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Cultural Differences in Engineering Service Learning Applying Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to Predict Students-Managers Interaction in Creativity Station 2014 Wayan G. Santika Department of Mechanical Engineering Bali State Polytechnic Bali, Indonesia wayan.santika@pnb.ac.id Abstract— The present study analyzes cultural differences of three countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea). The countries are working together in an engineering service learning program called Creativity Station 2014 which is going to be held in Bali on 11-22 August 2014. Students, teachers, and staffs from three different cultures will meet and difficulties and complexities which may arise are discussed. Keywords—Cultural dimension; power distance; individualism; Masculinity; uncertainty avoidance; creativity station. I. INTRODUCTION According to Hofstede there are at least four values that distinguish countries culturally, i.e. the ways they cope with inequality, individual's relationship with her/his groups, how people deal with gender roles, and the way they cope with uncertainty [1, 2, 3]. These four dimensions of culture are usually named

power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Later on, two other dimensions were added: pragmatism and indulgence. Things are quite simple when people come from the same culture (country) since they share the same understanding of what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and appropriate, and what is good and what is bad. When a team consists of people from different cultural backgrounds, however, complexities may emerge [4]. In teaching and learning environment, serious misunderstanding may occur when teachers and students come from different cultural background. The present study analyzes cultural differences of three countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea). The countries are working together in an engineering service learning program called Creativity Station 2014 which is held in Bali on 11-22 August 2014 [6]. Students, teachers, and staffs from three different cultures will meet and difficulties and complexities that may arise are discussed. Managers are teachers and staffs who manage teams of students [see 6].

## II. DIMENSIONS OF CULTURES

Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of families, organizations and institutions within a country accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. [1, 3]. It also deals with the question of how subordinates interact with their bosses. According to [3], individualism and collectivism are the degree to which a society maintains interdependence among its members. Ties between individuals are loose in individualistic societies and strong in collectivistic ones. Masculinity is the degree to which social gender roles are clearly distinct [1]. In masculine societies men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and competitive, while women tender, modest, and concerned with the quality of life; on the other hand, in feminine societies both genders are supposed to be tender, modest, and concerned with the quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which the members of a culture feel uncomfortable about unknown or ambiguous situations and have created norms, rules, beliefs and institutions to avoid them [5]. Pragmatism describes how people in the past as well as today relate to the fact that so much that happens around us cannot be explained [5]. Indulgence is the degree to which humans suppress their impulses and desires [3, 5].

## III. METHODS AND RESULTS

### A. Methods

In order to get the cultural comparison, the country names are entered into the assigned column at <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>. The website will provide us with the figure (see Fig. 1).

### B. Results

Fig. 1. Indonesia's cultural indexes in comparison with Malaysia's and South Korea's [5]

Power distance. According to the site [5], with the index of 78 and 100 respectively, Indonesia and Malaysia are high and very high in power distance which is characterized by "Being dependent on hierarchy, unequal rights between power holders and non power holders, superiors in-accessible, leaders are directive, management controls and delegates. Power is centralized and managers count on the obedience of their team members. Employees expect to be told what to do and when. Control is expected and managers are respected for their position. Communication is indirect and negative feedback hidden. High Power Distance also means that co-workers would expect to be clearly directed by the boss or manager – it is the classic Guru-Student kind of dynamic that applies to Indonesia (and Malaysia). Westerners may be considerably surprised with the visible, socially acceptable, wide and unequal disparity between the rich and poor." South Korea, on the other hand, is intermediate in power distance and according to [5]: "South Korea is a slightly hierarchical society. This means that people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy in an organization is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat." In this situation we would expect that South Korean students and managers of The Creativity Station 2014 will treat each other more equally than those of Indonesian and Malaysian. Students of Indonesia and Malaysia may

expect to be told what to do and expect managers to take all initiatives, and their managers may require more obedience from the students. South Korean managers may think that Indonesian and Malaysian students to be passive while the students expect them to dictate what to do.

**Individualism.** Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea are very low in individualism scores which mean they are collectivistic countries. People in collectivistic countries are characterized by a tight long-term commitment to the group and family they belong to, everyone is responsible for the action of others within the group, loyalty to the group prevails over almost any rules and regulation, everyone is born in an extended family, harmony should be maintained and no direct confrontation in discussions, and relationship overrides task [1, 5]. With this similarity we would expect no difficulties in student-manager interactions.

**Masculinity.** Both Indonesia and Malaysia are in the middle of masculinity, although South Korea is a little bit to the feminine side. It means that the people of the countries are neither driven by achievement, competition, and success (masculinity) nor dominated by the tendency to caring of others and quality of life (feminine). Boys and men are not supposed to be too assertive, ambitious, and tough, while girls and women not too tender.

**Uncertainty avoidance.** Indonesia is in the middle of uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), while Malaysia low and South Korea high. Low in UAI, Malaysian students and managers will be more tolerant to deviant and innovative ideas, show a more relaxed attitude, expect no more rules than are strictly necessary, believe that uncertainty is normal in life and that punctuality and precision do not come naturally [1,5]. On the other hand South Korean students and managers may, according to [5]: "maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. In these cultures there is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work), time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation." [5]

**Pragmatism.** Indonesia is somehow high in pragmatism while Malaysia quite low and South Korea very high. South Korean students and managers tend to be long-term oriented, adapt traditions to modern contexts, live their lives guided by virtue and practical good examples, be perseverance toward slow results, and have willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose, while Malaysian tend to short-term oriented, respect for traditions, concern with possessing the Truth, expect quick results, and concern with 'face' [1, 5].

**Indulgence.** Low in indulgence, Indonesian and South Korean students and managers tend to control their desires and impulses, do not focus on leisure time, tend to be cynical and pessimistic, and may feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong [5]. Malaysian students and managers on the other hand have willingness to realize desires and impulses, enjoy live and have fun, tend to be optimistic, act as they please and spend money as they wish [5]. We may expect that Indonesian and Korean students to be more serious and focus toward their projects and Malaysians may provide more fun to the team.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Unintended conflicts as well as culture shock often occur when people fail to acknowledge cultural differences during intercultural encounter [1]. Understanding our own cultural tendencies and others' during intercultural encounters is essential. It avoids misunderstanding during interactions and severe consequences of culture shock.

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