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**International Negotiation between Ecuador and
France. Analysis from the Perspective of Transcultural
Communication: Renault Case Study**

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Negociación Internacional entre Ecuador y Francia. Análisis desde la Perspectiva de la Comunicación Transcultural: Caso de Estudio Renault

Resumen

Una negociación internacional involucra a dos o más individuos con bagajes culturales distintos, los cuales, al ser regularmente ignorados, dificultan el entendimiento de las partes involucradas. La falta de entrenamiento en el ámbito intercultural, puede generar malentendidos o choques culturales que podrían impedir el éxito en medio de un acuerdo. En consecuencia, este artículo se centra en un análisis cultural con la finalidad de identificar las principales competencias interculturales que se deben considerar al momento de interactuar con una cultura extranjera. La investigación se enfoca específicamente en el estudio de las interacciones culturales entre ejecutivos franceses y ecuatorianos, a través de una metodología mixta. Se tomaron los datos estadísticos del modelo de las 6 Dimensiones Culturales de Geert H. Hofstede y las respuestas de una entrevista estructurada a un empleado ecuatoriano de la empresa francesa Renault. Mediante un análisis bibliográfico de teorías culturales, los datos de las dimensiones, la entrevista al ejecutivo y el uso de una metodología hermenéutica, se encontró que las culturas varían principalmente en la dimensión del Individualismo y de la Orientación a Largo Plazo. Finalmente, la investigación concluye con formas de mejorar sus encuentros, de acuerdo a cada dimensión y a la experiencia del entrevistado.

Palabras clave

Cultura, Encuentro Intercultural, Negociación, Dimensiones Culturales, Interculturalidad

International Negotiation between Ecuador and France. Analysis from the Perspective of Transcultural Communication: Renault Case Study

Abstract

An international negotiation involves two or more individuals with different cultural backgrounds, which, when often ignored, make it difficult for the parties involved to understand each other. The lack of cross-cultural training can lead to misunderstandings or cultural clashes that could prevent success in the midst of an agreement. Consequently, this article focuses on a cultural analysis in order to identify the main intercultural competencies to be considered when interacting with people from a foreign culture. The research focuses specifically on the study of cultural interactions between French and Ecuadorian executives, through a mixed methodology. Statistical data from Geert H. Hofstede's 6 Cultural Dimensions model and responses from a structured interview with an Ecuadorian employee of the French company Renault were used. Through a bibliographic analysis of cultural theories, the data of the dimensions, the interview with the executive and the use of a hermeneutic methodology, it was found that cultures vary mainly in the dimension of Individualism and Long-Term Orientation. Finally, the research concludes with ways to improve their intercultural encounters, according to each dimension and the interviewee's experience.

Key words

Culture, Intercultural Encounter, Negotiation, Cultural Dimensions, Interculturality

International Negotiation between Ecuador and France. Analysis from the Perspective of Transcultural Communication: Renault Case Study

1. Introduction

"When there are encounters between companies belonging to different cultures, misunderstandings are easily given by ignorance of existing sociocultural differences." (Maldonado, 2007, p. 261)

The existence of the different ways of relating of each culture, involves challenges to achieve a successful meeting between members of different countries. Efficiently confronting and managing these culture shocks must be part of the organizational strategy (Donado, 2015) since the intercultural relationship involves two parties, who, if they do not achieve their understanding, will not be able to create a synergy in the encounter.

According to Karen D. Maldonado (2007) in her text "The Interculturality of International Business", it produces positive relationships between members of different cultures in the administrative and business world (p. 263). Therefore, it is essential to have the intention to be trained in intercultural communication issues, since the success or failure of an agreement will depend to a large extent on it. (Bandera & Tarra, 2016) Consequently, prioritizing the identification of good intercultural interaction tactics, to overcome cultural barriers that may arise in encounters, is the first step to relate and negotiate adequately with other cultures.

This research focuses particularly on the cultural interactions between Ecuador and France. France, having solidly structured companies in the organizational field, in addition to having an innovative economy and a large market -which has allowed the growth of its companies in areas of productivity and competitiveness-, is a good ally for Ecuadorian executives and organizations. Therefore, from a cultural approach, it is intended to identify the main intercultural competencies that Ecuadorian members should consider today, when relating with French people, in order to promote their good relations and improve their interaction strategies. To accomplish the intention of the study, the model of the 6 Cultural Dimensions will be analyzed, together with an interview to an Ecuadorian executive in the Renault company -which was based on his international experience with members of the French culture-.

1.1 Objectives

General Objective: To identify the main intercultural competences that should be considered in meetings between Ecuador and France

- Analyze theories related to intercultural factors
- Analyze the cultural differences that exist between Ecuadorian and French culture
- Describe how cultural encounters between French and Ecuadorians can be improved

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Living in a globalized world has made meetings between different countries indispensable in the business field. As Sandra J. Hortua explains (2014) in its text "Impact of Interculturality in International Business" intercultural encounters are inevitable and necessary for the consolidation of relationships and business, since they allow societies to reinforce their knowledge about other cultures to improve their strategies.

Therefore, interacting with various cultures is essential for an organization to maintain good relations with members from abroad and to benefit from them. However, cross-cultural analysis can be regularly neglected in business. Karen D. Maldonado (2007) states that prioritizing only the commercial

transaction, omitting the fact that executives have different cultural backgrounds, causes the cultural aspect to be underestimated in this field. However, these socio-cultural factors are also important because of their influence on global interactions between individuals and organizations, from the first moment of intercultural contact.

Taking into account the relevance of the study of culture in business, improving intercultural interaction strategies, by analyzing the main cultural factors that can influence the relationship with other societies, is fundamental to increase the possibilities of maintaining and successfully concluding meetings, agreements and relationships. As stated by Dagoberto Páramo (2011) in his text "Culture and International Business" the need to maintain commercial ties with people with different customs, traditions and origins, makes it essential to have a broad knowledge of factors such as the style, forms, beliefs and ways of relating to other cultures. Consequently, it is important for businessmen to study culture to have positive encounters with members of other nations, since the more one knows about the other person's culture, the more accurately one will be able to predict and understand his behavior. (Rodríguez, 2007)

Since this study should have been developed according to each culture, the intercultural factors to be considered between French and Ecuadorians were specifically examined. France has several advantages due to the fact that it belongs to the European Union, which remains the world's leading economy with more than 500 million consumers. In addition, according to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2021), the country currently has more than 65 million consumers; it is Europe's second largest market and the world's sixth largest economy. Therefore, engaging in good interactions and building a strong relationship with French companies and negotiators, can bring a variety of mutual benefits. (Oligastri et al, 2017)

To analyze those intercultural competences that must be considered when interacting with French culture, it is key to take into account one of the most considered authors in the field of cultural differences such as Geert Hendrik Hofstede. This author, through his 6 Dimensions Model developed during the 1980s - which covers aspects such as Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term Orientation and Indulgence versus Restraint - states that the cultural groupings maintained by a specific society affect human behavior in a region, country, continent, and even in business organizations, for decision making. (Aguilar et al, 2018) Later, his model was explored in order to reflect on the cultural dimensions he proposes.

1.3 Organizational culture

"Culture is the set of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capacities and habits acquired by man by being a member of a society." (Luna, 2013, p. 3)

This article is framed within the field of organizational culture by dealing with the forms of interaction maintained by two different cultures (Ecuadorian and French). According to Eugenio Sainz (2011) la concepción de la cultura organizacional puede llegar a ser definida desde varias perspectivas. From a sociocultural perspective, with reference to Gareth Morgan (1997) is defined as a set of values, norms, beliefs, symbols and personalities that determine the unique character of an organization in order to provide it with a framework for action. As stated by Sainz (2011) within this set could be found traditions, different organizational routines and structures of authority. In other words, the organizational culture according to the author, is built by a group of individuals who have been trained, have adopted or have learned from the environment that surrounds them, the way to act in common situations or conditions. Therefore, organizational culture develops in the same way as other types of social learning, based on human interactions. (Sainz, 2011)

This culture, by involving several individuals in its construction, from an intercultural approach should take into account the background of the members that make up an organization for its operation. Cultural recognition and understanding, as Nancy Adler (1980) explains in her book "Cultural Synergy: The Management of Cross-Cultural Organizations", will allow the achievement of the synergy of a group, which will result in an efficient organizational culture.

1.4 Nancy Adler and the Theory of Cultural Synergy

When dealing with two cultures, Nancy Adler -who identified several alternatives to work and maintain a good coexistence between individuals from different cultures- is considered as a theoretical support. Particularly, it is necessary to deepen the theory of Cultural Synergy, which, according to the author (1980) describes the attempt to articulate various cultures to constitute an environment that maintains as a base the combination of strengths, skills and concepts of all groups. Theoretically, the differences identified, within the perspective of Cultural Synergy, would be used as a tool to motivate or promote the reciprocal growth or improvement of the parties through mutual intercultural cooperation. (Adler, 1980)

As believed by Nancy Adler (1980), this approach refers to a process in which the practices, actions and policies of an organization are established on the basis of the cultural patterns of its members. In this way, new ways of management can be created that can transcend the cultural context of each member. According to Adler (1980), within this model, differences and similarities of the different cultures that are part of an organization are identified, so that the diversity among them is not minimized or ignored. On the contrary, this approach suggests that multiculturalism should be used as a key instrument for organizational design and development. In Adler's view (1980), by recognizing and valuing various perspectives, synergy is fostered for the creation of new management practices, which will reduce resistance among members and, in turn, will allow them to work effectively across cultures. Therefore, through this approach Nancy Adler (1980) highlights the importance of the cultural study and the analysis of the vision of all the constituent parts at the moment of conflicts or obstacles.

Acceptance and validation of these multiple visions or paradigms of different events, situations or goals within the organization, are crucial to achieve synergy. Therefore, multicultural feedback is essential in the Model, as it will allow group harmony and improvement of solutions. This process of cross-cultural appreciation allows going beyond a single way of thinking and its limitations - which could become a major obstacle when facing cross-cultural encounters. "To overcome a single culture perspective, managers must examine their underlying assumptions about the world. A single view or way of managing severely limits the flexibility of managers in international situations." (Adler, 1980, p. 176). In other words, synergy allows the limitations of a single paradigm to be diminished, and in turn, enables an organization to use cultural diversity to its advantage in solving cross-cultural dilemmas. In summary, Adler thus sees diversity as a strength for the dynamism and the better cultural understanding of a company.

1.5 Cultural Diversity and Business

Negotiation is a process based on communication between two or more parties to reach an agreement, which is affected by the cultural aspect. According to Jean-Claude Usunier (2003) in his book "International Business Negotiations", negotiators in the international arena have different backgrounds, which lead to patterns of feeling, thinking and action. These factors tend to differ between parties within an international negotiation, influencing their forms of communication Likewise, Jenifer Delecta and G.P Raman (2015) in their text "Cross Cultural Communication Barriers in Workplace" state that, in a multicultural environment, it is common for people with different cultural backgrounds to have different values and beliefs, which can lead to situations of uncertainty and misunderstandings, generating barriers or cross-cultural clashes when relating to each other. Therefore, in order to better understand what the culture of a group of individuals entails and how it influences their behavior, thinking and forms of communication during organizational decision making, theories and authors who have contributed extensively in the field of cross-cultural comparisons will be taken into account.

1.6 The Cultural Iceberg Model

According to Gary Weaver (1986) in order to understand the social, economic, and political behavior of a group of individuals, it is essential to recognize the predominant values within their culture, which are transmitted between generations through learning.

For Weaver, culture maintains a hidden dimension by having hardly visible factors that have a strong influence on human behavior. Thus, according to the author (1997) culture can be explained or interpreted by means of an iceberg, in which only the tip or external part refers to what can be easily visualized. On the one hand, in this first part, the tangible and visible elements represent only 10% of the iceberg, which considers the behavior of the members of a culture. On the other hand, according to Larrea and Raigón (2012) with reference to Weaver (1986) most of the iceberg cannot be seen in a simple way, since it is

submerged, encompassing invisible and intangible elements. This last part is internal as it comprehends ways of perceiving, thinking, as well as the different beliefs and values unconsciously assimilated by an individual in a particular culture. For Weaver (1997), that set of values, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions underlie most of people's behaviors. Therefore, to understand them, it is essential to differentiate the features of the external from the internal part of culture.

External or Superficial Culture

In the external part of culture, which is at the tip of the iceberg, according to Paron (2021) the main features that show surface-level behaviors comprise rules and behaviors that members of a society tend to reinforce in their culture. Individuals obtain those cultural rules and behaviors through explicit learning. That is to say, they acquire knowledge of the surface culture by consciously and deliberately learning certain rules and customs - which are acquired through the experiences of other members of the group. In general, these aspects, behaviors and superficial norms, refer to habitual patterns that are revealed in the everyday cultural life of a group.

As stated by Paron (2021) the external level orders or governs the members of a particular society through visible practices known to its members. Those practices come to form a set of historical patterns, social covenants, ideas, values, manners and lifestyles including mainly components such as food, music, art, clothing, greetings, aesthetics, language, etc.

Commonly, by simplifying the analysis of culture to that which is evident and visible to the public, a society is often stereotyped according to superficial traits that do not represent its most relevant aspects or characteristics. Consequently, there is a tendency to criticize and erroneously define a culture by analyzing only that 10% that is visible. Common terms that refer to this interpretation may be "Third World", "developing country", "emerging economies", etc., which denote the conditions of inequity that are evident in global negotiations. However, to properly understand a culture in its totality, it is indispensable to analyze the factors that make up the internal or hidden dimension.

Internal or Hidden culture

The internal or hidden level comprises the part below the surface of the cultural iceberg. According to Paron (2021), these hidden dimensions are developed through implicit learning and they are the basis for behaviors at the external level. This assertion aligns with that of Weaver (1986) within this part of culture where the invisible aspects are, since they involve ways of thinking and perceiving. Likewise, within this dimension, he explains that those paradigms and thought patterns have a great influence on the behavior of a society or a specific culture, since they cannot be easily altered. As Paron (2021) states, paradigms or worldviews structure the deepest level of a culture and on them people base their lifestyle through values, beliefs and internal rules. Therefore, they are complex to observe because they govern the behaviors expected by a culture, unconsciously. Within the levels of hidden culture are aspects such as roles, ideologies, ritual norms, philosophies, tastes, assumptions, desires and myths.

In the same way, according to Paron (2021) with reference to Plueddemann (2009) internal values in a society also include factors such as non-verbal communication, emotion management, eye contact, leadership notions, conversation patterns and rules of conduct. It is essential for a good negotiator to be aware of and know this deep dimension of culture, since it will be the one that will guide the decision making at the time of shaping or not, the negotiation.

2. Literature Review

Once it is understood what the cultural sphere encompasses in the forms of behavior, and its influence in the organizational field, in order to distinguish cultures it is fundamental to take into account an author who has dealt with intercultural differences to analyze the forms of interaction of the individuals immersed in the negotiation process.

As theoretical support, Geert Hofstede, one of the main authors related to intercultural analysis, will be considered thanks to the development of its cultural dimensions.

2.1 Geert Hofstede and Cultural Dimensions

It is complex to structure and characterize different societies taking into account the variety of factors described above, both in the external and internal part of cultures. Nevertheless, Geert Hofstede's

contribution has served as one of the most widely used quantitative parameters thanks to his cultural indicators. This type of method makes it possible to measure, relate and compare the elements that maintain cultures, as well as different human groups. (Cabezas & Ortiz, 2017)

Hofstede conducted a study for a multinational company in more than 70 countries to establish the main characteristics of societies according to their place of origin. The recognition of those traits was aimed at improving multicultural relations, to foster empathy and efficiency among work groups.

In this way, Hofstede was able to show that there are different types of cultural groupings - in regional and national contexts - that persist over time and influence the behavior of organizations and societies. According to the author (1980), the concept of culture - from the anthropological perspective - refers to a conception related to the variety of ways of feeling, acting and thinking. Therefore, with this type of worldview or collective cultural mentality, it is possible to distinguish people from different groups and their forms of interaction.

Through the development of his research, Hofstede (1991) proposed a model with four dimensions whose purpose was to identify the diversity of cultural patterns according to each group of people. Subsequently, he developed a fifth and sixth dimension. In general terms, the author explains that these dimensions project the basic ways of relating in human societies. Therefore, they influence the response of a cultural grouping when facing general problems. (Hofstede, 1980)

From this perspective, the author outlines the following dimensions in order to understand the cultural influence within a society:

- 1) **Power Distance:** According to Hofstede (1980), this dimension refers to the problem of inequality between individuals as it is related to the extent to which subjects with less power accept it in society. In other words, this dimension measures the perception of people according to how power is divided. Within this dimension, a low score is interpreted as a culture's acceptance of democratic power relations and perceives its members as equals. On the other hand, a high score is manifested as the recognition that members with less power have a well-defined place and assume the formal existence of certain hierarchies. Clear examples of high indexes in this dimension are the countries that, historically, have suffered colonial and domination processes.
- 2) **Individualism versus Collectivism:** Through this dimension, Hofstede (1994) focuses on the degree to which an individual expects to act on his or her own behalf or as a member of his or her community. That is to say, it refers to the level of interdependence that a certain culture has with its members. Based on this conception, as Tarapuez (2016) explains, in the case of cultural groups inclined to individualism, personal goals are prioritized. On the contrary, in the case of collectivism, group goals and purposes -rather than those that are specific to the members of a cultural grouping- are usually of greater importance. For example, in Latin America, collective practices such as the minga, in which an entire community works for the acquisition of a common good, are still accepted.
- 3) **Uncertainty avoidance:** According to Hofstede (1980) this dimension refers to the degree to which the members of a society feel discomfort in unstructured conditions. Unstructured situations or conditions are perceived as those that are unfamiliar, unusual or new. Therefore, the dimension is based on the level at which a society attempts to control the uncontrollable by measuring how people choose familiar or known situations over unfamiliar ones. (Hofstede, 1994) A low score means that a culture has a lower level of concern for ambiguity and uncertainty conditions. Therefore, it would be open to accept change more easily, take greater risks and be more tolerant of diverse behaviors and perspectives. On the other hand, a high score refers to a society that will try to avoid conditions of ambiguity, causing its members to follow rules to reduce uncertainty. Therefore, according to Triandis (2004), this latter cultural group prefers to know exactly what will happen, because it places a high value on predicting future situations and experiencing structured conditions.
- 4) **Masculinity versus Femininity:** According to Tarapuez (2016), this dimension explains the degree of relevance that a culture gives to values regularly related to the masculine gender, such as ambition, heroism, assertiveness, materialism and power, versus those determined for the feminine gender, such as cooperation, modesty, solidarity and emphasis on interpersonal relationships. According to Fariás (2007), on the one hand, a masculinity-oriented group tends to give greater importance to material things, achievements, success and wealth. On the other hand, a femininity-oriented group provides more value to

individuals, to their help, to equality and to the achievement of consensus in a society. Similarly, according to the Hofstede Insights tool (2022) a score inclined to femininity indicates that the factors with the highest relevance in society are caring for others and quality of life. The latter being more relevant indicators of success than standing out among others.

- 5) **Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation:** Fariás (2007) explains with reference to Hofstede (2001) that this dimension measures the level at which the members of a given cultural group accept postponing the gratification of current social, material and emotional needs. In other words, it refers to the value that a society places on long-term planning, instead of focusing on immediate problems. In this way, it describes how the members of a group organize their present and future priorities. According to Swaidan and Hayes (2005) a high level of Long-Term Orientation indicates that a society gives greater relevance to future commitments and the rewards of work done in the present. In contrast, a group with a low level of Long-Term Orientation tends to distrust or not show as much interest in future events or conditions. Therefore, they place more value on rewards and day-to-day situations.
- 6) **Indulgence versus Restraint:** In this dimension Hofstede (2010) explains that, on the one hand, indulgence represents a community that admits the free satisfaction or reward of natural human drives and desires, which are related to enjoying life. On the other hand, restraint refers to a society that moderates the satisfaction of such factors by keeping it strictly regulated through social norms. In other words, this dimension refers to the level at which a society tends to control human desires or impulses of comfort and happiness, according to what is determined as appropriate within its culture. In the case of indulgent cultures, members of the society tend to slightly control the aforementioned factors. In contrast, in restrained societies, members of the group tend to moderate more strongly or strictly those natural impulses.

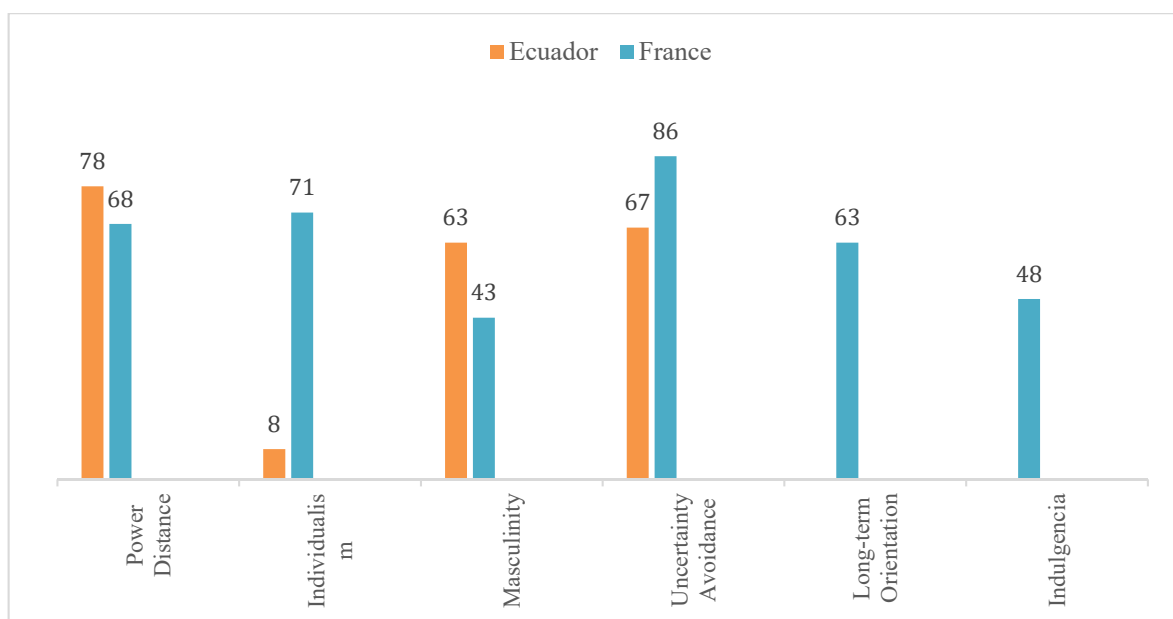
2.2 Ecuador and France according to the Cultural Dimensions of Hofstede

Score interpretation

Culture is not a homogeneous component as it is based on human and social dynamics, therefore, it is important to mention that the data presented below are estimates and do not represent the totality of the members of a group. However, the values established in each dimension and their interpretation were collected through the Hofstede Insights cultural survey tool, which provides proven and effective analytical frameworks for examining, comparing and solving cross-cultural organizational challenges. (HofstedeInsights, 2022)

Figure 1

Cultural Dimension Scores



2.3 Cultural Dimensions: Ecuador

Power Distance

According to the cultural survey tool Hofstede Insights (2022), Ecuadorian culture maintains a score of 78, which places it in one of the highest positions in this dimension. Therefore, it can be inferred that inequality is perceived as something completely natural and inevitable. It is widely accepted in society and is frequently related to social class and race. In addition, the idea of the superiority of European origin over indigenous origin is also accepted by the majority of the culture as a whole. This is reflected in the way people negotiate. In international settings, Ecuadorians strongly perceive the levels of inequality and hierarchy as something unquestionable and natural, which must be respected, assumed and maintained according to the historical parameters that have been imposed. In social practices, Ecuadorians demonstrate high levels of philoxenia, showing affection or admiration for the foreign, which is curiously exhibited in relation to Americans and Europeans, but not to other human groups such as Venezuelans or Peruvians.

Individualism versus Collectivism

According to the Hofstede Insights tool (2022) Ecuador maintains a score of 8, which positions Ecuadorian culture as one of the most collectivist in the world. Due to strong collectivist ties, in this culture belonging to an internal group, avoiding conflicts and preserving harmony in the group are essential aspects. Likewise, Ecuadorian culture tends to be very supportive of its in-group members. However, those who are not within the group could be seen as possible enemies or become excluded, unless they manage to maintain good relations or have the opportunity to access to those groups. Professional and political guilds are clear examples of cultural collectivism in Ecuador. They have been responsible for social, cultural and political events, demonstrating that one of their most prominent characteristics is group cohesion.

Masculinity versus Femininity

In the case of Ecuadorian society, a score of 63 is maintained. The value indicates that it is inclined towards Masculinity, which makes this group to be oriented towards factors such as success, motivation and competition. Therefore, Ecuadorians generally tend to seek to be part of groups or associations that give them a position of status and rewards for their performance. Likewise, members of this culture frequently sacrifice rest activities for work (HofstedeInsights, 2022). With the eagerness to fit into the system, Ecuadorian society has tended to comply with parameters based on the search for success and profit, strengthening the neoliberal paradigm, which favors those who have more resources in economic terms.

Uncertainty Avoidance

With respect to this dimension, Ecuador maintains a score of 67. This high value can be interpreted as an avoidance by the country's members of situations of ambiguity, for which, according to Hofstede Insights (2022), this culture uses mechanisms such as the open expression of emotions, broadly detailed legislation and the maintenance of a conservative society. Also, aspects such as superstition, traditions and religion are relevant factors for the members of this community. This becomes evident when thinking about negotiation situations that include traditional religious practices - such as blessing a start-up business or celebrating a Eucharist, for example-.

Long- Term Orientation versus Short-Term Orientation

The Hofstede Insights tool does not provide data about the Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation dimension. However, according to a study conducted by Natalia Encalada Castillo (2018) to members of the Ecuadorian culture -through a survey on "Ecuadorian culture as a factor in immigrant integration problems"- 70% of the participants responded that their concerns are more focused on the immediate. Therefore, it can be inferred that a short-term orientation prevails in this society.

Indulgence versus Restraint

There is also no data on the dimension of Indulgence versus Restraint for the Ecuadorian culture in the Hofstede Insights tool. However, the usual social practices in this society denote a high index of indulgence. Social customs accept celebration and festivity in a good way. Traditions that have to do with the Catholic religious calendar are respected and celebrated. Thus, Carnival, Christmas, etc., are festivities observed by Ecuadorians. Octavio Paz (1950) in the book "El laberinto de la Soledad" (The Labyrinth of Solitude) analyzes the dynamics of Mexicans in relation to the holidays and maintains that "everything is an occasion to get together". Any excuse is good to interrupt the march of time and celebrate events with festivities and ceremonies. This tendency benefits the reward or satisfaction of impulses or desires of Latin cultures. Therefore, this concept may well apply to the entire region, including Ecuador, where indulgence is quite accepted.

2.4 Cultural Dimensions: France

Power Distance

According to the analysis of the Hofstede Insights tool, France maintains a score of 68. Therefore, in this society there is a tendency to accept high levels of inequality, as members of the French culture are educated from dependence, which influences the role of superiors and the centralization of power within institutions and organizations. Therefore, according to Hofstede Insights (2022) within the organizational environment, companies in France maintain more hierarchical levels than in other countries. Also, superiors have a higher degree of prestige, which allows them to maintain privileges and conditions that are often inaccessible to the rest of the members of the organization.

Individualism versus Collectivism

France is positioned as an individualistic society by maintaining a score of 71. In this culture, individuals are raised independently in relation to the groups to which they belong, therefore, they take care of themselves and their family. (HofstedeInsights, 2022) In addition, because of the high level of individualism, for its members, the distinction between work and private life is essential.

Masculinity versus Femininity

French culture maintains a score of 43, which indicates that its members have an inclination toward femininity. According to Hofstede Insights (2022) the score may be related to the importance that this society places on welfare and social security systems, the importance of good working conditions and the emphasis it maintains on quality of life. However, there is a differentiation between the working class and the upper class, with the former tending towards masculinity, while the latter is more prone to femininity.

Uncertainty Avoidance

France has a score of 86, indicating that the culture maintains a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. Therefore, the French will seek to avoid surprises. Consequently, at the organizational level, they will seek to have all the necessary information and to plan in advance to conduct meetings. Likewise, due to the high score in this dimension, there is a high need for regulations, rules and laws by its members in this culture. (HofstedeInsights, 2022)

Long- Term Orientation

In this dimension, France has a score of 63, making it a long-term oriented culture. According to the cultural analysis tool, the French maintain a marked predisposition to investment and savings, as well as moderation and values such as perseverance to achieve results. (HofstedeInsights, 2022)

Indulgence versus Restraint

In this dimension, France has a score of 48, which can be interpreted as an intermediate value. According to Hofstede Insights (2022) that value reflects that French tend to be less relaxed and regularly tend to moderate their impulses or desires when interacting with others. However, since this is an intermediate value, it is inferred that nor is this culture closed to satisfy its desires.

3. Methods

In order to identify and analyze which cultural factors should be taken into account when interacting with French culture, the research maintained an exploratory-descriptive approach, using qualitative methods. The Methodology Manual proposed by Ruth Sautu et al. (2005) was the main reference for the present research. The text infers the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research by means of a comparative table that points out the paradigms of social research, dividing them into the Positivist/Post-positivist paradigm (quantitative methodology) and the Constructivist paradigm (qualitative methodology). In this way, hermeneutics, or an interpretative methodology, was applied by carrying out bibliographic reviews that took as a guide the cultural dimensions proposed by the author Geert Hofstede. At the same time, the author's official website was used by employing the Hofstede Insights intercultural tool. This tool contains a cultural comparison instrument that details the scores of each country in the model of the 6 dimensions.

Subsequently, the results were obtained through the application of a structured interview with questions focused on the above-mentioned cultural dimensions of Hofstede, to an Ecuadorian employee of the French company Renault. He explained his experience within the organizational processes, such as the development of intercultural encounters and decision making to reach agreements, by having interacted with French people. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1987) in their text "Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods", "participant observers also expect key informants to provide them with an in-depth understanding of the setting." (p. 62) In this way, an interview with a specialized informant facilitates research that may be limited in time and scope, and fill in what the researcher does not know about the topic. Thus, the methodologies were combined by performing an interpretative analysis of the review of the dimensions, together with the interviewee's responses, in order to reach the conclusions and fulfill the research objectives.

4. Results

4.1 Interpretative analysis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions between Ecuador and France

Table 1.

Cultural Dimension Scores between Ecuador and France

Dimension	Ecuador	France
Power Distance	High	High
Individualism	Low	High
Masculinity	High	Intermediate
Uncertainty Avoidance	High	High
Long-Term Orientation	Low	High
Indulgence	High	Intermediate

Based on: Hofstede Insights, 2022.

4.2 Similarities in Cultural Dimensions Ecuador- France

Power Distance

There is a coincidence between these two countries, as both have high scores. Both accept inequality, consequently, to maintain and respect the order of hierarchies is something inevitable for both parties.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Both countries have high indices of aversion to uncertainty; therefore, both tend to avoid unstructured or unknown situations. Both Ecuador and France, according to their high scores in this dimension, develop tools to avoid surprises or ambiguous conditions.

4.3 Differences in Cultural Dimensions Ecuador- France

Individualism versus Collectivism

This dimension strongly distinguishes the two cultural groups. France maintains a high level of individualism, in contrast to the Ecuadorian culture, which presents a high level of collectivism. Consequently, the French will prioritize their own culture, while Ecuadorians will be more open and interested in the conditions of individuals outside their group.

Long- Term Orientation

There is a variation between the two cultures. According to their score, the French maintain a long-term orientation, so they tend to plan or act with the projection of obtaining future benefits. Contrarily, according to Encalada's study (2018) Ecuadorians maintain a short-term vision, due to the condition of immediacy demonstrated by the members of this culture.

4.4 Common areas and changing trends Ecuador- France

Masculinity versus Femininity

France maintains an intermediate score. However, there is a distinction between the upper class, which leans toward femininity, and the working class, which is oriented toward masculine values. In Ecuador, which is a low-income country, the masculinity dimension also prevails.

Indulgence

French culture presents an intermediate value. Therefore, its members will control the satisfaction of desires or impulses of pleasure or enjoyment depending on the conditions in which they find themselves. Ecuador presents a higher level of indulgence; thus, its members will repress those factors less and they will seek to reward them more frequently.

4.5 Structured Interview according to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: Renault Case

Xavier Gonzalez, Commercial Manager of the Renault Company agreed to be interviewed after having approved the consented report used to frame the research in ethical terms. The engineer has three years of experience as Showroom Manager, and is the one who had been able to establish contact with members of the French culture. Taking into account his area of expertise, information was gathered regarding Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. The questions that were asked sought to investigate specific elements in relation to each of the dimensions, in order to understand the processes of interaction with France.

When questioned about the main differences between Ecuadorian and French businessmen when negotiating, Gonzalez said that the main difference lies in the language. He also pointed out that the differences in technological advances and the type of inputs used between the two countries can be a limiting factor in reaching agreements. He also mentioned that it is necessary to create specific car models for the South American market. He explained that, in spite of having an agreement with the European Union, it is not possible to import cars that are too sophisticated for Latin America. (González, 2022)

Later, when questioned about decision-making, the interaction process and the general conditions for meetings between French and Ecuadorian executives, González pointed out that all these aspects are established through a calendar with Renault Colombia. In other words, the brand establishes with whom they must negotiate. Therefore, a zonal head office for Latin America is maintained to attend Latin American executives. (González, 2022)

González, by responding what are the positions of the executives involved to explain the behavior that the members of the organization maintain before the authority, pointed out the existence of three managements (commercial, marketing and financial), which report everything to the general management, which is the one in charge of the final decision making. As for communication, he said that it is direct, permanent and fluid in terms of payments, financial benefits and meeting goals. In this way, he made it clear that the relationship is close among the executives (González, 2022).

When asked about the existence of training processes for interacting with the French, Gonzalez responded that it depends on the hierarchical position, since middle management is not involved. Therefore, the preparation for negotiating takes place in commercial management, focusing mainly on economic aspects. (González, 2022)

Regarding the experiences that the executive had, at the time of socialization, González explained that communication is essential because of the relevance that Renault gives to inform and give feedback about the evaluations of the company's position and decision making with those involved. Through this constant socialization, the factory has given the freedom to adapt products to the area. (González, 2022)

In answering what are the main characteristics of the French members, González explained that, in their experiences in intercultural encounters, they have shown themselves to be very warm and open people. In addition, they show interest in meeting the objectives of positioning and growing the brand in Ecuador. (González, 2022)

Regarding the existence of obstacles or cultural barriers when contacting French executives, González pointed out that they have not occurred. In fact, the Ecuadorian executive said that the current CEO seeks to improve brand positioning through his vision and interactions. (González, 2022)

With reference to what has attracted his attention in the interactions with the French, the executive explained, on behalf of Renault Ecuador, that, when interacting, the interest in learning from the origins and needs of the regions in a reciprocal way stands out. In the words of González: "that is what we are looking for the most, to understand each other and adapt to those realities." (González, 2022)

Then, referring to the most important aspects to consider in order to maintain positive intercultural encounters, González emphasized that an Ecuadorian executive can look impeccable when speaking fluent French. In his experience, the French appreciate it when executives from other countries speak in their native language. (González, 2022)

Among the main advantages of interacting with French executives, González highlighted their social openness. Regarding the disadvantages, the executive explained that there are legislative restrictions for imports, which limit the commercial aspect. He also pointed out that the general disadvantage that can lead to the reduction of investments is related to the instability of Ecuador in economic, social and legal terms. (González, 2022) Subsequently, González explained that for agreements and final decision making, the regional manager for Latin America, who is delegated by the brand, is in charge. (González, 2022).

Regarding the recurrent topics in the meetings, González stated that they are mainly of economic, administrative and marketing themes, pointing out that they are dealt with in the long term. (Gonzalez, 2022) Later, referring to the benefits and the relationship between the parties, the executive stated that the agreements are always linked to the economic sphere. However, he stated that the French are also interested in training Latin American managers to position their new ecological models. Along with González, in this way they try to facilitate the issue of cultural change in order to have the support of the government and its executives. (González, 2022) Regarding etiquette, manners and formality in the meetings, González responded that, from the beginning of the conversations, the French give total importance to these issues. (González, 2022)

Finally, the Ecuadorian executive, referring to the interactions or social meetings between the members of the two cultures, pointed out that in all negotiations or meetings with the French, typical products and foods of the region are selected. Consequently, when dealing with them, they try to make sure that the food is clearly focused on the French culinary culture to their liking. With respect to interactions, they can be formal, informal, direct or indirect, depending on the meeting or activity to be developed. (González, 2022)

5. Discussion

Ecuador and France in relation to Power

In the dimension of distance to power, which according to Hofstede (1980) referred to the behavior of a culture towards authority figures and the degree to which individuals with less power accept inequality, according to the Hofstede Insights tool (2022) it could be inferred that the two countries coincide in maintaining high scores. Therefore, both maintain a high degree of respect for hierarchies. This information is corroborated by Gonzalez (2022) when he repeatedly mentions the hierarchical system and explains that, within the dynamics of the company, despite maintaining good communication and close relationships between executives, middle management has no influence. Consequently, decision-making power is centralized in the general management. Likewise, there is evidence of respect and acceptance of the superiority of European origin by the Ecuadorian culture, raised in the analysis of Hofstede Insights (2022), because according to Gonzalez (2022) in the conditions of negotiation and intercultural meetings, Ecuadorian executives are subordinated to a zonal leadership for Latin America, which is established by the French brand. Therefore, the company's framework of action is indirectly determined by the French executives. Although there would not be a cultural clash due to the respect that Ecuadorian culture maintains for hierarchies, it is valuable to work on the position of inequality that is regularly maintained in a negotiation. Adler (1980) argues that the vision and cultural factors of individuals in the organization should not be ignored or underestimated. On the contrary, all perspectives should be recognized and valued in order to strengthen the organization. Therefore, it is key to maintain a business preparation that recognizes and reinforces the capabilities of Ecuadorian executives, so that the conviction of European superiority does not limit them to take greater risks or prioritize their interests.

Ecuador and France in relation to Masculinity and Femininity

Along with the score established by Hofstede Insights (2022), France maintains an intermediate score, so it can be inferred that its masculine or feminine tendency is not strictly defined. This can be evidenced by the experience of González (2022) when explaining that, on the one hand, the French are interested in learning about the origin and needs of Ecuador in order to adapt and understand each other's realities. Likewise, he indicated that the brand is interested in job training to position ecological models and facilitate the cultural change that this would imply through mutual support. Therefore, the country also invests in good relations, solidarity between cultures and cooperation between executives, evidencing the values related to the importance of interpersonal relationships that Tarapuez (2016) links to femininity. However, as a company, it will always seek economic benefits. As Gonzalez (2022) responded, the French are attracted to work on the positioning and growth of the brand in Ecuador. In addition, the transcendental topics in the meetings are linked to management, marketing and economic gain. Consequently, they also give importance to the material values that Farías (2007) points out, such as success, achievement and wealth, which are inclined to masculinity. In short, that intermediate value demonstrates their interest in profit without neglecting the relationship between their employees, as indicated by the Hofstede Insights tool (2022) when stating that the French culture cares about well-being in labor aspects. Consequently, taking advantage of this openness French executives, to improve relationships and train their employees, is very important as it brings not only economic benefits, but also at the interpersonal level. Consequently, the feminine component is something that should be stimulated more in the organization, among Ecuadorian executives, since masculinity regularly prevails in them.

Ecuador, France and their levels of Indulgence

In the dimension of indulgence, which according to Hofstede (2010) refers to the level at which a group accepts to reward desires related to enjoying life or to moderate those impulses, the cross-cultural comparison tool Hofstede Insights (2022) suggests that French people usually moderate their desires and are less relaxed. This may influence their behavior in interactions, as González (2022) points out when

explaining that for these executives, formality, manners and etiquette are fundamental in their encounters. However, their score is still intermediate. Therefore, it can be interpreted that this cultural group also satisfies their desires depending on the context in which they find themselves. This idea coincides with the response of González (2022) by explaining that their way of relating is formal or informal, depending on the activity they develop, and that they show warmth and social openness in their way of being during their encounters. It also confirmed the existence of spaces and events of social kind, not only of professional type as such, in which the French also like to carry out relaxation activities, proving that there is time for gratification or satisfaction of desires. Therefore, this dimension could be considered as a good interacting channel, means or space to reach agreements with the French culture, by facilitating a positive environment among executives and promoting the cultural synergy proposed by Adler (1980). In this way, the intercultural recognition and understanding of the executives could be fostered to improve their relationship in the meetings, as it is a dimension that is appreciated by both parties.

Ecuador and France in the Dimension of Individualism

The degree of individualism, according to Hofstede (1994), considers the relevance that a group gives to acting on its own and the value or importance they give to their own cultural factors. According to Hofstede Insights (2022) the cultures maintain a great difference. On the one hand, France is an individualistic culture, which, according to Tarapuez (2016), prioritizes its own interests and elements. This coincides with what González (2022) explained because, when interacting, the French appreciate that other executives speak their language. Also, in the meetings, French cultural components prevail, demonstrating that they give a high level of value to their culture. On the other hand, Ecuador has a strong bias towards collectivism, so it tends to yield or favor third parties to preserve group harmony. However, as mentioned with reference to Gonzalez's (2022) explanation, Renault is also interested in the objectives of both parties being met, and despite primarily individual decision making, there is a tendency to socialize and give feedback on company performance collectively with all involved. Therefore, although French culture maintains an individualistic tendency, in practice it has also been interested in informing decisions at the group level. This cultural difference would be a great strength that Ecuadorian executives should take advantage of, since it promotes consideration and cohesion in the organization, as well as group work.

Ecuador, France and the Uncertainty Avoidance

In the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, which deals with a culture's level of evasion of unstructured, unknown or ambiguous situations, according to Hofstede Insights (2022) both countries avoid them in order to feel in control. As mentioned, French executives avoid surprises and plan their actions in meetings in detail and in advance with the necessary information. (Hofstede Insights, 2022) González (2022) confirms this by answering that one of the main disadvantages or limitations during negotiations is especially linked to the instability of the Ecuadorian territory in economic, social and legal terms. In other words, French executives tend to reduce or restrict their investments in the country, due to the degree of insecurity that they would perceive when investing large amounts in a country with possible situations of uncertainty such as those in Ecuador. As Triandis (2004) explains, members of this culture prefer to know precisely what will happen. Hence, when negotiating with French members, it is essential that Ecuadorian executives demonstrate the ability to be prepared for possible events that may hinder the development of business activities, through contingency plans. In this way, greater confidence could be generated among executives by guaranteeing the operation of the organization under conditions of uncertainty.

Ecuador, France and the Short- and the Long-Term Dimension

There is a clear cultural variation in this dimension. On the one hand, France is inclined to the long term according to its score. Thus, as Swaidan and Hayes (2005) argue, for this group it will be very important to prepare for future events through efforts and actions in the present. This is evidenced by the analysis of Hofstede Insights (2022) when explaining that the French culture prefers to focus on aspects such as; investment, savings and perseverance, with the view of achieving future benefits. Gonzalez (2022) also confirms the tendency of French executives by answering that all agreements are established for the long term. On the other hand, according to Encalada's (2018) study and Hofstede's (2022) score and analysis, Ecuadorians maintain a short-term vision, causing them to focus on satisfying needs or solving events of the moment, as Hofstede (2001) states. This can generate clashes in the objectives or projects in an organization, because there could be a greater search, perseverance and preference for long-term planning, by a single culture. However, as mentioned, Adler (1980) proposes to use cultural diversity to achieve goals, emphasizing that an efficient organizational culture is based on the sum of the strongest

qualities of the groups. In this case, France has a greater experience to work on its future objectives. Therefore, in the midst of a cross-cultural meeting, it is essential that Ecuadorian executives focus on proposing or participating in the development of initiatives that will result in future benefits, as this will lead to a better understanding to reach agreements. In fact, improving long-term projection could solve the dilemma of the high scores that both cultures show in the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance. By being oriented towards planning or structuring aspirations and solutions for the future, the possibility of unexpected or unknown conditions would be reduced, generating greater confidence in the French to negotiate with Ecuador.

6. Conclusion

In summary, throughout the research it has become evident that, in order to fulfill the general objective of determining the intercultural competencies that should be considered in the meetings between Ecuador and France, first of all, the theories related to intercultural factors were investigated. Authors such as Adler, Weaver and Hofstede, who served as a guide to understand the importance of organizational culture, the cultural background of its members and the variety of factors that make up their cultures, were examined. Subsequently, the study of the 6 Cultural Dimensions model, which simplifies the comparison of the elements maintained by both groups, made it possible to establish, on the one hand, the main cultural differences. These most marked variations refer to the Individualism versus Collectivism dimension and the Long-Term Orientation dimension. On the other hand, the cultures coincided in the dimension of Distance to Power and Aversion to Uncertainty. The dimension of Indulgence and Masculinity versus Femininity were complex to categorize due to their intermediate values, since they do not share criteria in their totality to define them as a common or dissimilar dimensions between the two cultures. In this case, when dealing with the French company Renault, all the analysis was corroborated thanks to the interview with the executive González, which served to infer how the cultural encounters between French and Ecuadorians could be improved, in the discussion of the research. In summary, after the bibliographic analysis and the comparison of the data taken from the dimensions together with the interview, it was determined that the main intercultural competencies that should be considered in encounters between the two cultures are:

- Business training to strengthen the intercultural negotiation skills of Ecuadorian executives.
- Stimulation of the femininity component in the organization.
- Taking advantage of the dimension of indulgence as a positive channel of interaction.
- Promoting the collectivist tendency of Ecuadorians to achieve greater group cohesion.
- Efficient planning of long-term objectives and projects.
- Showing aptitude for resolving unexpected situations through contingency planning.
- Improving language skills of Ecuadorian executives in order to be fluent in French.

Thus, it is shown that a cultural analysis, such as the one carried out, should be considered because it allows to have an idea of the counterpart's vision to obtain a deeper knowledge of their possible behaviors at the time of the negotiation. Such an analysis would serve to efficiently prepare executives prior to their interactions with their foreign counterparts, and would simplify the promotion of a synergic environment, the reduction of cultural clashes and the improvement of communication, negotiation and convincing strategies.

"To understand a culture, it will always be necessary to understand others on their own terms without projecting our own categories." (Luna, 2013)

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