




# WHAT STOPS US FROM STARTING?


How Cultural Dynamics Impact  
Global Well-being Activation

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 Mumbai, India

# INTRODUCTION

 Shanghai, China

**FOR TODAY'S GLOBAL WORKFORCE, MENTAL WELL-BEING IS CRITICAL NOT ONLY FOR OVERALL HEALTH, BUT ALSO FOR MAINTAINING A SATISFYING AND PRODUCTIVE WORK LIFE BALANCE.**

According to **Gallup**, data from a global sample show that more than 40% of employees worldwide experienced stress or worry much of the previous day. These challenges to mental well-being have a direct, negative impact on business outcomes. In addition to the medical costs for treating anxiety, poor mental well-being has important productivity impacts. **Aon/IPSOS reports** that globally, 28% of employees say that they have trouble concentrating, 20% are taking longer to complete their work, and 15% have trouble with reasoning or decision making.

Employers are increasingly offering mental well-being tools and programs to help meet employees' needs for support. For large multinational companies with a footprint across many different countries, merely offering a program to a global employee population does not ensure that the solution will resonate with everyone who needs it. For example, a mindfulness program that enjoys widespread adoption in Southeast Asia may struggle to find traction among employees in Latin America.

Deep-rooted cultural differences play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards many of the benefits offered by employers. In a global population, messaging about digital well-being tools focused on mindfulness, sleep, resilience, and stress face not only the challenge of cutting through the noise of high-volume corporate communications, but also working with and around important differences in cultures. Culture has a powerful influence on our beliefs about the relative importance of individual vs group accomplishment. Culture even impacts our degree of openness to new experiences. Maximizing the reach and impact of digital well-being tools requires a thorough understanding of the cultural landscape that colors individuals' attitudes and beliefs.

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of employees say that they have trouble concentrating

**20%**

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**15%**

have trouble with reasoning or decision making





## APPROACH

In order to better understand how culture impacts well-being activation, meQ partnered with Hofstede Insights, a world leader in the study of cultural dynamics. The late Professor Geert Hofstede literally **wrote the book** on how culture affects values in the workplace. Today, Hofstede Insights consultants around the world help companies improve the way they communicate with global constituencies and customers. The partnership between meQ and Hofstede Insights leveraged large data sets on resilience and cultural dynamics to examine how culture influences the ways in which people interact with well-being messaging. meQ is now harnessing the learnings from this project to develop a first of its kind global, culturally specific, well-being activation plan.

“Every person’s mental programming is partly unique, partly shared with others.”

- GEERT HOFSTEDE

*Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*

## THE RESILIENCE EFFECT

Resilience, the ability to adapt and effectively deal with adversity, addresses many foundational components of mental well-being. More resilient employees have better health outcomes, are less depressed, and are more productive at work. Research has identified core competencies of resilience—such as emotion control, impulse control, empathy, and mindfulness—that equip employees to overcome adversity and thrive at home and in the workplace.

More than 2 decades of meQ research shows that resilience can be measured and learned. The clinically validated, 92-item meQ assessment spans 18 factors that include core competencies of resilience plus key performance and self-care indicators that impact or are impacted by resilience.

### HIGHLY RESILIENT PEOPLE ARE:

**60%** less likely to experience burnout

**31%** more engaged

**80%** less likely to exhibit signs of depression

**88%** better at stress management

meQ has over a decade of experience measuring and building resilience for the corporate workforce. Offered in 14 languages, meQ’s digital resilience coaching solution is used by employees in more than 130 countries. With billions of data points from members across the globe, meQ provides insights into both individual resilience growth as well as global enrollment and engagement that can be segmented by country or region.

# THE HOFSTEDE MODEL OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

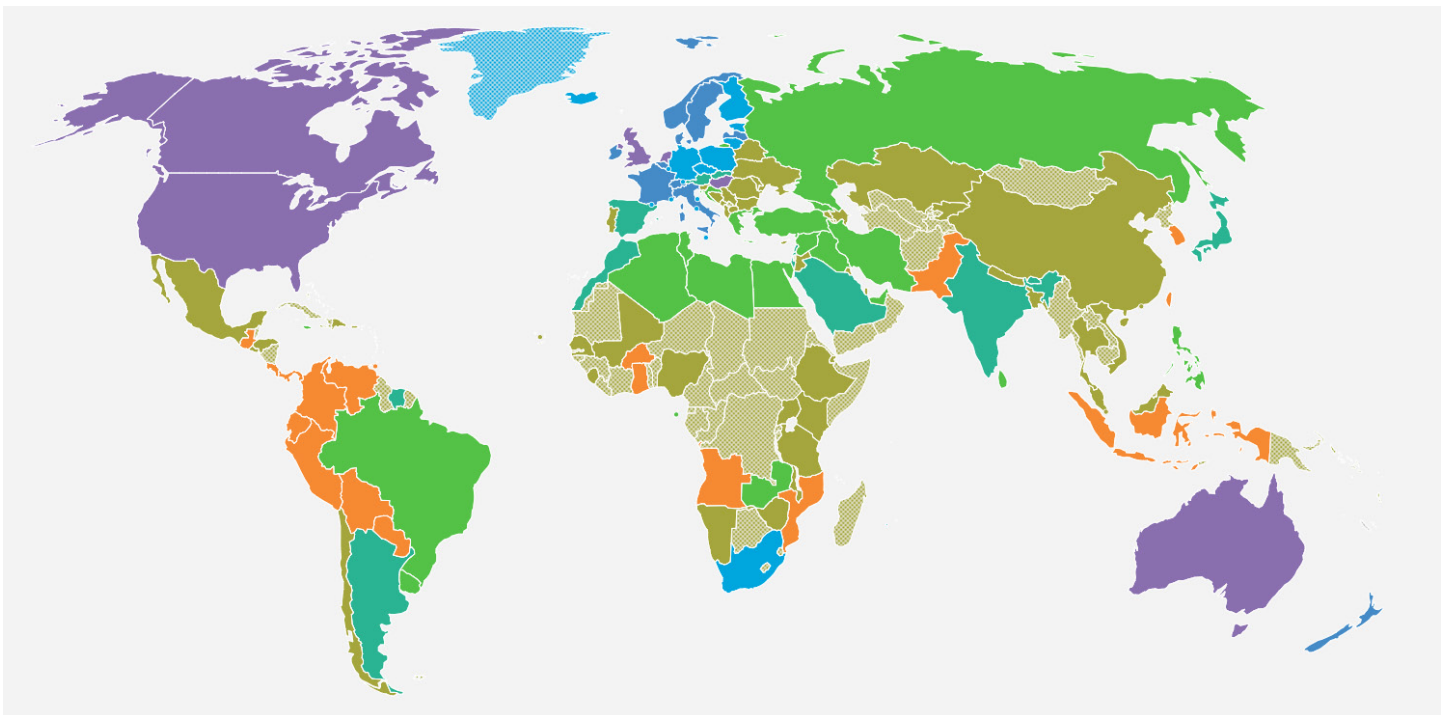
**HOFSTEDE INSIGHTS' APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING CULTURE, OR WHAT HOFSTEDE INSIGHTS CALLS THE CULTURE FACTOR, IS BASED ON THE HOFSTEDE 6-D MODEL.** The Hofstede 6-D Model of Cultural Difference has been refined and extended by dozens of additional research studies over the past 40 years. The “6-D” aspect of the model refers to six critical cultural dimensions:

## 01 POWER DISTANCE VS EQUALITY

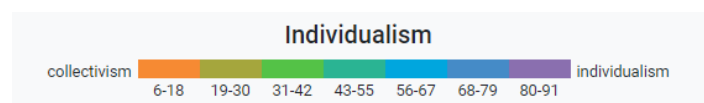
How unevenly distributed is power within a society? Countries with high power distance accept a hierarchy, whereas those on the other end of the spectrum expect equality, or a more equal distribution of power.

## 02 INDIVIDUALISM VS COLLECTIVISM

Do members of a culture value the strength demonstrated by an individual through their character, or because they are part of something bigger? Members of individualist societies are focused on themselves and their immediate family, whereas in collective societies, the larger group is paramount.



© Hofstede Insights



## 03 **ACHIEVEMENT** vs **QUALITY OF LIFE**

How much does a culture value competition? High achievement societies tend to strive more for success, whereas high quality of life societies focus on providing support and finding consensus.

## 04 **LOW UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE** vs **HIGH UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE**

How comfortable is a culture with ambiguity? Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are more flexible and comfortable with ambiguity, whereas those with high uncertainty avoidance maintain rigid beliefs, rules, and institutions.

## 05 **LONG-TERM ORIENTATION** vs **SHORT-TERM ORIENTATION**

Does a culture believe change best occurs through constant, incremental improvement or through radical disruption? Countries with long-term orientation tend to see themselves as part of a longer history and focus on outcomes far into the future. By contrast, countries with short-term orientation focus on quick results.

## 06 **INDULGENCE** vs **RESTRAINT**

Does a society allow enjoyment, or strive for impulse control? In indulgent societies, people tend to be more open to trying new things. In restrained societies, people tend to be more thoughtful but slower to try something new.

**SCORES ACROSS THESE SIX DIMENSIONS PROVIDE A PICTURE OF A COUNTRY'S UNIQUE CULTURE RELATIVE TO OTHERS.**

For example, the US is more impulsive, and impatient for results than a less indulgent long term culture like Germany. Brazil has a collectivist orientation, which values community and social acceptance, as opposed to the UK, which encourages more personal independence.

 São Paulo, Brazil

# APPROACH

In order to better understand how culture interacts with well-being messaging, the research team focused on three questions:



## HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE ADOPTION OF DIGITAL WELL-BEING TOOLS AROUND THE GLOBE?

meQ historically has recommended similar approaches to marketing digital well-being to employees. While recommendations are highly tailored to each customer's specific population (e.g., manufacturing employees vs knowledge workers vs transportation industry drivers) marketing plans have been less often tailored to account for differences across cultures.

To address the question of how member marketing lands differently across cultures, the meQ team compiled enrollment data from more than 70 countries and paired those measures with data from the Hofstede Insights database on each of the 6 cultural dimensions where meQ enrollment data were available. The association between culture and enrollment was assessed by country-level correlations between enrollment rates and scores on each of the six dimensions.



## DOES WHO DELIVERS MARKETING MESSAGES IMPACT ADOPTION OF DIGITAL WELL-BEING TOOLS?

Part of the global challenge in deploying digital well-being tools is messaging, but part is also who delivers the message: whether communication about a new program comes from a local well-being champion or from a regional or international benefits leader. To assess the impact of who delivers messaging about digital well-being tools, meQ enrollment rates across 70 countries were compared across two groups: one group where a local well-being champion was the primary communicator and another group where a regional or international intermediary was the primary communicator.



## DOES RESILIENCE DIFFER ACROSS CULTURES?

A third area of interest was understanding differences in resilience scores across culture. Country level data on average resilience were paired with data from Hofstede Insights. The relationship between resilience and culture was assessed through correlations between the resilience measures and cultural dimension data from Hofstede Insights.



LOCAL  
CHAMPIONS  
HELP DRIVE

40%

HIGHER  
ENROLLMENT  
IN DIGITAL  
WELL-BEING  
PROGRAMS



Ljubljana, Slovenia

## FINDINGS

### HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE ADOPTION OF DIGITAL WELL-BEING TOOLS AROUND THE GLOBE?

Three cultural dimensions were significantly associated with higher meQ enrollment: higher individualism relative to collectivism, higher achievement relative to quality of life, and higher indulgence relative to restraint. These three dimensions clearly influence how a culture receives messages about digital well-being tools. meQ's marketing materials historically emphasized the benefits of resilience for individual well-being through a self-improvement lens. Enrollment rates were accordingly highest across cultures where individualist, indulgent, achievement-oriented cultures hold strongest sway. The analysis showed that meQ enrollment rates tended to be highest in Northwestern Europe, Canada and the U.S., each of which exhibit high scores on these three dimensions.

### DOES WHO DELIVERS MARKETING MESSAGES IMPACT ADOPTION OF DIGITAL WELL-BEING TOOLS?

The answer to this question was a resounding "Yes." Across all countries, having a senior executive such as the local Chief Executive Officer or another highly-respected local champion within the country resulted in 40% greater enrollment compared to a regional intermediary. meQ has long seen the power of local well-being champions to maximize enrollment and engagement. This analysis underscores the importance of local champions in building trust, encouraging action, and increasing stickiness.

### DOES RESILIENCE DIFFER ACROSS CULTURES?

In some cases, yes. Across most of the resilience factors that make up the meQ assessment, resilience was shown to be universal. For a subset of resilience factors, differences across cultures were noted related to the same three cultural dimensions that were shown to impact enrollment. For example, countries at different ends of the individualism vs collectivism, indulgence vs. restraint, and achievement versus quality of life spectra had different scores on the Sleep and Mindfulness factors. Lower sleep scores were observed among Individualist and achievement-oriented cultures such as the U.S. and northwestern Europe. This is unsurprising. Sleep deprivation is often a **badge of honor** among Individualist, achievement oriented cultures. In contrast, countries with more Collectivist-oriented cultures have more disciplined sleep habits. Similarly, scores for the meQ Mindfulness factor were higher in more Collectivist cultures relative to Individualist, achievement-oriented cultures. Given that most Collectivist cultures (e.g. India, China and Vietnam) have strong rituals around mindfulness and meditation rooted in religious practice, this gap is to be expected.

# IMPLICATIONS

Taken together, the evidence suggests that three of the six Hofstede cultural dimensions have the most significant impact on how a culture engages with digital well-being: individualism relative to collectivism, indulgence relative to restraint, and achievement relative to quality of life. To maximize employee activation related to mental well-being in multinational enterprises, these data strongly show that messaging about the benefits of improving one's well-being must account for differences in each of these dimensions.

**TAKEN TOGETHER, THESE INSIGHTS SUGGEST THREE PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GUIDE COMMUNICATION ABOUT WELL-BEING ACROSS A GLOBAL ENTERPRISE:**

## 1. PAY ATTENTION TO HOW CULTURE IMPACTS IDENTITY

**IN INDIVIDUALIST CULTURES—SUCH AS THE U.S., CANADA, AND COUNTRIES IN NORTHWESTERN EUROPE—A PERSON'S IDENTITY IS DEFINED BY WHO HE OR SHE IS AS AN INDIVIDUAL, WITH A FOCUS ON PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.** However, over two-thirds of the world's population lives in Collectivist cultures, like those found in Vietnam and China. Messaging about well-being must account for cultural differences by addressing differences in three key areas: the social fabric, context, and trustworthiness.

### SOCIAL FABRIC

Accounting for the social fabric requires understanding who and what is valued. In collective cultures, the group supersedes the individual. In this context, messaging and imagery can pivot to feature benefits for the group or team, as opposed to the individual. To maximize appeal to those in collective cultures, effective messaging highlights acceptance from or endorsement by authority figures within the company and/or shows that something is popular among others in a peer group.

### CONTEXT

Accounting for context requires understanding how those who receive communication interpret it. In Individualist cultures, communication is direct and language is typically interpreted quite literally. By contrast, in collective cultures—also known as context cultures—meaning is derived from aspects beyond the literal interpretation of language. Where text-heavy calls to action may be effective in Individualist cultures, reliance on photos and visuals that demonstrate context and social relationships will be more likely to drive well-being activation in Collectivist cultures.

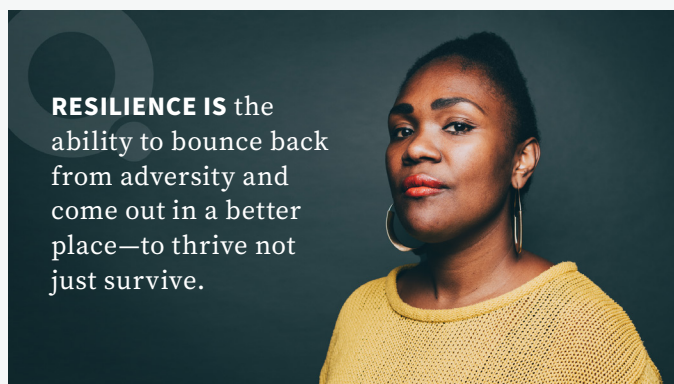


Seoul, South Korea



## TRUSTWORTHINESS

In collective cultures, risks associated with breached confidentiality extend beyond the individual to the group. This results in heightened concerns about trustworthiness and privacy, especially surrounding sensitive topics like mental well-being. As a result, care should be taken with context and language surrounding topics suggesting mental illness or difficulty. Also important are messages that feature enhanced assurances of data privacy, with explicit descriptions of methods to ensure confidentiality.



*More effective in Individualist cultures*



*More effective in Collectivist cultures*

## 2. KEEP IN MIND HOW CULTURE IMPACTS OPENNESS TO NEW EXPERIENCES

**AN INDIVIDUAL'S OPENNESS TO NEW EXPERIENCES IS INFLUENCED BY WHERE THEIR LOCAL CULTURE FALLS ON THE INDULGENCE-RESTRAINT SPECTRUM.** Cultures characterized by higher Indulgence (e.g. the U.S. and Latin America) tend to have a lower barrier to trying new things. In high Restraint cultures, such as those found in India and South Korea, new opportunities and ideas tend to be more carefully considered. Three specific considerations should guide culturally adept messaging: receptivity, the integration of body and mind, and expressiveness.

### RECEPTIVITY

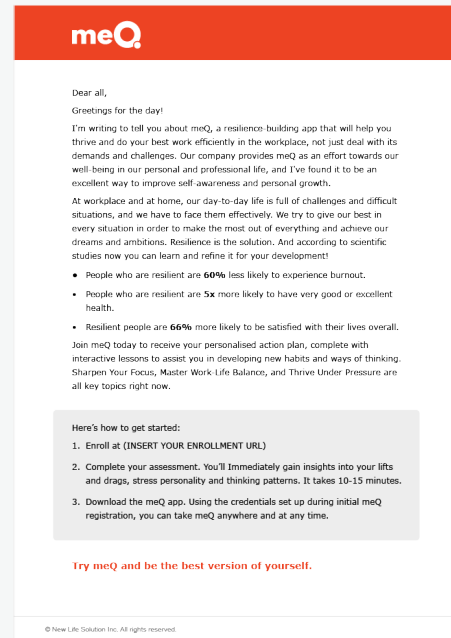
People in restrained cultures are more likely to receive new ideas with discernment and careful consideration, so messaging should focus on emphasizing why the content is important and clearly addressing why someone should take action. Short, frequent messages tend to be successful in indulgent cultures, but impactful messaging for restrained cultures tends to be less frequent with more impactful content.

## INTEGRATION OF BODY AND MIND

Restrained cultures view the body and mind as an integrated whole, rather than as separate. Language that refers to just the mind or separates body and mind is viewed as inconsistent by those in restrained cultures. Instead, language should address the person as whole.



*More effective in Indulgent cultures*



*More effective in Restrained cultures*



 São Paulo, Brazil

## EXPRESSIVENESS

In restrained cultures, people typically operate with fewer displays of emotion and lower expressiveness. They also are less optimistic. Messaging for those in restrained cultures requires more reserved language and more moderated expressions of optimism and positivity.

### 3. KEEP IN MIND HOW CULTURE IMPACTS WHAT PEOPLE VALUE MOST

**HOFSTEDE'S ACHIEVEMENT-QUALITY OF LIFE CONTINUUM IS MOST RELEVANT HERE.**

**"STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR  
GAME CAN BE TOUGH"**

*More effective in Achievement cultures*

**"STAYING IN BALANCE  
CAN BE TOUGH"**

*More effective in Quality of Life cultures*

Countries focused on achievement, such as Japan and the U.S., tend to produce people who are more competitive and assertive. Status and success are key motivators. However, in countries like Thailand and South Korea, where the emphasis is on quality of life, the focus is on cooperation and consensus. People in these countries are typically driven by the pursuit of contentment and a high quality of life. Increasing well-being activation in countries oriented toward quality of life requires a communication strategy that makes careful use of language. Two special areas of concern involve gamification and success:

#### **GAMIFICATION**

The inclusion of gamification components, such as leaderboards or tracking scores to identify personal improvement, are common aspects of well-being solutions that are most successful in Achievement-oriented cultures. Gamification does not resonate in the same way with Quality of Life cultures, so such components may need to be downplayed.

#### **SUCCESS**

Language around success needs to be treated with caution. Quality of Life cultures don't stigmatize mistakes and failures in the same way achievement cultures do, so promises of success need to be moderated, and success should not be equated with dominance.





## CONCLUSION

### **MENTAL WELL-BEING IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE.**

By prioritizing it, organizations can improve the health and wellness of their employees, increase productivity, and create a positive and supportive work environment. However, an effective global well-being strategy requires careful attention to cultural differences.

To date, limited guidance has been available for companies to develop such a strategy. This new research from meQ and Hofstede Insights has identified three critical cultural dimensions that influence how people engage with messages about their well-being.

To develop an effective global employee well-being strategy requires tailoring employee communication in ways that resonate with local culture. meQ has harnessed these learnings to develop a culturally aware global well-being activation strategy for multinational and global companies.



## CASE STUDY: INDIA

### A GROWING ECONOMY

Although meQ serves a global workforce, tailoring content for the Indian workforce has the potential to be particularly impactful. India currently has the second largest population in the world. India's working age population is projected to **surpass China's**, becoming the largest working age population within the next decade. India also has the fastest growing economy in the world, with **projections suggesting** it will have the third-largest economy and third-largest stock market within that time frame. This growing workforce struggles with elevated rates of mental challenges like **burnout and anxiety**, highlighting a significant need for workplace well-being solutions.

### A COLLECTIVE AND RESTRAINED CULTURE

Culturally, India is **COLLECTIVE** and **RESTRAINED**, two dimensions identified as particularly influential for resilience messaging. To drive well-being activation among the Indian workforce, meQ applied the learnings from this research to tailor a well-being activation strategy drawing on the importance of local champions and these two cultural dimensions.

Who delivers well-being messaging is critically important, so meQ is partnering with companies to identify and recruit local champions in India. Local champions are key for building trust, and because collective cultures are particularly sensitive to messages from authority, particular attention is given to recruiting high authority local champions.

meQ's resilience training is delivered through a curriculum that is personalized for each member. Messaging has traditionally reflected this, with an emphasis on how individuals can grow stronger and better themselves. Messaging tailored for India reflects the collective culture, with a focus on how building resilience helps the individual grow stronger to benefit not only themselves but also those around them, including their team and family.

Compared to traditional content, the content tailored for India includes additional details about privacy, how to use meQ, and its benefits.

This addresses both the greater emphasis on trust within collective cultures and creates more impactful messaging to be effective in restrained cultures.





## A NEW ENROLLMENT CAMPAIGN

**IN ADDITION TO CULTURAL TAILORING, meQ DEVELOPED A NEW INDIA-SPECIFIC ENROLLMENT CAMPAIGN THAT FEATURES CONTENT TO SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS HOW THE BENEFITS OF RESILIENCE EXTEND TO THE FAMILY.**

Language specifically addresses not just how building resilience can help someone give their best at work and at home, but also how fostering resilience in oneself can help build resilience in one's family. Because collective cultures are also high-context cultures, all messages in the campaign include photographs of families in a context highlighting their connection. And, like other content tailored for India, this campaign stresses privacy and includes more detailed, impactful language for this collective and restrained culture.

Just like my work,  
my family gets the  
best part of me.

**THAT'S RESILIENCE.**

meQ helps you get there.

**TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TODAY!**



meQ

With meQ's focus  
building tips, both  
my child and I have  
gained a whole new  
level of focus.

**THAT'S RESILIENCE.**

meQ helps you get there.

**TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TODAY!**



meQ



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:



**MARTIN KARAFFA**, Associate Partner at Hofstede Insights, helps brands and organizations harness the power of cultural forces in their strategy. His resume includes Global Planning Director including JWT Tokyo launching the Kit Kat phenomenon, JWT New York leading strategy for Pfizer's health brands globally and BBDO in Munich as the Director of International Planning on Daimler businesses. In 2019, Martin joined Hofstede Insights as an Accredited Practitioner while also serving as a consultant to the United Nations.

**DR. SHEA LEMLEY** is a Data Scientist at meQ, where she works on the Science Team creating actionable insights and developing predictive models with meQ's data. Before joining meQ, Dr. Lemley earned her PhD in Behavioral Psychology and then completed postdoctoral training in digital health at the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine.



**SHAKIRA MACLYONS** is VP of Customer Marketing at meQ. She works with customers to understand their populations and create strategies, tactics, and messaging that will educate, activate, and engage their employees across the globe. Before meQ, Shakira worked at C Space and Hill Holliday, partnering with brands to launch into new markets and introducing services and products to populations across cultures and languages.

*The authors would like to thank Dr. Brad Smith, Linda Lewi, Pam Boiros, Robin Streit, Michael Schachner, Egbert Schram, Dr. Steffi Necheva, Divya Susan Varkey, Michael Siller, Alvin James Saldanha and James Myers.*



## ABOUT HOFSTEDE INSIGHTS OY

As one of the world's leading authorities on cultural dynamics, Hofstede Insights has spent over 35 years helping over 5,000 of the world's largest organizations transform their intercultural and organisational challenges into business success stories. Building on the work of Professor Geert Hofstede, Hofstede Insights continues to pioneer the operationalisation of academic research in both business and the public sphere. Headquartered in Helsinki, its core team of academics, data scientists and researchers have developed unique, proprietary software solutions, answer pattern analysis tools, and predictive cultural analytics protocols. A select group of over 130 experienced consultants work with companies to facilitate meaningful, impactful interventions to shape strategy and performance in diverse fields; organizational culture, cultural adaptability, global brand management, trust, and more.

### DISCOVER MORE AT:

<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>



## ABOUT meQ

meQuilibrium (meQ) is the #1 global digital resilience solution to build workforce well-being and performance at scale. Our mission is to make any workforce a workforce for growth. meQ's data analytics based approach uses AI to predict workforce risk for burnout, turnover, and behavioral health issues, to prepare employees for growth and propel teams to action. The meQ solution is available in 14 languages, and serves Fortune 1000 global enterprises in 130 countries. The company has been included in the Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Companies list the last four years in a row (2019-2022), Financial Times' and Statista Americas' Fastest Growing Companies, and was honored with Deloitte's Fast 500 Technology Award. meQ product innovation has been recognized by Brandon Hall's Annual Technology Awards and the 2022 WELCOA Well-being Trailblazer Award.

### LEARN MORE AT:

<https://www.meQuilibrium.com>

# LET'S TALK

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