

A stylized teal logo of a bird in flight, resembling a rocket, with its wings spread wide and a flame-like tail. The background features abstract, swirling teal and gold patterns.

ROCKET

Culture and Intercultural Communication

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What is Culture?

- Broadly to be defined as the **expectations** and **ways of living** of a group of people, with the acknowledgment that individuals can belong to numerous groups.

Deardorff, Darla 2022

Examples:

- **Expectations** of care for how to be treated as a student while studying abroad, autonomous vs. accompanied through learning experience
- **Ways of Living:** How one communicates with a group of students in a project, task-oriented vs. relationship-oriented



Culture

- Something seen from the perspective of one's own culture can have an entirely different meaning when looked at in the context of the foreign culture.
- Understanding oneself and understanding others are closely related processes. To do one, you must start with the other, and vice versa.

Hall, Edward T. 1989



Culture

- **Above the waterline:** Visible, physical cultural characteristics, like dress, foods, festivals. (Hall 1990 in Page 2021)
- **Below the waterline:** Aspects of culture that are invisible and unknown to others without deeper exploration, like orientations to time, expectations of communication style, values in relationships. (Hall 1990 in Page 2021)
- **Subcultures/ "Small cultures"** (Holliday 1999) can be found in social groupings with a cohesive pattern of behaviour. People can belong to multiple, overlapping subcultures small cultures.

Examples: academic disciplines, student groups, pop culture fandom, etc.

- **Cultural Hybridity** (Bhabha 2011): Understanding that cultural identity is fluid, provides a framework for understanding complex, shifting cultural identities that emerge as individuals move between cultural contexts, making choices about how they shape their cultural selves.



Culture

- Significant **intra-cultural variations** take away the meaning of culture as being assumedly homogeneous populations with new heterogeneous groups that do not fit old labels.
- This concept is replacing a broad, overly encompassing concept of culture, with a more specific concept of **patterned practice**.
- More or less stable patterns of everyday life are specific to particular types of situations, defining preferences, predispositions, and expectations for actors, e.g. how to solve problems and address challenges.
- Regular, patterned activities shape the human mind and body through embodiment, and internalization. Enacting practices shape and re-shape norms, processes, institutions and forms of sociality.

Intercultural Communication

- Intercultural communication prioritizes
“communicating within human diversity that is inclusive
of age, race, genders, religions, socioeconomic
backgrounds, physical abilities, ideological beliefs.”

Deardorff, Darla 2022.



Introduction to Intercultural Communication

- The way how people view the world is culturally learned and shaped through patterns of behaviour in everyday life and through institutions. Culture and one's own cultural lens influences the interpretation and meaning that is attached to practices of behaviour.

Example: One's learning environment affecting the way they perceive behaviors and etiquette in the classroom. People can belong to multiple, overlapping subcultures that comprise cohesive patterns of behaviour, such as subcultures of academic disciplines, student groups, pop culture, etc.

- Invisible aspects of culture, like values and beliefs requiring time and energy to explore, adapt and integrated into existing patterns of cultural behavior.



Introduction to Intercultural Communication

- Social psychology explains stereotypes with the tendency of people to group themselves and others into groups which they belong to (in-group) and those which they don't belong to (out-group). (Brehm, Kassir, Fein 2002)
- Stereotypes distort people's perceptions and interpretations of the behaviors of other group members. (Brehm, Kassir, Fein 2002)
This includes the way how conflictual situations are perceived, interpreted and evaluated.
- Aspects such as cognitive dissonance may hinder nonviolent communication and conflict transformation, which aim to improve good relationships among parties involved.



Introduction to Intercultural Communication

- Intercultural learning includes gaining greater insight and a non-judgmental approach when encountering situations that are new, do not reflect expectations and are unfamiliar.
- It covers cultural self-awareness, appreciation of cognitive complexity and difference, with the importance of taking perspective and building empathy.
- Building intercultural competence includes a non-judgmental approach to conflict, acknowledging and expecting a range of different interpretations and evaluations within a culturally diverse group of people.



Attributions as Cultural Constructions

- **Attribution** is the process by which people explain others' behaviour, making personal or situational attributions for their behaviour.
- **The culture** in which people live **shapes the kinds of attributions** made about people and social situations.

Example: Believing that persons are autonomous and responsible for their own actions or emphasizing relationships between individuals and their social surroundings.

Brehm, Kassin, Fein 2002.



Stereotypes

- Beliefs that associate groups of people with certain characteristics.
- Formation of stereotypes begin with the tendency for people to group themselves and others into social categories, allowing perceivers to make quick inferences about group members, which can lead to inaccurate judgments.

Brehm, Kassin, Fein 2002.



Stereotypes

- Stereotypes of groups distort people's perceptions and interpretations of the behaviours of group members.
- Perceivers are likely to see members of stereotyped groups as more similar to the stereotype than they actually are, especially when a stereotyped person behaves in an ambiguous way and perceivers reduce the ambiguity by interpreting the behaviour as consistent with the stereotype.

Brehm, Kassin, Fein 2002.



Stereotypes

- Perception of others is profoundly influenced by the act of perceiving them as member of a group. Perceivers' thoughts, feelings, actions can be influenced by aspects of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical appearance, economic class (among others).
- Formation of stereotypes involves a) categorization, in which people are sorted into groups and b) perception of groups to which people belong (ingroups) and to which they don't belong (outgroups).
- **Social Categorization** is a process, in which people sort each other into groups based on attributes like race, gender among others. This leads to overestimate the **differences between** groups and to underestimate the **difference within** groups.
- **Ingroups and outgroups** creates a separation of „us“ and „them“ leading to **Outgroup Homogeneity effect**, in which perceivers assume that there is greater similarity among members of outgroups than among members of one's own group – with fine differences between members of „us“ but a sense of „them“ being all alike.

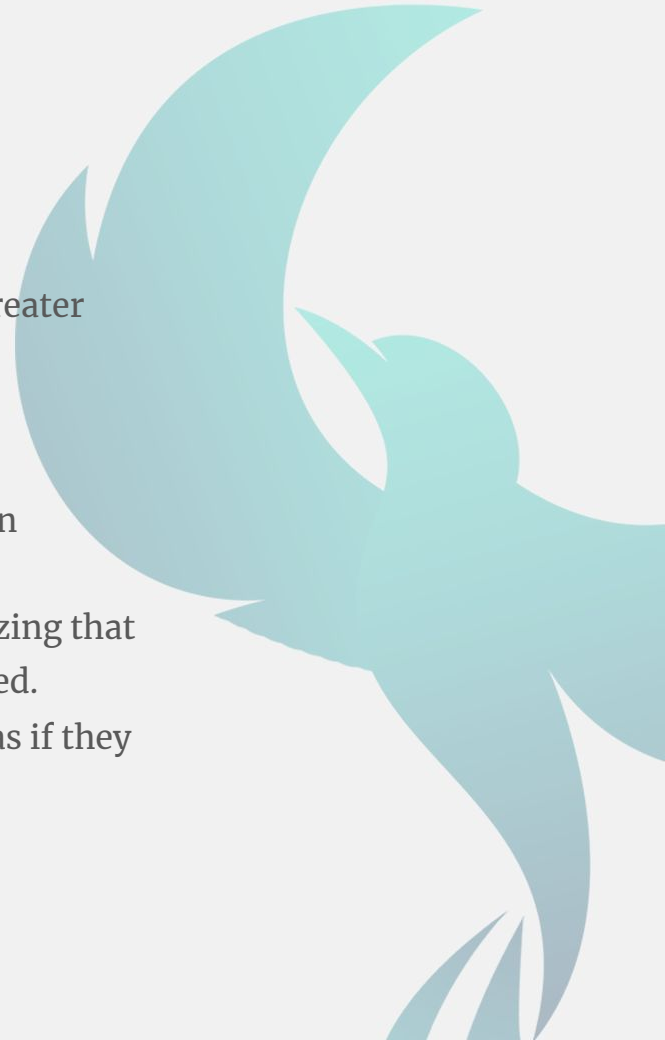
Brehm, Kassin, Fein 2002.

Building intercultural competence

Intercultural activity D.A.E.: Describe, Analyze, Evaluate

- The broader purpose of this exercise is to guide people toward greater insight when encountering the unfamiliar, including mindfully withholding judgment.
- It includes fostering self-awareness of personal and cultural assumptions, strengthening importance of frame-shifting, when encountering the unfamiliar.
- Moving through a process of sense-making (interpreting), realizing that description, interpretation, evaluation are often not distinguished.
- People react and speak from personal and cultural perspectives as if they were describing some objective truth.

Nam, Condon 2009



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Thanks!

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