweden: 4.10, Finland: 3.96.

7. Uncertainty Avoidance is defined as the extent to which a collective group strives to avoid uncertainty by relying on social norms, structural arrangements, rituals and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events (Holmsberg & Åkerblom 2007). The mean scores for Norway: 4.31, Finland: 5.02, Denmark: 5.22, Sweden: 5.32, indicate a moderate collective value of striving for order in society in the Nordic region, with the 62-nation average scores being lower at 4.16. Examples of uncertainty reduction and protection measures in the Nordic cluster include the high value placed on the extensive welfare system with comprehensive social security payments for sick leave, long-term disability, unemployment, maternity and paternity pay.

A second Norwegian, Swedish and Danish institution which mirrors the value placed on uncertainty avoidance is the ombudsman system – a system of checks and balances that protects individuals against misgovernment in the legal or public administration systems. Another element of Norwegian, Danish, Finnish and Swedish cultures that is reflected in the sense of order in society is people’s approach to time. The social norm is to always be ‘on time’ for both business meetings and social gatherings. Agendas are frequently distributed in business meetings and social club meetings, and even for birthdays, weddings and christenings, to ensure a sense of order. In this way, good time keeping and the ethos of sticking to agreed times is important in the maintenance of good social relations, in both working and private life.

8. Future Orientation is the degree to which an organization or society encourages and rewards future-oriented behaviours such as planning, investing in the future and delaying gratification (Chhokar et al. 2007). All Nordic countries rank moderately high in terms of future orientation. This result mirrors a culture where saving for the future and long-term planning at an institutional level is valued. On an individual level, the majority of Scandinavians have some private or company pension funds to save for financial security in the future. At an institutional level, the welfare system and mandatory occupational pension schemes provide guaranteed pensions or disability payments to cover the future financial needs of the population. The government’s strong commitment to free schooling from the age of six to eighteen and free university places also mirrors the Nordic regions’ ethos of planning for a better future. To conclude, the country scores for Future Orientation are marginally higher for Norway: 4.48, followed by Denmark: 4.44, Sweden: 4.28 and Finland: 4.24.

Summary of Findings

To summarize, although the Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and Finnish cultures are indeed ostensibly similar, the results of this present study illustrate Ashkansy’s (1997) point that such intercultural research can reveal subtle but important cultural differences in nations that are similar yet dissimilar. All four Nordic societies appear intrinsically egalitarian, they appear to value low power distance, directness and consensus in decision making and to promote gender egalitarianism. Box-plot statistics are used in Table 3 below to show the distributions of cultural practices scores for all 61 GLOBE countries (House et al. 2004). In the cylinder-shaped box-plots, the four quartiles represent the lowest 25%, low 25%, high 25% and highest 25% of all scores from 17 300 respondents. The vertical black bar represents the median. Denmark’s scores are represented by a circle, Norway’s scores are represented by a square,

Sweden’s scores are represented by a slash and Finland’s scores are represented by an X. In this way, the variation between the mean scores for the Nordic countries, as a cluster, compared to the mean scores for all GLOBE dimensions is clear to see. Moreover, one can see significant differences in the national mean scores of each individual Nordic society, indicating the uniqueness of each Nordic nation:

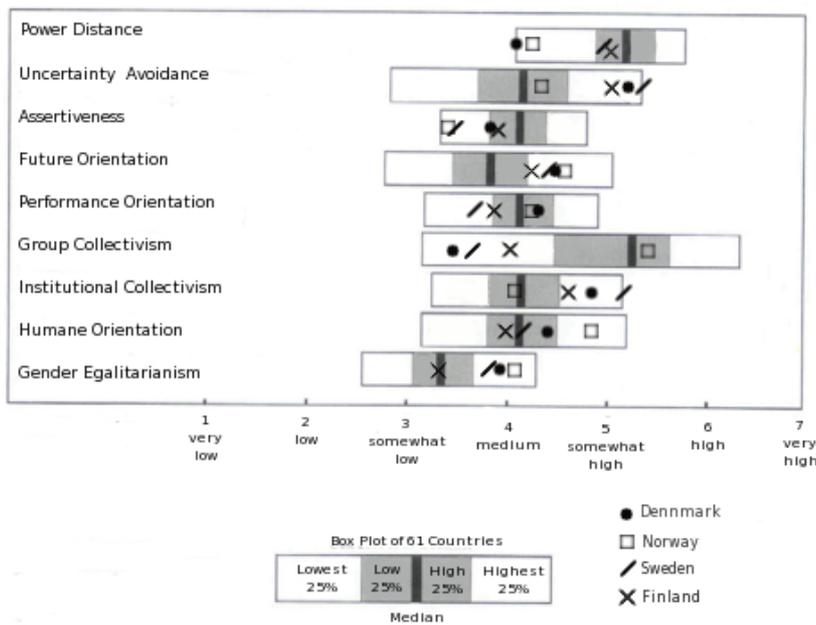


Table 3. Quantitative findings from the study of Nordic countries with Project GLOBE dimensions adapted from brodbeck et al. 2002; Warner-Søderholm, 2010

* In terms of sample sizes, these are 710 respondents for the Norwegian dataset. Sample sizes not specified for all countries by House et al. (2004). It is stated that a total of 17,370 respondents completed the questionnaire and that the number of respondents by society ranged from 27 to 1,790 with an average of 251 respondents per society.

A valid critique of quantitative findings in cross-cultural studies has been: how meaningful can we say a mean difference of .10 for example is? There is no tradition for ANOVA analyses to calculate significant differences in comparative cultural studies with GLOBE or Hofstede data. Hence the collection of qualitative data from focus group interviews and archival data in this study addresses the need for a richer understanding of the quantitative findings to add meaning to the statistical results. These unique country variances in cultural practices can then to be understood and appreciated to avoid misunderstandings in diverse Nordic teams.

Managing Nordic differences

The qualitative statements listed below, collected by this researcher from focus group interviews and archival data, capture particularly important and unique aspects of each individual Nordic culture which individuals need to manage in business or education. Practitioners working with colleagues from Norway, for example, may need to deal with a more direct culture where honesty is traditionally valued above face and harmony. On the other hand, colleagues visiting Sweden may need to respect the general appreciation of a more pragmatic matter-of-fact approach to tasks and a clear borderline between private and public life. Visitors to Denmark may experience a more individualistic, autonomous approach to tasks, whereas in Finland one may expect a more defined sense of responsibility, clear lines of authority and less social networking.

	Statements used to describe unique Norwegian cultural values	Statements used to describe unique Swedish cultural values	Statements used to describe unique Danish cultural values	Statements used to describe unique Finnish cultural values
Illustrative statements used to describe people’s cultural norms in this Nordic region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More direct, call a spade a spade • Don’t waste words, say it how it is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value ‘socially concerned individualism’ • Consensus important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer a team player approach to management, with an open style of supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard-working if they are correctly and clearly motivated • Honest, reliable, punctual,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See family , friends and the community as important but have less time for voluntary work in urban, anonymous areas • Try to always reach consensus with stakeholders • Value future planning in terms of investment and public spending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict borderline between public and private life • Pragmatic, rational, matter-of –fact approach: value order • Used to a high percentage of female managers, less so than Norway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong need for employees to experience autonomy • More individualistic than other Nordic neighbours • Less class and status conscious than most trading partners • Moderately direct 	<p>appreciate well-defined responsibilities and lines of authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less used to social networking, • Less used to the need for social competence • Less used to female managers, a changing society
Quantitative findings supported by the qualitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-group Collectivist values highest in the Nordic region (m=5.34) • High Humane Orientation values (m=4.18) • Highest Future Orientation Values (m=4.48) • Highest Gender Egalitarian values (m=4.03) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Gender Egalitarian values (m=3.84) • Highest level of Uncertainty Avoidance values in the Nordic cluster (m=5.32) • Lower levels of In-Group Collectivism (m=3.66) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest level of Power Distance in the Nordic cluster • Lower level of In-group Collectivism (m=3.53) • Highest level of Performance Orientation in the Nordic cluster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest level of Gender Egalitarianism in the Nordic cluster (m=3,35) • Highest level of Power Distance in the Nordic cluster • Lowest level of Humane Orientation in the Nordic cluster

Table 4. Unique perceived cultural traits in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland (adapted from Smith et al. 2001; Grennes 2003; Javidan et al. 2004; Warner-Søderholm 2010, Warner-Søderholm 2011)

Clearly, management practices in Norway differ in three subtle ways from those of her Nordic counterparts since Norwegians tend to place greater value on low context communication, stronger gender egalitarianism values and a low power distance. This is in clear contrast to the more silent, conservative Finnish approach. Management practices in Sweden tend to differ in three different ways: Swedes tend to value collectivism within the framework of socially concerned individualism – in other words as people who value personal achievement and rights whilst at the same time supporting initiatives such as the welfare state. Moreover, part of the Swedish decision-making culture is a participative approach with consensus valued above a top-down style of management. In addition, Swedes tend to value a clear borderline between private life and working life. They may not be used to sharing much spare time with work associates. Danish management practices are often coloured by an intrinsic sense of open, participative management, where a close sense of supervision is not appreciated. Consequently, high reliance on colleagues and co-workers rather than a reliance on top-down instructions is the norm in Denmark. Finns report a strong aversion to rules made by others and a strong respect for 'unwritten rules' (Smith et al. 2003). Another rather unique element of the Finnish culture in a Nordic context is their more masculine business culture, with fewer females in decision-making positions than their Nordic neighbours.

While these intercultural differences in societal values are not major, their combined effects may have consequences in certain situations. For example, if a manager from Norway presented his or her ideas in an open, direct manner, this could be interpreted as confrontational by the other party. A statement could be made by a Swedish manager such as “I’m afraid we believe that the company should consider due diligence procedures”. The manager from Norway might have phrased this message as “You have to follow due diligence procedures!” In a similar way, the communication style of a project member from Finland might mirror his or her slightly more assertive, hierarchical values. A colleague from Sweden may misunderstand such assertive leadership behaviour as rather too autocratic – they may value a more trusting and consensus-based approach to business instead. Knowledge about such specific cultural characteristics can help team members from different Nordic regions to value and anticipate differences. Potential problems such as interpersonal conflict, which leads to stress and unnecessary personal strain and potential loss of revenues, can then be minimized.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Its first purpose has been to explore Nordic intercultural communication practices based on project GLOBE's qualitative and quantitative findings (2004) combined with this author's new research findings of the Norwegian culture (Warner-Søderholm 2010). The second purpose of the paper has been to shed light upon unique values and practices within this region to help future practitioners work more effectively in the Nordic region. As discussed earlier in this paper, 'we're not all Vikings' even though we share a rich cultural history and traditions. Subtle but disturbing differences may surface even when representatives from neighbouring regions in the Nordic cluster work together.

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