

Observe, Ask and
I Will Disclose To You Who I am:
The Art of Intercultural
Competence

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Culture: An Ordered Parameter

- Building blocks, created by a collectivity that sets criteria of behavior to make
 - communal living
 - communication
 - social life and
 - relationships possible

Culture: Human Construction

- Beliefs & practices about the transcendent
- Rules of interacting with others
- Proper and improper behavior
- Roles- gender roles, extending hospitality
- Food culture - every day, special occasions
- Dressing – everyday, special occasion
- Furnishing homes, place at dinner table
- Beauty – “Miss Universe” – a cultural misnomer. In reality does not exist



Hidden from the “Stranger”

- Most aspects of culture are hidden
- What we see is usually not what it is
- What is seeable in culture is about 10%
- About 90% of cultural elements lie underneath – but known “intuitively” to the initiates
 - Like building a tower where 90% of its overall height is the foundation

Culture - Not So Obvious

- Core values, taken for granted assumptions, attitudes, that shape and guide behavior
 - Correct and incorrect ways of doing things
 - Right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable
 - Etiquette, courtesies,
- We live and interact along effortlessly without thinking of it
- We breathe and move along like everyone else.
 - I am not discounting the cultural deviant. Of course, deviant means s/he is does not toe the line

Language - a vehicle of Culture

- Language is a carrier of culture
- Sign Language: A commonly standardized criteria of meaning
- Language is more than syntax. It is a vehicle for communicating culture

Taken for Granted by In-Group

- *“A fish only discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it”*

• Fons Trompenaars & Charles Hampden-Turner (2006) *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Differences in Business*. London, Nicholas Brezina Publishing

Go Beyond the Surface

- Reach out to the deep to understand
- Peter’s encounter with Jesus at the Lake **“Reach out to the deep.”** – Luke 5:4
- Peter reached out, what a find! What a catch of a life time!
- Suspend judgment >> [**bracket out**] what you know

Concede: Uniqueness of Culture

- Conceding to the uniqueness of culture is fundamental
- An intellectual disposition that is useful for understanding (another) culture:
 - What informs the culture?
 - How did a given practice come about?
 - How one practice is intertwined with others?
 - What is the history behind a given practice, etc.?

Concede – contd.

- Conceding creates the right frame of mind to communicate meaningfully
- Adopt, as an intellectual tool, the mentality that **culture is what it is**
 - Neither superior nor inferior
 - Particularly useful for ministers & formators
- Without this mentality, it is difficult to communicate **meaningfully**

Community in Diversity



Phenomenological Approach

- Adopt the mentality of a phenomenologist:
 - Let what you observe **speak to you first**
- **This approach**
 - disposes one to discover deeper meanings
 - enables one to detect
 - Elements of culture that different from ours
 - Values that are contrary to the Gospel
 - Critique like a native sage without being judgmental

Our Humanity Grounded in Culture

- “The Humanity of the Priest [**minister, formator**] is the **bridge** to Christ.” – *St. John Paul II*
- “The priest’s mission is to be the ‘bridge’ between God and the world” – *Benedict XVI - 'lectio divina' with Rome's priests - Feb. 23, 2010*
- **BRIDGE** [**cement, iron, steel, wood, pillars, etc.**]
 - **Connects** one side [river, valley, etc] to the other
 - Formation and evangelization is to connect
 - Formation provides grounds for bridging cultures
 - Cultivates the Gospel to challenge values contrary to Gospel
- **What is your Human Bridge made of?**

Our Humanity is Shaped by Culture

- Cultural encounters shape and reshape us
- What we encounter along life’s journey is central to who we are and our ministry
 - It impacts how we respond to present encounter
 - It informs our spiritual life
 - It shapes how we relate to God
- The adage: “Man Know thyself” is right on target
- Two great moment in a person’s life; day you were born, day you discovered who you are
 - – *African proverb*

Paul VI on Culture

- The Foundation [DNA] of our social life
- “Mankind's criteria of judgment
 - determining values, symbols, gestures
 - points of interest
 - lines of thought
 - sources of inspiration and
 - models of life”

o Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #19

“The Stranger” - Alfred Schutz

- Cultural patterns taken for granted by the in-group – **SUBJECTIVITY**
- Challenge to the “Stranger”-**OBJECTIVITY**
- Newcomer’s (NC) taken for granted world and standardized situations nullified
- NC constrained to being a cultural critique

- Alfred Schutz

A Person - Cultural Phenomenon

- A person is a cultural phenomenon
- Each person bears within a stamp of **primal** cultural heritage
 - o Shapes who we are
 - o Shapes our worldview
- A person unfolds in an ongoing encounter and context

Already Shaped But Unfolding

- How do we understand the already shaped yet also unfolding?
- A phenomenological approach
 - Yes I see but I do not really grasp
 - It looks like but might not be
 - I have seen a similar but might be difference
- **Suspend judgment**

True Encounter Triggers Change

- Peter at Cornelius': Who really was converted?
- **The real convert was Peter**
 - Converted from ritualistic observances
 - Freed from the yoke of religious purity
 - Liberated from the prison of cultural segregation
- Peter crossed over, was touched by the other and changed to truly understand: "The **truth** I have now come to **understand** is that God has no favorites" (Acts 10:34).
 - **Conversion of Cornelius is a misnomer**

Tips For Approaching Other Culture

- Each culture is unique - different
- Assuming difference rather than similarity
- Ask when in doubt about the meanings
- Seek to understand when "taken for granted" expectations are violated
- Approach with respect for the other's culture
- Realize the other already mastered a different cultural script

A Culture **One Model** of Ordering

“The culture in which you were raised is just **one model** of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique expression of the human spirit.”

- Wade Davis (2009) *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World*
