UNIT 11: CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to –

- Understand the meaning of communication
- Know what culture is
- Comprehend the meaning of cross-cultural and intercultural communication
- Learn what structure based cultural characteristics are

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The concepts of culture and communication have been defined and re-defined repeatedly as these are concepts that are associated intrinsically with human beings. Although distinct, these concepts can be well understood in relation to each other. In this unit, we will not only learn the meanings of these concepts, but also have an in-depth understanding of them.

11.3 COMMUNICATION

The term communication has its origins in the Latin word "*communis*" which means common. Communication means mutual sharing of feelings

and ideas. The connection between communication and families is created through social interaction of family members. By communication with each other, members of society learn what they should expect and what they should not expect from each other. They learn how relationships function and how to behave within them. It is through communication that people learn how to interact socially and build social relations. Thus, communication is the way in which verbal and non-verbal messages are exchanged between the members of society.

Communication rose and advanced along with the development process of society. It is a process in which people have communicative potential. It is interactive, so a crucial impact on its effectiveness is in one's relationship with people. Communication is diverse – it may be verbal or non-verbal. It can also be direct or indirect, face-to-face or via mediums like telephone, email, SMS, social media, etc. Direct communication takes place when people say what they mean; indirect communication is when the meaning is not just in words, but also in the surrounding background of a conversation.

Communication is culturally rooted and can vary from culture to culture. Language and gestures are integral components of communication and are also culturally defined. But there are also certain symbols and signs of communication that are universal, for instance, traffic signals. Once a person starts interacting outside his/her community, he/she begins to understand that there can be different ways of communicating.

In this unit, we will talk about cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication. But to do that, we first need to understand what is culture. Culture is fundamental to communication. It not only dictates who talks to whom, but also, when, why and how.

11.4 CULTURE

While nature is seen as biological, culture is considered social. It is human-made and shapes their thoughts and actions. It has its origins in the Latin word '*colere*' which means to build, to cultivate and to foster. Culture is

constructed whereas nature is innate. It is present in the minds and habits of people. Culture is a systematic way of constructing a reality that people acquire by living in a group. It is seen as a product of a group and as a shared reality.

Culture is considered as a way of life that includes each and everything from food, music, dance, art, architecture, heritage, dress, literature, etc. to daily activities. Culture distinguishes members of one community from another. It is transferred from one generation to another generation. A fundamental characteristic of culture is a similarity in the way in which it's members interpret information. Individuals who share a common culture have similar mental models of the worlds that facilitate communication. For peaceful survival of human beings, culture is a pre-requisite. It is impossible to understand human society without understanding human culture. It is culture which separates human beings from other living beings.

Cultural differences show themselves in many different ways including in symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. It is used to refer to all the activities of life whether these are social, physical, external or internal. It is made up of both tangible and intangible things. The tangible things refer to material components like clothes, food, buildings, etc. whereas the intangible part comprises values, customs, traditions, etc., Cultural evolution or advancement is known as civilization, that is, the development of knowledge, skills, standards, values and norms which are utilized in creation of tools, institutions and human social behaviour. The development of culture happens through a series of inventions. Inventions spread from one culture to another through inter-communication.

Thus, we can conclude that culture is –

- A result of social interaction
- It is historical
- Transferred from generation to generation
- Different from nature
- A group product
- Both materialistic and non-materialistic

Primary cultural dimensions are –

- Patterns of thought
- Patterns of behaviour
- Patterns of artifacts
- Imprints in nature

11.5 CROSS-CULTURE COMMUNICATION AND INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The terms cross-cultural communication and inter-cultural communication can be used synonymously. They refer to the ability to communicate between people of different cultural contexts. It is interpersonal communication and interaction across cultures. To do so, language skills, understanding cultural influences on identity and adapting to unknown cultures is required. Effective cross-cultural communication is concerned with overcoming cultural differences across nationality, religion, ethnicity, borders, culture, and behavior. When culture became established, and communities began having interpersonal relationships, this allows for intercultural communication. It looks at how people from different cultural contexts try to communicate.

Cross-cultural communication is a subject of study of Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Psychology, and Linguistics, as these disciplines deal with the human being as their subject matter. The urge for communication is natural and has become a necessity in today's society. Effective cross-cultural communication is concerned with overcoming cultural differences across nationality, region, borders, culture, and behaviour. The term 'cross-cultural' is used to describe the comparative study of cultures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – (A)

Q1. Is cross-cultural communication an inter-disciplinary subject?

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Q2. How does invention spread from one culture to another?

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Some of the skills that are required for cross-cultural communication are –

- Speech and language skills – positive speech like encouragement, confirmation, affirmation,and recognition
- Etiquette and manners
- An understanding of norms, values,and customs
- Body language
- Verbal and non-verbal gestures
- Concepts of time and space
- An idea about privacy
- Listening skills – attentive listening is critical to be able to understand meanings, read between the lines and able to empathize with the speaker from a different culture
- Observation – of people's dress, body language, interaction,andbehaviour can give a lot of information about another culture
- Patience – sometimes cross-cultural differences are annoying and frustrating,and therefore, patience is a pre-requisite
- Flexibility, adaptability,and open-mindedness
- Cultural competence helps us to understand how and why people from other cultures think, act and do in the way they behave
- Communicative competence
- Translation and interpretation

Learning as much as possible about another culture, for example, about its history, social structure, values, and customs can enhance one's cross-cultural communication skills. Miscommunication can occur if people do not understand another culture correctly.

How to cope with cultural differences?

Some measures that can help appreciate cultural differences are:

- Awareness of cultural diversity
- Knowledge of one's own culture
- Understanding other cultures

Intercultural communication depends on many variables, They are-

- Cultural knowledge or awareness when establishing contact with people from a different community.
- Socio-cultural information about the interlocutor.
- Psycho-cultural information related to individual characteristics of each subject.

There are different aspects of cross-cultural communication, They are-

- Oral communication is communicating one's thoughts through speech which can be ideas, opinions, directions, instructions, etc.
- Written communication is communicating through writing, which can be messages, emails, telegrams, etc.

In this section, we have discussed at length about cross-cultural communication. We have outlined the importance, aspects, and variables of inter-cultural communication and the skills necessary for doing it. Intercultural communication becomes a vital skill in today's workplace culture as people from diverse cultural backgrounds work together in organizational structures. In the next section, we will be looking at the cultural characteristics of specific structure based institutions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – (B)

1. Identify two forms of communication.

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11.6 STRUCTURE BASED CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

When we talk about structure based cultural features, many structures come to the mind. The society itself is the most massive structure

that surrounds human beings. The community, the family, religion, kinship relations, and organizations are other structures that govern our lives. Culture is tool making, institution making and value making. In this section, we will be outlining some of the cultural attributes of these structures.

- **Society and culture**

A society is defined as a group of people with mutual territory whereas culture is a way of life. One society can have multiple cultures. For instance, Indian society has various cultures residing within its geographical territory. One cannot understand society without understanding the culture.

In most cases, the behavior of human beings is guided by their cultural upbringing. It is through language that people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other. Language is one of the culturally based characteristics of society and is culturally dependant.

Apart from language, gestures, signs, and symbols are also cultural characteristics that govern society. While some symbols are universal, others are relative. For instance, waving at someone is universally understood to mean saying hello. However, folding and joining hands together to say *'namaste'* is specific to Hindu culture of Indian society. Language and gestures are thus, cultural traits that define the societal structure. While animals can be taught certain gestures, language cannot be taught to them. Therefore, verbal language is the base of culture. Intercultural communication has therefore developed into inter-verbal and inter-language communication.

- **Community and culture**

A community is a smaller group of people than society, but it is also a group of people that share a common territory. In one society, many communities can co-habit that have different kinds of cultures. It is language and symbols, signs and gestures that enable different communities with varied cultures to interact with each other within a society. Culture is patterns of behaviour socially acquired and transmitted through symbols.

- **Family and culture**

The family is considered to be the institution that binds the community and the society together. It is one of the major socializing agents and transmitter of culture from one age cohort to another. The family has several

cultural characteristics. For instance, mostly in developed countries, the nuclear family is the accepted norm whereas in developing countries, the joint or the extended family is the most common form. It is the family which transfers language, religion and culture from parents to their off springs.

- **Religion and culture**

Religion is a component of social structure that is considered both a unitary and a divisive force. Although it was argued that with modernity, the importance of religion would gradually decline, it has not been the case. Religion is still relevant even in modern societies like that of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, etc. However. Religion is not universal but is culturally relative. For instance, Muslims living in India have more in common with other religions living in the country rather than with Muslims living in other parts of the world. Religion, therefore, is also culturally determined.

- **Kinship and culture**

Like family, kinship relations, too, are dependent on one's cultural background. Kinship is an analytical category which involves relationships that are based on the biological connections created through sex and birth. Marriage is the central institution of kinship and it is culturally determined. For example, while arranged marriage is an accepted way of getting couples married in Indian and Pakistani societies, it is very uncommon in Western societies. Therefore, although kinship is biological but at the same time it is culturally bounded.

- **Organizations and culture**

Organizations are an important part of society and organizational culture is seen as an important influence on human beings in today's society. Organizations can be of various types like schools, colleges, offices, etc. Organizational culture is a complex combination of formal and informal systems, processes and interactions. It is comprised of leadership, structure, policies, reward systems, rituals, norms, etc. It creates a shared pattern of behaviour which guide one's action in the organization. Organizational culture is the underlying beliefs, assumptions, values and ways of interacting that contribute to the social and mental environment of an organization.

Different kinds of cultures influence and impact organizations differently. For instance, governmental, corporate and non-governmental organizations have different work cultures and ethics, especially in India. Having a deeply embedded organizational culture is linked to its performance. The organizational culture also decides the way employees interact in their workplace. It is the culture of the organization which brings the best out of each employee by bringing everyone together at a common level.

Having looked at the relationship between structure and culture, we will now look at how this relationship is created. It is communication that bridges the divide between structure and culture. This communication happens primarily at the levels of leadership and individual.

To sum up findings from this section, some of the structure based cultural characteristics that are common to most structures are –

- Language
- Symbols, signs, gestures
- Cultural relativity
- Bringing every member to a common platform



11.7 LET US SUM UP

- Communication means mutual sharing of feelings and ideas. Communication is culturally rooted and can vary from culture to culture. Language and gestures are integral components of communication and are also culturally defined.
- There are certain symbols and signs of communication that are universal, for instance, traffic signals. Once a person starts interacting outside his/her community, he/she begins to understand that there can be different ways of communicating.
- Culture is considered a way of life, that includes each and everything from food, music, dance, art, architecture, heritage, dress, literature, etc. to daily activities. Culture distinguishes members of one community from another.

- The terms cross-cultural communication and inter-cultural communication can be used synonymously. They refer to the ability to communicate between people of different cultural contexts.
- In cross-cultural communication, there is sending and receiving of communication between two or more than two cultures. Cross-cultuarl communication requires specific skills and is dependant on particular variables.



11.8 FURTHER READING

1. Ardichvili, Alexandre, James A. Mitchell and Douglas Jondle. 2009. Characteristics of Ethical Business Cultures. *Journal of Business Ethics*. 85(4): 445-451. Springer.
2. Ellwood, Charles. 1944. Culture and Human Society. *Social Forces.* 23(1): 6-15. Oxford University Press.
3. García-Carbonell, A. & Rising, B. 2006. Culture and communication. Georgia: College of Management, GeorgiaInstitute of Technology Atlanta, Georgia.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No A.1. Yes, it is multi-disciplinary.

Ans to Q No A.2. Through inter-communication.

Ans to Q No B.1. Oral and written communication.



11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q1. What is meant by communication?

Q2. Define ‘culture’.

Long Questions (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q1. Write a note on ‘cross-culture communication’.

Q2. What is meant by ‘structure-based cultural characteristic’? Explain. Give suitable examples.