CHAPTER 2
The Cultural Context

A Contextual Model of Intercultural Communication

Culture
- Basics: invisible, pervasive, learned
- Provides implicit theory on...
  - How to feel
  - What to believe
  - How to behave
- 5 ways to differentiate cultures...
  - Individualist – Collectivist
  - High-context – Low-context
  - Value Orientations
  - Power Distance
  - Uncertainty Avoidance
- And...masculinity-femininity, time orientation

Cultural Taxonomies: Caution
- Not absolutes, rather a sliding scale
- Cultures can vary internally
  - Dominant culture vs. microcultures
- Cultures change
  - China & one-child policy
  - Japan as collectivist society
  - USA in reaction to 9/11
- Individuals have personal choice

Individualism—Collectivism
- How do individuals perceive themselves?
  - “I am distinct and unique.”
  - “I am a member of a family.”
• How do individuals relate to others?
  ◦ “What do I gain?”
  ◦ “How will this affect others?”
• What goals do they follow?
  ◦ “I want to win.”
  ◦ “I am a team player to help the group win.”
• What drives their behavior?
  ◦ “It is my right to do this.”
  ◦ “My duty is to my group.”

7 Individualism—Collectivism

• Individualism
  ◦ Individuals brought up to be…
    • creative, self-reliant, assertive
  ◦ Nature of group memberships?
    • many, but shallow, short-lived
  ◦ Behavior control:
    • Guilt
• Collectivism
  ◦ Individuals brought up to…
    • have strong sense of duty to group, accept interdependence, highly value harmony
  ◦ Nature of group memberships?
    • few, but deep => family, work
  ◦ Behavior control:
    • Shame
• Economic systems – how do they fit?

8 Individualism—Collectivism

• Countries?
  ◦ Individualist: USA, Netherlands, Germany, Hungary
  ◦ Collectivist: Guatemala, Indonesia, China, Russia
  ◦ Norway? Japan?
• States?
  ◦ Individualist: Montana, Western States
  ◦ Collectivist: South, Utah, Hawaii, California
• Individual?
  ◦ Idiocentric = individualistic orientation
  ◦ Allocentric = collectivistic orientation

9 Consequences of Individualism-Collectivism

1 • Individualistic cultures
  (“the squeaky wheel gets the grease”)
  – Do not perceive a large chasm between in-group and out-group members
  – Train their members to speak out (use confrontational strategies) as means of resolving difficulties

2 • Collectivistic cultures
  (“the nail that sticks up gets pounded”)
  – Typically impose a very large psychological distance between the in-group & the out-group
  – Avoid confrontation, use third-party intermediaries, & other face-saving techniques

10 Horizontal/Vertical Cultures

• In “horizontal” cultures, individuals expected to not stand out; value placed on equality and not on freedom
• In “vertical” cultures, individuals are expected to stand out; equality is not valued and freedom is valued

11 Horizontal/Vertical Individualistic Cultures

• Horizontal IND cultures: people are expected to act as individuals but not stand out; high value on equality and freedom (Sweden, Austria)
• Vertical IND cultures: people are expected to act as individuals and stand out; low value on equality and high
value on freedom (U.S., Britain, Germany)

12 Horizontal/Vertical Collectivistic Cultures

- Horizontal COL cultures: people value equality highly and should not stand out; high value on equality but little value on freedom (China)
- Vertical COL cultures: people do not value equality highly and are expected to stand out; low value on equality and freedom (India)

13 High- and Low-Context Cultural Taxonomy

Assumptions:
- The degree to which interactants focus on different contexts (physical, socio-relational, perceptual) while communicating varies considerably from culture to culture, for example, non-verbal communication more important in some cultures than others.

- Cultures differ on a continuum that ranges from high to low context
  - High context messages = most of the meaning is implied
  - Low context messages = most of the information is in the explicit code (language)

14 Examples of High- & Low-Context Cultures

15 High-Context—Low-Context

- Use physical, socio-relational contexts for info
- Indirect, implicit messages
- Silence is valued
- Examples: China, Vietnam, and many African cultures.
- Verbal code mainly used to convey information
- Direct, explicit messages
- Silence is uncomfortable
- Examples: the U.S. and Germany
Value Orientations
- Communication between people from different cultures shaped by fundamental values people hold
- Values are learned, not innate or universal
- Help guide our social behavior & actions
- Prescribe what is preferred or prohibited
- Shape concepts of right or wrong
- Important in understanding “where someone is coming from”
- Caveat: people are individuals

Value Orientations
- Individualistic/Low context values similar as they are for Collectivistic/High context
  - USA
    - Self-interest, individualism
    - Equality
  - China
    - Respect (filial piety)
    - Tolerance & Harmony

Value Orientations (Condon & Yousef)
- The self
  - Ind: Individualism, youth, equality of sexes
  - Coll: Conformity & cooperation, old age, greater role for men
- The family
  - Ind: Democratic-open, flexible roles
  - Coll: Hierarchical-authoritarian, prescribed roles
- Society
  - Ind: On your own, individual rights
  - Coll: Tied together, communal good
- Human nature
  - Ind: People are inherently good, happiness achievable, people can change
  - Coll: People are bad, life is sad, immutable human nature
- Nature
  - Ind: Humans dominate, nature is mechanistic & can be controlled
  - Coll: Nature dominates, nature organic and man not apart
- The supernatural
  - Ind: Material goods important, fixed, understandable order to cosmos
  - Coll: Spiritual goals more important, unknowable, irrational cosmos

### Power Distance

“the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.” — Gert Hofstede

Small PD => minimize inequalities
Large PD => inequality accepted, even desired

How manifested in family, school, work?

### Differences Between Small & Large Power Distance

Small/lower power distance cultures

- Emphasize equal distance
- Individual credibility
- Symmetrical interaction
- Emphasize informality
- Subordinates expect consultation
Examples:
Austria
Israel
Denmark
New Zealand
Ireland
Sweden/Norway
Germany
United States, Canada, Great Britain

2 - Large/high power distance cultures

- Emphasize power distance
- Seniority, age, rank, title
- Asymmetrical interaction
- Emphasize formality
- Subordinates expect directions

Examples:
Guatemala
Panama, Mexico
Philippines
Malaysia
Arab countries
India
West African countries
France, Russia

23 - Power Distance

- Positional power versus earned power?
- How authorities are viewed/judged?
- “Facework” = Updating your Facebook?
• Self-face, Other-face, Mutual-face
• Power Distance and body language?
• Eye contact, passing something, smiling

24 The Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension
Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain and unknown situations and the extent to which they try to avoid these situations.

25 Differences between Weak & Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures

1 Weak UA cultures
• Uncertainty is valued
• Career change
• Encourage risk taking
• Conflict can be positive
• Expect innovations

Examples:

Generally Western (individualistic)
United States/Canada
Denmark
Sweden/Norway
Australia
Jamaica

2 Strong UA cultures
• Uncertainty is a threat
• Career stability
• Expect clear procedures
• Conflict is negative
• Preserve status quo

Examples:

Generally Eastern (collectivistic)
South Korea, Japan
Guatemala
Uruguay
Greece
Portugal
France, Russia

26 Consequences of Uncertainty Avoidance
• Members of high UAI cultures…
  • worried about future
  • have high level on anxiety
  • are highly resistant to change
  • Uncertainties of life = threat to overcome
• Members of low UAI cultures…
  • tend to live day to day
  • are more willing to accept change and take risks
  • see conflict and competition are natural
  • accept dissent, don’t see deviance as threatening
  • individual achievement is beneficial.