Chapter 4 Review questions and answers

1. Give a definition of national culture in your own words. Give some examples of typical behaviour in your own culture compared with another.

Refer to the chapter for various definitions and the discussion of cultural dimensions so that you have a basis on which to describe your culture.

2. How does national culture affect organizational culture?

Culture in an organization will be influenced by the culture of the people working in it and if they are all from the same country it is likely that the culture in the company will reflect the values of the people of that country in which it is formed.

3. Explain Hofstede’s five dimensions. Describe your own culture using two of these dimensions.

**Power Distance**, the degree to which inequality is accepted in society, as illustrated in terms of hierarchies, positions of status, or power; **Uncertainty Avoidance** is illustrated by the need for rules and regulations to reduce the level of risk in a society, indicating openness to unstructured ideas and situations; **Individualism**, the degree to which people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families, as opposed to **Collectivism** to describe those who have strong ties to their wider family groups in society; **Masculinity** is the way in which men’s and women’s roles are distributed. In a highly masculine society, the male values of assertiveness and competitiveness are dominant; **Long Term Orientation (LTO)** deals with ‘virtue regardless of truth’ and it is considered that those with LTO exhibit values of thrift and perseverance, while the values associated with **Short-Term Orientation** concern respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one’s ‘face’.

See [http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html](http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html), and the other websites provided in the web links section of the Online Resource Centre, for examples of the dimensions in relation to different countries.
4. Why is time an important aspect of culture? How might this concept affect the behavior of employees in another culture differently from in your own?

Time is a concept used within various authors’ cultural analyses. Hofstede’s Long Term Orientation refers to a society’s attitude to perseverance and for example, saving for the future. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s concepts of Diffuse versus Specific, and also Achievement versus Ascriptive, descriptions of societies incorporate the concept of time. In diffuse societies personal time may overlap with work time, so that you are obliged to go out with your boss after work. In an ascriptive society, the time you have worked for a company, and your seniority (for example in Japan) may be as important for promotion as how well you perform, while in an achievement based society, such as the USA, performance would be the basis for promotion. In synchronic societies people do several things at the same time, while in sequential societies, people tend to do one thing at a time and in order; time commitments are important and schedules must be followed.

5. Explain how culture is relevant to leadership style? If you were sending an expatriate to lead a team of local employees in India, what style would you advise him/her to use and why?

Different cultures have different expectations of leaders’ behaviour. (See House et al. (2002) The Globe Project.) In India leaders are expected to be strong and to take the lead. Asking for employees’ ideas would not be fully understood as decision making is regarded as part of the leader’s role and this might show weakness or inability to do the job.

6. What do you understand by cultural adjustment? Why is this concept important for International HR Managers who supervise expatriate employees?

Cultural adjustment for an Expatriate means the ability to accept and live within a culturally different society. HR Managers must know how to measure the adaptability. It is about the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity perceived within the new environment. This may depend partially on the amount of cultural difference that exists between the expatriate’s own culture and that of the host country, organizational factors, work role factors and personality factors. Managers of expatriates need to understand that expatriates may go through various phases before they adjust and that failure to adjust by the expatriate or his/her family may have serious consequences for the success of the assignment and the expatriate’s psychological well-being and career. Careful screening of potential expatriates for adaptability, readiness to accept
uncertainty, and even the ability to speak the host country language all impact on adaptation.

7. What measures do you think should be taken to prepare expatriates and their families for a new overseas assignment? Do you think it is possible for pre-departure training to prevent culture shock?

Cross-cultural training should be provided including general knowledge about the country, and essential tips on behaviour and sensitivities. The training should take place partially in advance and may include a country visit. Additional training should be available on site when the expatriate has had some time to understand the culture, so that the training has more relevance. A mentoring scheme with a person assigned to the expatriate in the foreign country could be included and language training would also be useful. The objective of any training should be to facilitate adjustment for the expatriate and spouse. Additionally, contacts with the company headquarters must be retained, perhaps through the appointment of a mentor at home. Pre-departure training can go some way to preparing a person for a different country, but a degree of culture shock is inevitable.

See chapter 9 for more on cross-cultural training.

7. Which HR practices are affected by cultural difference? Give specific country examples to support your answer.

See the Geert Hofstede website to answer this question, when you have some countries to consider. Go to: www.geert-hofstede.com.

Many HR practices are affected by cultural difference, See Table 4.1 on page 92:  
**Remuneration** – the philosophy in a country with high power distance (Malaysia) will result in very high pay for senior positions and relatively low for junior employees.  
**Performance Appraisals**: Providing feedback on performance must be done in private so that the employee does not lose face (Malaysians and other Asian groups).  
**High uncertainty avoidance**: means that employees prefer clearly defined roles, rules and procedures (Malaysia)  
**Collectivism**: Recruitment may be associated with family links, ‘guanxi’, or networks.
9. Evaluate a country of your choice using ideas from Hofstede and other sources and write a short report on that country for future expatriates.

This answer will depend on the country chosen. Go to the website of Geert Hofstede for country information; www.geert-hofstede.com.

10. To what extent can culture be blamed for divergence in human resource practices between countries?

Culture is one factor which may make the values and behaviour of people different from those in other countries. These values will determine the HR practices. Culture will affect issues such as concepts of power distance and equality, thus salary distribution will be affected; uncertainty avoidance will impact on the amount of dependence on policies and procedures; the degree of masculinity will impact on the degree of focus on results etc; Individualism will impact on the degree of focus on team work, or individual performance and so on. However, divergence in HR practices will also be affected by Institutional difference and the legal environment, as discussed in chapter 5.