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The Culture, Intercultural and Cross-cultural Dimensions in Communication

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Abstract: *Culture as the philosophy of life refers to the values, norms and rules, and actual behavior which is taken over by man from the past generations, and to leave it to next generation in a different form, separates individuals belonging to the culture from individuals belonging to other cultures. Each of these different attitudes describes the degree to which the culture values the past, the present, or the future. Cultures place emphasis on the events that have happened or will happen during the period that they view as important. In order to be able to describe and understand each of the involved cultures in a specific intercultural situation, three dimensions of culture are worked with: 'the horizontal cultural dimension'; 'the vertical cultural dimension' and 'the cultural dimension of time.*

Keywords: *Culture, intercultural, Cross-cultural, Communication, Functions.*

Introduction

For communication to work, people must have something in common. If communicators know and respect one another, communication is relatively easy. They can predict one another's moods and meanings, they know what topics to avoid, and they can sometimes even complete one another's thoughts. Uncertainty and stress are at a minimum; communication is spontaneous, open, and comfortable. Communicating with strangers is more difficult. If the strangers come from our own culture, we can at least base our messages on shared attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences; but if the strangers are from another culture, we may be at a loss. In such a case, uncertainty is maximized. The actual forms, and even the functions, *of* communication may be strange to us. In cross-cultural settings even simple interactions can become complex. Imagine for a moment that you're working in Morocco. A colleague has invited you to his family home for dinner, but is a little vague about when dinner will be served, and you have to ask several times before fixing the time. That evening, when you enter your host's home, his wife is nowhere to be seen, and when you ask when she'll be joining you, the host looks flustered and says that she's busy in the kitchen. When his little boy enters, you remark on how cute and clever the child is, but rather than being pleased, your Moroccan colleague looks upset. Before dinner is served, you politely ask to go to the washroom to wash up. During the meal you do your best to hold up your end of the conversation, but its hard going. Finally, after tea and sweet, you thank the host and politely leave. You have a feeling the dinner party wasn't a success, but you don't really know what went wrong. As it turns out, according to Craig Storti, almost everything you did in this social situation was inappropriate. In Morocco an invitation to dinner is actually an invitation to come and spend time. At some point food will be served, but what's important is being together. Therefore, discussing the specific time you should come to dinner is like asking your host how long he wants you around, and it also implies that your major concern is to be fed.

Your questions about his wife and your compliments to his son were similarly inappropriate. It is not customary for a Moroccan wife to eat with guests or even to be introduced, and praising a child is considered unlucky because it may alert evil spirits to the child's presence. Washing up in the washroom

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was also impolite. If you'd waited, your host would have arranged for water to be brought in to you in an expensive decorative basin that would have shown his good taste as well as his concern for your comfort. Finally, it was rude to carry on a conversation during dinner. Talking interferes with the enjoyment of the meal and can be interpreted as a slight against the food. An isolated incident such as this is not terribly serious, but people who spend time in other cultures may encounter many such small misunderstandings, which over time can take their toll. If cultural differences can get in the way of a simple meal between friends, you can imagine how they might seriously affect complicated business or diplomatic relations. Because cross-cultural contexts add an additional layer of complexity to normal interactions, some grounding in intercultural communication is essential for anyone who travels abroad or interacts with strangers in this country. Although cultural differences can sometimes cause misunderstandings, intercultural communication need not be doomed to failure. As Harry Hoijer has remarked, "No culture is wholly isolated, self-contained, and unique. There are important resemblances between all known cultures . . . Intercultural communication, however wide the differences between cultures may be, is not impossible. It is simply more or less difficult. "Intercultural communication is possible because people are not "helplessly suspended in their cultures." developing an openness to new ideas and a willingness to listen and to observe, we can surmount the difficulties inherent in intercultural interaction.

What is Culture?
Culture *n* [ME, fr. MF, fr. L *cultura,* fr. *cultus*, pp.] (15c)

1: cultivation, tillage
2: the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculty's esp. by education
3: expert care and training
4 a: enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training **b:** acquaintance with and taste in fine arts, humanities and broad aspects of science as distinguished from vocational and technical skills
5 a: the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations **b:** the customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group **6:** cultivation of living material in prepared nutrient media; *also:* a product of such cultivation Culture, of course, is a very broad term, used in various ways, so often that it has comes to mean anything and everything to some people. We will try to employ a concept of culture that is not too broad, but retains the rich layers of meaning that the term has acquired over time. The word "culture" is from the Latin "*cultura*," which is from the verb *colere*, meaning "to till" (as in soil or land). The word shares etymology with such modern English words as agriculture, cultivate, and colony. To till and cultivate the soil is both to do it violence and to stimulate its growth. It is a process that irrevocably alters the soil's present form in order to make it achieve a certain potential. In a certain sense this is a process of actualizing a potential that already exists within the soil. Cultivation channels the growth in a particular direction with a certain kind of value directing this growth — e.g. to produce food from dirt and seeds. Culture in the human sense also involves both violence and a growth. (Hermann Goerring's infamous quote comes to mind here —"Whenever I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun." It is sometimes facetiously said that American liberals have a version of the same sentence — "Whenever I hear the word 'gun,' I reach for my culture.") Note that, like communication, culture is an active and organic process rather than a final product (e.g. "race"). This is a problem in intercultural communication studies because culture is sometimes equated with an unchanging quality or category like race or ethnicity without focusing on the ways in which culture is always growing, changing, and developing. Culture is *dynamic*. From this perspective, a question like "what culture are you?" is meaningless. One of the dictionary definitions of culture is "the cultivation of intellectual/moral faculties" - a process of "civilizing." Culture shares the same root as the word *colony*.

The process of colonization (a violent process of uprooting societies and forcing them to adopt new modes of being in the world) was always portrayed by the colonizers as something being done for the good of its victims. Civilizing them raises their moral or intellectual capacity to the level of the colonizer.

Note that social and political (as well as economic and military) relations are made to seem *natural and inevitable* with the concept of culture. Culture is a *human* process, and the results of cultural processes are also the result of human decisions (conscious or not), which are always avoidable. Culture, then, can also be seen as a process of naturalization: Social relations that have been established by historical accident come to *seem* natural and unchangeable over time. One example of this process of naturalization is the way in which Western culture has been globalized and universalized so that all other cultures appear as "backwards" or "primitive." Ruth Benedict argues: "Western civilization, because of fortuitous historical circumstances, has spread itself more widely than any other local group that has so far been known. It has standardized itself over most of the globe, and we have been led, therefore, to accept a belief in the uniformity of human behavior that under other circumstances would not have arisen.... The psychological consequences of the spread of white culture have been all out of proportion to the materialistic. This worldwide cultural diffusion has protected us as man has never been protected from having to take seriously the civilizations of other peoples; it has given to our culture a massive universality that we have long ceased to account for historically, and which we read off rather as necessary and inevitable." ("The Science of Custom," 1934). Finally, culture must be understood as a *communicative* process. It inevitably involves the use of symbols to shape social reality. Edward T. Hall, the "father" of intercultural communication studies, points this out in what is known as "Hall's identity": "Culture is communication and communication is culture." Culture is the philosophy of life, the values, norms and rules, and actual behavior - as well as the material and immaterial products from these - which are taken over by man from the past generations, and which man wants to bring forward to the next generation - eventually in a different form - and which in one way or another separate individuals belonging to the culture from individuals belonging to other cultures.

Different Definitions of Culture

1. Anthropological definition Clifford Geertz: "a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life."
2. Psychological definition Geert Hofstede: "a programming of the mind" - a set of patterns of thinking that you learn early on and carry with you in your head. Note computer analogy.
3. Ethnographic definition Gerry Philipsen: "a socially constructed and historically transmitted pattern of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules."
4. British Cultural Studies definition Stuart Hall points to culture as a *contested zone* — a *site of struggle* and conflict, always variable and changing. Raymond Williams discusses culture as "a whole way of life of a people."
5. Intercultural Communication Studies definition this one comes from Guo-Ming Chen and William J. Starosta: "a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals' behaviors and incline them to function as a group."

Negotiated: brings in the cultural studies notion of culture as a zone of contestation. Symbols are not self-evident; they can only make meaning within particular contexts, and those meanings are negotiated or struggled over.
Shared symbolic systems: the symbolic process depends on intersubjective agreement. A decision is made to participate in the process of meaning making.
Guide behavior: culture is persuasive. It doesn't literally program us, but it does significantly influence our behavior.
Function as a group: people form cultural groups - note the dynamic of identity and difference at work when this occurs; to form one group and identify with some is always to exclude others and differentiate oneself from them.

Functions of Culture

1. To provide the *context* for 3 aspects of human society: the linguistic, the physical, and the psychological.
2. Culture provides the stability and structure necessary for a group to maintain a group identity.

Characteristics of Culture

1. **Culture is holistic:** a complex whole that is not the sum of its parts. You might, for example, analyze a particular cultural belief or a kinship system as a specific cultural formation, but all of the aspects of culture are interrelated. Culture affects language, religion, basic worldview, education, social, organization, technology, politics, and law, and all of these factors affect one another.

Age grading	Ethics	Language
Athletics	Etiquette	Law
Bodily adornment	Family	Magic
Calendar	Folklore	Marriage
Cleanliness	Funeral Rites	Numbers
Cooking	Gestures	Customs/ Rituals
Cosmology	Greetings	Restrictions
Courtship	Hairstyles	Surgery
Dancing	Hygiene	Tool making
Education	Kinship	Music

Table above gives an idea of the variety of interconnected activities that are found in virtually every culture. These activities are common to all people who live together in social groups and are thus examples of cultural universals, yet the enhancement of these activities varies dramatically form culture to culture. In every culture, for example people adorn their bodies, eat, educate their children, recognize family groupings, and keep track of time, and so on.

2. **Culture is learned:** It is not inborn or biological. We actively learn culture throughout our lives. The first point about cultures is that they are learned. Americans act like other Americans not because we are innately predisposed to do so, but because we learn to do so. Much of our early training is an attempt to make us fit cultural patterns. If we do not learn the lessons of our cultures, we pay-"through a loss of comfort, status, peace of mind, safety, or some other value. . ." We may even be imprisoned or labeled insane for acting in ways that would be perfectly acceptable in other cultures. We are so well programmed that we seldom stop to think that culture is learned. Our cultural norms appear to be natural and right, and we can't imagine acting differently.

Yet had we been brought up in Korea by Korean parents an entirely different set of norms would appear natural. We would be culturally Korean. We would speak Korean, follow Korean norms and customs, and see the world in typically Asian ways. Although this point seems obvious, it is one we often forget. When we see someone from another culture act in ways we consider strange, our first impulse is to attribute the action to personality. For example, we label someone "pushy" who speaks more loudly and forcefully than we do; we seldom stop to realize that had we been brought up in that person's culture, we would probably express ourselves just as loudly and forcefully.

3. **Culture is dynamic:** It is constantly changing over time, not fixed or static. As economic conditions change, as new technologies are developed, and as cultural contact increases, old ways of doing things change, people must learn new things and behaviors. This important fact is one reason why memorizing list of do's and don'ts is just not the right way to prepare for intercultural contact. A better way to prepare for intercultural communication is to become sensitive to the kinds of differences that occur between cultures and to develop the ability to learn by observation. What is acceptable behavior and what is not, and what is right and what is wrong? Our culture also teaches us how to interpret the world. From our culture we learn such things as how close to stand to strangers, when to speak and when to be silent, how to greet friends and strangers, and how to display anger appropriately. Because each culture has a unique way of approaching these situations, we find great diversity in cultural behaviors throughout the

world. Learning about cultural diversity provides people with knowledge and skills for more effective communication in intercultural situations. Samovar and Porter (1999) suggest that the first step in being a good intercultural communicator is to know your own culture and to know yourself-in other words, to reflect thoughtfully on how you perceive things and how you act on those perceptions. Second, the more we know about the different cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes of our global neighbors, the better prepared we will be to recognize and to understand the differences in their cultural behaviors. The knowledge of cultural differences and self-knowledge of how we usually respond to those differences can make us aware of hidden prejudices and stereotypes which are barriers to tolerance, understanding, and good communication. The cultural behaviors of people from the same country can be referred to collectively as cultural patterns, which are clusters of interrelated cultural orientations.

The common cultural patterns that apply to the entire country represent the dominant culture in a heterogeneous society. It is important to remember that even within a homogeneous society, the dominant cultural pattern does not necessarily apply to everyone living in that society. Our perception of the world does not develop only because of our culture; many other factors contribute to the development of our individual views. When we refer to a dominant cultural pattern we are referring to the patterns that foreigners are most likely to encounter. We also need to remember that culture is dynamic and as the needs and values of individuals change, the cultural patterns will also change. One example of such a change is the status of women in United States culture. After World War II, women began to work outside the home and started to share the previously male role of family provider. At the same time, family roles shifted to accommodate the working wife and mother, and men had to assume more responsibility for maintaining the home, like helping to cook, clean, and care for children. Value dimensions are a group of interrelated values that have a significant impact on all cultures. Hofstede (1980) has developed a taxonomy (a classification system) that identifies value dimensions that are influenced and modified by culture like individualism-collectivism and power distance. In individualistic cultures, each individual is the most important part of the social structure, and each individual is valued for his/her unique persona. People are concerned with their own personal goals and may not possess great loyalty to groups. In collective cultures, on the other hand, individuals are very loyal to all the groups they are part of, including the work place, the family, and the community. Within collectivism, people are concerned with the group's ideas and goals, and act in ways that fulfill the group's purposes rather than the individual's. Samovar et. al., (1997) note that while individualism and collectivism can be treated as separate dominant cultural patterns, and that it is helpful to do so, all people and cultures have both individual and collective dispositions. According to Hofstede's classification system, a second value dimension that varies with different cultures is power distance. Some cultures have high-power distances and others have lowpower distances. High-power-distance cultures believe that authority is essential in social structure, and strict social classes and hierarchy exist in these countries. In low-power cultures people believe in equality and the people with power may interact with the people without power on an equal level. Kluckhohn (1961) offers a third value dimension, a culture's orientation to time. In our world, we have cultures that are either past-oriented, present-oriented, or future-oriented.

The Relativity and Co-incidence of Culture

The definition of what is to be considered a culture is very relative, as the individual considers himself a part, or a member, of different cultures in different situations. He can also be considered by others as a member of a different culture, depending of the situation and the character of their intercultural relations. This situation is due to two different but interrelated aspects of the complexity of cross-cultural relations.

1) The relativity of the cultures
2) The co-incidence of the cultures.

When speaking of the relativity of cultures, we might refer to "national culture" or "macro culture" (like the Geert Hofstede concept of "Culture" when talking about Danish, Swedish, and other cultures). Both the individuals themselves and others might consider them to be representatives of different layers of culture within the category of macro culture, e.g., my personal situation as a Dane, as a Scandinavian, or just as a European, or even as a "northern Jydlander". In this way we can talk about a cultural hierarchy within a specific category of culture consisting of different layers of culture (Kuada and Gullestrup, 1998).

By category of culture:
A set of interrelated units of culture which, at a general (or higher) level of aggregation, can be meaningfully described, analyzed, and understood as one distinct cultural unit which can then be broken down into its component units (cultural dimensions) for more detailed analysis for specific purposes.

By layers of culture:
A number of units of culture within a given cultural category together can be meaningfully described as a distinct cultural unit at a higher level of aggregation. This unit forms, together with other units at the same level of aggregation, another cultural unit at a still higher level of aggregation within the same cultural category. In this way - theoretically as well as empirically - we have to count a hierarchy of different layers within a certain category of culture. And we never know whether the people involved in a cross-cultural relationship consider one another to be at the same layer in the hierarchy. The complexity of cross-cultural relations is also caused by the fact that people are not only to be considered as members, or part, of one category of culture, but of many different cultural categories at the same time. This can be referred to as the co-incidence of cultures. This means that even though we want to analyze differences in macro/national cultures - like Hofstede's studies - we also have to recognize the fact that people simultaneously reflect other cultural categories than the macro/national culture, each of them with their own hierarchy of cultural layers.

When considering culture - as well as cross-cultural relations and management - in this way, one might expect that individuals, or groups of individuals, have to be understood according to a number of potential cultures in a number of different hierarchies within different categories of culture. Of the many different possible cultures, the one which could be expected to be the most important for understanding the people involved in the cross-cultural relations will, of course, depend on the actual situation and might change rather rapidly. However, the intercultural actor, or manager, will have to predict which of the actual cultural categories and layers in the relevant hierarchy he considers to be the potentially relevant culture – or cultures - and which cultures he might try to understand according to this assessment. Each of these potential and/or relevant cultures then has to be analyzed as an empirical unit in accordance with the analytical, theoretical cultural frame model or other models. As mentioned before, a particular culture might be described and understood at a given time by means of two cultural dimensions, the horizontal and the vertical.

The Horizontal Cultural Dimension

Common to all living creatures is the fact that their survival as individuals, or as a species, depends on the relationship between their own fundamental biological needs (e.g., the need for food, the need for protection against the climate, and the need for a possibility to bring up new generations) and the opportunities offered to them by the natural and social environment surrounding them. If more than one human being is present at the same time in nature, man will try to fulfill his or her fundamental needs in a kind of joint action, which may be characterized by social cooperation and solidarity or by some kind of oppression and exploitation. Even though the natural conditions are the same, the actual ways of fulfilling the fundamental needs and in which the joint action is organized may, thus, vary considerably over time and space and from one group of people to another – or from one culture to another. So one might be able to observe differences and variations in the way in which the individual cultures try to fulfill their fundamental human needs. At the same time, however, it will also be possible to observe a certain pattern in the tasks or functions that make up the central parts, or the central cultural segments,

in this human joint action. In this connection it is meaningful to operate with eight such cultural segments which are all manifested in any culture, but which may individually and in relation to each other manifest themselves in very different ways. Human behavior and its material output are important elements within the level of immediately observable symbols. However, this behavior is only rarely coincidental. It is rather based on more or less fixed patterns within the structures that are difficult to observe.

The individuals within the culture behave in a particular way towards other individuals according to the age and status within society of these individuals, just as they follow particular rules and laws to a certain extent, if for no other reason than to avoid sanctions from others. In this way certain connections and systems are created which somehow form a skeleton for the culture observed. These patterns and norms whose structures and contents vary from one culture to another are very central to the understanding of a given culture. Even if they cannot be seen or heard, the knowledge of their existence and their contents may be inferred from an empirical analysis, and together with the other two cultural levels mentioned above they make up the manifest part of the culture. Partially legitimating values are those values which only comprise part of the culture, such as general values concerning competition and trade. But the generally accepted highest values then become valid for the entire culture. An example could be the individual's rights in relation to the rights of the community. The fundamental philosophy of life says something about man's view on other human beings; about man's relation to nature; about man's attitude towards life and death, and about his relation to the past, present, and future. The three last mentioned levels make up the core culture.

By means of the horizontal and the vertical cultural dimensions - or rather by trying to describe and understand the individual segments and levels of the two cultural dimensions - the actor or manager will be able to obtain a static snapshot of a given culture at a given time. Which information and data should be included in such an analysis, and which segments and levels might be relevant, will depend both on the object of the cultural analysis and on the resources that are available as mentioned above. Thus, the static cultural model introduced here is an abstract cultural model which, as already mentioned, must be made more definite in connection with a concrete analysis and empirical analysis. As examples of such studies, these models have formed the basis of two comparative analyses, one of management theories developed in the West and management cultures in Ghana and Kenya (Kuada, 1995), and one of Danish playground technology and French, German and Dutch children's culture (Gram, 1999).

The Dynamics of Culture or the Changeability of Culture

A culture is not static. It is constantly subjected to pressure for change from both external and internal factors - what I will refer to as initiating factors of change. The reason why they are called "initiating" factors is that they may well press for changes in the culture, but they do not determine in the same way whether or not a change will actually take place in the culture observed. Whether a change does occur, and the direction such a change would take, will be determined by another set of factors, the determining factors of change. Among the external initiating factors of change in a culture are changes in both natural conditions and conditions in other cultures. The mere fact that nature constantly changes with or without the interference of man means that the joint action of men, whose explicit object is to make it possible for a group of people to exist under certain given natural conditions, is also subjected to a pressure for change. Thus, any culture is in a kind of double relationship towards nature. On the one hand nature forms the framework to which the culture - i.e., the total complex of cultural segments and levels developed by a group of people over time - will have to adapt; on the other hand, this culture at the same time, for better or worse is involved in changing that very nature. Research, technological development, and trade and industry also play decisive roles in this double relationship, and the same applies to their relationship with other cultures from which new input within the three areas may have a change-initiating effect on the culture observed.

The internal initiating factors of change are, as the term signifies, initiating factors which have developed within the culture observed. All kinds of internal research, technological development, and trade and industry are internal, initiating factors of change. Determining factors of change affect whether an action

for change will actually lead to a change in the culture observed. Decisive factors in this understanding will be the degree of integration - this applies to the existing values - and the degree of homogeneity of the culture in question, but the existing power structure within the culture also plays a part. The degree of integration is an expression of the degree of conformity among the different values within the culture, whereas the degree of homogeneity is an expression of the width and depth of the total knowledge and insight of the culture observed. In a strongly integrated culture, almost everybody agrees on certain values - such as the values of "technological development at all cost", the "prioritization of economic gain" over resource gain, and the "individual's right to consume and the freedom of the individual in general". Reciprocally, the value could concern the "individual's responsibility towards or dependence on the group or the whole", whether this whole is based on a strong religion, a strong family, or on fixed organizational relations. Usually, modern industrial cultures are very integrated around liberalistic freedom values, economic values and individualistic freedom values.

Conclusion

As was evident in the present study people from different cultures can learn to communicate more effectively with each other. In fact learning about cultural diversity provides people with knowledge and skills for more effective communication in intercultural situations. Also, a particular culture might be described and understood at a given time by means of two cultural dimensions, the horizontal and the vertical. We found that the complexity of cross-cultural relations emerges when people are taken as members of not only one category of culture, but of many different cultural categories at the same time. This means that people simultaneously reflect other cultural categories than the macro/national culture, each of them with their own hierarchy of cultural layers.

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