

Perspective

Culture: Characteristics and its elements

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a unique possession of man. It is one of the distinguishing traits of human society. Culture doesn't exist at the sub-human level. Only man is born and mentioned during a cultural environment. Other animals live in a natural environment. Every man is born into a society that is the same as saying that each man is born into a culture. The dictum 'man could be a social being' can thus be redefined as 'man could be a cultural being'. Every man will be considered a representative of his culture. Culture is the unique quality of man which separates him from the lower animals.

Culture is an extremely broad term that includes in itself all our walks of life, our modes of behaviour, our philosophies and ethics, our morals and manners, our customs and traditions, our religious, political, economic and other kinds of activities. Culture includes all that man has acquired in his individual and social life. In the words of MacIver and Page, culture is "the realm of designs, of values, of emotional attachments, of intellectual adventures". It is the whole 'social heritage' which the individual receives from the group.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

Culture is learnt

Culture is not inherited biologically, but learnt socially by man. It is not an inborn tendency. There is no cultural instinct as such. Culture is usually called 'learned ways of behaviour'. Culture is social: culture doesn't exist in isolation. Neither is it an individual phenomenon. It is a product of society. It originates and develops through social interactions. It is shared by the members of society.

Culture is shared

Culture in the sociological sense, is something shared. It is not something that an individual alone can possess.

Culture is transmissive

Culture is capable of being transmitted from one generation to subsequent. Parents pass on culture traits to their children and then in turn to their children, and so on. Culture is transmitted not through genes but by means of language.

Culture is continuous and cumulative

Culture exists as an endless process. In its historical growth it tends to become cumulative. Culture is a 'growing whole' which incorporates in itself, the achievements of the past and the present and makes provision for the longer term achievements of mankind.

Culture is consistent and integrated

Culture, in its development has revealed a tendency to be consistent. At the same time different parts of culture are interconnected.

Culture is dynamic and adaptive

Culture is comparatively stable it's not altogether static. It is subject to slow but constant changes. Change and growth are latent in culture.

Every society has a culture of its own. Thus people in numerous societies everywhere the world have different cultures. These cultures aren't only diverse but also unequal. Along with cultural diversities and disparities that are found in societies throughout the world, we observe certain cultural similarities. People may worship different gods in several ways, but all of them have a religion. They may pursue various occupations, but all of them earn a living. Details of their rituals, ceremonies, customs, etc., may differ, but all of them nevertheless have some ritual, ceremonies, customs, etc. every culture consists of such non-material things. Similarly, people of each society possess material things of various kinds. These material things could also be primitive or modern and simple or complex in nature. These material and non-material components of culture are often referred to as "the content of culture".

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ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Cognitive elements

Cultures of all societies whether pre- literate or literate include a vast amount of knowledge about the physical and social world. The possession of this knowledge is referred to as the cognitive element.

Beliefs

Beliefs constitute another element of culture. Beliefs in empirical terms are neither true nor false.

Values and norms

It is extremely difficult to enlist values and norms for they're so numerous and diverse. They are inseparable from attitudes, except perhaps, analytically. Values could also be

defined as measures of goodness of desirability. They are the group conceptions of relative desirability of things. One way of understanding the values and their interconnections is to approach them through the four functional subsystems are: government, family, economy and religion.

Signs

Signs include signals and symbols. "A signal (also means signs) indicates existence- past present and future- of a thing event or conditions.

Non-normative ways of behaving

Certain ways of behaving aren't compulsory and are often unconscious. Such patterns do exist. Non normative behaviour shades over into normative behaviour and symbolic behaviour.