

Lecture 1: what is culture?

2) Types of Culture

Chastain (1988 p. 303) differentiated between two types of culture: big “C” culture– or formal culture-, and little “c” culture –or deep culture-. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993, p06) the former can be referred to as “achievement culture” which encompasses history, geography, institutions, literature, art, music and the way of life. However, the latter is referred to as “behaviour culture” that includes beliefs and perceptions.

Brislin (2001) defines culture in terms of a set of some visible and invisible elements. In his view, culture is made up of:

Ideals, values, and assumptions about life that people widely share and that guide specific behaviours. Yet these are invisible elements. Assumptions, values, and ideals are not immediately obvious. Instead, they are stored in people’s minds and consequently are hard for outsiders to see.” (p. 5).

That is to say, culture consists of some invisible factors which influence or result in visible behaviors. It is this kind of invisible factors that often turn the visible behaviors to a major source of communication failures with people from outside.

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Considering the (in) visibility of the elements of culture, and following Chastain's types of culture, Peterson (2004) makes a distinction between the big C Culture and the little c culture, each of which encompasses visible and invisible distinctive features or phenomena. The big C Culture, in his view, covers classic or grand themes some of which are visible to the eye like architecture, geography, classic literature, presidents or political figures, and classical music. Others are invisible like core values, attitudes or beliefs, society's norms, legal foundations, assumptions, history, and cognitive processes.

The second type of culture, the small c culture, covers minor or common themes. These may be visible like gestures, body posture, use of space, clothing style, food, hobbies, music, and artwork or invisible like popular issues, opinions, viewpoints, preferences or tastes, and certain knowledge or trivia facts. The difference between the small c culture and the big C Culture is that the former refers to the style of life by which a group of people is characterized while the latter refers to the products or the contributions of a society (Chastain, 1988).

Moreover, Peterson (2004, p 18) posited **the tree** analogy through which he likened culture to a tree with some visible and easily noticed elements (e.g. geography, music, food/ branches and leaves), and others that require close scrutiny to be realized (e.g. Beliefs, attitudes/ termites and roots).

In addition to the tree model, two other models have been developed; "**The Iceberg Model**" and The "**Onion Model**". In the former, behaviour, clothing, and food, for instance, are on the surface of the water, while underlying meanings, beliefs, attitudes and values are below. In the latter, components like behaviour, clothing, and food are represented by the

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outer layers which can be peeled away to uncover the underlying meanings, beliefs, attitudes and values found in the center (Gibson, 2000)

Exercise:

- 1) In a table, try to summarize Peterson's types of culture taking into account the (in) visibility of their components.
- 2) Represent the three analogical models proposed by Peterson (2004) in clear well drawn diagrams.