

Lesson 4. Culture, cultural diversity and communication styles

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Slide 4: In order to define culture, we must consider several components.

Slide 5: Components of culture can be classified into three categories: products, ideas and behaviour.

Slide 6: Components of culture can be mainly explicit or mainly implicit. Components within the “Big C” are evident, explicit, which means that they can be easily identified. Instead, components within the “Small C” are less evident, more implicit, so they are not directly observable and should be inferred. If we want to fully understand a culture, we must get to know all of them.

Slide 10: Software of the mind means the learnt culture components, like, for example: customs, beliefs, norms and values. The brain is the hardware of the mind. The brain gives the physical support for learning and expressing culture components.

Culture is transmitted through socialization processes (the educational processes taking place, for example, at home and at school). Cultures are in general stable; however, as societies change, cultures can also change. For example, if a society becomes increasingly multi-ethnic, a culture within that society may change and become more open-minded to multiculturalism and multiethnicity.

Slide 11: There are cultural differences related with emotions. People from different countries interpret emotional expressions differently, what means that emotion interpretation is not universal. Moreover, people from different cultures express emotions in different ways when facing the same event (for example, if someone passes away, his/her relatives will express different emotions depending on their country). Another cultural influence is vocabulary about emotions: some cultures do not have a word to define an emotion, so it is more difficult for members of that culture to understand that emotion.

Slide 14: Trompenaars' Onion Model of Culture implies to understand that culture components can be compared to onion layers. Accordingly, artifacts are the outer layer, norms and values conform the intermediate layer, and basic assumptions are the inner layer.

Slide 16: The seven dimensions are:

1. Universalism versus particularism: This dimension concerns the standards by which relationships are measured. Universalist societies are based on rules: their members tend to feel that general rules and obligations are a strong source of moral reference. They are inclined to follow the rules to act equally and fairly in all cases (even when friends are involved).

Particularist societies are predominantly based on relationships: particular circumstances that lead to exceptions are more important than rules. Bonds of exceptional relationships (family, friends) are stronger than any abstract rules, therefore the response to a situation may change according to the circumstances and the people involved.

2. Individualism versus communitarianism. This dimension is about the conflict between an individual's personal desires and the interests of the group to which one belongs to. In a predominantly individualistic culture, people are expected to make their own decisions and to only take care of themselves and their immediate family. Personal freedom and individual development are fundamental.

In contrast to this, members of a predominantly communitarian culture place the interest of the

community before the individual, whose main responsibility is to serve the group. The quality of life for the individual is seen as directly dependent on the degree to which he or she takes care of fellow members, even at the cost of individual freedom. People are mainly oriented towards common goals and objectives.

3. Specific versus diffuse. Generally, people from specific oriented cultures begin by looking at each element of a situation. They analyse the elements separately, viewing the whole as the sum of its parts. Concerning relationships, in specific oriented cultures people engage others in specific areas of life (for example, separating private from professional life).

People from diffusely oriented cultures see each element in the perspective of the complete picture. All elements are related to each other, so the whole is more than simply the sum of its parts. Concerning relationships, in diffusely oriented cultures people engage others in multiple areas of life (for example, having close friendships with your workmates).

4. Neutral versus emotional. This dimension focuses on the degree to which people express emotions, and the interaction between reason and emotion in human relationships. In affective/emotional cultures, emotions are spontaneously displayed: moods and feelings aren't hidden. The expression of emotions is a sign of sincerity, attachment and trust. In neutral cultures, people are more reserved and don't openly display emotions as they have learned that it is incorrect to overtly show them. Not expressing emotions is seen as a positive sign of self-control and reason dominates one's interaction with others.

5. Achievement versus ascription. This dimension focuses on how personal status is assigned. In achievement-oriented societies the status is a reflection of performance, of what an individual does and has accomplished. In short, "you are what you do." On the other hand, in the so called "ascribed" cultures, status is a reflection of what you are and how the other individual within a group (community and/or organization) relate to you. Factors like age, class, gender and education are fundamental in attributing status. Taking it to the extreme, in this type of culture "you are what you are from birth."

6. Sequential time versus synchronous time / Past-present-future / Short term – Long term.

People who structure time and tasks sequentially view time as a series of passing events. They tend to do one thing at a time and prefer planning and keeping to plans once they have been made. Time commitments are taken seriously and staying on schedule is a must. On the other hand, synchronically oriented people view past, present, and future as being interrelated. They usually have a multi-tasking approach and do several things at once. They are less concerned about what single-tasking cultures define as punctuality. Time commitments are desirable rather than absolute and plans are easily changed.

This dimension also reflects the relative importance given to past, present and future. If a culture is predominantly oriented towards the past, the future is often seen as a repetition of past experiences. In a culture predominantly oriented towards the present, day-by-day experiences tend to direct people's lives. In a future-oriented culture, most human activities are directed toward prospects. In this case, the past is not considered to be vitally significant to the future.

7. Internal direction versus outer direction (locus of control). This dimension concerns how people relate to the environment and the perceived degree of control over it. Internally controlled people have a mechanistic view of nature: it can be dominated once one has understood how it functions. This mechanistic view favors a feeling of internal control: people

seek to take control of their lives and see their own internal perspective as the starting point for determining the 'right' action.

In contrast, cultures with an externally controlled (or organic) view of nature, assume that human beings are controlled by nature and unpredictable external forces such as fate, chance and the power of others. For this reason, they tend to "go with the flow" and orient their actions towards others.