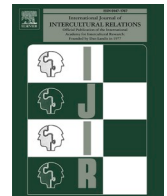




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## New developments in Hofstede's Individualism-Collectivism: A guide for scholars, educators, trainers, and other practitioners

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### ABSTRACT

Introduced as a measure by Geert Hofstede in 1980, the cultural dimension of Individualism-Collectivism ("I-C") has dominated the field of cross-cultural research and guided intercultural trainers, educators, and other practitioners up to the present. In 2023, The Culture Factor, the global cultural analytics and strategy advisor company associated with Hofstede's framework, updated their I-C scores due to mounting concerns with Hofstede's operationalization and measurement of I-C, specifically over its old and non-representative data, as well as its limited face and content validity. These newer I-C scores are derived from the work of Hofstede's former collaborator, Michael Minkov, and are based on two distinct datasets: a 2015 Hofstede Insights survey covering 55 countries and the World Values Survey covering 47 more, for a total of 102 countries/regions. Conceptually, the model redefines I-C as consisting of three facets: conformism, social ascendancy, and exclusionism. We discuss three major sources of country-level scores associated with Hofstede's name that pertain to his cultural dimensions, present a synthesized overview of the new developments in understanding and measuring I-C as it pertains to Hofstede's work, and examine the suitability of both Hofstede's original work and Minkov's subsequent revisions to I-C for academic research, intercultural training, and education. Our article concludes with recommendations to (1) rigorously scrutinize the construction of cultural dimensions—in this case I-C—by critically assessing their validity, data sources, and methodologies; (2) validate these dimensions against external evidence; and (3) continue refining I-C measures by emphasizing reliable, representative data and stringent methodological validation.

### Introduction

Introduced by Geert Hofstede in 1980, the cultural dimension Individualism-Collectivism (herein referred to as "I-C") has dominated the cross-cultural research field and guided intercultural trainers, educators, and other practitioners to date. On October 16, 2023, The Culture Factor (formerly known as Hofstede Insights), the global cultural analytics and strategy advisor company associated with Hofstede's framework, updated their I-C scores due to concerns over the accuracy of the original scores. The new scores are

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derived from the work of Hofstede's former close collaborator, Michael Minkov (Minkov, 2018b; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022) and include a substantial departure from the past. For instance, East Asian cultures'<sup>1</sup> scores have shifted toward the midpoint or even closer to the Individualism end of the continuum, close to the US's new score. Rather than an East-West dimension, as it is sometimes perceived, the new scores represent I-C as a North-South dimension, with Northwestern Europe as the most individualist and African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian countries as the most collectivist (see Fig. 1).

This substantial revision of country scores necessitates an analysis to guide scholars and practitioners through the motive for and meaning of such changes. To help readers make sense of abundant and often contradicting literature, we present a synthesized overview of the new developments in understanding and measuring I-C as it pertains to Hofstede's work. Throughout the paper, we address I-C as an ecological, or national-level dimension in Hofstede's research and its reconceptualization by Minkov and colleagues. In other words, we do not detail individual-level measures of I-C, such as those by Triandis and Gelfand (1998) and the measures reviewed by Oyserman et al. (2002).

One "twist" to the present article is that the two authors hold opposing views on some conceptual and practical questions about I-C. Adam Komisarof's research is positioned primarily in acculturation, belonging, and national identity. He has also worked as an intercultural communication corporate trainer since 1997 while holding tenured positions at Japanese universities since 2001—all the while using Hofstede's concepts to inform his teaching in both lines of work. Plamen Akaliyski has cooperated closely with Michael Minkov and colleagues in revising Hofstede's framework and in developing the field of "comparative culturology," an approach pioneered by Hofstede that measures group-level constructs and their relationship to other group-level differences—most often national differences (Minkov et al., 2024). This article will present the new developments in I-C and expose readers to the authors' sometimes diverging perspectives about I-C before jointly recommending how to move forward. In the process, we hope to empower readers to make informed decisions in their own use of I-C and to set directions for future research in this dynamic field.

We begin by explaining the major sources of I-C scores (and those for other Hofstede dimensions) that are associated with Hofstede's name. Here, we do not limit ourselves to I-C, as we hope to provide readers with a broader understanding of how Hofstede's research has been developed and represented before delving specifically into I-C's conceptualization and measurement. In other words, it is much easier to grasp how I-C has been reconceptualized and presented differently by various sources by placing it in this larger context. This section is followed by a discussion of research that has catalyzed the revision of I-C scores, and the suitability of both Hofstede's original work and Minkov's subsequent revisions for academic research, intercultural training, and education. We finish with practical take-aways from our analysis.

## Disentangling the manifold representations of Hofstede's dimensions

Many intercultural communication trainers and educators, whether working in corporate or university environments, teach their clients or students Hofstede's dimensions to compare cultural tendencies between nations, with I-C being probably the most well-known and widely used. However, when one searches for country scores in Hofstede's books or online, three major sources associated with Hofstede's name (detailed in the next paragraph) offer different scores for I-C (as well as for Hofstede's other five dimensions); moreover, the dimensions themselves sometimes have completely different names. This raises the questions of what the most credible country scores are, and why sources that appear to represent Hofstede's work showcase divergent information.

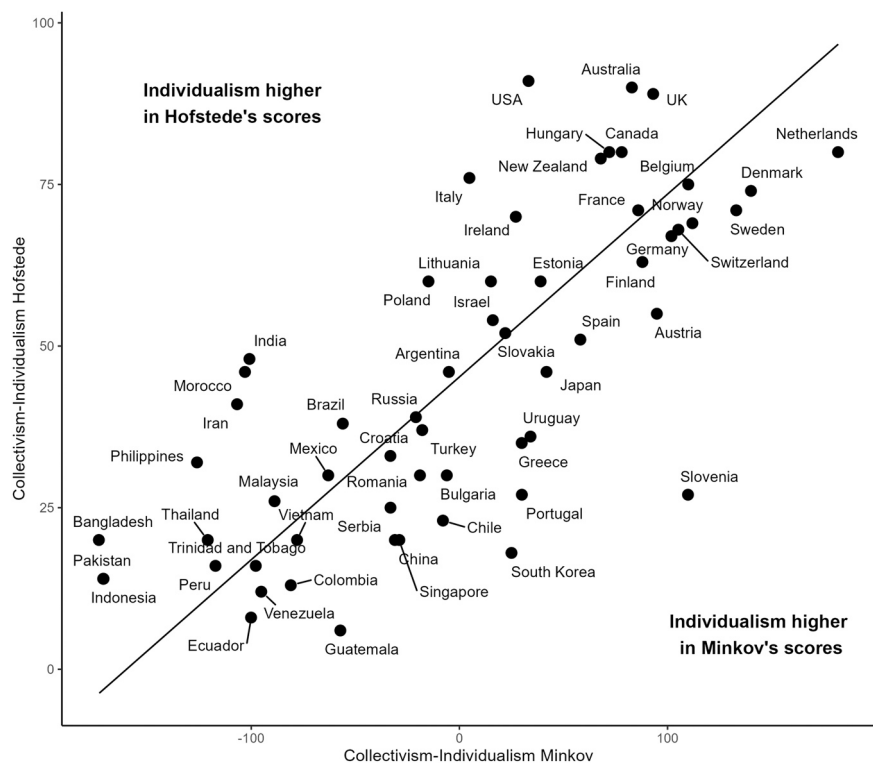
We distinguish three major sources about Hofstede's I-C and other cultural dimension scores that use Hofstede's name in some regard (but do not constitute an exhaustive list of sources about Hofstede's work). First, we have Geert Hofstede, who passed away in 2020, and his son Gert-Jan, who is now the director in charge of maintaining his father's website ([www.geerthofstede.com](http://www.geerthofstede.com)). This website lists scores for six cultural dimensions developed either in whole or cooperatively by Geert Hofstede and can also be found in his books (most recently Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The website includes Hofstede's four original dimensions: Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance (High vs. Low), Uncertainty Avoidance (Strong vs. Weak), and Masculinity-Femininity (Hofstede, 1980). The scores on these dimensions are based on two surveys of IBM employees administered in 1967 and 1973, as well as subsequently collected data and estimates from cultural experts (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Long (vs. Short) Term Orientation (in short "LTO") and Indulgence vs. Restraint were subsequently added to Hofstede's framework as a result of collaboration with Michael Minkov. LTO was first formulated by a team led by Michael Harris Bond (and called "Confucian Work Dynamism") using a survey informed by Chinese academics and cultural experts (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). A newer operationalization of LTO using data from the World Values Survey (WVS)—which has collected nationally representative data for over 100 countries in consecutive waves since 1981—was developed by Minkov (2007) and later in collaboration with Hofstede using more recent WVS waves (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Indulgence vs. Restraint was developed by Minkov (2007), and later accepted by Hofstede as the sixth dimension in his framework (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Scores for LTO and Indulgence vs. Restraint on the Hofstede website are based on WVS data from Wave 5, covering 2005–2009.

A second major data source displaying scores for Hofstede's dimensions is a website administered by The Culture Factor (known until 2023 as Hofstede Insights, yet no longer holding rights to use Hofstede's name), which sells training and consulting services based

<sup>1</sup> We follow Hofstede in referring to nations/countries as cultures. This approach of assuming that nations/countries represent meaningful cultural units remains controversial as it has been criticized by some (see e.g., McSweeney, 2002) and defended by others (e.g., Akaliyski et al., 2021). We acknowledge that cultures may exist at various levels aside from nations, e.g., regional cultures and various intra-national subcultures.

<sup>2</sup> The dimension introduced by Minkov (2007) was labeled Monumentalism vs. Flexhumility, but due to its conceptual and statistical overlap with LTO, it was subsequently accepted as an equivalent dimension.



**Fig. 1.** Differences Between Hofstede's Original I-C Scores and Those in the Revised Minkov-Hofstede Model. Note. Collectivism-Individualism Hofstede scores come from Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) and Collectivism-Individualism Minkov from Minkov and Kaasa (2022). The correlation between the two is .75 ( $p < .00001$ ,  $n = 58$ ). The diagonal line represents the first principal component minimizing perpendicular distances and capturing the maximum shared variance between Hofstede's scores and the new I-C scores.

on the work of Geert Hofstede ([www.hofstede-insights.com](http://www.hofstede-insights.com) or [www.theculturefactor.com](http://www.theculturefactor.com)). Consistent with the latest version of Hofstede's original framework, their website offers scores for six dimensions: Individualism, Power Distance, Motivation Toward Achievement and Success (MTAS) (a new label for Hofstede's "Masculinity-Femininity" dimension), Uncertainty Avoidance, LTO, and Indulgence (see Table 1 for a comparison of terminology and scores). The country scores for Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, MTAS/Masculinity, and Indulgence are identical on the Hofstede and The Culture Factor websites, as they are based on the same data sets. However, LTO and I-C differ between these sources. The Culture Factor's LTO scores are comprised of those for Monumentalism-Flexibility<sup>3</sup> offered by Minkov and Kaasa (2022). These Monumentalism-Flexibility scores are based on two distinct data sources: (1) data for 55 countries collected in 2015 and analyzed by Minkov et al. (2017), and (2) data for an additional 47 countries from the WVS added by Minkov and Kaasa (2022)<sup>4</sup>. These distinct data sources explain the difference between the LTO scores on The Culture Factor and Hofstede's websites, as the latter scores are based only on WVS data and employ a different set of items than Minkov and Kaasa (2022). For I-C, Hofstede's website has retained the original scores based on their IBM questionnaire, but The Culture Factor uses Minkov and colleagues' newer scores (Minkov et al., 2017; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). In addition to the 102 countries available in Minkov and Kaasa (2022), The Culture Factor includes scores for 15 other countries based on other smaller-scale studies (e.g., Almutairi et al., 2020, for a few Arab states not surveyed in the WVS), as well as some scores based on experts' estimates.

The third central figure in deciphering Hofstede's manifold scores is Michael Minkov. Though he does not have a website that displays Hofstede dimension scores, he and his collaborators have published a series of academic papers proposing a revision of Hofstede's original cultural model (Minkov, 2018; Minkov & Kaasa, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024). After a large-scale survey across more than 50 countries he conducted with Hofstede Insights in 2015, Minkov proposed an update of Hofstede's original framework, calling

<sup>3</sup> Minkov's Monumentalism-Flexibility dimension is a reconceptualization of LTO, which contrasts cultures that emphasize consistency, fixed values, and a sense of pride (Monumentalism) with those that prioritize adaptability, self-improvement, and a focus on the flexible nature of the self (Flexibility).

<sup>4</sup> These two datasets use different items to compute the Monumentalism-Flexibility dimension. Minkov et al. (2017) relied on a newly created scale consisting of seven items with three possible responses, for example: 1. I am usually the same person at home and outside (at work, at school, in public places); 2. I am somewhere here, in between these two; 3. I am often quite different at home and outside. Minkov and Kaasa (2022), on the other hand, employed three items from the WVS, namely thrift vs. obedience and religious faith as desirable qualities in children, to add scores for 47 new countries.

**Table 1**

Comparison of Three Versions of Hofstede Model: Terminology and Sources of Country Scores.

Hofstede Website	The Culture Factor Website	Revised Minkov-Hofstede Model
Individualism-Collectivism	Individualism: Minkov and Kaasa's (2022) scores	Reoperationalized Individualism-Collectivism
Power Distance (High vs. Low)	Power Distance: Hofstede's scores	Merged with Individualism-Collectivism
Uncertainty Avoidance (Strong vs. Weak)	Uncertainty Avoidance: Hofstede's scores	Removed from model
Masculinity (vs. Femininity)	Motivation Toward Achievement and Success: renamed but same scores as Hofstede's Masculinity	Removed from model
Long (vs. Short) Term Orientation	Long Term Orientation: Minkov and Kaasa's (2022) Monumentalism-Flexibility scores but Hofstede's label	Reoperationalized and renamed Monumentalism-Flexibility
Indulgence vs. Restraint	Indulgence: same as Hofstede's scores	Removed from model

Notes. This table was constructed by using the following sources:

Hofstede website: <https://geerthofstede.com/>

The Culture Factor website: <https://www.theculturefactor.com/>

Revised Minkov-Hofstede Model: Minkov and Kaasa (2022).

it the “revised Minkov-Hofstede cultural model” (Minkov, 2018; Minkov & Kaasa, 2021, 2022). Minkov and colleagues reconstructed I-C (Minkov et al., 2017; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022) and LTO, the latter of which Minkov reconceptualized and renamed “Monumentalism-Flexibility” (Minkov, 2018; Minkov, Bond, et al., 2018).

Power Distance and I-C were merged into a single dimension, as Minkov et al. (2017) reasoned that they constitute different components of the same cultural syndrome and are statistically indistinguishable.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, individualist countries tend to have low Power Distance, whereas collectivist countries typically have high Power Distance. Minkov (2018) also concluded that Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity (MTAS) are not internally consistent and could not be replicated. Because analogues to these dimensions have not been identified in the WVS, Minkov has recommended removing them from Hofstede's model. Indulgence was excluded in Minkov's more recent publications (e.g., Minkov, 2018) as part of the revised model, though he has not explicitly disowned it. Thus, the revised Minkov-Hofstede model of culture includes only two cultural dimensions: I-C and Monumentalism-Flexibility. The pool of scores for 54 countries based on the cross-national survey from 2015 published in Minkov (2018) was subsequently expanded with WVS data, for a total of 102 countries in Minkov and Kaasa (2022).

According to Gert Jan Hofstede (personal communication), this framework should be dissociated from his father's name, as it is based on a different questionnaire and conceptualization from Hofstede's. However, we have chosen to employ the nomenclature of the revised “Minkov-Hofstede” model since this is the name used in the literature to describe the model, and to call it something else is likely to confuse readers. Also, we respectfully hope that this label honors the close collaboration between Hofstede and Minkov, from which this new framework has emerged.

To summarize, the Hofstede website lists the dimensions and scores recognized by Hofstede during his lifetime, whereas those by The Culture Factor contain a mix of Minkov's scores that were not accepted by Hofstede (the revised I-C scores and the new Monumentalism-Flexibility scores) as well as some Hofstede dimensions no longer recognized by Minkov as distinct dimensions (Power Distance, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Indulgence). In addition, other studies have produced scores for dimensions that capture many features of I-C that are not associated with Hofstede's name and thus remain beyond the scope of this article. These dimensions include Beugelsdijk and Welzel's (2018) I-C, Inglehart and Baker's (2000) traditional vs. secular rational and survival vs. self-expression values, Schwartz' (2006) autonomy vs. embeddedness and egalitarianism vs. hierarchy value orientations, Welzel's (2013) emancipative values, the GLOBE Project's institutional and in-group collectivism (House et al., 2004), and Pelham et al.'s (2022) global collectivism index.

We encourage interested readers to examine these studies, too, as they provide a valuable broader context. Our hope is that consumers of Hofstede's research will better understand the types of data endorsed by the three sources presented above, how they differ, and then choose which of Hofstede's concepts and sets of country scores they would like to employ in their own work, if they choose any at all. Next, we turn toward Hofstede's original definition and measurement of I-C so that we can subsequently explain Minkov and colleagues' reformulation of its operationalization, measurement, and their revised I-C scores.

### Hofstede's original Individualism-Collectivism

Hofstede (2011) defined I-C as follows:

Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, Collectivism, as a societal, not an individual characteristic, is the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side we find

<sup>5</sup> The close statistical correlation between Power Distance and I-C was also acknowledged by Hofstede (1991), who distinguished the two on conceptual grounds (not statistical ones).

cultures in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other ingroups. (p. 11)

Hofstede (2011) further explicated that Individualism is characterized by self-reliance, personal freedom, and the right to privacy, where individuals prioritize their own thoughts, feelings, and tasks over group needs. In contrast, Collectivism focuses on strong in-group loyalty, maintaining harmony, and relationships, with the community taking precedence over the individual; moreover, behaviors are often guided by social norms and expectations of the group. Hofstede (2001) depicted I-C as being closely tied to societal development, as Collectivism is associated with traditional "Gemeinschaft" societies, emphasizing community and particularism (Parsons & Shils, 1951; Tönnies, 1887/1963). In contrast, Individualism aligns with "Gesellschaft" societies, which are modern or postmodern, highlighting self-orientation, universalism, and personal autonomy (Inglehart, 1997).

Importantly, Hofstede emphasized that I-C is a group-level rather than an individual construct. As Hofstede (2001) explained, "Cultures are not king-size individuals [...] and their internal logic cannot be understood in the terms used for the personality dynamics of individuals" (p. 17). Instead, culture arises from interactions between individuals in a specific context, creating a system that is distinct from and cannot be reduced to the traits of those individuals; it is not simply an extension of individual attributes (Akaliyski et al., 2025). Therefore, cultural-level I-C should not be conflated with seemingly similar dimensions operationalized at the individual level that describe psychological characteristics of individuals such as vertical and horizontal Individualism and Collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) or self-construals (Vignoles et al., 2016).

Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) measured Individualism through items emphasizing personal time, freedom in one's approach to work, and challenging tasks for personal accomplishment, whereas Collectivism was gauged using opportunities for skill development, good physical working conditions, and the full utilization of skills (pp. 92–93) (see Table 2 for item wording). Hofstede's reasoning was that Individualism is characterized by a desire for personal autonomy and self-fulfillment through work, whereas Collectivism focuses on the importance of group welfare, job security, and a sense of belonging within the work environment.

The literature scrutinizing Hofstede's I-C index is voluminous and requires no detailed repetition (e.g., Baskerville, 2003; Bond, 2002; Brewer & Venaik, 2011; Gelfand et al., 2004; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1997; McSweeney, 2002; Minkov, 2018; Minkov et al., 2017). We briefly list the main issues on which contemporary scholars largely agree:

1. **Poor face validity:** Few of the items directly tap central differences between Individualism and Collectivism such as the focus on loose ties between individuals (Individualism) vs. strong ingroups (Collectivism).
2. **Inadequate content validity:** The items do not capture the full range of the concept described in Hofstede's I-C definition (e.g., Hofstede, 2011).
3. **Outdated data:** Data were collected more than 50 years ago. Subsequent cultural changes are likely not in parallel,<sup>6</sup> and new values may have even diverged since then (Jackson & Medvedev, 2024).
4. **Lack of data representativeness:** The data collected from IBM branch employees are likely not representative for their respective nations, as survey participants were largely highly educated and middle class, a category that differs greatly between countries (for instance, middle class in France equates with the average individual, whereas middle class in India consists of roughly the top 5 % in terms of socio-economic status).
5. **Inconsistency of data sources:** The sample in Hofstede (1980) included only 40 countries, to which 10 more countries with less complete data were added in Hofstede (2001)<sup>7</sup>, whereas the remaining scores are based on subsequent replications or "informed estimates" by cultural experts (i.e., not based on survey data).

Given these issues and the accumulation of large amounts of new data and knowledge over the last half a century since Hofstede introduced his groundbreaking work, updating the I-C scores for the 21st century was viewed by many as long overdue. We turn to this update by Minkov in the next section.

### The revised Minkov-Hofstede I-C index

Although IBM's data were arguably the best available at Hofstede's time, it has become widely acknowledged that large-scale international surveys are desirable to assess whether I-C replicates with representative samples. One such large-scale study was financed by MediaCom (a British multinational company) and administered in 2015 by Hofstede Insights. Data were collected mostly by Lightspeed (a company specializing in consumer behavior research) from more than 55,000 probabilistically selected individuals in 56 countries, closely representing their populations on basic demographic characteristics (Minkov, 2018). Using these data, Minkov began collaborating with Hofstede to revise his model, yet differences of opinion regarding how extensive and what types of changes

<sup>6</sup> Hofstede argued that even if country scores change, they do so in parallel, maintaining the same relative positions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). For example, if all country scores from around 1970 increased by 20 % toward Individualism by 2024, the new scores would still be valid, as they would correlate perfectly with the old scores.

<sup>7</sup> In Hofstede (1980), the inclusion criterion was that a country had at least eight respondents in at least four out of seven occupational categories (e.g., managers, system engineers) surveyed by IBM. In Hofstede (2001), this criterion was relaxed, allowing the inclusion of 10 more countries with significantly smaller sample sizes, ranging between 56 and 132 respondents. Additionally, the Yugoslavian sample was split after the country's division into Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian samples.

**Table 2**  
Items Measuring Individualism-Collectivism in Hofstede’s and the Revised Minkov-Hofstede Measures.

	Hofstede’s original I-C	Revised Minkov-Hofstede I-C scores (102 countries)	
		Items for 55 countries (Minkov et al., 2017)	Additional items for 47 countries (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022)
Individualism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal time: have a job that leaves you sufficient time for your personal or family life</li> <li>2. Freedom: have considerable freedom to adopt your own approach to this job</li> <li>3. Challenge: have challenging work to do—work from which you can get a personal sense of accomplishment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If I could, I would allow people to break useless or meaningless laws and rules.</li> <li>2. If necessary, I will argue with people of my rank even if that can lead to a conflict.</li> <li>3. I rarely observe any religious rules.</li> <li>4. I hate to be a boss. I prefer to mind my own life and leave other people alone.</li> <li>5. I see fame and glory as useless to me.</li> <li>6. I am ready to do favors only for people who also do me favors.</li> <li>7. I arrive exactly on time for meetings or other events. I am hardly ever late.</li> </ol>	High justifiability of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Homosexuality</li> <li>2. Abortion</li> <li>3. Divorce</li> </ol>
Collectivism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training: have training opportunities (to improve your skills or learn new skills)</li> <li>2. Physical conditions: have good physical working conditions (good ventilation and lighting, adequate workspace, etc.)</li> <li>3. Use of skills: fully use your skills and abilities on the job</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If I could, I would make all people in our society follow all our laws and rules very strictly.</li> <li>2. I usually try to avoid conflicts.</li> <li>3. I am a very religious person. I follow the rules of my religion very strictly.</li> <li>4. I like to tell people what to do and be their boss.</li> <li>5. I would like to achieve fame and glory.</li> <li>6. I can do big and expensive favors for my friends just to see them happy.</li> <li>7. I am often at least 5–10 minutes late for meetings or other events.</li> </ol>	Low justifiability of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Homosexuality</li> <li>2. Abortion</li> <li>3. Divorce</li> </ol>

*Note.* Hofstede’s items comprise three Individualism and three Collectivism items. Minkov et al.’s (2017) scale comprise seven items, each including three options: one indicating Individualism, one indicating Collectivism, and one neutral (“I am somewhere here, in between these two”). Minkov and Kaasa’s (2022) three items ask respondents to indicate whether the statements (homosexuality, abortion, and divorce) are justifiable on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 “Never justifiable” to 10 “Always justifiable.”

were desirable led Minkov to pursue his research separately.

Minkov’s revised model’s definition of I-C focuses on creating an inductive theory of I-C based on what cultural traits tend to go together, although Minkov acknowledges borrowing from Shalom Schwartz’s work (e.g., Schwartz, 2006). Specifically, Minkov et al. (2024) described Collectivism at the national level as consisting of three facets: conformism (the tendency in a society to pressure members into uniformity and submission), social ascendancy (the tendency to prioritize acquisition of power and high social status), and exclusionism (the tendency to promote group-based privileges and exclusion of out-groups). Conformism and exclusionism were well-acknowledged by Hofstede (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010) as characteristics of collectivist societies, while the opposites—personal freedom and universalism—describe individualist societies. The main difference with Hofstede’s model concerns social ascendancy, which relates to hierarchy and thus to Power Distance. Minkov incorporated social ascendancy into the larger I-C dimension, given its statistical overlap with the other I-C components. The three components in Minkov’s models were seen as manifolds—i.e., mutually reinforcing cultural traits that also have shared underpinnings in societal institutions (Minkov et al., 2024). For example, in a collectivist culture where group boundaries prevail, universalist state institutions that expectedly treat all citizens equally would be impaired, which would then encourage individuals to pursue power and status that can ascertain the satisfaction of their needs.

Consequently, there are great differences in how Hofstede and Minkov have operationalized the I-C concept. Items measuring each of the three facets were used to generate a scale for I-C and compute scores for 55 countries (Minkov et al., 2017). Specifically, items 1–3 in Table 2 intend to measure conformity, items 4–6 social ascendancy, but exclusionism is measured only by item 7. Minkov and Kaasa (2022) used three new items from the WVS (i.e., justifiability of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce, which were assumed to be more permissible in individualist cultures) to calculate country scores for 47 additional nations. This was a parsimonious operationalization of I-C focusing primarily on conformity (i.e., to traditional norms) versus individual freedom.

The differences in sampling and operationalization between Hofstede and Minkov’s approaches resulted in two strongly correlated, yet not entirely overlapping, sets of country scores ( $r = .75, p < .00001, n = 58$ ). The reliance on higher-quality nationally representative data arguably led to an improved face validity for the country scores, resolving many anomalies in Hofstede’s rankings. For example, it was puzzling that India scored higher in Individualism than Argentina and Greece, Portugal and Slovenia lower than Mexico and the Philippines, and that Hungary ended up being the most individualist culture in Europe after the UK. In Minkov’s country rankings, these nations are near their neighbors with similar historical backgrounds and levels of socio-economic development, which makes the scores more plausible in this regard. Yet, new puzzles emerged, such as Japan’s score being higher than that of the US, to which we will return in a later section.

Although Minkov and colleagues have made numerous invaluable contributions to the study of I-C (and the study of culture more

generally), like any seminal work, this research has also drawn some criticism. First, the face validity of some of the I-C items is questionable. For example, the rationale of using “I arrive exactly on time for meetings or other events” as a measure of universalism’s component of Individualism versus “I am often at least 5–10 minutes late for meetings or other events” as a measure of outgroup exclusionism’s component of Collectivism is not immediately obvious,<sup>8</sup> leading Minkov himself to conclude, “We admit that our operationalization of these two concepts is not strongly convincing” (Minkov et al., 2017, p. 399). Also, items measuring social ascendancy raise questions about whether or not social ascendancy is best associated with Collectivism (“I like to tell people what to do and be their boss” and “I would like to achieve fame and glory”). Minkov (2018) theorized that social ascendancy is favored by people in collectivist societies because it brings a better life and more privileges, including for one’s ingroup. However, these items do not mention anything about ascendancy for the benefit of one’s fellow in-group members (i.e., power and fame can be in the pursuit of one’s own goals and fulfilment, in line with Individualism). Therefore, they could also be interpreted as focusing on the respondent’s individual differentiation from others in their social and work environments and hence risk conflating responses favoring Collectivism and Individualism.

Earlier, the content validity of Hofstede’s model was questioned, as the domains described in the definition of I-C are not all present in his instrument. The same could be said for Minkov’s, as neither Minkov et al. (2017) nor Minkov and Kaasa’s (2022) I-C-related items cover personal identity (group-based vs. individual), the relative permanence of group membership (permanence in collectivist societies vs. mobility in individualist societies), or the degree of dependence on one’s ingroup. However, note that these concepts are not explicitly part of Minkov’s I-C conceptualization, which explains the lack of corresponding items in his I-C instrument. The inclusion of social ascendancy items, on the other hand, appears to have been included in the scale by Minkov partly due to its statistical overlap with the remaining items, and partly due to his argument that social ascendancy results in social inequality, which in his view is a form of exclusionism. In other words, this is a data-driven approach of constructing I-C based on the statistical overlap between items and facets (i.e., conformity, social ascendancy, and exclusionism) that were not purposefully designed to measure Hofstede’s original I-C concept, but were instead inspired by Schwartz’s work, where conformism (called “embeddedness”) and social ascendancy (called “hierarchy”) are correlated statistically and associated conceptually with one another.

Another concern about Minkov and colleagues’ country scores relates to their calculation methods. In computing country scores, Minkov mixed data from two different surveys, as his original 7-item scale for I-C was used by Minkov et al. (2017) to generate scores for 55 countries, yet Minkov and Kaasa (2022) instead used three new, additional items from the WVS to compute scores for 47 more countries. However, these two data sources do not produce identical scores. For example, if one relies on the WVS data, Sweden would be the most individualist culture in the world, whereas according to the 2015 Hofstede Insights data, the Netherlands leads the ranking. Such differences may influence conceptualizations about specific countries and intercultural training program content and/or designs. Therefore, the compatibility of these two sets of scores needs to be established, or the scores themselves should be recalculated and revised using a single reliable measure.

### The US-Japan comparison and its implications for other country scores

One of the changes in Minkov’s new I-C scores that sparked controversy is that the US and Japan score almost identically, with Japan even being slightly more individualist (62–60 rating).<sup>9</sup> This finding has divided the community of scholars and intercultural trainers. On the one hand, there was nothing surprising in this (Matsumoto, 2002), as many other global studies of cultures aside from Hofstede’s have assigned these countries similar scores on I-C or closely related dimensions. These include Beugelsdijk and Welzel’s (2018) I-C index (with Japan scoring slightly lower than the US), GLOBE’s in-group Collectivism practices (Gelfand et al., 2004) (where Japan scored slightly more collectivist), Pelham et al.’s (2022) Collectivism (with Japan and the US scoring exactly the same), Inglehart’s survival vs. self-expression (where the US scored slightly higher than Japan) and traditional vs. secular-rational values (with Japan scoring significantly higher than the US) (Inglehart & Welzel, 2022), Schwartz’s autonomy vs. embeddedness (where Japan scored slightly higher than the US), and Akaliyski’s (2023) freedom aspirations (almost identical scores). Although US culture has been idealized by many since the post-World War II period for its individualism, empirical support has not been so categorical. As Inglehart and Baker (2000) concluded in their seminal work:

It is misleading to view cultural change as “Americanization.” Industrializing societies in general are not becoming like the United States. In fact, the United States seems to be a deviant case, as many observers of American life have argued (Lipset 1990, 1996)—its people hold much more traditional values and beliefs than do those in any other equally prosperous society (Baker 1999). If any societies exemplify the cutting edge of cultural change, it would be the Nordic countries. (p. 49)

Yet Hofstede’s work has created a deep-seated belief that the US and Japan exemplify the two opposite poles of the I-C dimension, even though Japan scored slightly above the average on Individualism in his ranking. Why? Japan makes an appearance 40 times in Hofstede’s (2001) seminal book “Culture’s Consequences,” all in the Individualism-Collectivism chapter, with almost all of them associating Japan with Collectivism. This contrast between the two countries has been reinforced by another influential theory that

<sup>8</sup> Minkov justifies the inclusion of time punctuality as a measure of Individualism by linking it to universalism versus out-group exclusionism, suggesting that in individualistic societies, punctuality reflects respect for outgroup interests and personal responsibility, whereas, in collectivist societies, laxity in time management may indicate less concern for outgroup interests and a tendency to evade personal accountability.

<sup>9</sup> These score from the Culture Factor Website were rescaled to vary between 0 and 100 similarly to the remaining Hofstede dimensions. In the original publication by Minkov and Kaasa (2022), Japan and the US have scores of 42 and 33, respectively, on a scale ranging from –291–182.

depicts Japan as an interdependent (akin to collectivist) and the US as an independent culture (akin to individualist) (Kitayama & Salvador, 2024; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A large volume of studies have been conducted based on this theoretical premise, and many intercultural training programs are deeply embedded in this assumption.<sup>10</sup> This raises the questions of why Japan scores so high in Individualism when it is typically associated with Collectivism, and why the US is so much lower in Minkov's than in Hofstede's ranking. In the remainder of this section, we examine some of the controversies surrounding how I-C is measured and calculated in the form of country scores. These issues arise in the debate over where Japan and the US fall in the I-C continuum but are important when considering all country scores and the concept of I-C more generally.

First, like any measure of cultural patterns that is globally applied, I-C can overlook important local socially constructed meanings that reveal crucial information about those cultures. For example, Minkov et al. (2017) presented seven indicators of the US being less individualistic than indicated in Hofstede's scores: relatively high religiosity, a weak welfare system, spending less on foreign aid per capita, higher corruption rates, imposition of a death penalty, and gay rights and abortion remaining highly debated topics—all of these in contrast to Northwestern European countries, which score the highest on the new I-C index. We could debate whether any of these are signs of relatively weaker Individualism. For example, Minkov et al. (2017) contended that a weak welfare system demonstrates a low concern for others outside of one's ingroup and an inability to develop universal and impartial state institutions that treat everyone as individuals instead of as members of collectives. This is particularly observable in developing countries where people normally rely not on the state but rather on their ingroups for support (in exchange for loyalty), as explained by Hofstede (1980). In other words, societies with generous welfare states tend to have more individualist cultures compared to weak welfare regimes where the extended family remains the most reliable safety net. This is certainly one way of interpreting the meaning of welfare states in relation to I-C that appears valid when one examines patterns at the societal level.

It can also be countered that weaker welfare instead reflects an emphasis on the individual through the values of self-reliance (i.e., people must take care of themselves rather than the state doing it for them) and freedom (i.e., people can use their earnings as they choose by minimizing taxation)—a common line of thinking in the US among economic conservatives touting American individualism. By associating a weak welfare system with collectivist values, or assuming that a state institution always has the same meaning across cultures, one risks overlooking (and possibly misrepresenting) locally constructed meanings—i.e., the attributions that people make about their values, behaviors, and social systems. Thus, researchers and practitioners need to continuously unpack such local meanings and take care not to impose frameworks upon them without carefully considering the evidence on both sides (i.e., to determine whether locally constructed meanings or universal frameworks should be applied to understand a specific cultural context). Universal cultural frameworks such as that of I-C and studies at other levels of analysis unpacking local meanings are often based on different theoretical and epistemological assumptions and need not agree with each other; the knowledge produced by either of these scholarly approaches can play an important role in the construction of knowledge about cultures around the world.

Another point of contention revolves around Minkov and colleagues' operationalization and measurement of I-C that are predicated on the notion that individuals in Collectivist cultures identify with ascribed groups such as extended families, ethnic groups, and religions, whereas Individualism relates to non-ascribed groups, such as work organizations and other changeable group associations (Schachner & Akaliyski, 2024). Such an emphasis on extended family, religion, clan and other ascribed ingroups also exists in Hofstede's framework, yet it has been frequently applied to work and other settings. Schachner and Akaliyski (2024) contended that in Japan, extended families are less important than in the past, which presumably aligns with Japan's higher Individualism score (Matsumoto, 2002). Yet it can also be argued that Collectivism is not limited to specific groups; rather, more important is the strength of the bonds within those groups and the permeability of their group boundaries. Minkov et al. (2017) have provided such a generalizable set of criteria: collectivist societies promote ingroups with clear boundaries characterized by strong interpersonal bonds and loyalty (whereas ingroups in individualist societies are characterized by weak bonds with vague boundaries). Thus, collectivist groups could also be defined more broadly. Rather than being based on specific ingroups such as family or whether groups are ascribed or voluntary, intensity of ingroup bonds and identity can be assessed, and if such bonds and identity are strong, then these can be taken as signs of Collectivism. Japan is a case in point, as the institution of the extended family has weakened, but people often identify quite strongly with non-ascribed groups that demand loyalty and conformity (Komisarof, 2012), much like ascribed groups in various collectivist cultures, including work organizations (Komisarof, 2011) and university student clubs (Poole, 2010). Thus, "what is the group?" is a crucial conceptual question that any I-C framework needs to specify precisely, as the resulting country scores are likely to differ considerably depending on that decision (i.e., as to whether groups include only ascribed or both ascribed and non-ascribed ones such as the workplace, the local community, or even larger society).

Thus, any large-scale examination inevitably paints with a wide brush, and it is based on assumptions that may overlook local socially constructed meanings and characterize certain cultures in a non-intuitive manner. Although the big picture remains the same (i.e., Hofstede's and Minkov's scores are highly correlated), the details may differ significantly and pose challenges in interpreting the very concept of I-C. The debates on this question are likely to continue as they involve very different assumptions about the nature of I-

<sup>10</sup> An often-overlooked fact is that Japan scores slightly above the median for Individualism (rank 35–37 out of 76 countries/regions) even in Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010).

C.<sup>11</sup>**“Real” I-C doesn’t exist!**

Such disputes about the “correct” country scores underline a common misconception among cross-cultural scholars and practitioners, namely that dimensions are objectively existing entities, and we only need to find the right conceptual and measurement tools to discover their “real” nature. Hofstede has eloquently described this misconception:

In the first session of a new student class, I used to write big: CULTURE DOESN’T EXIST. In the same way, values don’t exist, dimensions don’t exist. They are constructs, which have to prove their usefulness by their ability to explain and predict behavior. The moment they stop doing that, we should be prepared to drop them, or trade them for something better. (Hofstede, 2002, p. 1359)

Therefore, we want to provide readers with realistic expectations of the kind of “truths” they can discover in country scores. Any cultural dimension is a researcher’s creation that is based on specific assumptions and a generalization of a much more complex reality. As we explained earlier, depending on how we conceptualize the group to which cultures are loyal to (Collectivism) or free from (Individualism), we may arrive at distinct country scores. Composing or selecting items and determining how exactly to combine them to create a cultural dimension inevitably relies on subjective judgment (Minkov et al., 2023). Thus, positioning one conceptualization or measurement as inherently more “real” than another may not be productive—a view that both Hofstede and Minkov have expressed.

That said, both frameworks justify their existence through their capacity to explain observed patterns of behavior—so-called nomological (or predictive) validity (Welzel et al., 2023). In this regard, Minkov et al. (2017) achieved stronger correlations with key national-level variables that both he and Hofstede expected to correlate with I-C, such as the Rule of Law and Political Freedom Indices, compared to Hofstede’s index. Further, Minkov and Kaasa (2022) demonstrated strong correlations ( $r \geq .70$ ) with additional indicators such as transparency versus corruption, gender equality, GDP per capita (PPP), and innovation output. This evidence seems to suggest that Minkov’s new scores offer certain advantages, although further testing could provide a clearer understanding, possibly affirming their broader applicability in capturing cultural patterns and their potential applications to intercultural communication.

**Lack of isomorphism: A concern for both frameworks**

A further controversy surrounding I-C research arises from the fact that such constructs may form different structures at national and individual levels of analysis. For example, Minkov (2018) used 14 items that yielded a two-component structure at the national level to create his new framework consisting of I-C and Monumentalism-Flexibility; yet when Minkov et al. (2024) analyzed those same items at the individual level using US data, they yielded a 4-component structure—none of which corresponded, either conceptually or empirically, to the national-level constructs of I-C or Monumentalism-Flexibility. This is not surprising, as Hofstede also failed to find his dimensions at the individual level. When scholars research I-C within nations, they may discover different constructs, such as the four distinct combinations of vertical vs. horizontal Individualism and Collectivism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), but such distinctions do not exist at the cultural level (Minkov et al., 2017).

When constructs have the same structure at the group and individual levels, this is known as isomorphism (see, e.g., Fischer & Poortinga, 2012). For comparative culturologists like Hofstede and Minkov, a lack of isomorphism is not problematic because they view cultures and individuals as fundamentally different (Akaliyski et al., 2025; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Minkov et al., 2024). Yet Fischer and Poortinga (2012) contended that isomorphism is important, as it is parsimonious and can potentially be used to clarify how individual behavior and societal contexts reflect and interact with each other.

Though this debate is far from resolved, we believe that if isomorphism is not found, it is preferable that we are able to explain the reason—especially considering the fact that researchers, including comparative culturologists, broadly agree that there is a symbiotic relationship between individual and group-level phenomena (e.g., Akaliyski et al., 2021). For example, if Japan is somewhat individualist (Minkov et al., 2017) as indicated by the new I-C country scores, yet Japanese individuals tend to be interdependent, as claimed by Kitayama and colleagues (Kitayama et al., 2022; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), then how is it possible that an individualist societal context produces predominantly interdependent individuals? Such an integration between levels of analysis is currently lacking. Expanding on Kitayama’s theory, Vignoles et al. (2016) found not one, but seven, independent dimensions of self-construals related to independence-interdependence at the individual level, and both Japan and the US scored above the sample average on some and below the average on others. Although cultural level analyses present us with a much more simplified picture of a uniform I-C dimension, the way individuals within cultures can be characterized appears much more complex. Understanding this complexity would help to grasp how the national and individual levels inform and shape each other, which has obvious benefits for researchers and educators/trainers who teach the relevance of I-C and other cultural dimensions in interpersonal intercultural communication.

<sup>11</sup> The coauthors hold opposing views on this debate and, after many spirited discussions, have agreed to disagree. For Komisarof, an American with 27 years living and working in Japan (at the time of writing), the difference between American and Japanese cultures is clear, with Japan being comparatively more collectivist than the US. In contrast, as an Eastern European who has lived in Japan for two years, as well as seven other countries, Akaliyski finds Japan far more individualist than it is often assumed to be. While the arguments on either side could fill an entire book, the examples provided here should be seen as illustrative rather than exhaustive.

## How appropriate is I-C for intercultural training and education?

Hofstede's conceptualization of I-C has been a dominant framework in intercultural education (Skow & Stephan, 2015) and training (Bhawuk & Bhawuk, 2020) for decades. Professionals in these fields have been attracted to I-C's definition for its utility in making sense of intercultural encounters and to the succinctness of country scores as a means of gauging cross-cultural differences. Therefore, it is critical for professionals to understand what both Hofstede's and Minkov's I-C scores represent so they can decide whether, and how, to employ these scores in their work.

For instance, professionals should be clear about the questionnaire items on which these scores are based, and about the domains of I-C that these items do (and do not) measure. They also need to ask themselves whether these domains (for instance, social ascendancy, exclusionism, and conformism in Minkov's instrument) are relevant to individual-level behaviors and attitudes that their clients and/or students are likely to encounter when engaging in intercultural communication. In other words, in addition to group-level constructs like I-C measuring associations between variables found at the societal level, those variables would also ideally have meaningful relationships with interpersonal differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors that students/clients are likely to encounter in their own daily intercultural communication. This is made theoretically plausible given the broadly recognized mutual constitution of culture and individual's psychology (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). For example, a teacher preparing students to study abroad can consider which I-C framework, or aspects of a specific framework, to employ in their classes based upon which framework most trenchantly addresses differences that their students might encounter in other cultures in terms of teachers' educational styles and their expectations for student comportment in the classroom. People can then utilize concepts such as I-C to gain insight into the meaning of confusing intercultural encounters—specifically by examining their own cultural schemata, comparing them with people from other countries with whom they are experiencing difficult communication, and then enacting new behaviors that are acceptable to both parties, hopefully resulting in more positive intercultural relationships.

Despite the limitations that we have previously described in applying I-C to analyze individual behaviors, I-C arguably still has utility for a broad range of intercultural interactions. As Akaliyski et al. (2025) noted, cultures are distinct types of contexts in which people are socialized, so intercultural communication is that which occurs “between people who are accustomed to different types of contexts, and not necessarily between different types of persons.” Having a national-level construct for I-C empowers us to know what kind of cultural system people have been exposed to and what expectations they are likely to have for other individuals and society, though it does not mean that everyone raised within that system will hold the same values or behave identically (i.e., the mean I-C score for a country can characterize the population as a whole, but there will also be variability around that mean). Therefore, I-C scores can be informative about societal-level institutions and the prevalence of certain behaviors. For example, as Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) ascertained, individualist cultures tend to have lower levels of corruption and to be more democratic, and Minkov and Kaasa (2022) added that these countries also have more patents per capita. These are all important culturally-driven societal characteristics with real-life implications for international businesses, even if none of them describe individuals. This means that, even if collectivist cultures have a higher prevalence of corruption, the vast majority of the population may still never engage in such practices.

Furthermore, I-C scores can provide valuable insight into the prevalence of certain values and beliefs within a culture. For instance, according to Minkov's framework, a high Collectivism score indicates that individuals in that culture are more likely to prioritize conformity, social hierarchy, and exclusion of outgroups. What we cannot discern is the extent to which these values are present in particular individuals or in what combination. Nonetheless, knowing that individuals in such a culture have been exposed to these values to a greater degree than individuals in a country that scores higher on Individualism can be useful for setting expectations and interpreting intercultural interactions. Thus, group-level concepts can be used to some extent to anticipate individual-level behaviors, empowering people to avoid intercultural conflicts that could have been avoided had interlocutors been better informed about each other's cultures.

Finally, though I-C country scores provide useful information when understood within the context of the definition, operationalization, and method of measurement from which they were created, when country scores are reified, they can obscure understanding of some of the nuances and even contradictions found in any culture. In other words, they do not necessarily tell people how Individualism and Collectivism may manifest differently across specific social spheres (public vs. private) and domains (e.g., health practices, friendships, or work attitudes and norms) in a society, nor do they tell us how such manifestations vary when we compare the same type of context across cultures.

Hence, even in countries like the US and Japan that have almost identical I-C scores in Minkov's revised framework, people should not assume that Individualism and Collectivism manifest identically across various contexts in those societies. Akaliyski (2023), for example, demonstrated that East Asian societies tend to emphasize different aspects of freedom, such as secularism and personal autonomy, compared to Western cultures, which value other aspects, such as gender equality and individual freedom more strongly, relative to their level of development.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the country scores can be an important first step in learning about a society's cultural context, but then, people need to learn about local socially constructed meanings that affect the contexts in which people communicate intercultural. In other words, scores for I-C and other cultural dimensions can be utilized as points of departure in discussions in classes and workshops about cultural differences—rather than as reified, unassailable encapsulations of cultural patterns (Skow & Stephan, 2015). This principle is particularly important because cultural patterns in thought and behavior that impact intercultural

<sup>12</sup> Akaliyski (2023) found that the more socio-economically developed a country is, the more its population values freedom; moreover, this relationship holds regardless of cultural heritage—whether Confucian or Western.

communication vary according to the social situation, the relationships with people present, and other contextual variables in question (Liu et al., 2025). Therefore, to improve intercultural communication outcomes, practitioners should dig deeper to understand such contextual variations within any culture. Once a specific country's I-C scores are known, educators and trainers can then guide learners on deeper explorations to grasp how Individualism and Collectivism manifest themselves within their society(ies) of interest.

### Implications for scholars

After reviewing the two sets of I-C scores, we conclude that, although Hofstede's framework has been foundational and remains a valuable tool for understanding cross-cultural differences, it is characterized by numerous limitations. Minkov's scores, despite some shared weaknesses, are part of ongoing efforts to provide a closer approximation to contemporary cultural realities, showing improved face, content, and nomological validity. As research efforts continue, we encourage scholars to consider this and other newer alternatives (described below), and to compare the benefits of Minkov's framework and other models with those of Hofstede's.

Critically, these new frameworks are not identical, and no measure is without flaws. The key is for practitioners and researchers to identify the model that conceptualizes, operationalizes, and measures I-C most appropriately for the work in which they are engaged. For practitioners, this means that their I-C framework of choice needs to focus on domains of human thought and behavior that can improve their quality of intercultural communication, or the types of intercultural communication for which they are preparing their students or clients. For researchers, it remains essential to critically assess all cultural dimension scores, and to continuously refine theoretical constructs and improve measurement.

Recognizing the limitations of Hofstede's scores, many scholars have turned to alternative measures or combinations thereof. These include not only Minkov and Kaasa's (2022) I-C index, but also Schwartz's (2006) autonomy-embeddedness value orientation, Beugelsdijk and Welzel's (2018) I-C, and Welzel's (2013) emancipative values. Each of these alternatives builds on or relates to Hofstede's foundational work while providing an arguably more reliable and empirically valid representation of cultural values. While these dimensions are highly correlated with Hofstede's I-C, it should be noted that they are not identical, and different conclusions can be drawn in empirical investigations depending on the measure used (see, e.g., Akaliyski et al., 2022). Therefore, scholars should make informed decisions on the most suitable dimension for their empirical investigations.

### Where to go from here? Concluding proposals for moving forward

Given the current state of research on cultural dimensions, particularly I-C, how can researchers, educators, and other practitioners move forward? We provide three broad recommendations:

1. **Critical examination of cultural dimensions:** Intercultural communication trainers, teachers, and scholars should strive for a more thorough understanding of how cultural dimensions such as I-C are conceptualized and operationalized, and to examine them with a critical lens. Such an examination involves careful consideration of the components that comprise these constructs (i.e., the specific facets and the items used to operationalize them). The data need to be examined for their size, quality, representativeness, and recency, whereas the lack of transparency in reporting such details should be considered a red flag. The methods for dimensionality reduction (e.g., exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis, principal component analysis, multidimensional scaling, and index construction), along with the theoretical foundations and statistical assumptions under which these methods were performed, and goodness of fit statistics<sup>13</sup> should also be considered. Cultural experts will be better positioned to assess constructs such as I-C if they are statistically literate and familiar with key statistical procedures involved in dimension construction. Understanding statistical uncertainty, particularly the concept of confidence intervals and statistical significance (or probability of outcomes in Bayesian approaches), can help practitioners recognize that national scores are not fixed points but are subject to variability. Even when confidence intervals are not explicitly reported, it is important to remain cautious when interpreting these scores, as they often reflect a range of possible values rather than a precise figure. This range of possibility reflects also the fact that there is a large variation in values within societies and the sample we draw from the target population will never represent it precisely. As an example of such variation, younger, more educated, females, living in larger cities tend to express stronger individualistic values than older, less educated, men, living in rural areas (Akaliyski et al., 2021). Speaking to the issue of representation, if a sample does not represent each of these groups in exactly the same proportions as they exist in the actual population, then the sample statistics would likely be biased.<sup>14</sup> Given these complexities, we recognize that some educators and trainers may forego concentrating on scores and instead focus on the definition and applications of I-C, encouraging learners to analyze and discuss how I-C manifests itself across various life domains, contexts, and human relationships that impact people's daily intercultural communication.

<sup>13</sup> Goodness of fit statistics are used to evaluate how well a model fits the data. Dimensionality reduction methods utilize different fit measures. Factor analysis commonly uses indices such as chi-square and RMSEA, principal component analysis typically looks at explained variance, and multidimensional scaling utilizes stress values, among other method-specific statistics. Cronbach's alpha is often employed to assess the internal consistency or reliability of a set of items in a scale or questionnaire.

<sup>14</sup> This fact should also serve as advice against relying on personal impressions from our own network, which is highly unlikely to represent the actual population of the country we want to "assess."

2. **Validation through external evidence and nomological validity:** To evaluate and scrutinize cultural dimensions effectively, it is essential to corroborate them against a broader set of external evidence, a process known as nomological validation (Minkov et al., 2024). Cultural dimensions should be consistent with what we know about countries' characteristics, such as their development level, geography, historical background, religious traditions, and type and quality of institutions. For example, neighboring countries with shared socio-political contexts, such as Norway and Sweden, should exhibit similar cultural patterns. Significant discrepancies between countries with otherwise similar profiles should raise questions about the validity of the scores. Practitioners should compare cultural dimensions with relevant external indicators—ranging from economic and political factors to social behaviors—to determine whether the scores are meaningful and contextually appropriate. Intuitions alone often fail in this quest, as numerous cognitive biases such as confirmation bias, “the Illusory Truth Effect,” and Experimenter’s Expectations Bias<sup>15</sup> can easily cloud one’s judgment (for details beyond those in the footnote below, see, e.g., Kahneman, 2011). Rigorous, theory-driven statistical assessments represent essential tools for ensuring a scientifically sound approach to developing reliable, valid, and replicable measures.
3. **Encouraging further research on cultural dimensions:** Recognizing that no existing framework for cultural dimensions is without limitations, we advocate for continued research and development in this area. Future endeavors to conceptualize and measure I-C should adhere to strict standards, relying on high-quality, representative samples that reflect current cultural realities. Moreover, the constructs need to be conceptually well-defined and coherent, with clear positioning among existing cultural theories. Constructs should also undergo rigorous validation processes, including testing for internal coherence and convergent, discriminant,<sup>16</sup> and nomological validity. Additionally, employing longitudinal analyses to track cultural stability or change can shed more light on temporal dynamics and causal processes, thereby further enhancing our theoretical underpinnings of cultural differences.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have clarified the rationale for the revision of I-C scores by Minkov and colleagues, which have been adopted by The Culture Factor but not by Hofstede’s website, so readers can make informed decisions about whether or not they would like to utilize I-C in their own work in the future, and if so, which iteration of I-C is preferable. We strongly recommend that those in intercultural education and/or training pass on an understanding of I-C’s definition, operationalization, and measurement to their students and/or clients if they are not currently doing so. Since the new I-C scores are based on a different set of questions than those from Hofstede’s original instrument, as well as a novel conceptualization of I-C, professionals should ask themselves how the concept of I-C can best be used to improve intercultural communication research and practice. We hope that the present article has served as one such step forward in this process.

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<sup>15</sup> Confirmation bias is the propensity to selectively seek, interpret, and emphasize evidence that aligns with preexisting beliefs while ignoring contradictory information. The Illusory Truth Effect refers to the tendency to believe a statement is true simply because it is easier to process or has been repeated frequently, regardless of its accuracy. Experimenter’s Expectations Bias is the tendency of researchers to favor, trust, and publish findings that confirm their own expectations and downplay those that challenge them.

<sup>16</sup> Convergent validity refers to the extent to which two measures of related concepts show a strong correlation. Discriminant validity is the degree to which a measure does not correlate with measures of unrelated concepts, showing it is distinct.

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