

ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL EFFECTS ON BUSINESS CURRICULAR SUBJECT MATTER

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ABSTRACT

It has been argued that culture effects how individuals implement, understand, and teach the curriculum of business courses within a society's educational institutions. The curricula and their subject matter of business faculties reflect the societies in which the curricula are developed and taught. The essay presents a rubric for analyzing this curricular phenomena based on Hofstede and Hofstede's conception that a society's culture constituted in and presented in individuals' views and routines is determinate of professorial understandings and teachings of business subject matter. In particular, Hofstede's indices on Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance are applied to select business curricula from the Slovak Republic and the United States. The analysis includes, for purposes, a summary table of curricular attributes also from a convenience sample; this time of university business programs — two from the Slovak Republic and two from the United States. The overall purpose is to determine if Hofstede's original research is the same today in an era of educational globalization for three distinct populations.

Keywords: business curriculum, global education, organizational cultural, Hofstede, accreditation

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that culture effects how individuals implement, understand, and teach the curriculum of business courses within a society's educational institutions [13; 4; 1]. The curricula and their subject matter of business faculties reflect the societies in which the curricula are developed and in which they are taught.

The essay presents a contextual rubric for analyzing this curricular phenomena based on Hofstede and Hofstede's [13] conception that a society's culture constituted in and presented in individuals' views and routines is determinate of professorial understandings and teachings of business subject matter. The rubric is a framework for analyzing the effects of culture on

curricular adaptations, and accreditation efforts globally. The essay includes a comparative analysis of selected business curricula from the Slovak Republic and the United States. Finally, Hofstede's indices on Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance are applied to a convenience sample from three universities from the Slovak Republic and the United States.

The Global and The Local

The global is always at odds with the local. Friedman [6] used the metaphors of "Lexus" and "Olive Tree" to evoke the conflictive and tension-filled relationships between the push of modernity and the pull of tradition. Friedman's concept of globalization emphasizes that there is a unifying and homogenizing system of markets, societies, and information networks worldwide, which are leveling and standardizing forces: the push of modernity. Standardizing forces are homogenizing.

An aspect of the global is the movement of AACSB International to spread across local situations to impose educational standards of quality on societies' institutionalized business curricula.

The Cultural Matrix

Culture is the concept we use to explain seemingly patterned behaviors from the perspective of a social group. Culture is the complex matrix of behavior; a shared system of valued sensibilities and practices which influence individuals' habitual ways of saying and doing things. Culture is all the things taken-for-granted and presumed as a basis for communication. Culture refers to the usual ways of doing and saying. Culture is the common sense in situations and their affairs and activities. People spend all their time learning how and why to act, learning what emotion goes with what cognitive affair, learning how to use language, how to see things, hear things, and touch things, learning things so well that they become habits of experience. Becoming enculturated and socialized are developmental and evolutionary affairs. Culture is the shared habits of representation, reference, and inference. Every person has an

idiosyncratic take on the habits learned (or each person thinks he or she does.) A typical habit learned is the habit of dependency (and independency.) Part of this phenomenon is an ability and competence at influencing the sense of a situation as defined by the web of social relationships. Being independent or dependent are important, but being able to influence how situations are finished is more important. Humans learn about this phenomenon even before they can name it. Hofstede and Hofstede [13] call this the power distance dimension of a culture. Power distance is an important explanatory concept of behavior. Another learned cultural habit is that of dealing with “up-in-the-air” situations or ambiguous situations. This is Hofstede and Hofstede’s [13] dimension of uncertainty avoidance. A combination of power distance and uncertainty avoidance tacitly focuses the cultural ground for people expounding theories of management and marketing. Following Hofstede and Hofstede, a particular society’s power distance index and uncertainty avoidance index explain managerial styles, organizational governance, information flows and use, and the scope of authority and responsibility. It follows that a society’s relative position to another society in terms of the indices also describes, analyzes and explains business theories used and taught by business faculties to explain to their students how corporate interests work in the “real world.” [8; 18; 20; 7; 12; 14; 21; 13].

Power and Ambiguity

As a hypothesis of situational behavior, power distance allows an explanation of culturally influenced behavior and theories of behavior. Power distance is defined as how “...*the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.*” (italics in original) [13, p. 46; 12, p. xix; 19; 17; 5; 14; 15]. It is also an explanation of the expectations of the powerful or those in positions of power (and influence;) their acceptance is an important as anyone’s acceptance. From within a culture, expectations, acceptances, and uses are natural. Power distance in a particular culture is a way of interpreting relationships between and among people generally. There is a continuum from small to large power distance and use in situations.

As a hypothesis of situations and their affairs, uncertainty avoidance is an explanation of culturally influenced attitudes towards types of situations and other people and things whose interactivity create the situations. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as a cultural perspective reflecting “...*the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations.*” (italics in

original) [13, p. 167; 10; 3; 16; 22]. As Hofstede [12] puts it, uncertainty avoidance “...is the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations” (p. xix). Uncertainty avoidance is a way of explaining characteristics of situations and relationships such as control, conflict and competition, or consensus. The strong to weak uncertainty avoidance continuum describes and elaborates the situational contexts: weak may be conflictive; strong may be consensual. The situations are conflictive pushing for consensus or agreeable pulling for conflict [12; 2; 17].

Culturally Effected Curricula

A society’s culture influences at the local level a course of study in business, its students, and its business faculty. Theories of management, corporate governance, and marketing are derivatives of a society’s culture which, in this paper, is manifested in the frames of power distance and uncertainty avoidance [13]. Accreditation bodies promulgate curricula aimed at providing a universal (if not global) frame of reference for the development and implementation of “ best practices” in business studies. The curriculum of any business faculty is always local; Friedman’s [6] “Olive Trees.” The local situation frames even AACSB International’s model curriculum. Even as this model channels thinking and action globally, the “water” in the channels represents local translations of particular business theories. The frames of power distance and uncertainty avoidance are sluices in the channels of accreditation .

While the frames of power distance and uncertainty avoidance impact social consciousness, universities continue to offer curriculum to address AACSB accreditation and the global marketplace. Our intent is to evaluate the curriculum at four (4) universities (two in the U.S.A. and two in Europe) to determine if each curriculum has a local frame on course content that addresses power distance and uncertainty avoidance across multiple cultures, specifically the U.S.A. and Europe, or if the curriculum has a “globalized” frame that is more homogenized with little content on culture frames for the U.S.A. and Europe.

The following sections lists first, the general requirements of a typical AACSB business bachelors degree program, and second, the courses and brief descriptions on content for the Faculty of Management at Comenius University and Banksa Bystrica in Slovakia for internationally focused business courses in an undergraduate program in business.

Although the undergraduate and graduate programs in Europe all have the same courses required as in an American AACSB accredited university school of business, they appear to reflect the same topics, use similar books, and have the same course titles. However, by examining the syllabi and detailed descriptions, the courses have basic yet intrinsic differences such as those suggested by Hofstede and Hofstede [13]. The courses examined included management, marketing, banking, economics, and human resources management—courses found in a typical school of business common body of knowledge. While reading the following course descriptions taken from the university's website, the course uses the nomenclature of its American counterpart with no indication the context is the same. Further examination reveals a European and Slovak perspective. While framed in a global economy, there is focus and emphasis on the localized culture. Figure 1 (in the Tables and Figures appendix) reflects the typical AACSB curriculum as a composite snapshot from a number of universities as of April 2008.

Comenius University, in Bratislava and Matej Bell University in Banksa Bystrica, Slovakia

The following course descriptions are direct translations taken from both the Comenius University's and Banksa Bystrica University's Faculty of Management websites. The courses described are greater in number and more global than a typical American curriculum. The internationally focused courses and descriptions at two business schools in the Slovak Republic are ancillary to the common body of knowledge found in business curricula in the United States and around the world. While these universities do in fact have a common business body of knowledge comparable to the universities in the United States, there is a significant additional focus on an international environment. The number and varied courses offered here are large in comparison to the relatively sparse international offerings in programs typical to a US business school curriculum.

Bank Marketing

The aim of the subject is to provide a main framework of bank marketing to students of specializations Marketing and Financial Management. The stress is on the effective implementation of marketing strategies into the banks. Also in Slovakia, the banking industry moves from a highly controlled industry to an industry characterized by competition that is more aggressive.

Business in Europe

The aim of the course is to provide students with knowledge of doing business and entrepreneurship in Europe and international business, which they could effectively utilize in their future managerial practice or/and entrepreneurship.

Economics IV

The last part of the course covers capita select that deserves special attention like economic policy (monetary, fiscal and supply side), exchange rate systems, regulation, environmental problems, the European Union, inflation and unemployment. Some remarks are made concerning the distinction between capitalism and socialism.

English for Managers – I-IV

This upper-intermediate Business English [British based as opposed to American] course for students of management follows the communications and functional approach, with an emphasis on both fluency and accuracy. The course is focusing on developing and improving language skills needed for future managers. Students practice and extend language skills such as listening and reading by means of activities in their English class where the latest articles on business and management issues are presented and discussed. Communication skills are extended with emphasis on speaking (e.g. role-plays, mini-talks, discussions, presentations), and on clarity of written work as extra-class activity (e.g. composition of business letters, memoranda, reports, etc.). Furthermore, cognitive knowledge of the English Grammar is developing as required by the students at upper-intermediate and advanced level. Introducing, studying and learning new vocabulary is developed in detail, particularly new words and phrases associated with Business English.

Global Networks

The main aim of this course is to grasp the fundamental principles of the internet, its functions, use in business, connectivity and creation of web pages. Part of the course is the creation of personal web pages with two levels of immersion.

Intercultural Management

The course shows importance, depth and influence of cultural specifics in various countries and geographic areas on management and business practices and helps to prepare students for professional business interaction with these countries. The regions covered are Europe, North America, South America, Arabic countries and Israel, Asia, Australia and Africa.

International Human Resource Management

This course provides a survey of human resource practices in Europe in comparison with other district regions (USA & Asia). The objective of the course is to examine different approaches to HRM.

International Economic Relations

The standard course in international economics is divided into microeconomic and macroeconomic sections. The microeconomic section discusses trade theory and trade policy. Trade theory examines the basis for trades and the gains from trade. Trade policy studies the reasons for and consequences of obstructing trade with tariffs, quotas, and other measures. "the single most consistent mission of international economics," according to Krugman and Obstfeld, "has been to analyze the effect of... protectionist policies." The macroeconomic section of a standard course in international economics deals with the balance of payments and adjustment in the balance of payments or, open economy macroeconomics. Classical and neo-classical theories of comparative advantages, international trade and economic growth, national accounts and balance-of-payments adjustment, exchange rate determination, capital mobility, economic integration

International Commercial Law

This course will focus on issues concerning the law and practice of international trade. The material will focus on contracts and the international sale of goods; the legal forms of business that international trading takes place under and related issues concerning these arrangements. The course will focus on the law of the European community, the United States, Slovakia and various treaties.

International Environmental Policy

Economical and social development of the world and global ecological problems. International requirements for ecologization of economic development. Global political and economical interests and international ecology policy. World ecology problems in north-south and west-east relations. UN ecology policy. Ecological policy of USA, EU, Asian countries. International environmental agreements and conventions.

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International Finance

The lecture combines theoretical lectures and practice through experience and relevant documents analysis (e.g. European Commission's reports). The objective of this program is to provide the students with a framework and tools that help them to better understand the development of the European Union and the set up of a coherent financial markets framework.

International Marketing

The course helps to understand and enables to use all the information about international marketing. It contains application of marketing in international marketing area. It is based on assumption that marketing in various countries have differences, which need special attention. Presentations and seminars should introduce and explain relations in world market area. Students should study international markets; methods for finding the strategies for these markets, as well as application of marketing mix factors according to international context.

International Trade and EU

The importance of international trade in qualitative development in the Slovak Republic and its entrance into the European Union. The role of international trade in the reproduction processes. The importance of science and technical processes in the economy development of the Slovak Republic. The importance of trade policy concerning the strategy of international economic integration. The commercial operations and the commercial negotiations in international business. The structure of commercial operations and the effectiveness of international business.

Management of EU Programs and Projects

Projects financed by EU.

Managerial Skills in the English-speaking Environment I, II

This is a skills based course for students of management at an advanced level of English. The course develops students' managerial skills required for meetings, negotiations, presentations, office talks and socializing at an international level. The emphasis is on improving students' oral communication skills in order to perform better and more effectively in the world of international business. The course pays high attention to increasing

social and cultural awareness of the business world, often the most difficult area for students.

Organizational Cultures

Understand the differences in HRM of individual EU countries.

Organizational Cultures (European features)

Understand the differences in HRM of individual EU countries.

Regional Economics and Policy of EU

Understand the regional economic policies of the EU.

Slovak Curricular Summary: Observations

From the sample course descriptions listed above, a few observations can be made. The Slovak business program has numerous business courses very specific to the content with respect to the business subjects described. Secondly, globalization is not a generalized segment of the business education, but an economic reality necessitating curricular immersion. Focus is on cultural differences, language and communication—particularly in English as the language of business, and policy related to doing business with the EU as well as the USA. It is quite noticeable that this Slovak business curriculum offers many levels of language courses of European Union countries as well as English.

Globalization is inherent to this curriculum. It is not an imposed addition to the curriculum but rather an designed practical solution to the economic and social reality that defines the nature of business in the Slovak Republic. It is possible in the Slovak context to contend with the practical issues of doing business in a European market by being able to offer so courses that presumably serve a well defined need. Furthermore, the curriculum is not restricted to a select common body of knowledge—but goes beyond to address the localized business needs to strengthen or provide an advantage in the global world as defined from a Slovak perspective. What is missing, however, is any course or courses dealing with ethics.

US Business Curricula: Observations

The business programs at typical schols of business in the United States reflect a topic and broad thematic approach to business issues and skills. The approach is centered on theory and appears to be universally generic with respect to its treatment of globalization. Relatively few international course are offered and

while there are programs that have stringent language requirements, many do not.

Results: Findings on the Curriculum Compared

An analysis of the curriculum at the Faculty of Management at Comenius University and Banksa Bystrica University in the Slovak Republic, and of a generic business curriculum in the United States:

- The curricula for all the universities address the AACSB's international model curriculum.
- The curricula for all the universities addresses basic principles in the areas of management, marketing and organizational behavior.

The differences between the Slovak and the U.S. universities were noticeable on some courses in the areas of management, marketing, and organizational behavior:

- While the American business curriculum can be viewed as “global“ and generic in nature with little content on specific social and cultural comparisons, it is strong in business foundations and principles.
- The curriculum in Slovakia is more “local“ with content that addresses Slovakian, European and U.S. social conscientousness. The “International Human Resource Management“ course addresses practices in Europe in comparison with other district regions (U.S. and Asia).
- The curriculum in Slovakia addresses management concepts for both Europe and the U.S. with courses such as “Business in Europe” and “English for Managers” as examples while the U.S. universities offered little course content on business in Europe.

The question that surfaces with respect to the core of Hofstede and Hofstede's [13] work: Can there truly be a standard curriculum of business derived from the US that can, in fact, be localized and be made relevant to globalization in a frame other than the EU, China, Japan, and the US? The EU consists of many localized business cultures forced to operate at a EU level, a global context beyond the bounds of Europe, as well as at the local level. Each facet of business incorporates power distance, ambiguity, and a context of market, machine, family, and pyramid--to name a few of the localized cultural dimensions [13; 4].

Hypothesis and Process for Testing

Our hypothesis is that Hofstede and Hofstede's [13] power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and individualism measures still reveal the impact of localized culture in today's globalized educational business curriculum environment as that impact was - described by Hofstede's [10] original research.

In this preliminary study, Hofstede's *International Questionnaire (VSM94)* was administered to three distinct populations to ascertain cultural differences that may provide insight as to potential educational impact on globalization. During January and February of 2008, the questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of university educators in Slovakia (population 18), undergraduate business student in the United States (population 32), and doctoral students in a business related program in the United States (population 22) for a total population of 72.

The responses of the 72 questionnaires were tabulated, processed, and computed according to the protocol established by Hofstede by the authors during March 2008, which revealed the following results. Figure 2 shows the relative calculated indices for Hofstede's power distance (PDI), Ambiguity avoidance (UAI), masculinity (MAS), and individuality (IDV) for the convenience sample from Slovakia. What is most notable is the relatively high PDI—the formal power distance structure.

Figure 3 reflects the results taken from a convenience sample from an undergraduate introductory business class in a mid-sized mid-Atlantic university in the United States. This figure shows a strong IDV identity, moderate uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and strong masculine cultural identity.

For Figure 4, the convenience sample taken from a mid-sized suburban university also in the mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States reveals an extremely low power distance (PDI) rating while at the same time at high UAI, MAS, and IDV. The low PDI can be explained by the cohort nature of their doctoral program and peer relationship with the faculty. The high uncertainty avoidance can be explained by their focus on structure and results, as would be expected, at the end of a doctoral program. The high MAS and IDV are typical American cultural attributes—particularly a strong sense of individualism

Figures 2,3 and 4 were derived from the summary data listed in Table 1. The final figure, (Figure 5) combines the above three populations—now in comparison to the indices derived by Hofstede in his 1983 study. This figure shows three things. First, it compares the data from Hofstede's original study to three convenience sample populations. For all the cultural indices, the Slovak faculty paralleled Hofstede's data pattern—however with lower values. With respect to the other two populations, PDI was very low for the doctoral students and high (significant power distance awareness) as might be expected for the undergraduates as compared to Hofstede's US data. Uncertainty avoidance was high for the doctoral students but consistent with Hofstede's data for the US. For MAS the two university sample populations were higher (doctoral population much higher) than the US data. Finally, the IDV data was slightly higher for both US university populations.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored the viability of curricular standardization in a global economy based on an inherent frame of localized culture. While curriculum may have the same naming conventions, texts, and general topics, localized interest and focus may skew the content away from the business model established through international accreditation standards. These standards, while focused on a business frame developed in the context of one culture with intended objectivity and cultural neutrality, may reflect only one small aspect of the business arena. While no curriculum can be complete and universally comprehensive, our findings from the research showed that the inherent inclusion of localized culture would inevitably be melded into the curriculum. The effect is either implicit as in the case of standardized business programs like those in the United States, or beyond localization explicit as in the case of Comenius University and Banksa Bystrica University in the Slovak Republic.

Further study will be directed to determine if and how European business education with its strong international and localized focus affects Hofstede's indices. Likewise, further study is needed to explore the relationship of standardized accredited US business education that is focused on fundamental business principles and practice and its possible effects on the tentative results of high MAS and IDV indices.

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TABLES	AND	FIGURES
GENERAL EDUCATION CORE		42 Credits Required
NON-BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS		6 Credits Required
Introduction To Ethics		
Statistics		
BUSINESS COMMON BODY OF KNOWLEDGE		27 Credits Required
Intro Financial Accounting		
Managerial Accounting		
Legal Environment Of Business		
Principles Of Finance		
* Principles Of Marketing		
* Management Theory and Practice		
* Management Science		
* International Business		
* Strategic Management		
BUSINESS MAJOR CONCENTRATION		24 Credits Required
* Technology Topics and Issues		
* Organizational Behavior		
* Human Resource Management		
* Labor Management Relations		
* Management Simulation		
* Supervisory Skills		
* Any course in the Management discipline (3000 level or above)		
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BUSINESS ELECTIVES		12 Credits Required
Students must choose Business courses at the 3000-4000 level for this section.		
NON-BUSINESS ELECTIVES		15 Credits Required
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS	15 Credits Required	
* International Trade/Finance		
* International Finance		
* International Marketing		
* International Business		
* Any course in the BA elective		

Figure 1: Typical AACSB Curriculum composite snapshot as of March 2008

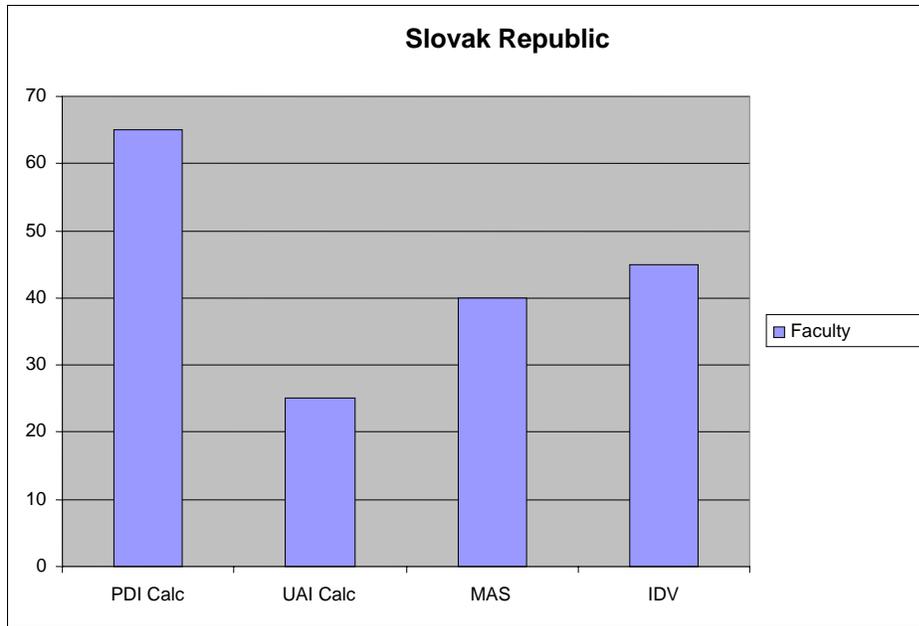


Figure 2: Indices from Slovakia – January 2008

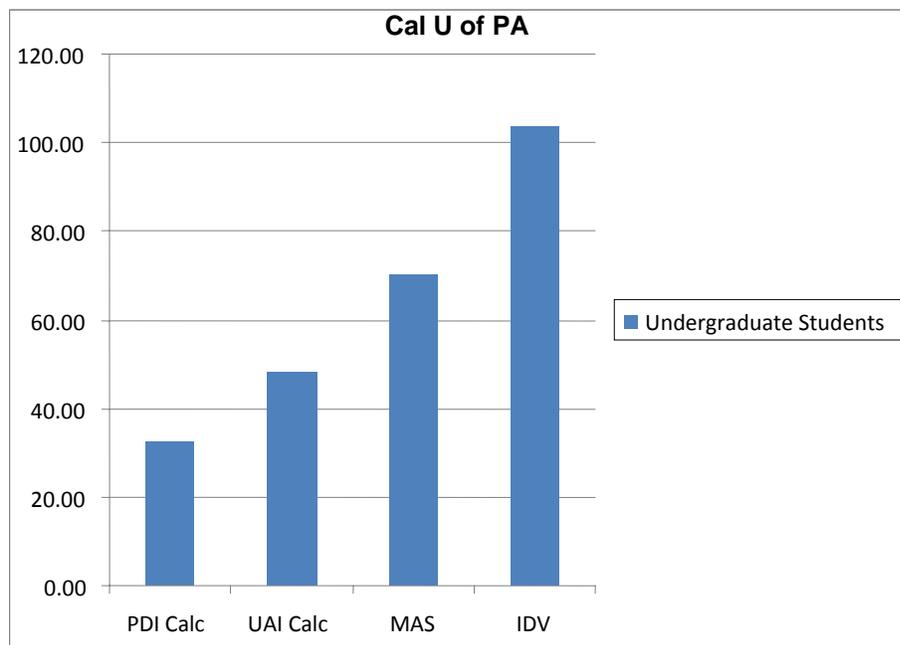


Figure 3: Indices from undergraduate business class in the United States – February 2008

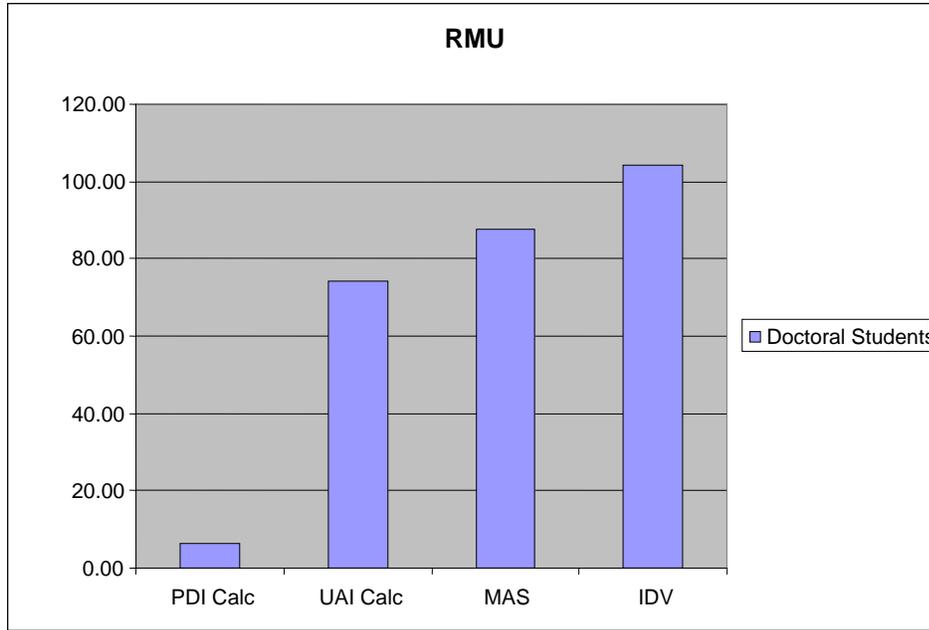


Figure 4: Indices from doctorate students in the United States – February 2008

	CALU	RMU	Hofstede's US	Slovak Faculty	Hofstede's Slovakia
PDI Calc	32.4	6.2	40	65	104
UAI Calc	48.3	74.2	46	25	51
MAS	70.0	87.7	62	40	110
IDV	103.5	104.2	91	45	52

Table 1: Summary data

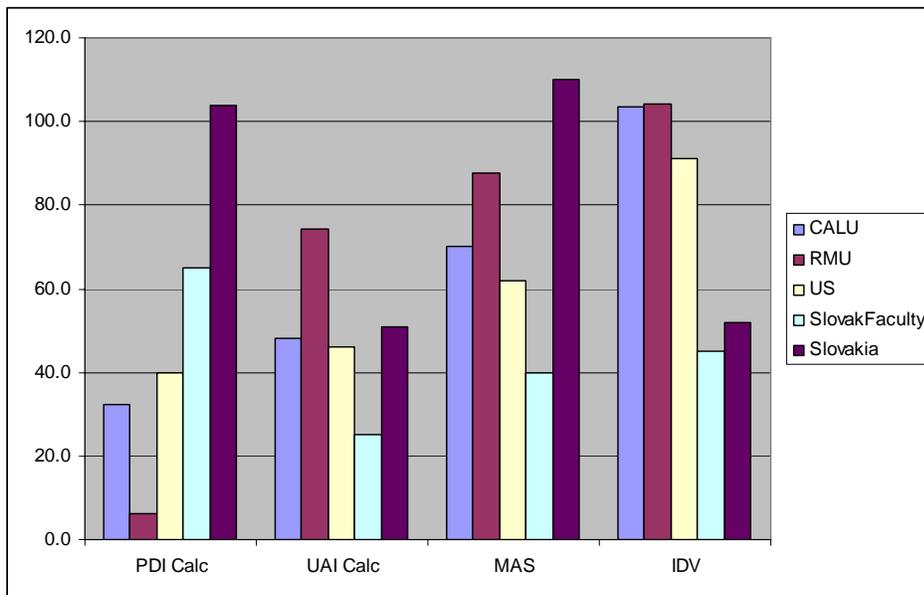


Figure 5: Three populations in 2008 compared to Hofstede's 1983 study.