

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

## Lecture 4 : Cultural Identity And Differences

**LECTURER:**

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# Lecture Learning Outcomes

## **By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:**

- ▶ 1. Define Cultural Identity and cultural Differences.
- ▶ 2. Identify factors that shape cultural identity
- ▶ 3. Describe examples of cultural differences
- ▶ 4. Explain the relationship between cultural identity and cultural differences.
- ▶ 5. Appreciate the importance of respecting cultural diversity

# Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture, shaped by shared values, beliefs, traditions, language and social practices.

Key Elements include

- Values
- Beliefs
- Norms
- Language
- Traditions
- Social practices

# Cultural Differences

- ▶ Cultural differences are the variations in beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, communication styles and ways of life that exist between different groups of people.
- ▶ These differences develop because societies are shaped by different histories, environments, religions, languages and social experiences. As a result, people from different cultures may think, speak, act, and relate to others in different ways.

# Forces That Maintain Cultural Differences

- ▶ Cultural differences are created and sustained by a complex set of the forces that are deeply embedded within the culture's members.
- ▶ Some of the forces that create these differences include:
- ▶ **History:** The unique experiences that have become part of a culture's collective wisdom constitute its history.
- ▶ **Ecology:** The external environment in which the culture lives is the culture's ecology. It includes such physical forces as the overall climate, the changing weather patterns.

# Forces That Maintain Cultural Differences

- ▶ **Technology:** The inventions that a culture has created or borrowed are the culture's technology, which includes such items as tools, microchips, hydraulic techniques, navigational aids, paper clips, barbed wire, stirrups and weapons.
- ▶ **Biology:** The inherited characteristics that cultural members share are the result of biology, as people with a common ancestry have similar genetic compositions.
- ▶ **Institutional Networks:** Institutional networks are the formal organizations in societies that structure activities for large numbers of people.
- ▶ **Interpersonal Communication Patterns:** The face-to-face verbal and nonverbal coding systems that cultures develop to convey meanings and intentions are called interpersonal communication patterns.

# Examples of Cultural Differences

- ▶ Language
- ▶ Religion and beliefs
- ▶ Food and dressing
- ▶ Communication styles
- ▶ Family and social roles
- ▶ Attitudes toward time
- ▶ Greetings and respect

# Cultural Similarities

- ▶ Cultural Similarities are the shared beliefs, values, customs or behaviors found across different societies or groups of people.
- ▶ Even when cultures seem very different on the surface, they often have common foundations.
- ▶ Despite differences in language, dress or customs, cultures around the world share common human experiences – family celebration, communication, values and expression.

# Cultural Similarities

Are there similarities that exist between different cultures?

A few scholars identified five situations that are faced by all cultures, which translates to 5 questions:

1. What is the character of human nature?
2. How do human beings relate to nature?
3. How do human beings view or interpret time?
4. What is the value placed on activity/work?
5. How do human beings relate to each other?

Each culture, in its own unique way, must provide answers to these questions in order to develop a coherent and consistent interpretation of the world

# Cultural Patterns

- ▶ Cultural Patterns are defined as shared beliefs, values, norms and social practices that are stable over time and that lead to roughly similar behaviors across similar situations.
- ▶ These patterns act as invisible threads connecting shared experiences, influencing everything from daily routines and social etiquette to religious expressions and material consumption (e.g clothing, art, architecture)

# Cultural Patterns Explained

- ▶ Cultural Patterns cannot be seen, heard or experienced directly.
- ▶ However, the consequences of cultural patterns are evident in what people say and do and are readily observable.
- ▶ Cultural patterns are primarily inside people, in their minds.
- ▶ They provide a way of thinking about the world of orienting oneself to it.
- ▶ Therefore, cultural patterns are shared mental programs that govern specific behaviour choices.

# Components Of Cultural Patterns

Definition: These are the individual parts represented in each patterns.

Those components shape how a society functions and maintains its identity.

# Beliefs

- ▶ Beliefs are what people believe to be true of the world.
- ▶ They can be: Central or Peripheral

# Beliefs

## 1. Central Beliefs:

- ▶ They are the most important and deeply held beliefs.
- ▶ They strongly influence a person's identity and behavior.
- ▶ They are hard to change and often linked to religion, morals or core values.

## 2. Peripheral Beliefs:

- ▶ These are less important beliefs that are more flexible.
- ▶ They have less impact on core identity.
- ▶ They are easier to change.
- ▶ Often based on preferences, trends or experiences.

# Values

- ▶ Values involve what a culture regards as good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust, beautiful or ugly, clean or dirty, valuable or worthless, appropriate or inappropriate and kind or cruel
- ▶ Values are the desired characteristics or goals of a culture, a culture's values do not necessarily describe its actual behaviours and characteristics. However, values are often offered as the explanation for how people communicate.
- ▶ Values are guiding principles in people's lives.
- ▶ From culture to culture, values differ in their valence and intensity. Valence refers to whether the value is seen as positive or negative. Intensity indicates the strength or importance of a value or the degree to which the culture identifies it as significant.

# Norms

- ▶ Norms are the socially shared expectations of appropriate behaviors. When a person's behaviours violate the culture's norms, social sanctions are usually imposed.
- ▶ Like values, norms can vary within a culture in terms of their importance and intensity.
- ▶ Norms exist for a wide variety of behaviours. For example, the greeting behaviours of people within a culture are governed by norms.
- ▶ Similarly, good manners in a variety of situations are based on norms.

# Social Practices

- ▶ Social practices are the predictable behavior patterns that members of a culture typically follow.
- ▶ Social practices are the outward manifestations of beliefs, values and norms.

## Examples

- ▶ In the United States, lunch is usually over by 1:30 p.m
- ▶ Gifts brought by dinner guests are usually opened in the presence of the guests.
- ▶ In Italy, lunch hasn't even begun by 1 :30 p.m
- ▶ In Malaysia, gifts are never opened in front of the giver as doing so is considered impolite.

# Social Practices

- ▶ Social practices can be informal when it includes everyday tasks such as eating, sleeping, dressing, working, playing, and talking to others.
- ▶ For example, cultures have social practices about eating with "good manners."
- ▶ Social practices can also be formal and prescriptive. These include the rituals, ceremonies, and structured routines that are performed publicly and collectively.

# Cultural Similarities

Are there similarities that exist between different cultures?

There are five situations that are faced by all cultures. The situations can be discovered by asking five questions:

- ▶ 1. What is the character of human nature?
- ▶ 2. How do human beings relate to nature?
- ▶ 3. How do human beings view or interpret time?
- ▶ 4. What is the value placed on activity/work?
- ▶ 5. How do human beings relate to each other?
- ▶ Each culture, in its own unique way, must provide answers to these questions in order to develop a coherent and consistent interpretation of the world

# Answers

1. People in all cultures face common human problems for which they must find solutions.
2. The range of alternative solutions to a culture's problems is limited.
3. Within a given culture, there will be preferred solutions, which most people within the culture will select.
4. Over time, the preferred solutions shape the culture's basic assumptions about beliefs, values, norms and social practices-the cultural patterns.

# Cultural Orientation

The unique questions sum up cultural patterns to include:

1. Activity orientation
2. Social Relations Orientation
3. Self Orientation
4. World Orientation
5. Time Orientation

# Activity Orientation

An activity orientation defines how the people of a culture view human actions and the expression of self through activities.

This orientation provides answers to questions such as the following

- ▶ Is it important to be engaged in activities in order to be a "good" member of one's culture?
- ▶ Can and should people change the circumstances of their lives
- ▶ Is work very different from play?
- ▶ Which is more important, work or play?
- ▶ Is life a series of problems to be solved or simply a collection of events to be experienced?

# Example

- ▶ Different cultures view activity differently
- ▶ An example of activity orientation within cultures is how different cultures value being, being-in-becoming or doing.
- ▶ In some Western cultures, such as the United States, people often value doing orientation. This means people are judged by what they achieve, produce or accomplish.
- ▶ In some other cultures, people may value being orientation, where importance is placed on living in the moment, relationships and enjoying life rather than constant achievement.
- ▶ A being-in-becoming orientation emphasizes personal growth, spiritual development and self-improvement.

# Social Relations Orientation

Social relations orientation describes how the people in a culture organize themselves and relate to one another.

It provides answers to questions such as

- ▶ How should people relate to one another?
- ▶ Is the Individual of the group more important?
- ▶ Should decisions be made alone or collectively?
- ▶ Who is to be considered powerful in society?

# Example:

- ▶ A culture that values collateral orientation may encourage family members to make decisions together. For example, when a student wants to choose a university course, the parents, uncles, aunts and even older siblings may all take part in the discussion. The final decision is seen as a family or group matter, not just an individual choice.
- ▶ Another example is lineal orientation, where authority is respected. In such a culture, the father, elder, chief or community leader may make the final decision because of age or position.
- ▶ In an individualistic orientation, a student may choose a university course alone based on personal interest, even if the family has a different opinion.

# Self Orientation

Self-orientation describes how people's identities are formed, whether the culture views the self as changeable, what motivates individual actions and the kinds of people who are valued and respected.

It provides answers to questions such as the following:

- ▶ Who am I within this culture?
- ▶ Is a person understood mainly as an individual or as part of a group?
- ▶ What matters most in defining a person—personal achievement, independence, relationships, duty, or belonging?
- ▶ What motivates people's choices and behaviour?
- ▶ Should a person put self-interest first or consider family and community first?

# Example:

- ▶ Some cultures place stronger emphasis on individual rights, personal freedom and speaking up for oneself.
- ▶ For example, an employee may openly disagree with a manager because expressing one's own opinion is seen as acceptable and important.
- ▶ Other cultures emphasize obligation, responsibility and duty to others over personal preference.
- ▶ For example, a person may sacrifice a personal opportunity in order to support parents or siblings. This reflects a cultural view of the self as responsible to the group, not only to personal goals.

# World Orientation

Cultural patterns also tell people how to locate themselves in relation to the spiritual world, nature and other living things.

It provides answers to questions such as the following:

- ▶ What is the relationship between human beings and nature?
- ▶ Do people control nature, live in harmony with it or submit to it?
- ▶ How do people understand the physical and spiritual world?
- ▶ What is the place of human beings in the universe?

# Example:

Some cultures believe people should control, change and use nature for human benefit. For example, building dams, changing landscapes and using technology to overcome natural limits reflect this view.

Other cultures emphasize balance with the environment. For example, a community may protect forests, respect the seasons and avoid unnecessary disturbance of nature because humans are seen as part of nature.

Some cultures may believe human beings are largely subject to natural forces, fate, or divine power. For example, drought, illness, or storms may be understood as realities people must endure rather than fully control.

# Time Orientation

The final aspect of cultural patterns concerns how people conceptualize time.

It provides answers to the following questions

- ▶ Is time seen as something to control carefully or something to use flexibly?
- ▶ Do people value punctuality and schedules highly?
- ▶ Is attention placed more on immediate results or future goals?
- ▶ Do people prefer doing one task at a time or many at once?

# Example

- ▶ People give strong importance to history, tradition and inherited ways of doing things. The past guides present decisions. This is common where customs and ancestral practices are highly respected.
- ▶ People focus more on current experience, immediate needs and today's realities than on distant future planning.
- ▶ People plan ahead, delay immediate rewards and work toward long-term goals.

# Cultural Patterns Summary

Each culture therefore, will ask the following question

- ▶ Who am I? How should people relate? What is the right use of time? What should human activity focus on? How do we relate to the world?
- ▶ Through the orientations, we are able to see that cultures do not think and behave in exactly the same way.
- ▶ Understanding these orientations is important because they help explain cultural differences, reduce misunderstanding and promote respect in Intercultural Communication.
- ▶ They remind us that people's actions, values and choices are often shaped by the cultural systems in which they live.

# Cultural Patterns Summary

- ▶ Cultural patterns are the shared ways of thinking, behaving, and living that are common within a particular culture.
- ▶ They include values, beliefs, customs, traditions, communication styles, social norms, and everyday practices.
- ▶ Cultural patterns are what create cultural differences. Since each culture develops its own shared ways of life, these patterns make one culture different from another.

# Relationship between Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences

- ▶ Cultural identities produce cultural differences. Since different groups have different histories, environments and experiences, they develop unique ways of life.
- ▶ Cultural differences help to make cultural identity visible. People often become more aware of their own culture when they meet people from different backgrounds.
- ▶ Interaction between different cultural identities reveals cultural differences.
- ▶ It is these cultural differences that produce Cultural Biases, which we will understand in our next topic.

# Cultural Patterns and Intercultural Competence

- ▶ Cultural patterns describe what people perceive as their reality and what they view as desirable.
- ▶ Cultural patterns form the basis for what is considered to be communicatively appropriate and effective.

# Lesson Summary

Cultural identity is a person's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group. It is shaped by things such as language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, traditions, values, customs and shared history.

Cultural identity helps people understand who they are and where they belong in society.

Cultural differences are the variations that exist between people or groups from different cultural backgrounds.

# References:

- ▶ Intercultural Communication in Contexts. Judith N. Martin & Thomas K. Nakayama, McGraw-Hill Education, 2025 (8<sup>th</sup> Edition).
- ▶ Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book for Students. Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde & John Kullman, Routledge, 2021 (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)



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