

Chapter 83

Cultural Models and Variations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides the models and variation of culture. Specifically, the following concepts will be introduced: an understanding of the original of culture and how culture is studied in the academic field; the most influential culture theories which are adapted in business and management research. A detailed exploration on the methodology, dimensions, and implications of each model will be provided. An understanding of culture's impact on manufacturing systems which stems from traditional factory-based model to inter-firm network with the increase of collaboration in globalization is given. Some understanding of culture's variation in the fast growing inter-firm collaboration with case observations are also elucidated.

CULTURE AND ITS NATURE

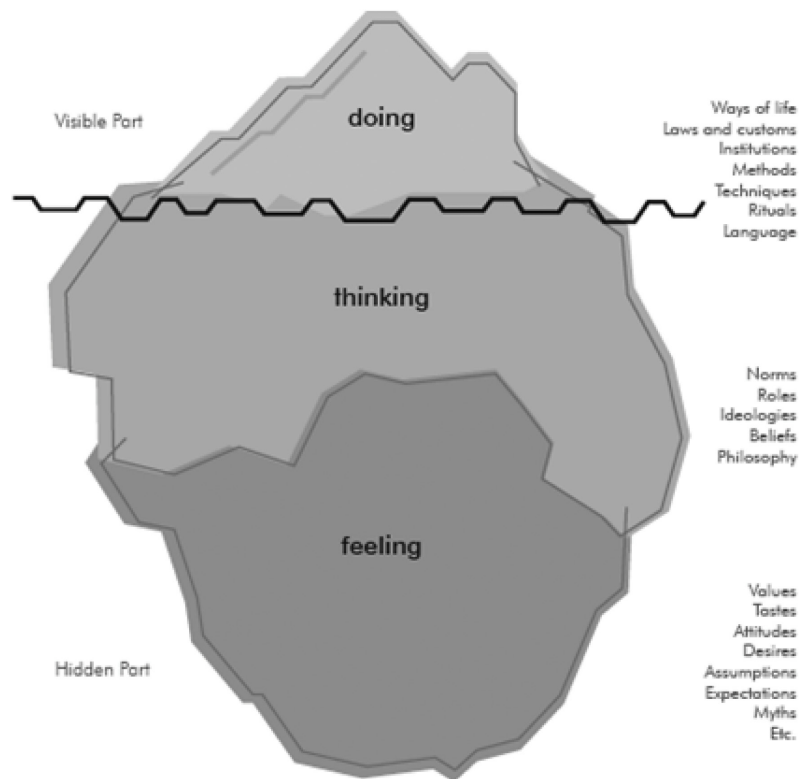
Today business practices have experienced an increasing amount of collaboration as companies seek strategies to grow, restructure, and become globalized (Shi, 2005). Instead of traditional in-house production, many companies choose to collaborate as networks, particularly as international networks. The networks often include firms in different countries, and thus the interaction with companies from different national culture backgrounds becomes important. Culture influences

the way companies operate. Cultural differences and conflicts become more obvious as increasingly more international outsourcing, Mergers and Acquisitions (M&As), and collaboration are developed. Culture can be defined as a system of values and norms “shared among a group of people, and when taken together constitutes a design for living” (Hill, 2000). It can be used to explain human and organizational behavior (Hofstede, 1980).

To illustrate and visualize the constructing elements of culture, several models have been developed. One of them is the “iceberg” model (French and Bell, 1979). As shown in Figure 1, it

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Figure 1. Iceberg model of culture¹



describes culture as an iceberg. The majority of culture, meaning to values and norms, is hidden below sea level. The top, visible area consist of behaviors, ways of life, laws and customs, institutions, techniques, rituals, language. They represent the impact of culture in daily life.

The “tree model” is another way to explain culture. As shown in Figure 2². It provides the historical roots of culture—unwritten expectations, values, and norms. These factors can lead to the type of rites, stories, rules, language and behaviors, control system, and symbols.

The third model, known as “onion” (Figure 3) (Hofstede, 1994), indicates that culture, like an onion, can be peeled layer-by-layer to reveal the content. Symbols – words, pictures, or objects that carry a special meaning – are the most superficial layer. The core part of a culture is formed by the tangible symbols, heroes, story, and rituals. However, the real culture meaning of the practice

is intangible. It is revealed only when the practices are interpreted (Hofstede, 1994).

In terms of cultural studies, the multi-discipline approach can be seen from perspectives of psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, management, economy, and religion. The study of culture in psychology begins from individuals to groups and organizations, as individuals grow up within a particular culture and the accumulation of individual actions changes culture over time (Smith, 2002). Anthropology is a field of humanity starting from a group to a nation. According to anthropologists, culture is human nature. Cultural sociology is the study which uses culture analysis to interpret social life. In political science, culture is originally related to political sociology. A practical cultural approach is to identify the establishment of politics, to explain how symbols can produce political meanings, and to find out why some policies work better than others (We-

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