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## CULTURAL AWARENESS AS THE BASIS OF CRITICAL THINKING

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This paper aims to investigate how the individuals of different cultures face misunderstandings or conflicts during communication process and what is the cause of this. The article stresses that main basis of this is cultural differences that affect our interpretation. As the members of various cultures, we attach symbolic meanings to the events and objects. Of course, people from any two cultures make the same observation but their interpretation would be very different. This is because they attach various cultural meaning to what they see. The article also indicates the more general cultural differences like high and low context cultures by E. Hall and cultural dimensions by G. Hofstede.

*Key words:* High and low-context culture, critical thinking, individualism, collectivism.

**Introduction.** All people are members of at least one culture. Whether or not we realize it, the culture we belong affects how we think, interact, communicate, and transmit knowledge from one generation to another. People from any two cultures maybe make the same observations about someone's behavior, mindset or lifestyle, but their interpretations would be very different. This is because they attach various cultural meanings to what they observe. So, the individuals of different cultures sometimes face misunderstandings or conflicts because of interpreting the same thing differently. Now, as a result of the immigration process in the world, the number of subcultures in some societies has increased and peaceful coexistence of various cultures in these kinds of societies demands awareness about characteristic features of other cultures that affect all decisions making process. Moreover, cultural awareness and critical thinking will reduce misunderstanding people which sometimes could decelerate scientific inventions that happened with Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887–1920) and Lotfi A. Zadeh (1921–1017). According to Lotfi A. Zadeh, his "Fuzzy logic" theory firstly accepted by Japanese in spite of he lived and discovered this theory in America. The main cause of this ignorance was the indefinite meaning of "Fuzzy". Srinivasa Ramanujan, great Indian mathematician could solve mathematical problems considered to be unsolvable but for a long time did not accept by English scientists.

The essence of high and low-context cultural theory in cultural awareness

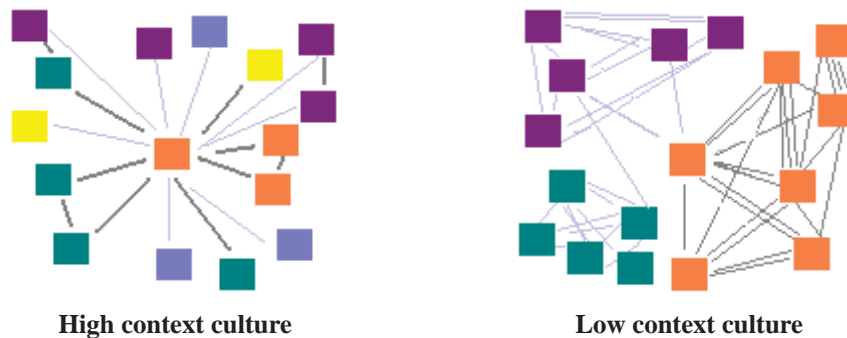
Generally cultural differences are the result of variousness in values. One such difference is the difference between what are called high-context and low context-cultures.

The famous American anthropologist Edward Hall (1914–2009), who known for his studies of culture and the integration of civilizations, also explained the concept of a personal zone based on the diversity of people and their different behaviors. The Anthropologist lived in the Navajo and the Hopi reservations in northeastern Arizona proximately four years and wrote "The Silent Language", "Beyond Culture", "The Hidden Dimension" works according to the observations he got here. Moreover, Hall is the author of some new concepts, like proxemics, polychromic and monochromic time and high and low context culture which highly used by the transnational corporation before they began a business transaction.

With the "high and low-context culture" terms, Edward Hall tried to explain the cultural diversity and the differences in thinking, behavior, and attitudes that derived from this diversity, also he described a communication style that based on explicit and direct language. It should be

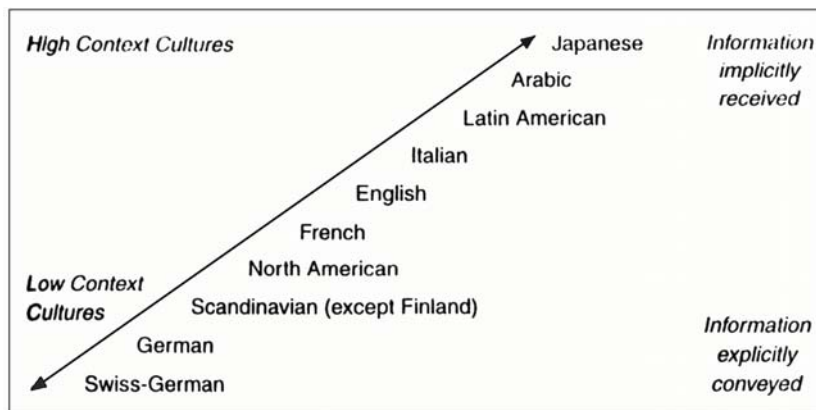
noted that the anthropologist used these terms to refer to differences between societies without penetrating the general details. So, what are the specific features of these cultures, and how do they reflect the nature of peoples?

According to the author, there are close relations between people and groups in societies dominated by high context culture, and such relationships are often viewed fewer, tighter and long-term oriented. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what to do and what to think from years of interaction with each other. That is why there is no need to explain the cause or the meaning of your action. So, the access to these groups is very difficult because these individuals dominate gestures and mimic that expressing certain meanings that only group member could understand them. Family as the small form of society could be an example of a high context environment. Unlike that, the relationships in low-context cultures are characterized as looser and multi-faceted and purpose oriented. Here people tend to have many connections but of shorter duration or for some specific reason.



Moreover, in low-context cultural societies, communication is expected to be straightforward and have to base on the direct manner that relies mainly on words. Cultural behavior, rules, norms, and beliefs need to be spelled out explicitly so that people from other cultures could understand what the expectations are. So, for understanding each other properly they have to express each idea or opinion with appropriate words [1, p. 91–101]. The representatives of this culture mostly take a more direct and explicit approaches in spite of contextual elements like a tone of voice or body language. Of course, this is the contrast to high-context culture, which relies on the use of implicit messages and non-verbal communication.

According to the resent research, approximately 70% of the world's countries are regarded as representatives of the high context culture [3, p. 215–217]. Great Britain, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Japan are belonging high context culture while, Germany, Scandinavian countries, North America, Switzerland are low context culture. In general, the high context culture is more characteristic for Asian countries where racial diversity is relatively less. In this kind of culture, the adherence to traditions and the historical roots are considered as basic rules and slight changes can be observed there. Indigenous people in America, which have very strong traditions, can be seen as an good example. This commitment creates enormous opportunities for every new generation for comprehending messages from the previous generation. In contrast, relationships in low-context cultures relationships are built so that, messages can change entirely or lose its content in the new generation and we can see it in the United States in the gap between parent and childhood [3, p. 215–217].



On the other hand, we have to mention that the high and low context terms are relative, it is not right to cross the strict line between two contexts of culture in the absolute sense because each message or attitude can be presented on a continuum from high to low or some societies could contain both modes. For example, French Canadian may be of a higher context than one English Canadian but lower context than another Spanish or French. Or, a person from Texas may communicate more with a few words or use of a prolonged silence, than an ordinary New Yorker who is being very explicit, although both cultures are considered lower context overall [9, p. 1–11].

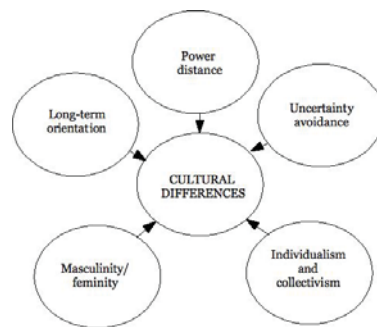
Intercultural competent people will adjust their behavior according to the context they find themselves in. But what happens when you move from one context to another? When a person who belongs certain context goes through another cultural context, she/he needs to be adopted. Compared to High contexts Low contexts are relatively easy to enter if you are an outsider because the important thing is accomplishing a task rather than feeling your way into a relationship. However, the representatives of a lower context culture may have more relations, but they maintain the social distinction in those relationships. Moreover, members of low-context cultures concentrate on their work, rather than asking questions or dealing with others. In that case, when they do not see the certain way of behavior in other environments, they become flout others [1, p. 99].

The next crucial point is various cultural attitudes towards time. According to this attitude, cultures are considered monochronic and polychronic. We have to mention that these statements were largely created after the industrial revolution since one of the main requirements for the employees was being at the factory at the appointed time. So, in monochronic cultures, such as in North America or Northern Europe, time is viewed as linear; people prefer to do only one thing at a time; schedules are not flexible, and time is considered a valuable commodity as money. Representatives of such culture take the table of everything even though the film they will see because time is money for them [6, p. 22]. However, people from polychronic cultures like the Middle East, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa focus on tasks, not schedules. If a task takes a little bit longer, they prefer to stay with the task and give it the time it needs. They are more likely to multi-task: for them, mixing personal activities and work activities is not a problem. Moreover, the peoples of this system pay much more attention to traditions and established relationships rather than concentrating on the work and the task [2, p. 173].

Monochronic cultures	Polychronic cultures
<b>One thing at a time</b>	Many thing at once
<b>Adhere to plans</b>	Change plans rapidly
<b>Linear</b>	Multi-dimensional
<b>Commit to task</b>	Commit to relationship
<b>Low-context</b>	High-context culture
<b>Designed approach</b>	Emergent approach
<b>Synchronous tools</b>	Asynchronous tools

Other cultural differences introduced by Dutch social psychologist Gerard Hendrik (Geert) Hofstede. According to him national cultures could be divided into six dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Uncertainty avoidance, Masculinity, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs. restraint.

In Power distance distribution less powerful member of organizations or even society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Of course, in the higher degree of the Index, the hierarchy is clearly established and executed in society, without doubt, or reason but in a lower degree of the Index people question authority and attempt to distribute power. Another important cultural difference is collectivism versus individualism. In a collectivist society, the group you belong to is your strongest identity. Your individual identity is less important. This group may be your family, your workplace, or your national identity.



If the group's needs conflict with your individual needs, you will be expected give up your individual needs in favor of the group. Furthermore, in this kind of societies, relations especially long-term relationships built on trust. Nevertheless, in individualist societies, people will be willing to sacrifice personal relationships if that is necessary for personal gain. So, because of this, relationships outside of their nuclear family are less important for them. The last two dimensions are Uncertainty avoidance and Masculinity which the first one shows the degree of comfort with obscure situations and successive one indicates societies encourages tough and assertive or tender and nurturing behavior [15, p. 4–24].

All these facts can be very useful to understand these differences in motivations and values that are generally true between certain cultures. Of course, these generalities help us understand people's motivations, opinions or behavior but we must be careful not to over-generalize or stereotype about people in a simplistic way. People are always complex, and there are always differences among the members of any group of people. So, these dimensions help us understand that cultures differ in terms of priorities. When we encounter differences in priorities, it is easy to jump to conclusions and be judgmental. In order to successfully negotiate these differences, we need to use critical thinking which is necessary for understanding perspectives other than one's own and for effective problem-solving. Moreover, critical thinking examines assumptions that based on our culture.

According to Greg R. Haskins, critical thinking is thinking that is free (as free as possible) from bias and prejudice. Because different values are expressed in different ways, people from high-context cultures are likely to consider people from low context cultures too blunt. At the same time, people from low-context cultures are likely to consider people from high-context cultures too secretive. Critical thinking requires us to understand things in their context [14, p. 4–5].

Critical thinking as imagining and exploring alternatives have to base on "universal intellectual values" like clarity, accuracy, consistency, depth, breadth, and fairness. Furthermore,

critical thinking as a process does not happen in an instant it takes time and effort for breaking down ethnocentrism. So, as a human we can estimate what is familiar for us, we can improve critical thinking with being aware of thinking way

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## КУЛЬТУРНА СВІДОМІСТЬ ЯК ОСНОВА КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ

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Мета статті – вивчити вплив культури на нашу інтерпретацію, думки, взаємодію та спілкування. Крім того, автор пояснює важливу роль культури високих і низьких контекстів і теорії культурного виміру в культурній обізнаності. Звичайно, ці узагальнення допомагають нам зрозуміти мотивації людей, думки або поведінку, але ми повинні бути обережні, щоб не занадто узагальнювати стереотип про людей у спрощеному вигляді. Люди завжди складні, і серед членів будь-якої групи людей завжди є відмінності. Отже, ці вимірювання допомагають нам зрозуміти, що культури різняться з погляду пріоритетів.

*Ключові слова:* висококонтекстна й низькоконтекстна культури, критичне мислення, індивідуалізм, колективізм.