
Systems Thinking and Organizational Communication

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Seminar Overview

- Understanding systems thinking?
 - Understanding the communication process
 - Understanding culture and diversity as a core system
 - Understanding cultural dimensions as a system
 - Understanding corporate systems
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Five Core Disciplines

- systems thinking
 - team learning
 - shared vision
 - mental models
 - personal mastery
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Systems thinking

Systems thinking is the art of seeing the world in terms of wholes, and the practice of focusing on the relationships among the parts of a system.

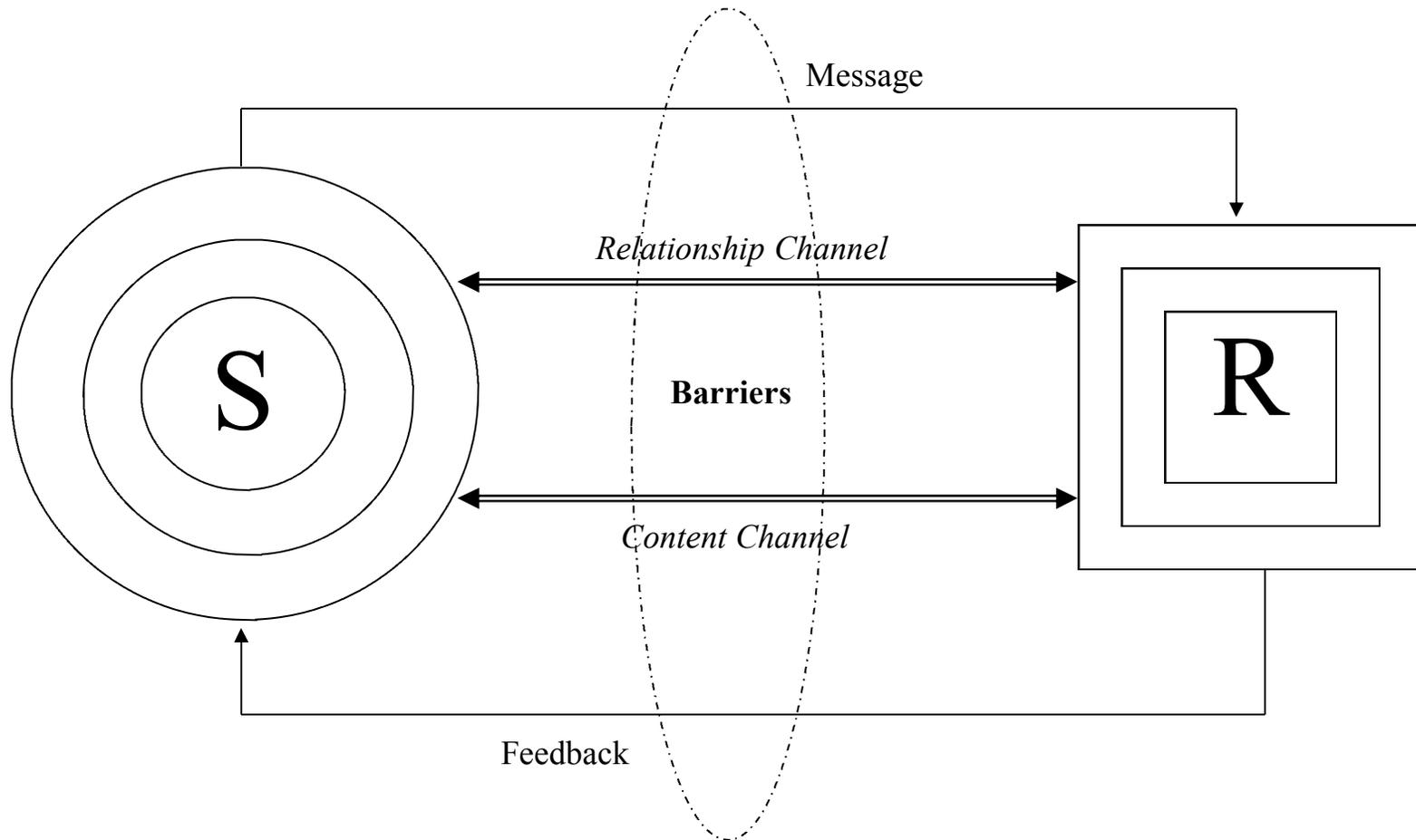
System: A Definition

- A system is an organized, highly integrated collection of parts (or subsystems) that accomplishes an overall goal.
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Communication: Some Definitions

- A symbolic process in which people create shared meanings
 - The exchange of meaning (my attempt to let you know what I mean) as well as any behavior that another perceives and interprets (your understanding of what I mean). This includes both verbal (words) and non verbal (tone, expression, actions, setting). Thus: “a complex, multilayer process through which we exchange meaning”
 - A dynamic, systematic process in which meanings are created and reflected in human interaction with symbols
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The Communication Process / System



Barriers to Communication

- *physical* (time, environment, comfort, needs, physical medium)
 - *cultural* (ethnic, religious, and social differences)
 - *perceptual* (viewing what is said from your own mindset)
 - *motivational* (mental inertia)
 - *experiential* (lack of similar experience)
 - *emotional* (personal feelings at the moment)
 - *linguistic* (different languages or vocabulary)
 - *nonverbal* (non-word messages)
 - *competition* (noise, doing other things besides listening)
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Edward E. Hall

Low / High Context Communication

Low Context

- Overt Messages
- Plainly Coded Messages
- Details verbalized
- Reactions on surface
- Flexible In and Out Group
- Weak interpersonal bonds
- Low commitment
- Closed time

High Context

- Covert Messages
 - Internalized Messages
 - Extensive non-verbal code
 - Reactions reserved
 - Distinct In and Out Groups
 - Strong interpersonal bonds
 - High commitment
 - Open Time
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Non-Verbal Communication

- touch
 - glance
 - eye contact (gaze)
 - volume
 - vocal nuance
 - proximity
 - gestures
 - facial expression
 - pause (silence)
 - intonation
 - dress
 - posture
 - smell
 - word choice and syntax
 - sounds (paralanguage)
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Culture Defined

- **A deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.**
 - **An integrated systems of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society.**
 - **A learned set of shared perceptions about beliefs, values, norms which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people.**
 - **The total way of life of a group of people – includes everything they think, say, do, believe, and make.**
 - **What gives people a sense of “who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing.**
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Projected Population of the United States, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000 to 2050

Population and percent and race or Hispanic origin	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
POPULATION TOTAL	282,125,000	308,936,000	335,805,000	363,584,000	391,946,000	419,854,000
White alone	228,548,000 81.0%	244,995,000 79.3%	260,629,000 77.6%	275,731,000 75.8%	289,690,000 73.9%	302,626,000 72.1%
Black alone	35,818,000 12.7%	40,454,000 13.1%	45,365,000 13.5%	50,442,000 13.9%	55,876,000 14.3%	61,361,000 14.6%
Asian alone	10,684,000 3.8%	14,241,000 4.6%	17,988,000 5.4%	22,580,000 6.2%	27,992,000 7.1%	33,430,000 8.0%
All others	7,075,000 2.5%	9,246,000 3.0%	11,822,000 3.5%	14,831,000 4.1%	18,388,000 4.7%	22,437,000 5.3%
Hispanic (any race)	35,622,000 12.6%	47,756,000 15.5%	59,756,000 17.8%	73,055,000 20.1%	87,585,000 22.3%	102,560,000 24.4%
White alone (not Hispanic)	195,729,000 69.4%	201,112,000 65.1%	205,936,000 61.3%	209,176,000 57.5%	210,331,000 53.7%	210,283,000 50.1%

From US Census: <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/natprojtab01a.pdf>

SDA Church Membership -- 2004

Division 2004

African

- East-Central Africa 2,075,173
- Southern Africa-
Indian Ocean 1,863,895
- West-Central Africa 727,064

Asian

- Northern Asia-Pacific 546,176
- Southern Asia 919,782
- Southern Asia-Pacific 1,064,375

Hispanic

- Inter-American 2,525,557
- South American 2,415,446

Division 2004

Anglo

- Euro-Africa 171,733
- Euro-Asia 144,558
- North American 1,006,317
- South Pacific 378,281
- Trans-European 98,575

- **Totals** 13,936,932

From:

<http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/ASR/ASR2004.pdf>

The Basis of Diversity

- gender
 - race
 - sexual preference
 - age
 - religion
 - language
 - accent
 - family relationships
 - marital status
 - country of origin
 - educational level
 - economic status
 - class
 - occupation
 - physical handicaps
 - hair color
 - eye color
 - complexion
 - height
 - weight
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Hofstede's Dimensions

- Individualism
 - Power Distance
 - Uncertainty Avoidance
 - Masculinity
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Individualism

Individualism focuses on the degree the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships. Essentially it is the extent to which people feel they are supposed to take care for or to be cared for by themselves, their families or organizations they belong to.

A High Individualism ranking indicates that individuality and individual rights are paramount within the society. Individuals in these societies may tend to form a larger number of looser relationships.

A Low Individualism ranking typifies societies of a more collectivist nature with close ties between individuals. These cultures reinforce extended families and collectives where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group.

Range of Individualism Responses

	high individualism	low individualism
social norms	<p>laws / rights same for all</p> <p>individualism is good</p> <p>controversy expected</p>	<p>laws / rights depend on group</p> <p>placing individual over group</p> <p>good is wrong</p> <p>harmony essential</p>
family	<p>few children per family</p> <p>children take care of self as soon as possible</p> <p>privacy is normal</p> <p>marriage is love based</p>	<p>more children per family</p> <p>children maintain lifelong dependence on family</p> <p>no one is ever alone</p> <p>marriage is arranged</p>
work	<p>family relationships a disadvantage in hiring</p> <p>hiring / promotion based on skill and rules</p> <p>more working hours</p>	<p>relatives preferred in hiring</p> <p>hiring and promotion involve relationships and in-group status</p> <p>fewer working hours</p>

Power Distance

Power Distance Index focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society. Essentially it is the degree of inequality among people which the population of a country considers as normal.

A High Power Distance ranking indicates that inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. These societies are more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its citizens.

A Low Power Distance ranking indicates the society de-emphasizes the differences between citizen's power and wealth. In these societies equality and opportunity for everyone is stressed.

Range of Power Distance Responses

	low power distance	high power distance
social norms	inequality minimized respect for individuality	inequality accepted respect for authority
family	parents treat children as equals children enjoy leisure	parents teach children obedience children work hard
school	teachers treat students as equals system focus on middle level	students treat teachers with respect system focus on top level
work	subordinates expect to be consulted privileges and status symbols for managers minimized	subordinates expect to be told privileges and status symbols for managers expected and popular

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance Index focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society - i.e. unstructured situations. Essentially it is the degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations.

A High Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty.

A Low Uncertainty Avoidance ranking indicates the country has less concern about ambiguity and uncertainty and has more tolerance for a variety of opinions. This is reflected in a society that is less rule-oriented, more readily accepts change, and takes more and greater risks.

Range of Uncertainty Avoidance Responses

	low uncertainty avoidance	high uncertainty avoidance
social norms	tolerance of diversity curiosity about differences emotions expressed willing to take unknown risks	xenophobia differences seen as dangerous emotions suppressed only known risks are taken
family	children taught world is benevolent few rules at home: rules changed if children unable to obey	children taught world is hostile many rules at home: infractions punished
school	teachers say "I don't know" hope of success open-ended learning	teachers always have answers fear of failure structured learning

Masculinity

Masculinity focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. Essentially it is the extent to which a culture is conducive to dominance, assertiveness, and acquisition of things versus a culture which is more conducive to people, feelings and the quality of life.

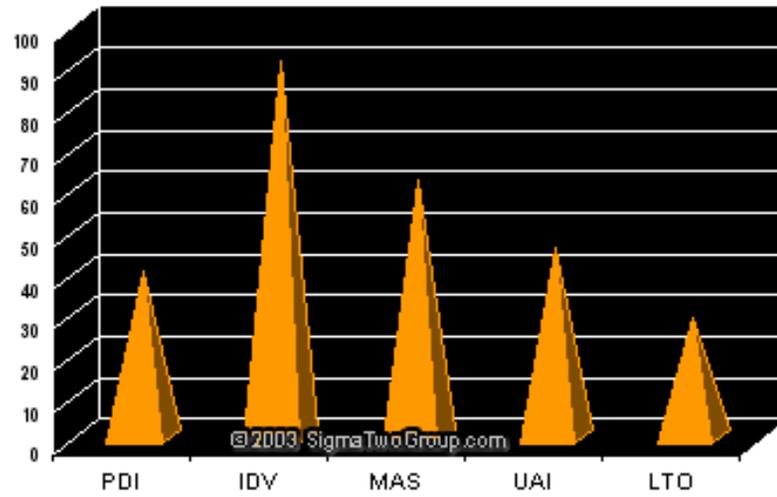
A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with females being controlled by male domination.

A Low Masculinity ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

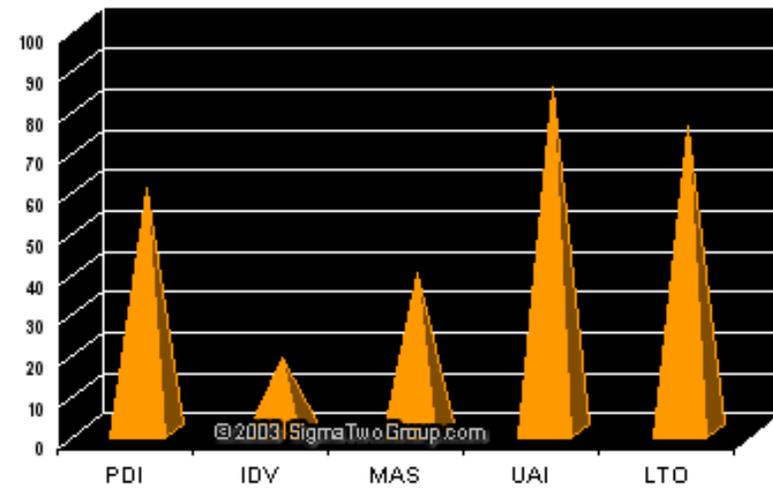
Range of Masculinity Responses

	high masculinity	low masculinity
social norms	gender roles distinct ego oriented money and things are important live to work admiration of the strong	flexible gender roles relationship oriented quality of life and people are important work to live sympathy for the weak
family	traditional family structure girls cry, boys don't; boys fight, girls don't	flexible family structure both boys and girls cry; neither fight
work	larger gender wage gap fewer women in management prefer higher pay	smaller gender wage gap more women in management prefer shorter working hours

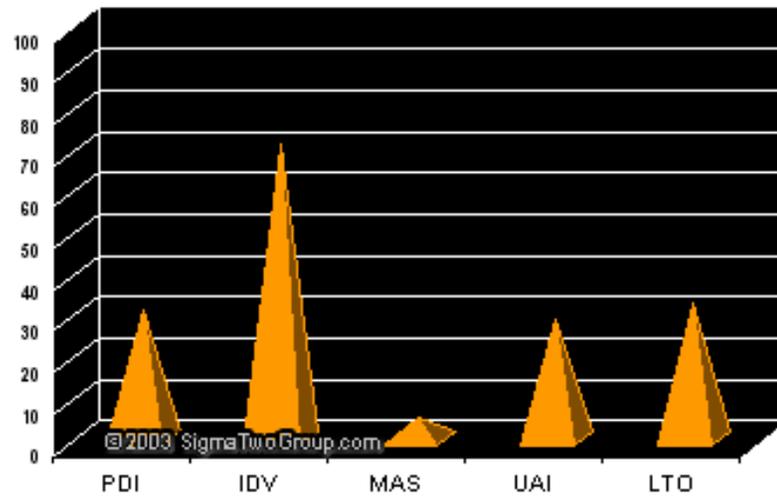
United States



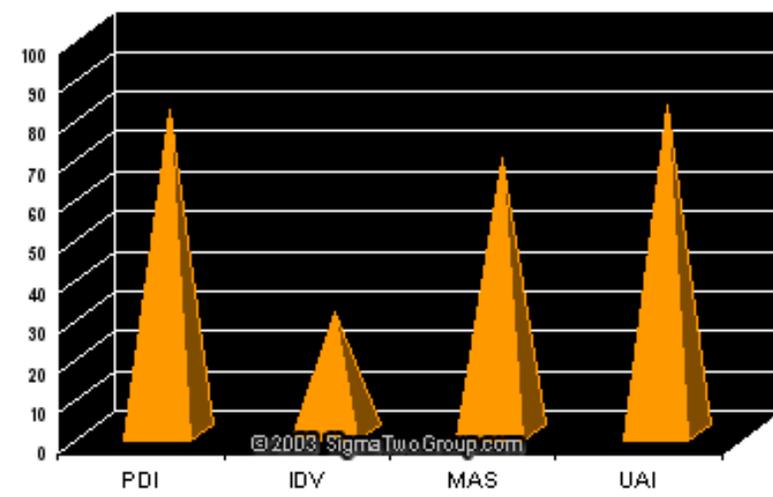
South Korea



Sweden



Mexico

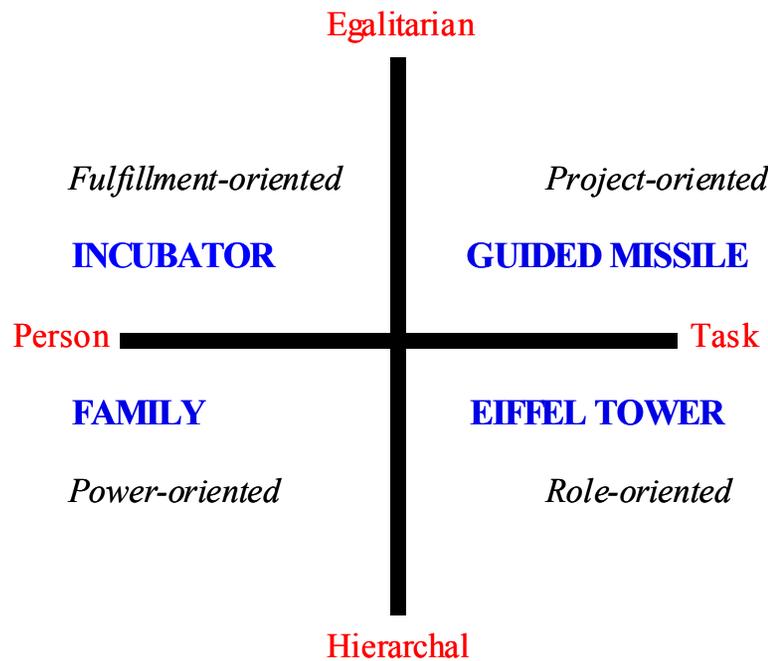


Top Five Values Compared

USA	Hispanic	African	Asian
Individualism	Family	Community	Community
Egalitarian	Personalismo	Solidarity	Harmony
Materialism	Machismo	Tradition	Thrift
Science	Fatalism	Holistic or shared wealth	Work ethic
Progress	Dignity	Religion	Loyalty

Corporate Cultures

Four Basic Systems of Corporate Culture



Corporate Cultures

Guided Missile

- highly egalitarian
- task-oriented, impersonal
- team approach emphasized
- cross-disciplinary
- performance emphasized
- loyalty to professions / project greater than to company
- motivation intrinsic

Examples: (USA, UK, Canada)

Eiffel Tower

- hierarchal
- structure more important than function
- leader is boss (not father)
- relationships specific; status ascribed
- highly bureaucratic, depersonalized
- rules dominate; roles before people
- careers depend upon professional qualifications
- symbolic of machine age

Examples: (France, Germany)

Corporate Cultures

Family

- personal, close face-to-face relationship
- hierarchal (“father knows best”)
- power-oriented (leader is fatherly figure)
- home-like work atmosphere
- long-term relationships of employee to company; high loyalty
- values, norms, atmosphere set by father” or “elder brother”

Examples: (Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Italy, India)

Incubator

- organizations secondary to individual fulfillment
- existence precedes organization
- aim at self-expression and self-fulfillment
- personal and egalitarian
- minimal structure; minimal hierarchy
- emotional commitment
- creative, innovative

Example: (Sweden)

Additional Readings

- Cooper, Betty. (2005). "Systems Thinking: A Requirement for all Employees." from <http://www.workteams.unt.edu/literature/paper-bcooper2.html>
 - Pegasus Communications. (2004). "A Quick Tour of Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning" from <http://www.pegasus.com/lrnmore.html>
 - "Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions" from <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>
 - Hofstede, Geert & Gert Jan Hofstede. (2005). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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