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By Charles Rarick, Gregory Winter, Inge Nickerson, Gideon Falk, Casimir Barczyk & Patrick K. Asea
Purdue University Calumet, United States

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An Investigation of Ugandan Cultural Values and Implications for Managerial Behavior

Charles Rarick ^α, Gregory Winter ^σ, Inge Nickerson ^ρ, Gideon Falk ^ω, Casimir Barczyk [¥]
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I. INTRODUCTION

As international business looks towards the future it has become clear that a very important part of the world for further development is Africa. The African continent has experienced increased growth in recent years and the prospects for further growth look promising. In order to do business in a country it is essential to understand its culture, which implies understanding its peoples' values and beliefs. A theoretical framework is helpful to facilitate such an understanding.

It can be argued that the most popular and far-reaching cross-cultural research work is that of Geert Hofstede and his associates. Hofstede, who was employed as an industrial psychologist by IBM during the late 1960s and early 1970s administered a "values" survey to employees in the subsidiaries of the company. Based on the data, Hofstede concluded that management theories were bound by culture. Management behavior appropriate in one culture may be inappropriate in another (Hofstede, 1980a; Hofstede, 1980b; Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 1993; Hofstede, 1994; Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede's work has been widely cited in various academic studies (Kirkman, Lowe &

Gibson, 2006) and typically forms the basis for cross-cultural analysis in university-level management courses. Using data from the original 72 countries surveyed, Hofstede was able to profile 40 countries. Later research provided for the classification of 10 more countries and three regions – East Africa, West Africa, and the Arab world (www.geert-hofstede.com, 2013).

Hofstede identified four dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance (PDI) is the degree to which members of a society expect power to be unequally shared. Individualism (IND) is the extent to which people look after their own interests. This is contrasted with collectivism, which is the extent to which people identify more closely to a group and expect group membership to protect them. Masculinity (MAS) is the extent to which people value assertiveness, competition, and the acquisition of material goods. This is contrasted with femininity, which values nurturing, relationships, and a concern for others. Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) is essentially a society's reliance on social norms and structures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). In essence, it is a measure of society's collective tolerance for ambiguity.

Later research (Hofstede & Bond, 1988) added a fifth dimension now called long-term orientation (LTO). That dimension reflects the extent to which a society encourages and rewards future-oriented behavior such as planning, delaying gratification, and investing in the future. LTO refers to a preference for thrift, perseverance, tradition, and a long term view of time (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). The original term, Confucian Dynamism, grew out of a view that "Asian values" were unique to a specific region of the world.

Hofstede's popular work has attracted a number of critics. Some have expressed concerns about the generalizability of his findings, the level of analysis, the equation of political boundaries of countries to culture, and the validity of his survey instrument (Mc Sweeney, 2002; Smith, 2002). Others have challenged the assumption of the homogeneity of each culture studied (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). Directly related to this article, Jackson (2011) expresses some concern about the theoretical validity of Hofstede's work when assessing African countries. The fifth dimension – long-term orientation (LTO) – has been challenged on the

Authors α ω ¥ : College of Business, Purdue University Calumet, 2200 169th Street, Hammond, USA. E-mails : crarick@purduecal.edu, gideon@purduecal.edu, barczyk@purduecal.edu

Authors σ § : Department of Business & Economics, Andreas School of Business, American University of Afghanistan Barry University, Darulaman Road, Avenue Kabul, Afghanistan. E-mails : gwinter@auaf.edu.af, pasea@auaf.edu.af

Author ρ : Andreas School of Business, Barry University, Miami Shores, USA. E-mail : inickerson@mail.barry.edu

grounds of conceptual validity (Fang, 2003). Grenness (2012) points out the inherent problem of the ecological fallacy in Hofstede's work in which the predominant traits of a culture are generalized to individuals within that cultural group. In 2010, the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) published a special edition issue devoted to cross-cultural research. While there is some validity to many of the concerns raised by Hofstede's critics, his research represents the most comprehensive analysis of cultural values to date, reflecting the fact that no method of cultural assessment is flawless. In the opening article of the JIBS series, Tung and Verbeke (2010) point out the "undeniable" impact of Hofstede's research on the theories and practice of management and international business. His theory of cultural dimensions has evolved (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011) and remains the most important and comprehensive work in the area of cross-cultural classification and understanding. While Hofstede's approach may be "blunt" (Jackson, 2011), it nevertheless provides useful insight into an initial understanding of important cultural values.

This paper provides a preliminary look into the cultural assessment of a country not included in Hofstede's data set. Since Uganda gained its independence from Great Britain in 1962 it has, at times, experienced major social instability. During the regime of Idi Amin, it suffered major atrocities and the struggle for power after his failed rule resulted in a six year civil war (McDonough 2008). At one time Uganda had a more heterogeneous population as a result of colonization and the importation of Indians to facilitate British rule. But in 1972 all "Asians" were expelled from the country (Asiime 2012) and the population became more homogeneous.

II. METHOD

The assessment of cultural values was made using a sample of 67 students at a midsize university in Uganda. The sample was almost perfectly balanced between male and female respondents. The

respondents were mixed in terms of their living in urban and rural areas. The survey respondents were all young adults who volunteered for participation in the study.

This study used Hofstede's Values Survey Module 1994 (VSM 94). The items measured Ugandan culture on the five value dimensions: power distance (PDI), masculinity (MAS), individualism (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and long-term orientation (LTO). The results were determined by using the index method developed by Hofstede. The scores for the value dimensions obtained in this study were compared to the scores obtained by Hofstede (www.geert-hofstede.com, 2013). Comparisons were made to five select countries: China, Brazil, Germany, Japan, and the USA. Scores for each value dimension from the current study were also compared to those from respondents living in countries within the region for a more in-depth comparison. The countries included in this comparative analysis included Hofstede's West and East Africa country groupings. West African countries include Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. East African countries include Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia.

III. RESULTS

The results of the survey indicate that, in general, Ugandan culture can be characterized as being low in power distance, masculine, collectivist, and high in uncertainty avoidance. Uganda is also short-term in its orientation toward time. These results indicate some differences in the value dimension scores for Uganda as opposed to other countries in the region. Power distance scores, for example, are considerably lower for Uganda. Long-term orientation offers fewer opportunities for comparison since this dimension was studied in only 23 countries (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). In this study Uganda was compared to the select countries for a comparative assessment of long-term orientation. Greater analysis can be conducted on the original four dimensions. Figure 1 shows the scores for Uganda on all five cultural dimensions using the Hofstede-Bond model.

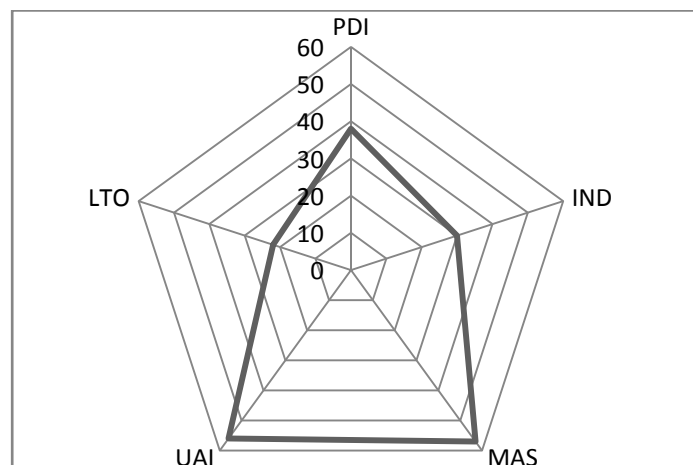


Figure 1 : Plot of the five cultural value dimensions in Uganda

a) *Power Distance*

The data indicate that Uganda has a PDI score of 38. This score suggests that Ugandans have a low level of acceptance of inequality among societal

members. Figure 2 shows the PDI scores for Uganda and select other countries. The data reveal that with respect to power distance, Uganda's culture is similar to Germany and the United States.

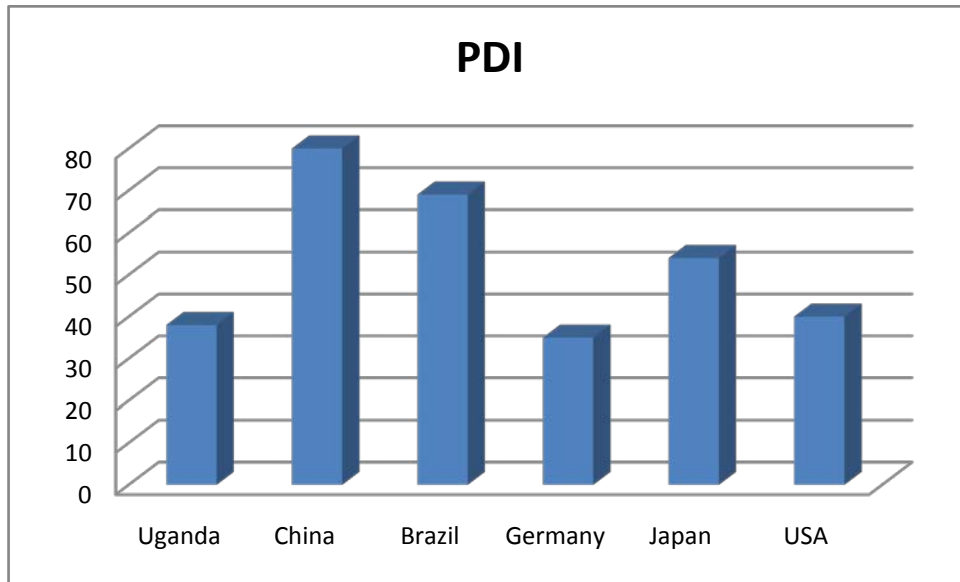


Figure 2: Scores for power distance in Uganda and select countries

Figure 3 shows that within Africa, Uganda's PDI is quite low compared to countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and West and East African

country groups. The average PDI score for the region is much higher than that found in Uganda.

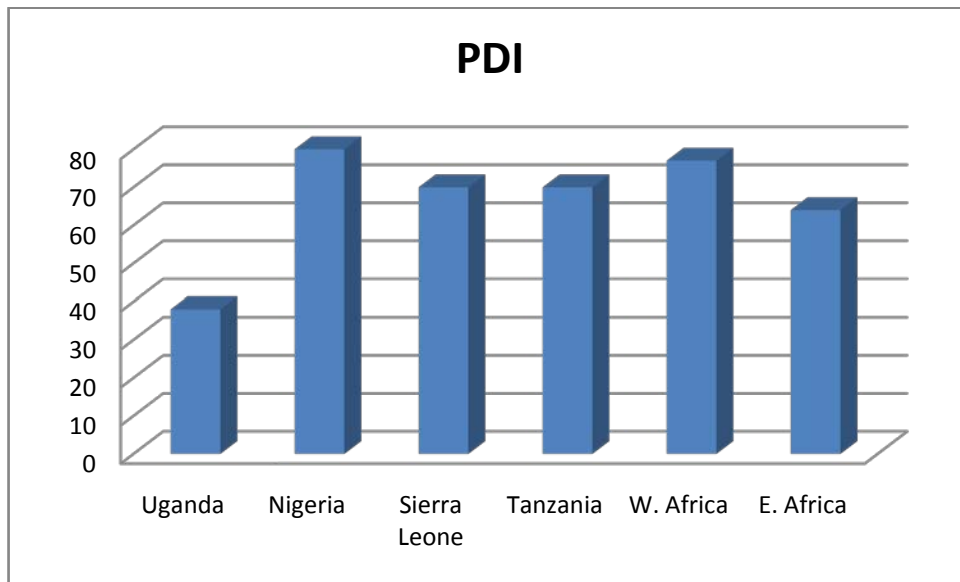


Figure 3: Scores for power distance in Uganda and select countries in Africa

b) *Masculinity*

The data indicate that Uganda has a MAS score of 57. This score suggests that Ugandan culture is masculine as opposed to feminine. Figure 4 shows the MAS scores for Uganda and select countries. The data reveal that Uganda's culture is less masculine than

Japan and Germany and somewhat similar to that of the United States.

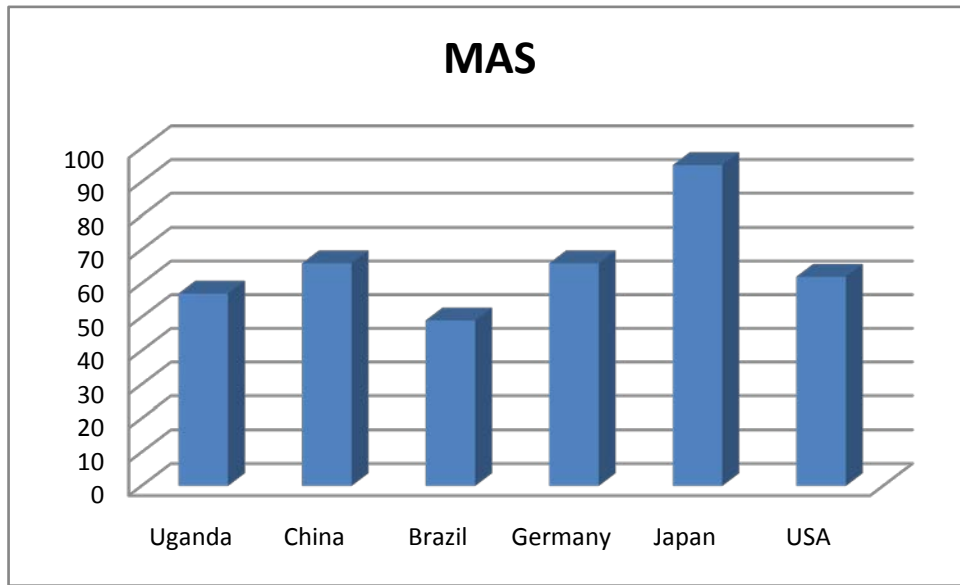


Figure 4 : Scores for masculinity in Uganda and select countries

Figure 5 shows that Uganda's MAS score is similar to most other countries in the region with little inter-country variation.

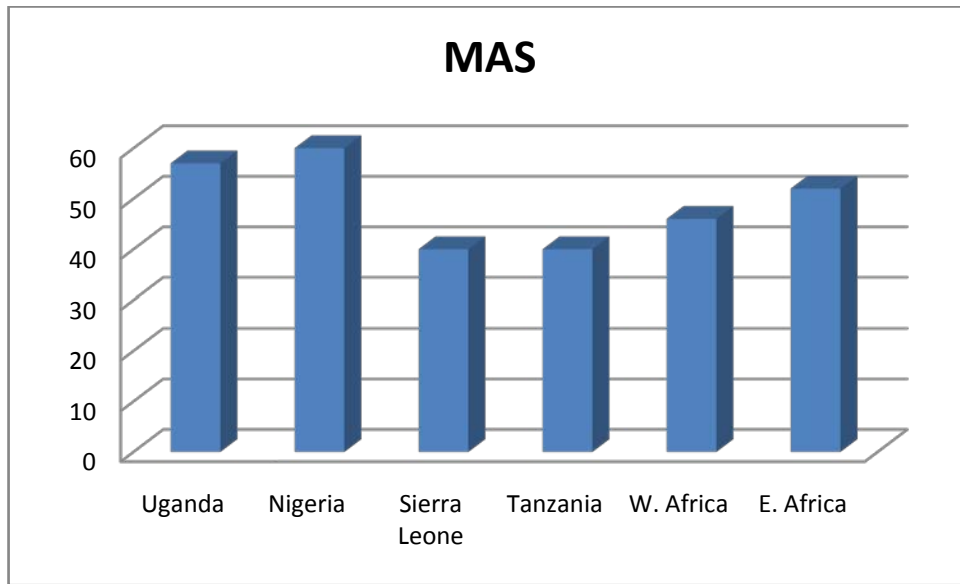


Figure 5 : Scores for masculinity in Uganda and select countries in Africa

c) Individualism

The data indicate that Uganda has an IDV score of 30. This score suggests that Ugandans are collectivist in nature. Figure 6 shows the IDV score for Uganda and select countries. With respect to individualism, Ugandan culture is very collectivist compared to select countries, with the exception of China, which has the lowest IDV score of the countries included in this analysis.

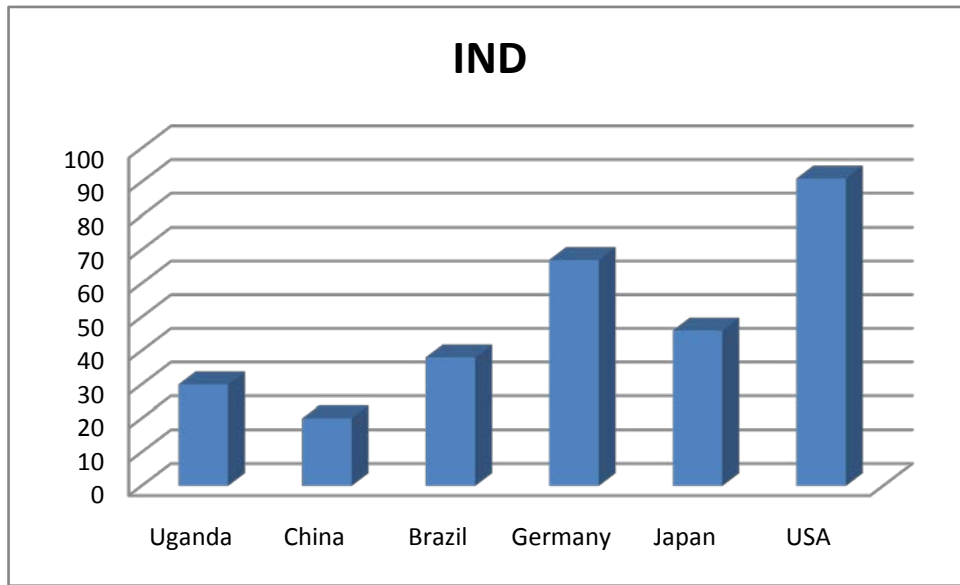


Figure 6 : Scores for individualism in Uganda and select countries

Figure 7 shows that within the region, Uganda's IDV score is high, but not significantly so, with other countries essentially being collectivist in nature.

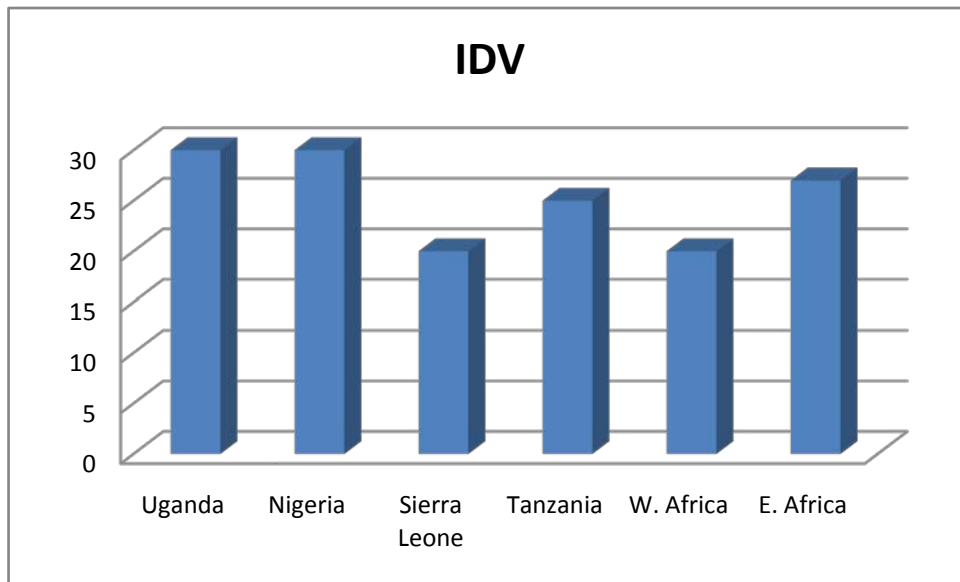


Figure 7 : Scores for individualism in Uganda and select countries in Africa

d) *Uncertainty Avoidance*

The data indicate that Uganda has a UAI score of 56. This score suggests that Ugandan culture has a relatively low tolerance for uncertainty, but not to an extreme extent. While technically classified as a high uncertainty avoidance culture, Uganda's UAI score is not too far above that of the United States. Figure 8 shows the UAI scores for Uganda and select other countries.

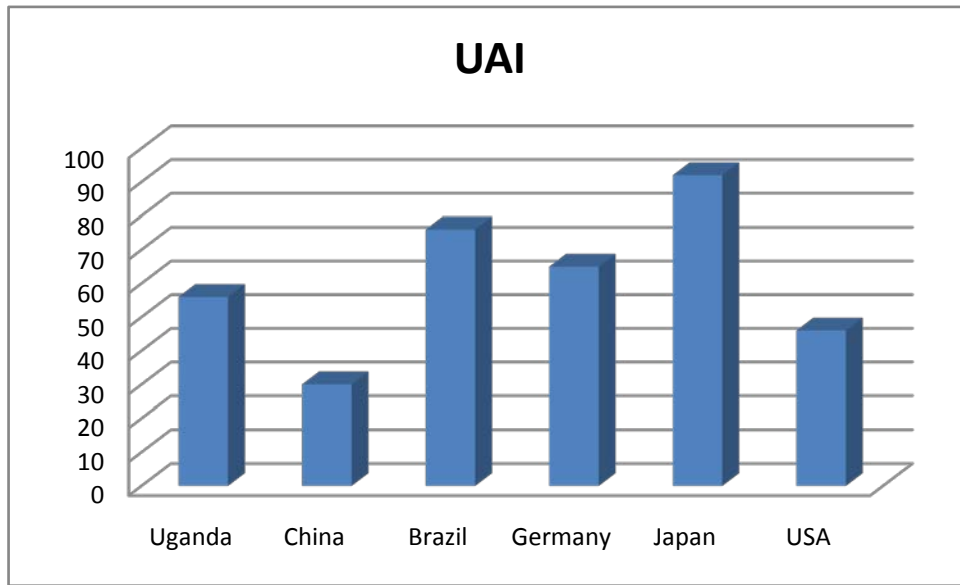


Figure 8 : Scores for uncertainty avoidance in Uganda and select countries

Figure 9 shows that within the region, Uganda's UAI score is higher than all other countries included in this analysis. However, the actual scores vary little from

Uganda's high score of 56 to Sierra Leone and Tanzania's low scores of 50. All countries in Figure 9 show relatively high uncertainty avoidance.

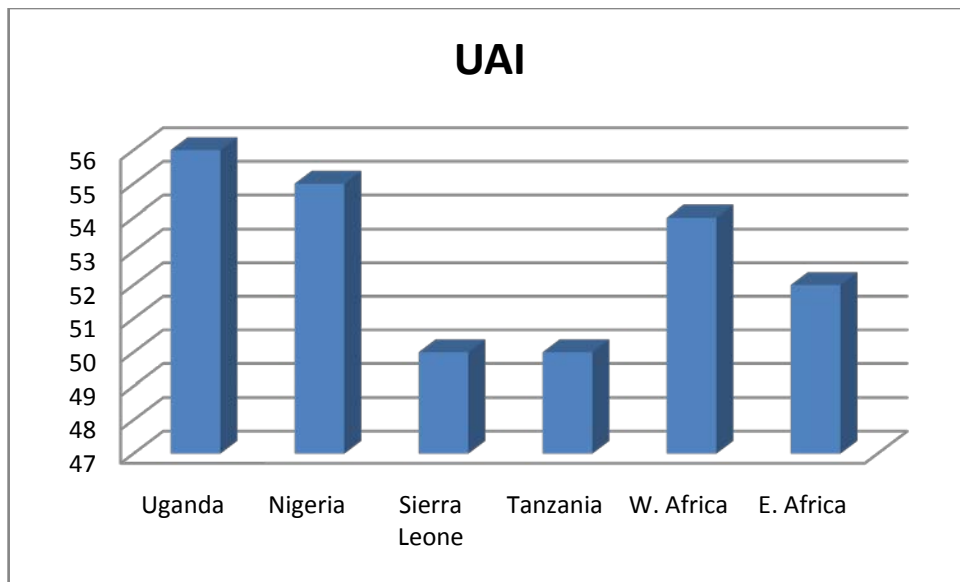


Figure 9 : Scores for uncertainty avoidance in Uganda and select countries in Africa

e) Long-Term Orientation

The data indicate that Uganda has an LTO score of 20. This score suggests that Ugandans have a culture that is very short-term oriented. As stated earlier in this paper, since this dimension was added nearly a decade after Hofstede's original study, we have comparative LTO data for relatively few countries. As such, comparisons with the Ugandan data are more difficult. Figure 10 shows the LTO scores for Uganda and the five select countries from which those data were

collected. The data reveal that Uganda's long-term orientation is quite low, perhaps not surprising given the uncertainty found in the country's recent past.

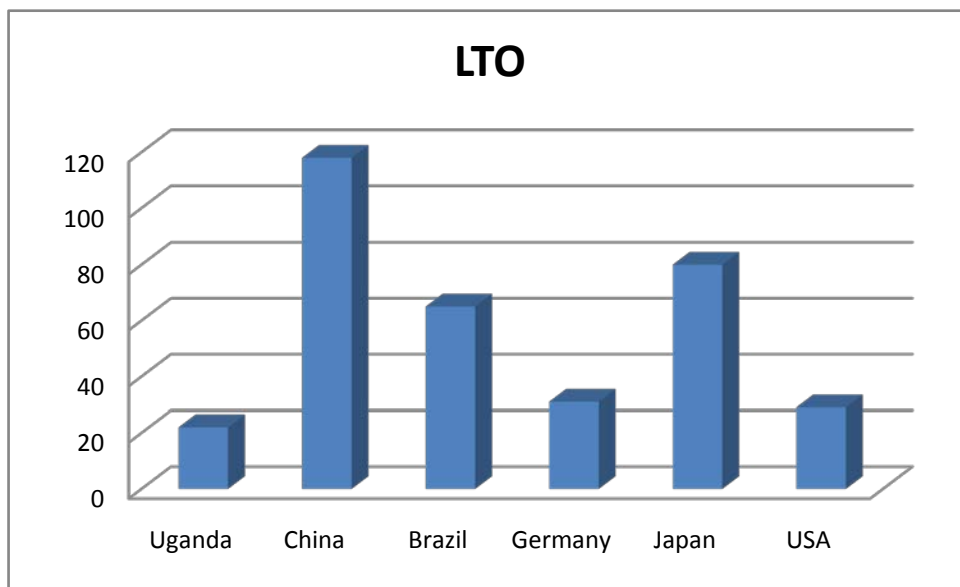


Figure 10 : Scores for long term orientation in Uganda and select countries

Uganda was under the control of the British for over 60 years before gaining its independence in the early 1960s. It seems likely that aspects of British culture could have become immersed into Ugandan culture. A comparison of the cultural values from Uganda and the United Kingdom is shown in Figure 11, which suggests that there are significant cultural differences between the two countries.

However, the two countries have similar values with respect to power distance and long-term orientation, a cultural configuration that may have been influenced by Uganda's colonial history. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Ugandan culture, when viewed holistically, is unique and not simply a copy of British culture.

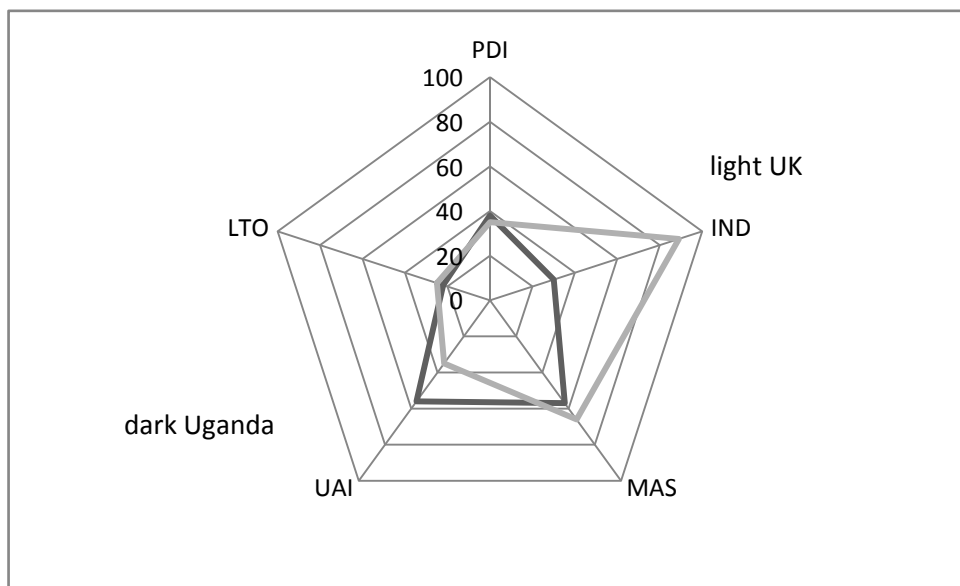


Figure 11 : Plot of the five cultural value dimensions in Uganda and the UK

IV. DISCUSSION

While this study is not unlike the original Hofstede work in terms of its sample heterogeneity, it is reasonable to conclude that the somewhat unique characteristics of the sample are not fully representative of the greater Ugandan population. The sample was balanced in terms of gender and represented a mix of

individuals from urban and rural population. However, the educational achievement of the sample was above the national average. As with many investigations into cultural values, significant underreporting of less educated and more isolated members of the culture can occur. In a recent article in the Academy of International Business's *Insights* (2013), Professor Hofstede challenged the validity of a study by Fischer and Al-Issa

(2012) using the values survey with unmatched samples. The current study suffers from the same shortcoming because it does not use matched samples for comparison. While we agree that using matched samples with the original data set would be ideal for comparison, without some degree of generalizability of the original data set, the work of Professor Hofstede has very limited application. The Values Survey Module (VSM) used by Hofstede and others can only act as a "blunt instrument" in assessing national culture. Despite this limitation, it provides insights and understandings of culture that would otherwise have been unavailable.

Based upon our assessment, Ugandan culture can be characterized as being low in power distance, masculine, collectivist, moderately high in uncertainty avoidance, and short-term orientated. These cultural values would dictate a certain style of management. People from cultures low in power distance prefer some form of power sharing and participation in the workplace. The masculine nature of Ugandan culture would indicate that aggression and competition would be valued in organizations. The collectivist nature of Ugandan culture indicates that groups would serve a useful role in the organization of people and achievement of goals. High uncertainty avoidance requires more direction and clear policies and procedures. The short term orientation would suggest that a focus on the present and more immediately realizable results would be considered more appropriate than organizational policies and procedures that emphasize the future and delayed gratification.

Olusoji, Oluwakemi and Uchechi (2012) point out in a qualitative study that African culture is enduring and somewhat difficult to change. In a study of Nigeria, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, researchers found that a common cultural characteristic called "ubuntu" was common with leadership behavior (Wanasika, Howell, Littrell, & Dorfman, 2011). Paternalistic leadership, group solidarity, and a humane orientation were found in the region. The appropriate management style in Uganda would follow a more power-sharing, paternalistic, and group oriented approach. International managers seeking to do business in Uganda must be sensitive to these cultural values.

Frontier markets are becoming increasingly interesting to companies engaged in international business and countries in Africa are seen as leaders in that market. In the McKinsey & Company report by Leke and Lund (2010), the African continent was cited as a region of particular importance to the future of international business. This claim was reinforced and expanded in an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* (Chironga, Leke, Lund, & van Wamelen, 2012). Africa offers not only a desirable place to acquire abundant natural resources, but structural changes and globalization make the continent an

increasingly important market for exports and a potential area for manufacturing operations. Having a greater understanding of the diverse cultures in Africa and managing in a way that capitalizes on this knowledge are important factors for successful business engagement on the continent.

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