Cultural Metaphors: Their Use in Management Practice as a Method for Understanding Cultures

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Abstract

This essay makes the case that in-depth analyses of national cultures must be added to the dimensional view on culture, which is likely the most significant advancement in cross-cultural understanding in the last 50 years. A cultural metaphor, defined as any action, occurrence, or institution that individuals of a certain culture emotionally and/or intellectually connect with, aims to alleviate such a condition. Hence, cultural metaphors serve as a reflection of a culture's core beliefs.

Keywords: Metaphor, method, culture, culture

Introduction

It goes without saying that an educator has to be aware of the audience they are aiming to affect, either emotionally or cognitively. This is especially true for a cross-cultural management educator and trainer because undergraduate business students, MBA (Master of Business Administration) students, and seasoned managers frequently pose challenging audiences, particularly when their exposure to cultures other than their own is limited. These managers and students typically choose lectures and training sessions that provide them with precise counsel and understanding that they can immediately or soon apply to their work, or that offer "takeaways," because they have little time to dedicate to a particular subject.[1:32]

For instance, the idea that an organization is a machine is frequently used as a metaphor, which makes it simple for managers to build their organizations according to rules that apply to actual machines like cars. In this scenario, there would be several organizational levels, intense monitoring, and little subordinate power. Rapid technological change, shorter product life cycles,

and strong global rivalry are incompatible with this method of structuring businesses. Guerrilla warfare, with its adaptable troop use, swift plan changes, and steadfast ideological commitment, or strong organizational culture, would be a more appropriate parallel.In essence, a metaphor is only as good as the value it adds in terms of fresh information and improved comprehension. Nevertheless, a cultural metaphor is considerably more complicated since it incorporates groups of people. The following is how I describe a cultural metaphor: It is any distinctive or particular behavior, event, or institution that all or the majority of people within a given culture emotionally and/or cognitively connect with. As a result, the metaphor depicts the basic principles that define the culture as a whole. The purpose of employing cultural metaphors is to solve the problem that outsiders frequently face in comprehending and/or connecting with a culture's core beliefs. When action is necessary, culture enables us to fill in the blanks, frequently unintentionally.[2:44]

The Japanese garden is another illustration of a cultural metaphor that has the following essential components: Wa (group harmony), Shikata (a seemingly excessive and large number of rules governing behavior, such as not crossing the street at a red light at 2 a.m. when no one is in the area), Seishin (spirit training), which aims to control the mind and body through the use of techniques like meditation, judo, and kendo or sword fighting; combining droplets or energies to achieve group goals; and aesthetics, as the Japanese term for "artistic.[3:61]

This conclusion resulted from my personal efforts to comprehend Thais while living in Thailand using. I had almost given up after a lot of reading and numerous discussions with Thai people before I read. Both societies value freedom, detest pomposity, and have a practical attitude on life. However there are a lot of variances. A leader is required to guarantee the welfare of subordinates, much like a parent would protect their children, in the intricate group-oriented authority-ranking structure used by the Thais. As a result, compared to Americans, Thais are more likely to be collectivistic or group-oriented and to be able to accept differences in rank and authority.A cultural metaphor is, in essence, a method for gaining fresh, in-depth insights about the culture of a group or country. Another way to communicate cross-cultural concerns, differences, and similarities without coming out as stereotyped or maybe unfriendly is through the use of cultural metaphors. Cross-cultural research must be taken into account while creating such insights, and it is for this reason that both the dimensional view and the communication perspective should be used in addition to cultural metaphors.A paradox is a statement or a group of related statements that, in reality, contain interrelated elements that are either/or (opposite to one another), in tension with one another, inconsistent with one another, or contradictory to one another, giving the impression that the statement is false when, in fact, it is true (both/and). Numerous definitions of paradox are lacking in one way or another. For instance, defines a paradox as a claim that appears to be false but is true in an otherwise excellent book on cross-cultural advertising and marketing. [5:72]More,

in fact. A paradox's essential components are the following:A paradox is a statement or a group of related statements that, in reality, contain interrelated elements that are either/or (opposite to one another), in tension with one another, inconsistent with one another, or contradictory to one another, giving the impression that the statement is false when, in fact, it is true (both/and). Numerous definitions of paradox are lacking in one way or another. For instance, defines a paradox as a claim that appears to be false but is true in an otherwise excellent book on cross-cultural advertising and marketing. More, in fact. A metaphor is essentially only as good as the value it adds by generating fresh perspectives and deeper comprehension. However, because a cultural metaphor deals with groups of people, it is considerably more intricate. According to my definition, a cultural metaphor is: It is any particular or unusual practice, event, or establishment that the majority or all in a given society can relate to on an emotional and/or cognitive level. As a result, the metaphor stands for the fundamental principles that define the culture. Using cultural metaphors aims to overcome the challenge that outsiders often have when attempting to relate to and/or comprehend the fundamental values of a culture. When action is needed, culture helps us fill in the blanks—often unconsciously—and cultural metaphors assist us in doing so. We are dealing with cultural metaphors when we start to apply this idea to culture as everyone utilizes them. American football is an example of a traditional cultural metaphor that is hard for people from other cultures to comprehend. Its special, or at the very least distinguishing, qualities, which are evident in the way American business is conducted in the United States, comprise:

1. The pre-game tailgate party, which is held in the stadium parking areas. Even though the fans frequently don't know one another directly, everyone is quite nice and having a good time. A portion of the parking lot may occasionally be blocked off for activities, such as gatherings involving supporters of a certain cause.

2. Entertainment during the pre-game and halftime that usually includes the performance of the national anthem, players and supporters praying silently, and amazing marching bands and other acts.

3. War and strategy. Football is a challenging game that requires precise tactics from both teams, and it is simple to see how it relates to both business and war. Comparably, the United States is a litigious society with a plethora of regulations, much to how a football game is played.

We employ a variety of strategies to provide an MBA class or management training seminar attendees a sense of closure as well as significance (i.e., the "takeaways"). One of the most well-liked involves presenting these three points of view, which is followed by a lengthy marketing/advertising exercise in which the trainees are required to use all three methods to create a 50-word or less slogan for an advertisement that a US travel agency could use to draw

customers from a particular country. Because the tourism and travel-related industries account for at least 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries, this activity is extremely relevant to MBA students and managers. This proportion is significantly greater in some countries. Naturally, the challenge is to have some overlap between American football and the cultural metaphor for the selected nation, as visitors must feel comfortable. But there cannot be total overlap, as there would be no reason for visiting the United States.

Conclusion

A cultural metaphor is, in essence, a method for gaining fresh, in-depth insights about the culture of a group or country. Another way to communicate cross-cultural concerns, differences, and similarities without coming out as stereotyped or maybe unfriendly is through the use of cultural metaphors. Cross-cultural research must be taken into account while creating such insights, and it is for this reason that both the dimensional view and the communication perspective should be used in addition to cultural metaphors. My personal attempts to apply dimensions to comprehend led me to this conclusion. I had nearly given up after reading a ton more and speaking with Thai people frequently, but then I came across John Fieg's seminal comparison between Thais and Americans (Fieg, 1976; Fieg & Mortlock, 1989). Both cultures have a pragmatic viewpoint, a distaste for pomposity, and a love of freedom. However, the disparities are significant. For instance, the Thai people have a sophisticated hierarchy of status based on group orientation, where the head of the group is supposed to look out for the well-being of subordinates, just like a parent would for their offspring. As a result, Thai people are more likely to be collectivistic or group-oriented and to accept differences in position and power more easily than Americans.

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