

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: GLOBAL CLUSTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The CQ Center sometimes uses the term "global clusters" in our training to help illustrate the similarities and differences in cultural values across different cultures. These global clusters represent the ten largest cultural groupings in the world, but they do not cover all countries or areas of the world, which is a complex place.

The global clusters are based on large-scale research conducted by scholars over the years; they are not based on research conducted by the CQ Center and they are not based on our database. These clusters are primarily useful for thinking about cultural similarities and differences, but it is important to remember that the global clusters are generalizations about different cultural groups. Diversity exists within each of the global clusters and so the typical cultural values for a cluster should not be viewed as stereotypes or as absolute indicators of the actual preferences of a specific person.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What are the global clusters?

The global clusters represent the ten largest cultural groupings in the world. They are based on the work of Ronen and Shenkar, and later built upon by the GLOBE leadership study. Not every national or ethnic culture fits into these ten clusters, but they are the largest cultural groupings globally and serve as a starting point for understanding the dominant behavioral preferences found in these clusters. The countries listed are not the clusters themselves. Instead, they are examples of places where a large number of people have this cluster of behavioral preferences.

2. What is the value of the global clusters?

The clusters show the similarities and differences in profiles of cultural value preferences across different cultural groupings. They allow people to compare preferences across the clusters, and they also help people to anticipate tentative possible cultural value preferences when they encounter people who have novel cultural backgrounds.

3. Are the global cultural clusters based on the CQ Center database?

No. The cultural clusters were initially developed by Ronen and Shenkar, based on their synthesis of eight large-scale empirical field studies conducted by diverse research teams across the world, involving over 100,000 participants working in different sectors, from over 65 different countries. Two of the studies were conducted in English, and the rest were translated into a variety of local languages. Results were analyzed using multiple, rigorous analytical techniques to validate and cross-validate the clustering. The clusters were later refined and extended by the GLOBE leadership research.

4. Did the empirical data on the global clusters reflect all countries in the world?

No. Although the research was large-scale and included participants from over 65 different countries, it did not include significant numbers of participants from all countries or all cultures. Specifically, the researchers called for additional studies with more data from certain parts of the world, including Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet republics. Thus, the clusters are incomplete and additional research is needed.

5. Why are some countries listed within specific clusters and other countries are omitted?

When countries are listed as being in a specific cluster, they are included as illustrations of where you are likely to find a high concentration of this cultural grouping (e.g., many people in Canada are not Anglo, but there is a strong presence of the Anglo cluster in Canada). The approach was not designed to be complete or comprehensive. Not every national or ethnic culture fits into the clusters because the world is complex and there are many different cultural groupings. Overall, the clusters provide a general heuristic for thinking about the ten largest cultural groupings in the world.

6. Why do some people's behavioral preferences differ from the global cluster(s) that are most similar to their background?

There is diversity within all global clusters. Although many people in Confucian Asia are Collectivistic, some people in this cluster are Individualistic or moderately Collectivistic. This could be due to personality, family history, or other individual differences.

7. Why are the clusters more nuanced for some parts of the world (for example, Europe), and more general, with fewer distinctions, for other parts of the world (for example, Africa and Latin America)?

The clusters summarize existing research. In places where less research has been done, we know less about cultural similarities and differences. This reinforces the critical need for scholars to do more research on cultural similarities and differences throughout the world.

8. Were some countries unique and difficult to cluster?

Yes. The researchers classified some countries as "independents" (based on unique combinations of preferences). Some examples include Brazil, India, Iran, and Israel.

9. Did the global pandemic change the global clusters?

No. The global clusters are based on existing research that was done over many years. In general, cultural value preferences change relatively slowly, but some research does demonstrate differences in the cultural value preferences based on generational differences.

10. If I change organizations or if I get promoted, will my responses to the cultural value questions change?

Fundamentally, your underlying cultural value preferences tend not to change. If, however, you are promoted into a new job, you may find yourself changing your behavior to fit with new peers or the new culture. Over time, this might cause you to place yourself in a different spot on the continuum, but the changes are usually relatively small.

11. What are the differences in my own individual behavioral preferences and the organizational culture of my organization?

Your individual behavioral preferences are usually established in early childhood and remain relatively stable. The organizational culture of your organization reflects the typical beliefs, assumptions, values, and norms of the organization. Organizational culture is relatively stable most of the time, but it can change when there are mergers, acquisitions, or changes in the management team. When an organization has a "strong" or "tight" organizational culture, that means that most people are expected to conform to the norms most of the time. In other words, your behavior in the organization might reflect the norms of the culture, instead of your own behavioral preferences. Your underlying preferences most likely do not change, but you do change your behavior.

12. Do the clusters reinforce stereotypes?

The clusters represent a general framework that simplifies cultural groupings. They can be used as a starting point for thinking about cultural similarities and differences, but it is critically important to remember that there is diversity within each cluster. Although the typical cultural values of a cluster can be used to form initial, tentative expectations, each cultural encounter must be treated as a unique event. It is important to make an informed judgment of the extent to which a specific individual is similar to or different from the typical cultural values of a cluster.