

Be Careful What You Wish for: Mapping Nordic Cultural Communication Practices & Values in the Management Game of Communication

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Abstract

Whether executives are sharing their organization's strategy goals, financial projections, marketing initiatives, crisis management, or perhaps disseminating HRM issues, culture-with regard to differing ways of communicating-matters. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to understand Nordic managers' cultural practices -and wished for values-within the context of delivering and receiving communication messages, not only within their organizations, but also with a keen eye to external stakeholders. Minor yet significant differences in communication norms may surface, even when representatives from similar cultures work together (Adler, 2002). As a follow on from the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004), data based on the GLOBE instrument collected on culture and communication values (Warner-Søderholm, 2012) are applied in this present study in order to explore to what degree cultural values impact how we form, deliver and receive an organization's business communication messages within the Nordic cluster. Thus, this supports the proposition that better cross-cultural business communication practices contribute to an organization's bottom line in the management game of communication today. Moreover, we contribute to the field with an analysis of the differences between managers' cultural practices and wished for values.

Keywords: business communication, Nordic culture, project GLOBE

1. Introduction

Business communication responsibilities of Nordic business people include a wide range of interactions with stakeholders where 'culture matters', both in writing and in oral communication. These may include digital media communications, crisis management messages, executive communications, internal employee relations, networking and communications related to strategic planning. The goal of these interactions is always to ensure effective strategic communication messaging. Indeed, the skillset, personality traits and value sets that are discussed in both scholarly and management literature as critical for successful management of stakeholders show that culture matters (Beurer-Zuellig, Fieseler & Meckel, 2009; Goodman, 2006; Liu et al., 2010; Sha, 2011). No matter if the intercultural communication takes place on a micro, meso or macro level, nor if one is working within operational or strategic tasks, there is a rising demand in the industry for skills in intercultural communication (Moreno et al., 2009; Wei, 2016).

Surprisingly, despite the logical linkage between cultural research and business communication practices, this is an under-researched area in the Nordics. It is only recently that scholars have attempted to unpack the degree to which culture affects communication processes in organizations (e.g. Sriramesh, 1992; 1999; Sriramesh & Takasaki, 1999). Nevertheless, as clearly stated by Sriramesh and Vercic, culture is so fundamental to communication that it behooves scholars to study how it specifically affects the choice of interaction and messaging strategies in international business communication (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). Our first contribution to this present study is therefore to focus on one element of Sriramesh and Vercic's theoretical framework for communication research and practice, namely the culture factor. Secondly, we address the dilemma of managing our present day 'societal practices' (our 'lived values'), verses our 'espoused values' (how we wish we behaved), to answer the call for a comparison of the two data sets for the Nordics. We therefore conclude by discussing the statement 'be careful what you wish for' to show that culture matters in how we communicate in business and

how we wish to communicate in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In this way, we explore the sometimes-negative correlations between how we perceive communication behavior in the Nordics today versus how we wished we interacted and behaved in a business communication context. Primary and secondary empirical data will be presented in this article, which measures specific cultural dimensions within a communication setting. The data is collected from middle managers in a wide range of Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish organizations (House et al., 2004; Warner-Söderholm, 2012, 2012b).

2. Theoretical Underpinnings of Cultural Dimensions

Before one can identify the relationship between culture and business communication, one needs to understand the term *culture* and all of its dimensions in a business communication context. Hofstede (1980, 2010) was one of the first scholars who managed to put structure on business culture by creating specific measurable constructs, over 30 years ago. He believed, for example, that understanding how power distance and hierarchy impact business behavior, appreciating how different cultures deal with risk in a society (uncertainty avoidance needs), and seeking out how masculine and individualistic behaviors manifest themselves, adds value to an organization. New developments in statistical analysis methods of such country-aggregated data, however, have resulted in quantitative research utilizing Hofstede's data being much critiqued: Firstly, because of outdated findings and more importantly, for having weak reliability (Bertsch, 2009; Harzing, 2004; Spector, 2001; Warner-Söderholm, 2010). Consequently, data from project GLOBE (House et al., 2004) have been chosen for this present study. For those researchers new to project GLOBE (House et al., 2004), GLOBE is an acronym for Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness. The theory that the GLOBE project is built upon is founded in implicit leadership theory (Lord & Maher, 1991), value belief theory of culture (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995), implicit motivation theory (McClelland, 1962) and structural contingency theory (Donaldson, 1993; Hickson et al., 1974). Project GLOBE's 170 social scientists and management scholars come from 62 cultures and thus they represent all major regions of the world. The GLOBE data for 62 societies was first published in 2004 (House et al., 2004). In 2007, Chokkar et al., further developed this data into an in-depth study of 25 societies. In the period 2008-2010, one of the present authors extended the dataset to include Norway as the 63rd society dataset (Warner-Söderholm, 2012). For the Norwegian study, quantitative data was collected from 710 Norwegian managers and qualitative data was collected from a sample of 35. Project GLOBE has developed a set of nine cultural dimensions that is more comprehensive and statistically rigorous than Hofstede's original four. In addition, the GLOBE researchers applied a seven-step rating scale in their value surveys, for more detail, compared to Hofstede's more limited five-step scale. Moreover, data was collected for both 'lived practices' and 'espoused values' for project GLOBE. Table 1 below summarizes project GLOBE's cultural dimensions and how we argue that they may impact business communication.

Table 1. Summary of GLOBE dimensions (adapted from Bertsch & Warner-Söderholm, 2013)

Description	Continuum	Impact on business communications
Performance Orientation	High scores indicate a perceived emphasis on societal values of high performance	Explicit performance goals often communicated openly, both verbally and in non-verbal communication patterns
Humane Orientation	High scores indicate a perceived value placed upon compassion for others	A more nurturing, paternal style of communication from leaders and colleagues
Gender Egalitarianism	High scores indicate a perceived acceptance of egalitarianism	Gender balance in communication, leadership teams and gender equality regarding who makes and disseminates decisions
Assertiveness	High scores indicate that more aggressive attitudes are perceived as valued	More openly competitive style of interaction, both verbally and non-verbally
Future Orientation	High scores indicate a perceived emphasis on future thinking	Business communication approach will take future planning into consideration of strategy and communication time lines
In-Group and Institutional Collectivism	High scores indicate a perceived higher level of in-group and institutional orientated value systems and inter-related support and obligation	Higher level of trust and openness in communication with 'in-group' and trust in interdependent relations at macro and micro levels
Power Distance	High scores indicate perceived value placed upon clear power distance in a society	Hierarchies are expected and clearly communicated, both explicitly and implicitly, in both written and spoken language, both verbally and non-verbally

Description	Continuum	Impact on business communications
Uncertainty	High scores suggest a society where risk	How risk management is factored into communications
Avoidance	avoidance is valued	

Project GLOBE reports high internal validity and reliability. Moreover, statistical analyses show strong correlations and face validity between GLOBE scales with research from Schwartz (1994) and World Values Survey data (Inglehart et al., 2010). For more information about the design mechanism, reliability and validity measures of the GLOBE instrument, please see Warner-Söderholm (2010).

3. Method

As presented above, unlike other contemporary cultural studies (Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schein, 1985; Trompenaars, 1993; Triandis, 2004), Project GLOBE does not limit its research to solely espoused 'utopian' wished-for values. Project GLOBE has studied both the enacted values (societal practices) and also the wished-for values (espoused values). Hence, project GLOBE documents both 1) how people experience cultural practices, 'as is' values and communication behaviors in society and organizations, and also 2) how people believe cultural values should be in their own 'ideal' society and culture. All the instruments for measuring cultural variables were developed by starting with questionnaire item generation and analysis, across the participating cultures, by collaborative development of dimensions and Q-sorting of items. This stage was followed by comprehensive psychometric analyses. Generalizability of the instruments across various cultures and countries was ensured through two pilot studies. The resulting data were collected through standardized questionnaires.

The first stage of this present study focuses on collecting and analyzing the quantitative data for the actual societal cultural practices, the 'lived values'. This is because it is the actual 'lived' business communication practices that mirror what happens today in business communication in the Nordics. Next, secondary data were collected and analyzed for the 'espoused' or wished for values, reflecting how respondents feel how 'things should be' in the Nordics. Interestingly, research shows (House et al., 2004) that one will often find negative correlations in the two GLOBE data sets. For example, respondents from countries who experience low gender egalitarianism, low humane orientation and high power distance might actually wish for a society with more gender equality, a more nurturing style of communication and leadership and less hierarchy. Consequently, in the second stage of this study we will present and compare both the 'lived' and 'wished for' values applied to communication in order to consider if we should 'be careful what we wish for' in the game of business communication. This research is based on a total sample size of 2295 respondents, consisting of n=710 Norwegian middle managers, n=896 Swedish middle managers, n=251 Danish middle managers and n=438 Finnish middle managers.

3.1 Sample Description and Data Collection

A pre-requisite for the GLOBE data collection is that all respondents must live and work and be a citizen of each specific country. In addition, respondents must be working as middle managers in the private sector in that society. These criteria are set for each country collaborator in order to avoid pollution in the data. All country collaborators who collected the secondary data for this present paper had matched samples by meeting these criteria. Country collaborators for project GLOBE have run in-depth reliability and validity analyses. In addition, T-tests, CFAs for goodness-of-fit, and similar analyses were carried out at both the individual and societal level to ensure strong results in reliability and validity of all the data. Please see the presentation of the measurement instrument items and syntax formula for each of the dimensions in appendix 1.

4. Discussion and Results

The fundamental question driving the first part of our study has been to investigate to what degree societal cultural factors (lived values) within a business communication context may vary between Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Thus, the following empirical findings of Nordic cultural factors within a communication context are now presented.

Table 2. Quantitative results from GLOBE data (societal practices)

Summated scales	Norwegian results	Swedish results	Danish results	Finnish results
Humane Orientation	4.81	3.72	4.44	3.98
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.31	5.32	5.22	5.02
Future Orientation	4.48	4.39	4.44	4.24
Institutional Collectivism	4.07	5.22	4.80	4.63
In-Group Collectivism	5.34	3.66	3.53	4.07
Gender Egalitarianism	4.03	3.84	3.93	3.35
Power Distance	4.13	4.65	3.89	4.89
Performance Orientation	4.18	3.72	4.22	3.81
Assertiveness	3.37	3.38	3.80	3.81
N (total number of respondents)	710	896	251	438

4.1 Humane Orientation

Humane Orientation is the dimension which conceptually measures how important it is in an organization or society to encourage and reward people for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others (Chhokar et al., 2007). Norway scores rather high in humane orientation (4.81). Indeed, the whole Nordic region is known for generously supporting aid work and refugee programmes, and for working as brokers in peace negotiation initiatives. Such initiatives may be seen to indicate a sense of humane orientation towards others. Even today, the philosophy of ‘civic duty’ and taking part in a ‘*dugnad*’ (voluntary local help projects) remains a part of daily life in many areas of the Nordic region, but to a lesser extent in Finland and in large cities. The scores in humane orientation practices for the Nordic countries are highest for Norway: 4.81, followed by Denmark: 4.44, Sweden: 4.10, Finland: 3.96. In line with the hypothesised negative correlation between societal practices and ‘wished for values’, the data shows that Finland is highest in ‘espoused’ humane orientation values, meaning they show a wish to be more friendly, and openly kind to others.

What is interesting with regard to humane orientation is the extent to which it is linked to the group, i.e., it is pretty difficult to be fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind all by yourself. Mind you, this can be said for all categories of behaviour, but the “civic duty“ element of the humane orientation has a definite collectivist core. In a business communications context, for example, it would be more difficult to spin a “humane“ project in a culture with low scores on humane orientation and group collectivism than in a culture with high scores.

4.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance is described as the degree to which a society endeavours to avoid risk and feels comfortable with set strategies and procedures in place in order to avoid uncertainty on both the macro, meso and micro levels in a society and thus is a matter of concern for communication strategies. The average scores for Sweden: 5.32, Denmark: 5.22, Finland: 5.02, and Norway: 4.31 indicate a moderate level of risk avoidance in striving for order in society in the Nordic region, with the 62-nation average scores being lower at 4.16. Indeed, specific uncertainty reduction and protection measures in the Nordic cluster include the support of an extensive welfare system with comprehensive social security payments for sick leave, long-term disability, unemployment and maternity and paternity pay. On an organisational level, this can be manifested in traditions for well-prepared crisis management messaging and clear rules and regulations regarding working conditions and HR practices. Interestingly again, Finland’s espoused values in uncertainty avoidance are lowest in the Nordic cluster.

Perhaps the paradox with uncertainty avoidance is that people in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance tend to be more engaged in the “what if“ game and more inclined to secure their futures—individually—through creative measures than might people from high uncertainty avoidance cultures. One reason for this is that the latter—because of their predisposition to assure orderly strategies—have put that issue behind them. Regardless, in a business communications context, an interesting arena for exercise has high risk in focus in some societies.

4.3 Future Orientation

Future Orientation is a measure of the value placed within an organisation or society on long term planning and thus delaying gratification. Communicating long term profit budgets, long terms reputation strategies and sustainable development is valued most in Norway, with the scores for future orientation marginally higher for Norway: 4.48, followed by Denmark: 4.44, Sweden: 4.28 and Finland: 4.24.

Again, we see only marginal differences among the Nordic countries with regard to a specific cultural orientation. However, as can be seen when comparing future orientation with, in this case, uncertainty avoidance, these

differences definitely give scope for further research because—in a communication context—they trigger the “why” question. Why communicate specific messages to respect different individual societal needs for planning for the future—or not.

4.4 Institutional Collectivism

Institutional Collectivism within a Nordic context is manifested in conformity and interdependence among groups of individuals. The strong support for labour unions is a good indicator of this dimension. Within a communication context, there is a tradition in the Nordics for greater transparency and a collective voice in strategy developments. Mean scores for institutional collectivism show rather high levels for most Nordic nations compared to the Globe mean scores: Sweden: 5.22, Denmark: 4.80, Finland: 4.63, Norway: 4.07 (GLOBE mean scores: 4.25). Interestingly, a negative correlation is found between Norway’s rather low institutional collectivism ‘practices’ scores and their much higher ‘espoused values’ scores.

The comfort zone for group interference in cultures with low scores for institutional collectivism is not a vast place. The Anglo cluster (Canada 4.17, the US 4.17, Australia 4.40, Ireland 4.59, England 4.31, South Africa [White sample] 4.30, and New Zealand 4.20) in the Globe culture scores for institutional collectivism has rather low levels. This can be reflected in, for example, New Hampshire’s, “Live free or die” state motto or Gadsden’s “Don’t tread on me” flag (1776). The message is clear. Interference from outside is negative. Going it on your own is good. For cultures with low scores for institutional collectivism “collective decision-making” is an oxymoron. Cabinets of parliamentary democracies, which tend to have higher scores on institutional collectivism, meet regularly. The US has a low score for institutional collectivism, which is reflected by the fact that the President’s Cabinet meets when he calls it, which—as a group—is seldom. In cultures with high scores for institutional collectivism, the assumption is that collective decision-making is the best and only way to go. Even the language can be impacted by this attitude. Norwegian has the expression, “We have to sit down and do something about this” (vi må sette oss ned og gjør noe med dette), which in any case *implies* a meeting. In contrast, the American sporting apparel manufacture, Nike, has another spin on things: “Just do it”. In a public relations context, the comfort zone for group interference or lack of such should definitely be an item for reflection.

4.5 Scores for In-Group Collectivism

Scores for *In-Group Collectivism* measure to what degree individuals openly express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their families and community/organizations. Indeed, pride is an important element of the Nordic culture – national pride and also pride in the achievements of the local community and the achievements of children. Even though Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland have collective school systems based on the philosophy of one state-run school system for everyone, the sense of pride in extra-curricular activities and the sense of responsibility and inclusion in local communities is a Nordic trait. In business communications, therefore, one can expect this sense of pride and inclusion to be a significant element of informal discussions in the workplace.

To sum up, the mean group collectivism scores for the Nordic cluster are as follows: Norway: 5.34, Finland: 4.07, Sweden: 3.66, Denmark: 3.53. As we can see, and as was the case with institutional collectivism, cultures such as the Scandinavian have a fundamental faith in group solutions that is played out in matters both highly personal and highly public. “The law of Jante”, which reflects a group orientation in its warning of the dangers of hubris, is something that Norwegians regard as a factor in their behaviour. Communication strategies must of needs reflect this predisposition. Private initiatives are very often met with scepticism. Initiatives should be consensus based and the government is very often an essential player in activities that have a public impact. The philanthropic tradition, with people like Bill and Melinda Gates devoting their lives to donating, is so low-profile in Scandinavia as to be virtually non-existent. Giving is good, but where’s the hitch? What’s the hidden agenda? What looks like a gift, may be a strategy for personal gain. Public relations policy needs to accommodate this fundamental scepticism.

4.6 Gender Egalitarianism

Gender Egalitarianism measures to what degree a society promotes gender equality and strives to minimize the gender gap in business roles and business communication behaviours. With a high mean score in practices - ‘as is’ values-(4.03), Norway can be described as the Nordic society that attributes most equal status to men and women. Pre-requisites for the success of the equal opportunities situation in the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish workplace have been 1) government subsidized pre-school day care centres, 2) shared maternity/paternity leave, with parents choosing to share up to one year’s paid leave, and 3) flexible working hours. A typical working day in the Nordic region is from 8:00am to 4:00pm, with the opportunity to use flexitime, take advantage of some

home office hours and get paid time off (PTO) when children are sick (Espen-Andersen & Korpi, 1987). In business communication, this means that availability of team members is equal for both genders and both men and women participate in all business interactions and negotiations. Mean scores for all 62 societies (House et al. 2004) was 3.37. Within the Nordic region, however, gender egalitarian mean scores were much higher and highest for Norway: 4.03, followed by Denmark: 3.93, Sweden: 3.84, Finland: 3.35.

The impact of the gender issue on communication is pervasive. Like low and high performance orientation, cultures on either side of the scoring scale have bases of assumptions that are simply at extreme odds. For business people in the Nordics, gender egalitarianism is not only a good thing; it is a right and good thing. This attitude permeates management at all levels – from the roles and relationships of men and women and their interpersonal communication, to the strategies of governments trying to put gender egalitarianism on the political and economic agenda. For business cultures at the other end of the scale, this attitude can be perceived of as being dogmatic, or worse, left-wing and feminist. “I’m not a crusader for feminism, and I’m not against it, either, said Republican Presidential candidate, Donald Trump. It is nonetheless both interesting and ironic, in this context, that Trump’s campaign statement that women who have abortions should face “some form of punishment” should backfire on him. The American voter is not notably gender egalitarian, but this was the first of a series of fairly outrageous campaign declarations to trigger a PR about-face for Trump, albeit one that left everybody wondering where it was he actually stood on the pro-life/pro-choice issue. Public relations strategy makers would be well served taking a closer look at the signals they might be sending with regard to their fundamental gender assumptions.

4.7 Power Distance

Power Distance is a dimension which measures to what degree a fixed hierarchy is experienced and expected in a society and thus impacts power distance in a communication setting. Norway’s mean score of 4.13 in the power distance practices dimension depicts Norway as a low power distance society, in keeping with her Nordic cluster profile. Interestingly, the ‘espoused values’ data shows Finland’s wish to have a lower level of power distance in the future. Such low power distance values in the Nordic region are manifested in certain aspects of business communication practices in a number of ways: There is little use of formal titles in the Nordics; moreover, informal dress codes are a visual communication of low power distance. Titles or last names are rarely used when communicating with others in business, even if they are of senior rank. Another element of power distance—the roles and hierarchy within a society—is mirrored in the egalitarian practices at work in the Nordic region, especially in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. As societies that expect and agree that power should be equally shared, the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish progressive and comprehensive tax systems, the high union membership and the generous welfare states exemplify systems that are in place to protect and promote egalitarian values. To sum up, the mean scores in power distance for the Nordic cultures are lower than all of the 62 scores from the GLOBE study, as the mean scores for project power distance practices for GLOBE was 5.17, compared to Finland showing the most hierarchical tendencies in the Nordic cluster with 4.89, followed by Sweden: 4.85, Norway: 4.13, and Denmark: 3.89. Hence, these results support the findings from Lindell and Arvonen (1996) that a dominant feature of the Scandinavian management style in general is delegation of responsibility.

People in high power distance cultures have a large comfort zone in relation to non-verbal communication and with regard to hierarchy; moreover they have an almost whimsical attitude to status. Within the strata of a hierarchy, there exists a multitude of status markers people in high power distance cultures are adept at locating and communicating; in a given stratum an individual can enjoy considerable status even though s/he is otherwise way down on the totem pole. Consequently, and perhaps paradoxically, people in high power distance cultures might very well feel non-stigmatized by position in a hierarchy. People in low power distance cultures might conversely be more sensitive to hierarchical stigmatization and less sensitized to status markers. This makes for an interesting field of operation for business people communicating across cultures, which includes not only status, but also decision-making, communicating and rewarding.

4.8 Performance Orientation

Performance Orientation measures the extent to which a society or company explicitly communicates the importance of high performance goals in business. Norway’s mean score in societal practices is 4.18. Seen within the context of the GLOBE survey of 62 cultures, this shows a moderate level of performance orientation for Norway as a whole. In terms of Sweden’s lower mean score in performance orientation (3.72), Holmberg and Åkerblom (2007) review this score in light of political policies implemented in Sweden. They note that Sweden’s development as a welfare state was largely due to its middle-of-the road strategy between capitalism

and socialism. Such balance between capitalism and socialism has affected this performance orientation. In Sweden and Finland, the current level of performance orientation is the lowest in the Nordic cluster. Lindell and Sigrid's (2007) posit that an explanation for this is that, although business results are stressed in Sweden and Finland, there are many counteracting factors, especially at society level. Consequently, performance orientation mean scores in the Nordic region are highest in Denmark at 4.22, followed by Norway: 4.18, Finland: 3.81, Sweden: 3.72. Interestingly again, a negative correlation is found in the 'espoused value' scores for all Nordic societies, especially for Finland, as these indicated a wish for a significantly higher performance focus in the future

For the purposes of business communication, it is extremely important to keep in mind that-while business cultures with a high performance orientation *assume* that a market economy, supply and demand, winner takes all approach is the one and true driving force in business-business cultures with a low performance orientation score do *not*. Consequently, business cultures with a low performance orientation might find themselves simply uncomfortable with the cultural assumptions lurking behind the management of a high performance orientation business. As such, they might be uncomfortable with explicit communication of performance metrics. Consider the implications of the Panama Papers offshore tax regime revelations. Leaked documents from Mossack Fonseca, the world's fourth biggest provider of offshore services, show the very many ways in which the rich can exploit secretive offshore tax regimes. Twelve national leaders are among 143 politicians known to have been using offshore tax havens. The Guardian poses the question, "Are all people who use offshore structures crooks?" The answer is "no"-there are many legitimate reasons for doing so and still, a lot of them are crooks. What these people have in common, however, is that they have a lot of money they would rather other people and governments didn't know they had or how they got it. Also, for countries with a high performance orientation culture there tends to be a note of indignation in response to all the media attention, the assumption being that these high performance people drive successful economies and therefore *need* their privacy.

4.9 Assertiveness

Assertiveness as a dimension measures the degree to which openly competitive, aggressive communication behaviour, both verbally and non-verbally, is the norm. The mean scores in all Nordic region cultures are low. Not surprisingly, foreigners often regard Nordic business colleagues as reserved and 'cold-hearted' as many Nordic people are non-dominant and do not feel comfortable with expressive non-verbal communication and prefer to not reveal their emotions openly. This way of showing feelings is very culture-specific. A Norwegian person's insular, low context approach (Warner-Søderholm, 2013) does not mean that individuals do not feel emotions: it is an indication of their sense of order and of keeping control. Mean scores for Assertiveness in Norway and her Nordic partners are as follows, with Finland showing slightly higher scores: 3.81, followed by Denmark: 3.80, Sweden: 3.38, Norway: 3.37. The mean score for Assertiveness in all 62 societies is 4.14. All Nordic cultures thus fall into the lowest band of cultures in terms of business communication and assertiveness in their social relationships.

Much like cultures with a low performance orientation, cultures on the lowest band of assertiveness-such as the Scandinavians-will find themselves uncomfortable with communication that reflects a "me first" attitude, whether this be couched in irony such as in L'Oréal's "Because you're worth it" campaigns, or represented more blatantly in such activities as assertiveness training seminars. There is, however, more scope for a forum of exchange here. Everybody loves a winner, especially when s/he is on your side, and the methods s/he uses to get there can be up for discussion and interpretation between cultures at either end of the scale.

Our contribution to the extant literature of communication practices in the Nordics presented above indicates that cultural practices mirror unique differences between Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Understanding such unique elements of each business society will add value to our organisations. In the next section of our article, we move on to explore the differences between 'how we are' in business (GLOBE societal practices scores for the Nordics), versus 'how we wished we were' (GLOBE espoused values scores for the Nordics). The table below presents a summary of the GLOBE data for all nine dimensions for the societal practices 'as is' scores and for the espoused 'should be' value scores.

The data indicates that all Nordic societies wish for a more humane orientation in business, with Finland showing the strongest negative correlation between 'as is' and 'should be' scores. A wish is indicated also for a stronger focus on future orientation and gender egalitarianism across the board for all Nordic societies. All societies, especially Finland, wish they had less hierarchy in society. Within a communication setting, we can be prepared for this wish by being pro-active in encouraging teams with low power distance and open door policies for encouraging discussions. We may also need to be prepared for a greater sense of informality in digital

communication messaging and social media interactions with stakeholders. Another interesting find is the wish for stronger explicit communication and value placed upon our performance at work.

Table 3. Summary of quantitative results from Nordic GLOBE ‘societal practices’ and ‘espoused values’ data

Cultural scales	Norway		Sweden		Denmark		Finland	
	Societal practices	Espoused values						
Humane Orientation	4.81	5.51	3.72	5.65	4.44	5.45	3.98	5.81
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.31	3.84	5.32	3.60	5.22	3.82	5.02	3.85
Future Orientation	4.48	4.70	4.39	4.89	4.44	4.33	4.24	5.07
Institutional Collectivism	4.07	4.30	5.22	3.94	4.80	4.19	4.63	4.11
In-Group Collectivism	5.34	5.85	3.66	6.04	3.53	5.50	4.07	5.42
Gender Egalitarianism	4.03	4.95	3.84	5.15	3.93	5.08	3.35	4.24
Power Distance	4.13	2.36	4.65	2.70	3.89	2.70	4.89	2.19
Performance Orientation	4.18	5.41	3.72	5.80	4.22	5.61	3.81	6.11
Assertiveness	3.37	2.55	3.38	3.61	3.80	3.39	3.81	3.68
N (total number of respondents)	710	710	896	896	251	251	438	438

5. Summary of Findings

The starting point of this study was that culture matters in business communication in the Nordics. Therefore, the importance of effective communication in achieving organizational goals and objectives is unquestionable. We find that appropriate messaging, which is culturally sensitive and identifies the cultural and communication values of the designated stakeholders and their organizations, adds value for both parties, shows engagement and helps avoid cultural clashes. Understanding the cultural context of the message for the sender and the receiver helps companies follow their organization’s master plan. To ignore cultural differences in communication strategies may be un-strategic, de-motivating and sub-optimal. Hence, the debate on to what degree culture matters in business communication is ongoing. In terms of societies in the Nordic region, if professionals appreciate how their communication behavior is perceived by others and how they can expect the other party will act, write, interact and de-code messages, cultural clashes that could otherwise threaten the business strategy and relationship can be avoided (Warner-Søderholm, 2010; 2012). In addition, if we also re-consider the statement ‘be careful what you wish for’ in the management game of communication, we explore the sometimes-negative correlations between how we perceive communication behavior in the Nordics today versus how we wished we interacted and behaved in a business communication context.

We found that the hallmark of Norwegian societal cultural practices within a Nordic context was seen to be higher gender egalitarianism. This suggests that within the context of communications between an organization and its stakeholders, gender balance in interaction in project teams can be most expected in Norway. The most pronounced Norwegian cultural values within a Nordic framework were also lower power distance and higher humane orientation values-thus suggesting that a flatter decision making hierarchy and a more paternal, people-based approach to communications with stakeholders is often the norm. The unique elements of the Finnish communication practices were seen to be the value placed on hierarchy, order, and a tradition for less relationship building and less interaction in teams. This suggests that more conservative communication structures, clearer, more formal divisions in responsibility and less priority placed on interacting with team building may be the norm. The unique elements of the Danish communication practices were seen to be a greater value given to performance orientation and assertiveness, suggesting a more dynamic, competitive, status-focused communication environment may be experienced in projects in Denmark. The cultural practices affecting business communication, more unique to the Swedish organizations, were the values placed upon institutional collectivism, consensus, long term planning to avoid risk and a lower level of assertiveness compared to their Danish colleagues. A further

contribution has been the discussion of negative correlations often found between 'practices scores' and 'espoused scores': this may help us understand where our own society or organization hopes to go in terms of cultural and communication practices in the future. The Finnish data suggested a stronger wish for lower power distance and an egalitarian and more performance-oriented way of behaving and communicating in the future. The Norwegian data surprisingly showed a wish for a less assertive way of doing business. The Danish and Swedish data showed even higher ambitions for gender equality and performance orientation in behaving and communicating at work.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

In conclusion, this paper has provided empirical results and presented practical implications regarding how to understand business communication practices in the Nordic cluster. Leveraging the unique differences in business communication found in each individual society—both within and with Nordic organizations—will offer benefit for all parties. In addition, by understanding our own cultural and communication practices and values, we will be better prepared for new business and communication opportunities in the future. A limitation of the study is that there is no opportunity for multivariate analyses to test the hypothesis that 'culture impacts communication' for statistical significance. Future researchers should collect data to statistically test relationships between business communication and culture in order to investigate similarities and differences vis à vis findings from the general management data. Future researchers could also explore in greater depth the findings of this article in relation to the 'espoused value scores' and the negative correlations often found between 'how we act and communicate' and 'how we wished we acted and communicated'. The data indicated that all Nordic societies across the board wish for an even stronger humane orientation, a more explicit focus on future orientation, higher gender egalitarianism and a wish for less hierarchy. Within a communication setting, we can be prepared for this wish by being pro-active in encouraging teams to communicate with lower power distance and open door policies to encourage more informal interaction. Furthermore, we may encourage a greater sense of informality in all communication, including digital communication messaging and social media interactions with stakeholders. Why should we then 'be careful what we wish for'? When societies or organisations have espoused values which show a wish for a move towards less hierarchy and more informality in business—the consequences may be a shift into more diffuse organisational structures and this could change communication and decision making patterns. So, if better cross-cultural business communication understanding can contribute to an organization's bottom line in the management game of communication today, both in and outside the Nordics, we need to dig deeper into both communication based practices and the espoused values of ourselves and our stakeholders.

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