

The Negative Impact of Reductionism in Macro-cultural Activities

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Cultures are ways of connecting people together and are the essence of social life as they depict nations' evolution and ancestry, shared values and traditions; and above all, they demonstrates the identity of a society. This brings the responsibility of how to react to competitions on cultural strategists and how imaginations are shaped. This study aims to shed light on the reasons why cultural activities revolve around some aspects, but neglect others and also to identify the reason behind unsuccessfulness of some cultural organizations in coping with cultural competition in an international level. It also offers solutions to dissolve the mentioned ineffectiveness of cultural strategies. Finally, some strategies to enhance re-imagination are suggested as well.

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1. Introduction

All over the globe, there exists a diversity of cultures, maintained from ancient times and handed over from one generation to the next. Cultures are ways of connecting people together and is the essence of social life. People living in the same culture are generally like-minded due to their hereditary values. Culture depicts a nation's evolution and ancestry; it shows its shared values and traditions; culture depicts the cumulation of knowledge through history; and above all, it demonstrates the identity of a society.

Preserving a culture is important and it offers people a sense of unity and belonging. Without culture, a sense of bewilderment and perplexity may lead a nation to meaninglessness and absurdity. Maintenance of a culture is not as easy as it may sound, specifically in today's world, where due to intercultural relationships, cultures are in competition with each other.

The reaction given to cultural competitions turns out to be a significant issue, as some cultures are powerful enough to dominate other cultures and, hence, reform all the values, thoughts, knowledge, traditions, discipline, and identity of a nation. This brings the responsibility of how to react to competitions on cultural strategists and how their imaginations are shaped.

While the notion of culture and cultural organizations and strategists have been the focus of inquiry in a plethora of research papers, the concept of imagination and reductionism from a cultural point of view has not been addressed yet, to the best of the researchers' knowledge. Hence, this paper tries to devote to this issue.

1.1. Objectives of the study

This study follows a number of objectives: first, to shed light on the reason why cultural activities revolve around some aspects, but neglect others. Second, to identify the reason behind unsuccessfulness of some cultural organizations in coping with cultural competition in an international level. Third, to offer solutions to dissolve the mentioned ineffectiveness of cultural strategies.

1.2. Research questions

In order to fulfill the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Why do cultural activities focus on some special aspects and ignore others?
2. Why are some cultural organizations unsuccessful in competitive context?
3. What are the solutions to solve the inefficiency of cultural strategies?

1.3. The significance of the study

This study is significant as it addresses the strategic importance of cultural activities in competitive international world. Also, it is an attempt to

shed light on the concept of imagination in shaping and reshaping strategists' worldviews and the effects it has on their decision-making. Moreover, this study is significant due to the suggestions given to reconsider imaginations and seek for more developmental cultural strategies.

2. Culture

Culture is a difficult concept to define. A critical review of definitions of culture by different scholars was compiled in 1952 and a list of 164 definitions was enumerated. In spite of all the efforts to define culture, up to 1990s there was no rigid agreement among scholars with regard to its nature (Apte, 1994). However, in general, all anthropologists agree upon the elements of the formation of culture as almost the same, and it is believed that a set of elements such as beliefs, values, norms, knowledge, technology, literature and art, religions, mythologies, national traditions, as well as whatever is left for a nation is called culture. The literature of culture offers a number of key characteristics for this concept (Avruch, 1998), some of which are mentioned below:

2.1. Culture has multiple levels of depth

While approaching and analyzing culture of a specific group of people, attention must be drawn to at least three layers of depth based on which culture is demonstrated: (a) observable artifacts and technological achievements, (b) values and beliefs, and (c) underlying assumptions and philosophies (Schein, 1990).

The most palpable fulfilment of an organization is its artifacts, which refers to all the stuff created by humans and is declarative of its origin culture. Artifacts may consist of historical records, or even current objects which are representative of their time of abundant existence, technological improvement, economic and social processes. The significant point about artifacts of a culture is that they are easy to observe, that is to say, one can easily describe "how" and "what" patterns are dominant in culture construction, but "why" they have been constructed needs deep interpretation as the underpinning logic is hard to obtain.

One level beyond this surface artifact level, is the values underlying a culture, which is not easy to observe explicitly, but can be implicitly accessible through analyzing the artifacts and inferencing from behavior of members. One issue with regard to inferencing is that the results cannot be certain and the deeper level might only be partially revealed.

In order to get a profound understanding of a culture, one should delve into the deepest layer which is the underlying assumptions governing all the shallower levels of culture and is the most difficult aspect to reach due to its unconscious nature. In other words, these assumptions are taken for granted by the members of the organ and may be manifested automatically in the other two levels discussed above.

2.2. The effects of culture on behavior

According to Hofstede (1991), despite the fact that some facets of a culture are visible directly, such as behavior of people, the meaning and interpretation of the behavior is not tangible unless scrutinized by the insiders of that culture. An example may be the use of specific gestures and body language in everyday communication, which might have different meanings from one culture to another. Unless explained and construed by an insider, it is difficult to grasp the interpretation of a particular gesture.

2.3. Culture is acquired

Another characteristic of culture worth mentioning is that culture is not inherited by genes from one generation to the next, but is learned in social context. On one hand, culture is not equivalent to human nature which is common among all human beings, including common sense, cognitive ability, physiological and emotional aspects and other universal characteristics of human beings. On the other hand, culture must be distinguished from personality traits of each individual which is particularly defined for each person, partly inherited and partly acquired. While the borderline between culture and universal/personal traits are not clear-cut, the difference between them must be distinguished.

2.4. Culture affects biological processes

A great deal of members' behaviors is shaped and reshaped by their interaction with other society members within the same culture. A part of this interaction leads to the choices of how, how much, and how often to eat. In this regard, culture influence the biology and natural processes of bodies (Ferraro, 1998).

2.5. Culture is linked to social groups

Culture is shaped and reshaped through communication between people; that is to say, it needs at least two or more individuals to share a culture (although normally a society is larger than that). Hence, an individual's way of thinking and belief is not considered as culture (Ferraro, 1998). Moreover, since each person is engaged in different communities of practice at the same time, they are involved in multiple representations of culture, i.e., multicultural membership (Hofstede, 1991).

2.6. Culture is fuzzy

Members of each culture share particular beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, traditions, etc., which makes that specific culture unique (Zegarac, 2007). Also, individuals are unlikely to share the identical cultural features, but share proportion of resemblance; meaning that, there is no stable and rigid boundary between cultures, but culture is a fuzzy concept.



2.7. Culture has etic and emic elements

While it might be presupposed that each culture is unique in a sense that it shares no similarity with other cultures, some scholars assert that a culture consists of both specific elements (emics) as well as universal ones (etic). This is because some generalizations are common in all cultures, not specified to one community (Triandis, 1994).

2.8. Culture gradually changes

Studies related to culture indicated that the status of a culture is not fixed, but it changes over time through internal or external forces. To put it in another way, culture is not a stable entity, but has dynamicity.

3. Different Aspects of Human Cultural Needs

Culture is interconnected to the strategies that authorities take to satisfy the social basic needs of people (Rosenfeld, Culbertson & Magnusson, 1992). The concept of human needs is replete with a full body of literature, because it has been a focus of psychology and philosophy as well as other fields. In the field of psychology, the most prominent work is that of Abraham Maslow (1943), who outlined a hierarchical pyramid of human needs. Unless the lowest level of needs is satisfied, the next level will not emerge. The five categories are depicted in figure 1.

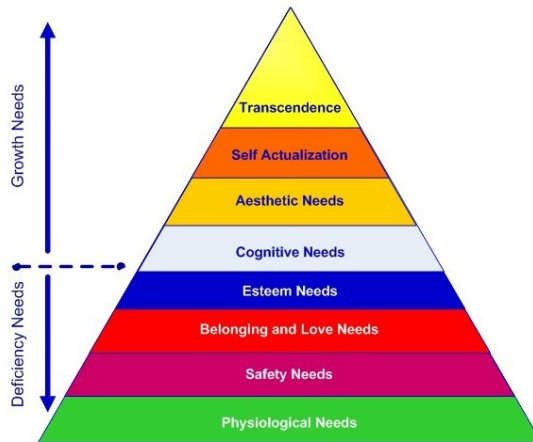


Fig. 1. Hierarchy of Human Needs

As shown in the above figure, the basic needs of human, as Maslow claimed, is physiological needs, including biological aspects of shelter, food, and clothes. The next category is related to safety needs, that is, security against natural perils, employment and savings. At the third level, following the satisfaction of the two first levels, human beings feel the need of personal relationships, such as friendship, love, and family. The fourth category, esteem needs, is an expansion of the previous level, that is, the

needs to be affiliated and appreciated by others. The mentioned categories are under the term deficiency needs, the insufficiency of which is a loss in life. From this category on, growth needs emerge, which are not rudimentary needs, but only is a path for development. On the peak of the pyramid and as the highest level of needs, Maslow refer to self-actualization. Even if all other former stages are accomplished, an individual may lack something more, which is self-actualization, or involving a set of activities that make him/her feel fulfilled.

The hierarchy demonstrates how different aspects of human universal needs can be a source for cultural strategists to encompass and consider culture from different perspectives and angles.

4. Cultural Activity as a Comprehensive Program

Cultural activities are a set of actions based on the norms and values of a society that are shaped in the form elements and components which are commonplace, such as nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, race, gender, customs, concepts, and interpretations. Its purpose is to identify the identity, history, and social heritage that has survived from the past generations as of today or has become a social value or belief in accordance with the requirements of time and place in the present time.

Cultural activities can take place in the following areas:

1. Propagation and insight: A range of religious-theoretical issues such as the religious-based worldview, ontology, anthropology and others. The format of these topics includes: training, group discussions, lectures, writing skills development, student publications, etc.
2. Knowledge: applied sciences, interdisciplinary knowledge, interdisciplinary subjects, specialized cultural professions and the like are among the issues that their expansion can have large cultural implications and political, economic, and social consequences.
3. Art: A wide range of activities, such as music, theater, cinema, visual arts, etc.
4. Literature: fictions, tales, stories, and myths of every nation are derived from the culture of the nation, which can be used to study the richness of culture.
5. Tradition: The norm is the result of free social communication. Tradition and customary experiences are tools for valuing judgments and producing values. Cultural activities can have a significant impact on the formation and richness of cultural practices through cultural relations, cultural interactions, intellectual interactions, values, norms, and the discussion of cultural day issues.
6. Life skills and life quality: Cultural activities are a way to improve the quality of life and increase life skills, such as compatibility skills with others, and many other areas, which vary according to each country.

Also, there are some principles governing cultural activities; some of them are mentioned below:

1. Flexibility and dynamicity while insisting on principles
2. Participating in the community (majority of society)
3. Strengthening national culture and paying attention to it
4. The axial rationality
5. The emphasis on absorption and avoidance
6. The freedom and discretion of the audience
7. Saving costs while achieving higher returns
8. Compatibility with taste of the audience and different age and scientific groups.

5. Competitive Atmosphere of Cultural Activity in International Arena

Intercultural communication is usually the communication that occurs between members of the cultures in contact or between spokesmen or cultural representatives (Ellingsworth, 1983). Intercultural communication is distinct from intracultural communication. Intracultural communications take place between people who share the same culture and intercultural communication refers to exchanges of different cultures at meetings. Intercultural communication encompasses sharing worldviews, social, political, and economic activities, and technological innovations (Rogers, Hart, & Miike, 2002). Hence, the impact of cross-cultural communications is unquestionable, that is to say, cultures in this process are somehow in competition with each other.

The Biology Encyclopedia defines competition as “a negative interaction that occurs among organisms whenever two or more organisms require the same limited resource. Therefore, competitors reduce each other’s growth, reproduction, or survival”.

Cultures, too, as living organisms compete with each other as a result of their interactions. One consequence of cultural competition is dominance of one culture. Cultural dominance occurs whenever a number of cultures are present in a society and one of them is the most robust, extensive, and authoritative.

Closely related to cultural dominance or subordination, is the term cultural imperialism, which refers to the imposition of a dominant culture over a less powerful culture, bringing about creation and maintenance of unequal distribution of cultural power within a society (Schiller, 1976). Since culture is a set of layers of activities and beliefs with horizontal and vertical cohesion, hegemony of a culture penetrates into all facets of a society. Cultural imperialism is indicative of competitive ambience of cultural activities at an international level.



6. The Necessity of Competitive Advantage

Today's world is a competitive environment. Competition is not always destructive, it also brings about change and dynamism. In this competitive world, there should always be innovation, development and progress. Cultural organizations in such a world must be competitive. Cultural organizations in confrontation with competitive atmosphere are divided into three groups: 1. Competition-escape, 2. Competition-rivalry, and 3. Competition-acceptance (Gharamaleki, 2016). Escaping and avoiding competition means trying to gain an exclusive position, because they have no clear idea of competition. Rivalry against competition is also destructive for the purpose of cruelly maintaining the exclusive position, for they see rivals as obstacles to their progress. They spend part of their capital on the destruction of rivals, such as malicious advertising, disclosure of rival secrets, and conspiracy. Neither of the above-mentioned cultural strategies are effective in response to cultural competitions.

Instead, the only way to survive in the current competitive world is through ethical competitiveness. Those cultural organizations that accept and welcome competitions, consider such a situation as an opportunity to put a win-win pattern in action, not as a threat to diminish or constraint their power. In other words, they use competition to work to their advantage.

7. Reductionism

The core concept of the current research is the idea of reductionism. Reductionism refers to contracting a complex theory or phenomenon and describe it through reduced, smaller, simpler ideas. Traditionally, there have been three major ways in which reductionism is understood:

1. Reduction as translation: The main theory is reduced to another theory when all the truths of it is translated into another language.
2. Reduction as derivation: The main theory is reduced to secondary theory when all the laws are derived from the main one.
3. Reduction as explanation: The main theory is reduced to another theory when all the observations explained in it are also explained by the secondary one.

This contraction leads to indifference toward unwrapping the complexity and negligence of intricacy of the theory or phenomenon. Hence, the influence of reductionist thinking is dangerous in general and even more alarming in cultural circumstances in particular. The reason is that it gives no chance for variety and leaves no room for diversity; in addition, it diminishes worldview to an infertile minimalism deprived of achievements and accomplishments. And the most significant consequence is that "reductionism is responsible for leading us towards societal collapse" (Bhat & Salinger, 2013, p.1). Reductionism is an antagonistic view against



historicism, which favors analysis and description of any phenomenon or theory by concentrating on its historical, social, and cultural context.

8. Reductionism as a Damage in Cultural Activities

Reductionism in cultural settings, prejudices policies that verify the interrelationship of societies and nations and remain uninvolved in the consideration that other communities and competitors have progressed their own layers of culture depth.

Reminding from part 3 (aspects of cultural needs), Maslow's taxonomy of human needs is a comprehensive manifestation of the hierarchy of concerns, which might be highlighted for cultural strategists. While positing in a competitive atmosphere, all facets of cultural needs must be adverted, scrutinized, and dealt with; for instance, addressing environmental activities, provoking national culture, fostering religious culture, dignifying public traditions, customs, rituals and morals, emboldening symbols and individual and social roles, provoking insights, beliefs and ideologies, urging and supporting values, identifying social structures, etc. are among some cultural activities strategists are supposed to work on.

It is worth mentioning that if in some cases, a set of the aforementioned dimensions of cultural activities are spotlighted, and other facets are undermined, one could claim that such policy is suffering from cultural reductionism. To put it in another way, some cultural needs are accented or even magnified by cultural organizations, while others are either completely or partially overlooked.

Such reductions thinking toward manipulating cultural needs is specifically palpable when it comes to cultural competitions. As a matter of fact, reductionist view cannot survive in a competitive battle, let alone looking forward to achieving development and success. Hence, it is recommended that cultural strategists reconsider their crucial roles and renovate neglected aspects of cultural activities.

9. Discussion and Analysis

The problem of strategists' reductionist thinking can be attributed to the notion of imagination. Imagination is a mental image with power, and by power, we mean its effectiveness. Imagination has an effect on feelings and emotions, judgments and beliefs, interpretations, relationships, choice and decision. The images are reflections of exterior objects, which are not the literal definitions of them, neither it is the name of objects, but replaces the name and definition of objects.

A. Imagination

Imagination formation process, according to Gharamaleki (2016), consists of five stages discussed below:



Stage 1: The presence of images in mind: human beings have an archive of whatever surrounds them in their memory. What we grasp through our sensory motors, such as the music we hear, the sceneries we watch, the flowers we smell, or the food we taste, leave a trail in our memory. These images, which are representation of the environment, are retrieved when needed.

Stage 2: Conjuncture: at least two images constructed in stage one are brought together and combined in an individual's mind based on internal and external factors, in a sense that, the image has another image attached to it.

Stage 3: Predication: the two images are now connected and correlated, are at this stage equal in the mind. Predication can take several forms such as description and simile.

Stage 4: highlighting: in some cases, the objects are so highlighted in the mind that the two become completely equal to each other. Other images related to the object are gradually blurred up to the point where other related images are reduced to one image. Hence, an imagination of something, is a description of it that dims or covers all descriptions pertinent to it.

Stage 5: Substitution and Symbol: as a result of repetition of the predication of objects and their similarity, the predication is eliminated and the images are now one unique imagination of an object.

These imaginations are at the center of one's decision-making. Individuals' attitudes encompass information selection and analysis, both of which are under the influence of the power of imagination. It may be the case that imaginations also affect the hierarchy of value system and even revers it, so that superior values change place with inferior values. Therefore, the power of imagination is much dramatic that can shape and reshape individuals' values. The significant point to be borne in mind is that the power of imagination effectiveness lies behind its unconscious nature. Also, imagination is tightly bound to one's past and future. Images are constructed in accordance to past experiences and will shape the future as well.

B. Re-imagination

The obstacle raised in encountering cultural competitions and strategists' reductionist approach can be dissolved in light of imagination and re-imagination.

As mentioned before, imaginations are unconsciously built through years of history and adventures; thus, the culture of a nation is closely related to imaginations of that nation understood in its historical, social, and political context. It was also pointed out that imaginations have enough potency to govern our value systems. Hence, in response to solve the reductionist problem, a re-imagination process is required on the part of cultural strategists. Since decision-making is influenced by imaginations, and the decisions in the area of cultural competition are made by strategists,

re-imagination must take place for the culture to enter an ethical competition and travel the path to progress and development.

Re-imagination can occur in a number of ways, some of which are mentioned below.

1. Cultivate education
2. Plan and hold workshops
3. In-service training
4. Practice discourses
5. Private counseling
6. Use of psychological and philosophical techniques

It is recommended that cultural strategists and organizations take step to reconsider their activities in order to ameliorate the effectiveness of organizations in particular and ethically compete other cultures and maintain their competitive status at an international level.



Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to discuss and scrutinize the reasons of concentrating on some particular cultural activities and neglecting some other ones. To this aim, a concept analysis approach was taken on the concept of imagination of cultural strategists.

In fulfilling the objectives of the study, first the definition and significance of culture as one of the essential facets of human society and communication was addressed. To elaborate on the coral role of culture, some of its distinctive features were enumerated, fuzziness, acquirability, gradual change, effects on behavior and biology, etic and emic elements, to name a few. Following that, the researchers discussed intercultural relationships among communities of people, and the competition of cultures as a result of such relationships. In response to cultural competitions, three approaches might be taken: competition-avoidance, competition-rivalry, and competition-acceptance. The two first approaches are believed to be ineffective, and the researchers insist on taking the third alternative within an ethical framework. For, the ultimate goal of competition-acceptance is identification of pitfalls and compensating for them for progression and development of culture. Thus, competition in this sense, has a positive connotation.

Subsequently, mention was made of reductionism as a phenomenon by which a construct is divided into constituent parts as a result of translation, derivation, or explanation, and end up getting contract and reduced. Reductionism is referred to be a dangerous process, in particular with regard to cultural settings. The problem raises here where cultural organizations take a reductionist thinking in dealing with cultural dominance and cultural imperialism. Such a view, in effect, is the basis of ineffectiveness of some cultural activities; i.e., overemphasizing some and overlooking others.

The reason of reductionist view is attributed to another phenomenon known as imagination, referring to a mental image individuals build in their minds over years as a result of exposure with sensory objects. It has an effect on feelings and emotions, judgments and beliefs, interpretations, relationships, choice and decision. Highlighting the influence of imagination on worldview of individuals, the researchers claimed that imagination can form and reverse the system of values.

Such being the case, a need for re-imagination was called upon. Since decision-making was asserted to be partially influenced by imaginations, and the decisions in the area of cultural competition are made by strategists, re-imagination is essential for the culture to enter an ethical competition and travel the path to progress and development.

Finally, some strategies to enhance re-imagination were suggested.



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