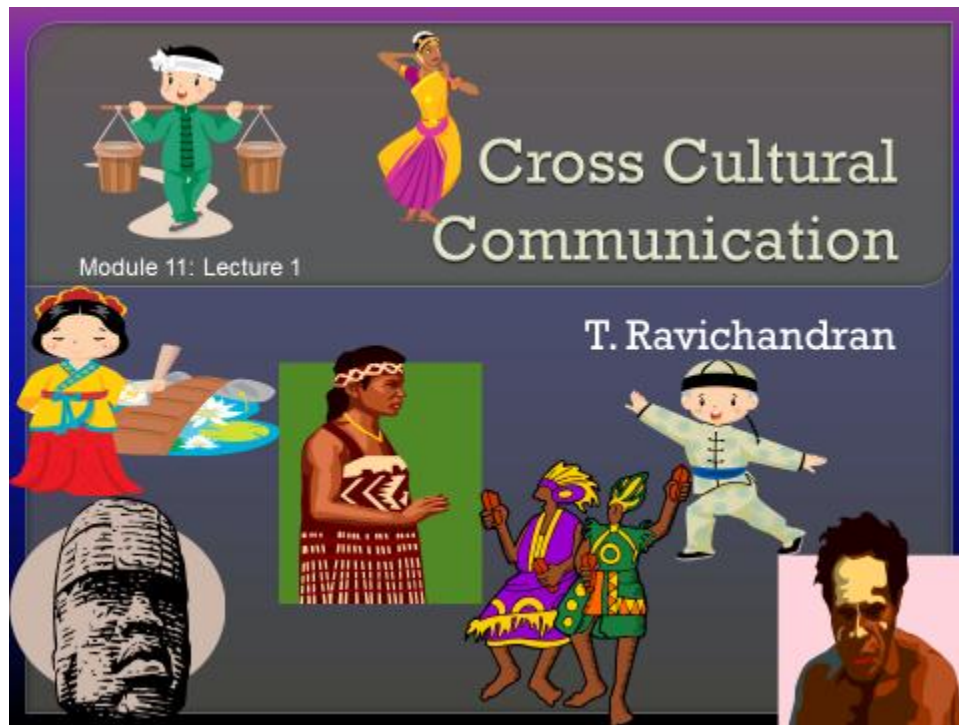


Communication Skills: Lecture No. 34

Module 11

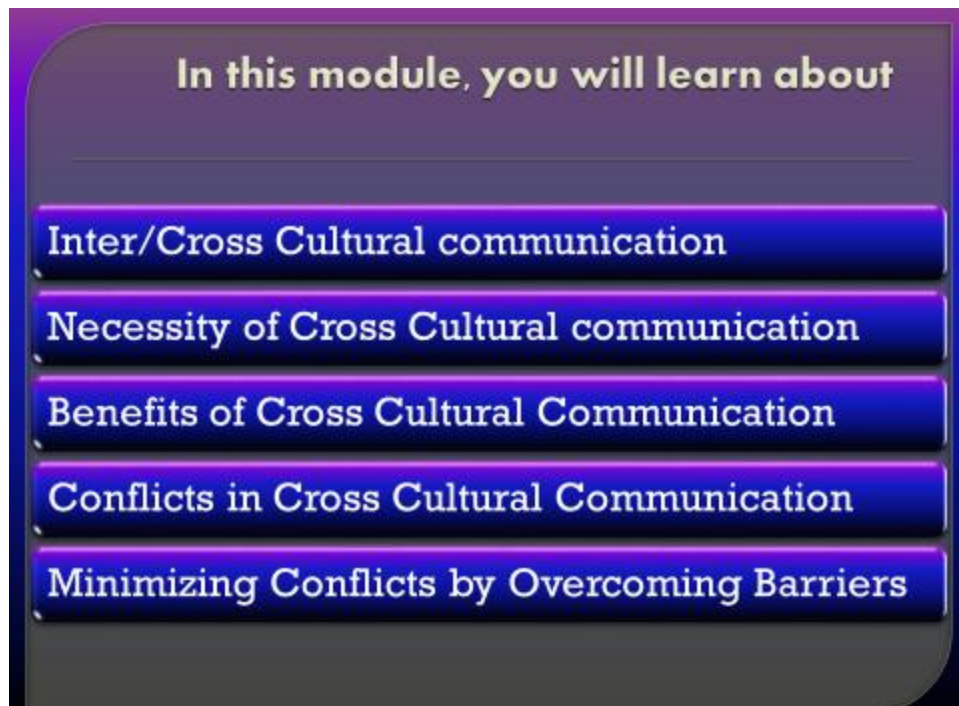
Lecture 1

CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION



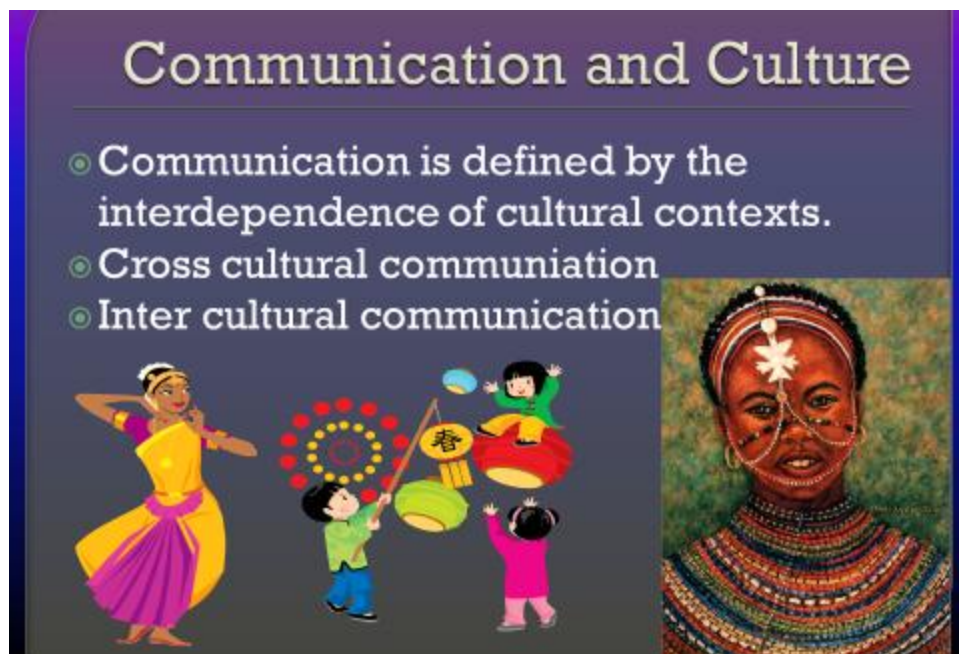
In the previous modules, when I discussed nonverbal communication with you, I mentioned that our communicative behavior is actually controlled by culture. And that it is not easy to probe into this behavior pattern because it is so deeply embedded in our cultural believes and values. Conflicts arise between human interactions because at the deep level it's a clash between cultures. In this module, I will particularly focus on Cross Cultural communication.

You will learn the following from this module that comprises four lectures:



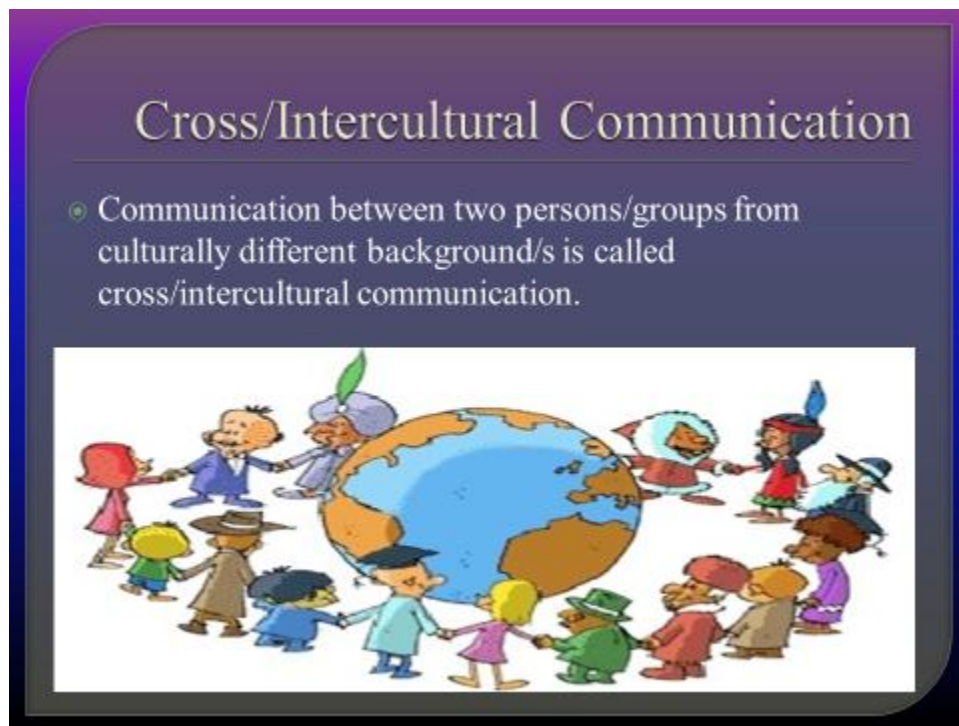
Communication and Culture

Communication is defined by the interdependence of cultural contexts.



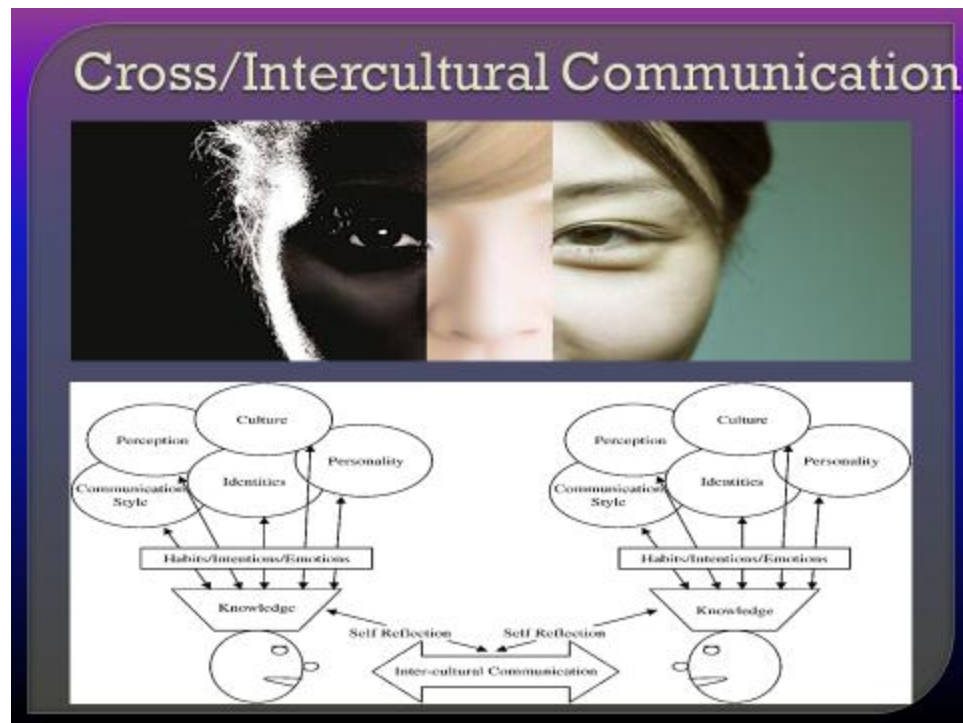
As mentioned before, you cannot have communication without culture, or rather, as Edward Hall points out *communication is culture and culture is communication*. Our verbal and nonverbal communications carry cultural codes so that even by the utterance of a single word we reveal so much about our cultural background with its regional and dialectical variation. Our hair style, our dress, our religious practices inform so much about us to others. So you need to understand that communication is interdependent on cultural factor.

Cross/Inter Cultural Communication



I hope you recollect from the introductory module that basically communication is a complex interactive process. It involves shared assumptions and unspoken agreement between individuals, which often causes gaps and misunderstandings. To avoid misunderstanding and to be able to communicate as effectively as possible, cross cultural understanding is required. If only you understand the cultural pattern of the other person, which determines the behavior that manifests from inherent thought pattern expressed in the form of words, symbols, and pictures, you will be able to understand the person fully and involve yourself with active interaction with the other person. Only then, the communication process is executed in a complete and successful manner.

Now look at the pictorial representation below that illustrates Cross Cultural Communication:



The knowledge that is used for communicating is conditioned by habits, intentions and emotions, which are infiltrated by culture, perception, personality, communication style and identity.

Influences

The following are the basic influences on cross cultural communication:

- Values
- Ethnicity
- Physical Geography
- Attitudes

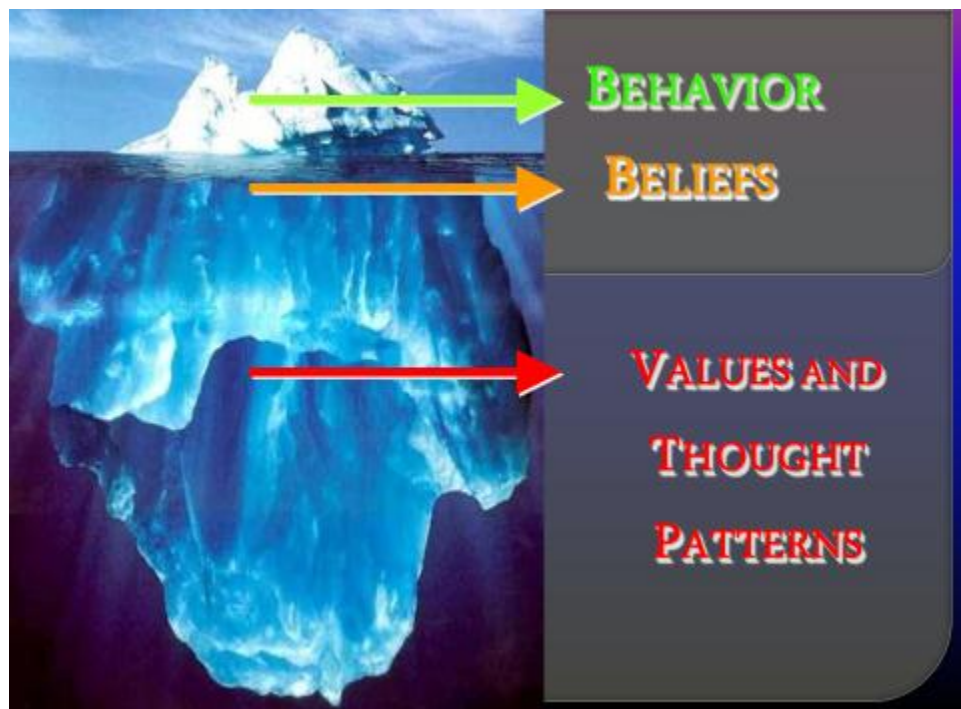
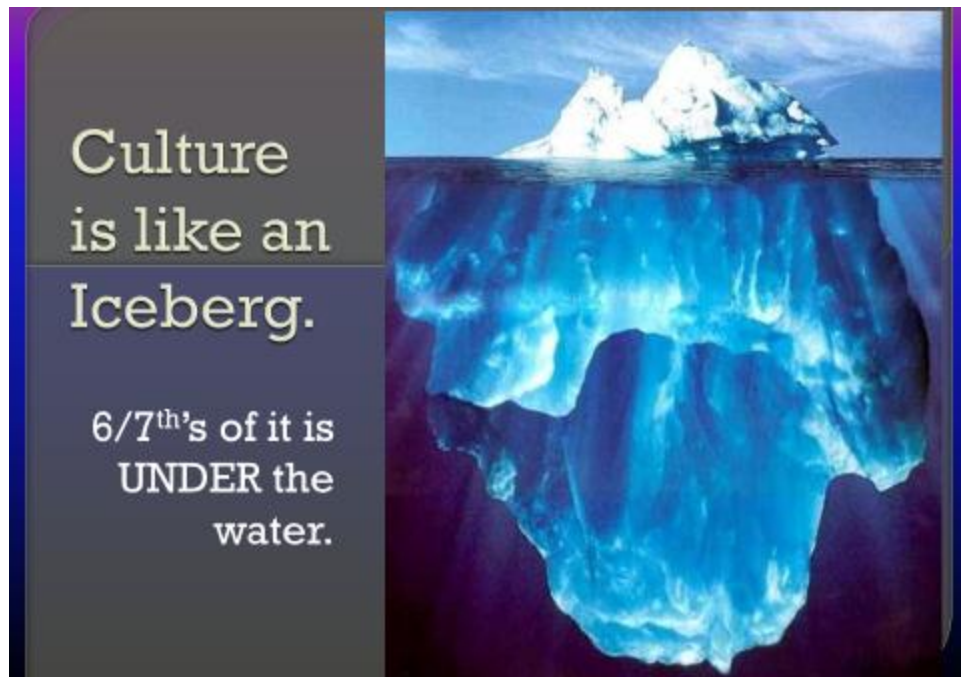


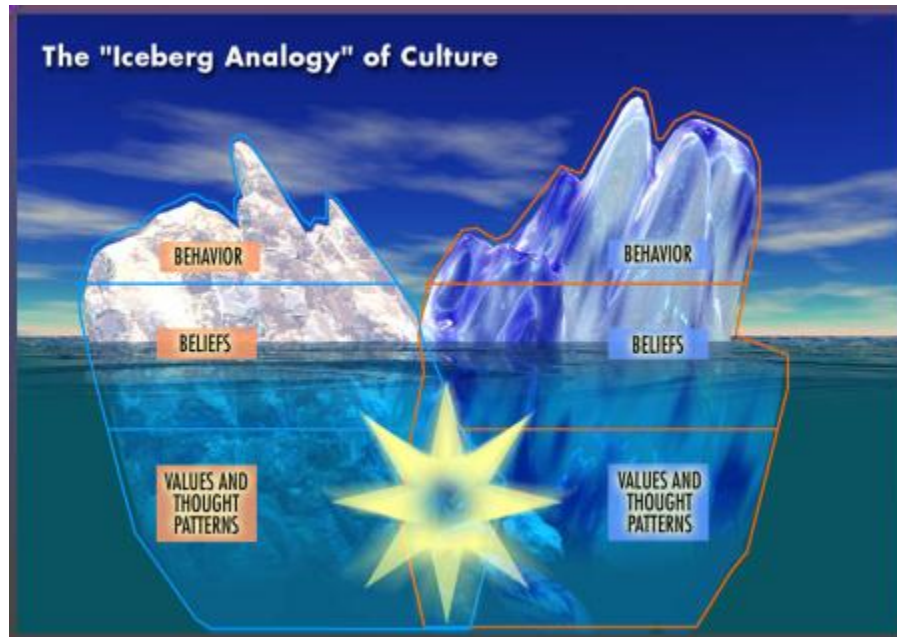
I will discuss these influences in detail in the coming lectures.

Barriers to Interpersonal Transactions

Our understanding is shaped by five aspects, namely, 1. Communication climate, 2. Context and setting, 3. Background, experiences 4. Knowledge, mood and 5. Values, beliefs, culture.

Any aberration to any of these aspects can cause barriers to interpersonal transactions. I would like to recollect here the iceberg analogy of culture.





Sometimes people are puzzled by somebody's odd behavior, which reflects only the other person's inner beliefs, own values and thought pattern, but also those of one's own!

Necessity of Cross Cultural Communication

The need for cross cultural communication arose with the technological advancement that contracted the world into a 'global village.' Besides, the economic boom and job opportunities in developed countries enabled mass migrations from developing countries that underwent economic pressure due to unemployment problem. Such factors force interaction between people of different races, nationalities, and ethnicities. Also natural calamities like Tsunami and earthquake compelled people to move from a native, familiar geographical location and cultural milieu to an unknown, alien place totally different from their cultural practices. Today, thanks to globalization, multinational companies hire people from a global pool and place them all over the world. This again forces people to interact using a common language, and in the absence of it, make use of nonverbal communication. Nonetheless, if you wish to become a globally demanded professional, you need to have an intrinsic knowledge of the functioning of cross cultural communication.

Global Aspects

The growth of MNCs has made people operate in heterogeneous socio-cultural environment. Hence, one has to comprehend the global aspects to make human interactions effective and

mutually beneficial. Communication is culture specific: the system of symbols, beliefs, etc, differs from culture to culture, ignorance of which, leads to cross cultural conflicts.

In a homogeneous social environment, you feel very comfortable because the other person speaks your language, eats your food, visits your place or worship, worships your god, celebrates your festivals, and can laugh at your jokes. However, in a heterogeneous social environment, people come from different places, they are of different origins, and different cultural background. Hence, they have different religious setup, different food habits, different hair styles, and different speaking patterns. Nonetheless, to survive in such a heterogeneous social environment, you need to develop your cross cultural competence.

I read a joke from the internet that describes a conversation between an American and a Chinese who meet in a cemetery. Both have come to pay homage to their ancestors. While the American had adorned the grave with beautiful and sweet smelling flowers, the Chinese had kept delicious and spicy dishes. Looking at it, when the American remarked sneeringly that he wondered



when the grandfather of the Chinese would come to eat all those dishes, the Chinese retorted immediately that by the time the American's grandfather would have smelt all those fragrant flowers, his father would have finished eating all the dishes! The point is, one man's meat is another man's poison! What is ridiculous from one cultural perspective is serious from another one and vice versa.

To avoid cross cultural clashes, one needs to be open-minded, tolerant, courteous, and keenly observant of the nonverbal symbols. One should always treat a foreigner as s/he would like to be treated. For instance, gifting clock in India is so common, but gifting a clock to a Chinese is considered inauspicious and hence unwelcome. Knowing such details will help in maintaining good relationship with a foreigner. One should also develop an impartial mind to look at a foreigner devoid of cultural stereotypes.

Benefits

Cross cultural communication contributes to healthier communities. With empathy and understanding, people work for the collective benefit of everyone, not just their national/regional/local group. It fosters international trade and increases job opportunities across the world. Overall, it reduces conflicts and enhances universal harmony because people learn to reconcile with differences. One more benefit of cross cultural communication is that it can lead to

personal growth. It helps one identify commonality between different cultures and makes one realize that all human beings have same basic needs but different ways of achieving them. Thus, it can lead to increased tolerance. Once people learn that their way is not the only way, that their culture is not the only best one, they develop a tolerance for difference. People lower their defenses and learn to accept and celebrate differences in other cultures. People become open-minded and accept other culture and embrace other people like their kith and kin. With a huge multicultural mixture of immigrant population in a country like America, cross cultural communication fosters flexible national identity.

In this lecture, I emphasized on significance of cross cultural communication and highlighted its benefits at personal, communal and global levels.

In the next lecture, I will discuss the various barriers to cross cultural communication and suggest suitable ways of overcoming them.

For Further Reference

