

Cross Cultural Psychology

As people interact, they form relationships based upon their own motivations and understanding of the other parties' intentions and desires. Similarly, people who represent an organization, political state or group of people must bridge relationships when interacting with others. The cornerstone of creating a constructive and working relationship amongst people, whether they are representatives of something greater or not, is understanding that all parties involved have a desired outcome. In most cases the desired outcome of one party will not align directly with the desired outcomes or motives of the other involved parties. With the latter in mind, individuals can improve their chances of a successful working relationship if they understand where they themselves are coming from and where the other parties are coming from in terms of experiences and ideology. It is from this observation that I argue that greater attention should be paid to the current environment and past mentalities and experiences of people and states in order to understand psychologically the motives and intentions of all parties. I believe that by understanding the psychological underpinnings of present motives of different parties, one can better form a working relationship and achieve more favorable ends.

The application and insight gained from understanding the basic psychological premises of people and parties involved in an interconnected network of relationships can be seen across all sectors of business and government relations. During the process of summer 2006, I attended numerous lectures, hearings and conferences dealing with a wide-range of international and domestic issues in Washington, D.C. Primarily, I focused on topics that dealt with East Asia, healthcare, psychology and current political hot topics. It quickly became apparent that many of the issues discussed had their foundations in the ideologies and psychological underpinnings of the people involved in the situations. The latter, however, was rarely addressed. If it were addressed, I think greater insight and enhanced understanding of situations and potential

solutions could be achieved. To exemplify how this can be done, I will reference several events I attended at which greater situational insight could be gained by looking specifically at the psychology of the involved groups and people.

Before providing an overview of several circumstances in which I found myself observing a need for or the presence of situational insight, I think it is necessary to explain a few basic premises I will be working off of. Firstly, inter and intra group relations are often wrought with a tendency to simplify situations in an attempt for quicker cognitive analysis. The latter “cognitive miser” account combined with individual and group motivations can account for a large portion of individual and group behavior (Fiske, 2004). Additionally, there is a tendency to perceive out-group members as more similar to other members of their group in comparison to members of one’s own group (Read & Urada, 2003). That is, person A thinks the members of their group are more heterogeneous than members of a group for which person A is not part of. This tendency is referred to as the outgroup homogeneity effect and has been demonstrated through extensive research within the field of social psychology. The effect directly relates to the formation of prejudices and stereotypes amongst individuals and groups. Prejudices are often the cause of group misunderstanding, as is evidenced by the outgroup homogeneity effect (Judd, Ryan & Park, 1991). Groups forming relationships should begin by seeking to unsimplify the “other” group in order to understand the true diversity that exists amongst the outgroup. In doing so, both parties can benefit in that greater respect is shown for both groups. Such respect results by acknowledging each group’s diversity and culture and by each group possessing greater overall understanding and awareness. Enhanced understanding enables both parties to market and frame their motives and intentions in a manner that better aligns with the other party’s interests, while still satisfying the intents of the original party. Lastly, one of the implications of research on the out-group homogeneity effect and similar social psychology theories is that

similarity breeds likeness amongst both individuals and people. All of the above premises provide a basis for my analysis of a select few of the events I attended.

One of the few events that did address the implications of an individual's psychology due to past and present conditions occurred at the Hudson Institute (7-5-06). "Another Look into Putin's Soul" approached Putin's current leadership and governmental strategies from a political psychology perspective. It was from this perspective that scholars and people in general are able to understand why Putin is currently changing his government's direction seemingly away from democracy and towards a centralized authoritarian regime. By understanding Putin's socialization and foundational ideologies, people with a vested interest in Russia and relations with Russia can gain greater understanding into the current situations and can better predict where Putin might lead Russia in the future. Knowing why and where Russia's leadership stands enables other parties dealing with Russia to market and frame their policies to Russia in a way that fits with the current mentality present in Putin's administration while also serving the original party's motives. It is obvious to say that knowing how to sell a product to other parties involved greatly increases the chances that a more ideal end will be achieved. Thus, understanding the motives and psychology of Putin on a fundamental basis enables those connected with him and his government the advantage of knowing how to more appropriately address issues and policies which involve Russia.

Newt Gingrich, during an event at the American Enterprise Institute entitled "*The Broken Branch: A Look at Contemporary Congress*" put it best when he stated "the legislative branch is inherently a human institution." Though he was referring specifically to the legislative branch, it seems this statement applies to all institutions. Ultimately institutions are composed of people each with their own thoughts and motives. Thus, by understanding the individual's psyche one can better grasp the group psyche of the institution in question. The panel discussion focused on

the shortcomings of the current legislative branch. Insight was provided into the group ideologies and psychology of the institution in relation to other institutions, such as the executive and judicial branch. By acknowledging the history of the branch and its interconnectedness with the other branches of government, one can begin to understand the origins of some of the current problems, such as collapses in the “deliberative process” and “oversight” (stated by Norman Ornstein, 7-12-06). By understanding how some of these issues developed—due to the institution’s and its members’ desires to maintain power by delineating its role and responsibilities in relation to other branches—one can begin to repair the faulty underlying ideologies within the current legislative branch. The psychology of both the institution and its members thus are fundamental to its organizational and ideological restructuring. Arguably the latter will involve transformations in people’s perceptions, understandings, identity and motivation in order to adjust the current shortcomings of the legislative branch. Notably, all of these transformations find their foundation in group and individual psychology.

A significant part of organizational restructuring, as it is directed from a psychological paradigm involves perceptions and understanding of other groups—that is, how they see themselves and how others see them. This issue is of utmost importance for individuals working within Iraq and unstable environments in general. Experiences of our armed forces in Iraq highlight the importance of understanding the ideologies and cultural foundation of groups we are interacting and forming relationships with. The integral need to train our troops on the cultural norms and ideologies before entering another culture has recently become a priority and was acknowledged as a necessary part of working with other cultures during “Training for Diversity,” an event held at the U.S. Institute of Peace (6-8-06). Diversity training ultimately seeks to counteract the tendency towards the outgroup homogeneity effect. For me, this event highlighted not only a topic of great interest but also a topic that needs to be examined and

discussed more. The push towards a more globalized and integrated world means that both business and government will be increasingly working with and within cultures that are alien to their own. In order to act appropriately with respect for others' cultures, successfully communicate with others and create beneficial relationships, individuals need to embrace and understand the diversity present between societies and within them. The specific discussion that took place at the USIP addressed the current trend within the armed forces and other groups working abroad to increase diversity training amongst those deployed. Ultimately, the problem becomes funding and staff to provide diversity training. Training can only be taught by those who understand the culture and region. Time is another constraint placed upon adequate diversity training. The military is trying to adequately train its soldiers to interact appropriately in a region, and specifically with regard to this event's topic of Iraq, but due to many constraints, it is ever more difficult to train those who need it the most. Those pushing for more training and greater depth in the curriculum understand that fundamentally groups must understand how to interact according to the norms of relevant cultures.

To appropriately respect other people as individuals, we must start by respecting what they understand as behavioral boundaries. Respect is fundamental to successful relationships. If another culture feels it is disrespectful to look a superior in the eye, it will work against an individual not from that culture if they fail to understand the norms and look a superior of the other group in the eye. Something as simple as the latter example can undermine the formation of a relationship in the present and future. Thus, this again exemplifies the importance of understanding the psychological foundation of other party.

In another event discussing security issues in Iraq at the U.S. Institute of Peace (6-29-06), cultural misunderstanding and their implications on how we approach situations in Iraq were highlighted. The three panelists, all experts on Iraq, explained how we have imposed our

American understanding of group relations and psychology on another culture. Such imposition has led to miscategorization and misunderstanding of political and social issues within Iraq, stated Major Connable. For example, we must understand that as a result of the tribally organized society in Iraq, insurgents are not one organized group, as we categorize them according to our American perspective, but rather an unorganized consortium of people from a variety of tribes and groups within Iraq that seek to promote their own motives and destabilize the government. The United States has based much of its strategy on the notion that the insurgents are a directed and rudimentarily organized group. Understanding that the latter is hardly the case allows better policy and more beneficial action to be taken by the United States.

This illustrates the need to form relationships based upon understanding that other groups and individuals live in settings unlike our own and thus relate to people very different than we ourselves might. Furthermore, for those advising the new Iraqi government and for those in the future interacting with the Iraqi state, it is crucial that the relationships built both embrace an acceptance for cultural diversity and the diverse psyches of groups and individuals that exist as a result. For example, tribal cultures, such as Iraq, lean toward greater family loyalty and identity based upon family as opposed to individualized societies, like in the U.S., which stress the individual over the family. To successfully create policies and relationships between the U.S. and Iraq, the U.S. must understand that Iraqi's psychologically perceive relationships and loyalty to others in a different manner than Americans. Thus, the U.S. must create a relationship that places importance on tribal loyalty within Iraq even when such issues are not of priority for the U.S. itself. Having knowledge of another culture and the implications of its socialization on individuals and group psychology significantly increases the probability that another party can interact successfully with it.

Often our policies and relationships are more than just strategic, but also based on

similarities in culture, ideologies and foundational psychology. To find examples of this, we need not look very far. On the North American continent, we can see the implications of likeness breeding stronger relationships amongst groups by looking at the U.S.'s relations with Canada and Mexico. Arguably, the U.S. has a more trusting and close relationship with Canada because of its history of democracy and individual rights. Conversely, it wasn't until recently that Mexico became an acknowledged democratic state. I would argue that their recent shift to a democratic government is the reason the U.S. seems to have paid much more attention to the recent elections in Mexico. Of course this statement vastly oversimplifies the U.S.-Mexico relationship, but I think that at a fundamental level, sharing a common ideology based in each country's psyche does enable a more intimate and successful relationship.

The U.S.-Taiwan relationship is yet another example of common psychological foundations breeding a stronger relationship. The United States' relationship with Taiwan is dramatically more intimate than its relationship with China. Like the U.S.-Mexico relationship, the relationship between China and the U.S. is highly complicated; however, underlying all of this is a prominent difference in the two countries' ideologies. However, Taiwan shares the democratic ideals of the U.S. and thus has been able to forge a more intimate relationship with the country. American Enterprise Institute hosted a panel discussion about the possibility of a future U.S.-Taiwan free trade agreement (FTA) (7-25-06). Much of the discussion was focused on what Taiwan had to offer the United States and what the United States had to offer Taiwan as incentives to pursue a FTA. The Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs for Taiwan, Steve Chen, stated that Taiwan and the U.S. should pursue a FTA agreement because of a "shared view for democracy, human rights and free market principles." This statement exemplifies that likeness amongst groups can breed a desire to form a stronger relationship. The latter is a fundamental principle for individuals seeking ways to increase group cohesion and loyalty. If the Taiwanese

however did not acknowledge this similarity and make it a salient reason why the two nations should work together, it may not be nearly as successful at achieving its goal and satisfying its motives to create a FTA. The Taiwanese have announced that they embrace ideologies that are fundamental in the U.S. and which are an integral part of the American psyche. In doing so, the U.S., as a party, can feel that the Taiwanese have more than just personal interest in formulating a FTA but also have interests that aid the U.S. In general, successful relationships benefit all parties involved in some way. This panel exemplified how the motives of one country and its psychology can be utilized to frame an issue and market it to another country that fails to share many cultural aspects of life but does have several key psychological and political similarities.

Like international relations, relations domestically are influenced by group and individual psychology. As already discussed, the current struggles and tensions between the three branches of government exemplify domestic relationship issues. Such ideological and psychological struggles on a domestic-level have occurred throughout history. Specifically, as discussed during an Osgood Center weekly intern meeting (7-21-06), a salient period of isolationism in America's early history demonstrates the implications of psychological states on domestic policy. Domestic policy ultimately underlies much of the U.S.'s foreign policy, and thus is not only important within the United States but also abroad. Isolationist periods often arise during times of uncertainty and a personal need to guard against the invasion of other groups. Such fears of the out-group occur often during immigration waves and war. Every country and civilization has gone through periods of isolationism as a reaction to a need for security. As discussed in our intern meeting, early American isolationism was prompted by the country's recent separation from Britain and a drive to focus on the young country's own development. After the U.S. established itself domestically, it was able to turn to international issues.

This process of first gaining a sense of security and then once that is achieved, having the

ability to relate to others with a greater international focus is seen today as well. For example, the current government in Iraq is seeking security and an end to internal turmoil. Thus, Iraq places priority on securing the safety of its citizens and land. Once that is achieved, the country can begin to exist with an increased international focus; however until the people of the country can have a psychological sense of safety, focusing on anything other than themselves is asking a lot. The above psychological framework laid out follows Maslow's hierarchy of needs in which basic needs such as security and food must be achieved before individuals are able to psychologically and physically move onto other needs, such as relationships and eventually actualization. This model, as illustrated above, can be applied in a number of settings involving both groups and individuals. Understanding that people must first satisfy certain fundamental needs, countries, both domestically and internationally, can better assess what types of policies and aid that should receive priority over others. Giving someone a priceless work of art will not be well received amongst a starving population of refugees who need food and shelter foremost. Thus, in forming relations—domestically and internationally—certain domestic issues must be looked at to understand the potential implications on individual and group psychological states.

I will end by discussing the only event I attended that was actually presented by a psychologist. The event, at the U.S. Institute of Peace (7-20-06), addressed the resiliency and psychological impact of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on children of the conflict. Dr. Sagi-Schwartz ultimately concluded that children are incredibly resilient and psychologically little harm is found amongst those that mature in areas of conflict in comparison to children in non-conflicted areas. The family relationships and caregiving that occurred during their development was of much greater salience—a finding that is supported amongst developmental psychologists. The study also found that youth who were active in their community fared better than those who were not; this is consistent with a wide-range of studies in America as well. The question I want

to pose, however, is not what the group activism does for the children's psychology in the present, but rather what their group involvement means for their perspectives, tendency to stereotype and general psychological ideologies in the future when they are grown. This is a salient issue because youth who form positive and intense group identities early in life could take one of three paths: a trajectory towards less involvement and greater detachment as a coping mechanism, a middle trajectory or a trajectory that leads them to extremism. It will be of interest to those involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and those on the periphery of it to understand the potential trajectories of these children who are the region's future leaders.

Arguably this conflict will greatly affect how the children of the conflict see the world and where they are motivated to direct the region in the future. If a tendency towards greater stereotyping of the "other" and increased bias is shown in relation to the outgroup homogeneity effect, then steps need to be taken now to promote an understanding of other cultures and diversity (see Goffman, 1963, for more discussion on out-group/in-group theory). Conflict often breeds a need for security, as discussed previously in reference to Maslow's hierarchy. This need promotes coping strategies that typically involve increased tendencies towards isolation from groups unlike or simply not your own. When isolation occurs, the outgroup homogeneity effect is often enhanced and negative results such as prejudice and stereotyping often occur. Thus, encouraging the groups to have contact and understand each other is crucial (Sherif, et al, 1954). In the case of the children of conflict, promoting understanding and knowledge of other cultures is of key importance during conflict in order to prevent psychological tendencies towards detachment and misunderstandings of the out-group in the future.

The events I have attended over the course of the summer have substantiated my belief that relationships are enhanced when all parties involved understand each other and where each is psychologically originating. Time and again we hear that the world is becoming more and

more interconnected. This interconnectivity of the world, its states and ultimately its people, is based upon the formation of working relationships. Within each relationship, participating parties bring with them their own ideologies, socialized practices, motives and perspectives. I argue that in order to forge and maintain successful working relationships, whether it be with a single person or an entire state-entity, we must learn to delve deeper into the psyche of each party. This will enable individuals and groups to understand where the other party is coming from, why their motives exist and how one party's motives can intersect successfully and meaningfully with others. Successful intersection of motives and intent will lead to more positive, peaceful and successful relations in the present and future within and amongst concerned parties.

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