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HEARING THE UNSPOKEN: HOW CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS SHAPE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

For decades, technology has been celebrated as a tool that would unite humanity into a *global village*. Yet today, instead of fostering mutual understanding, digital platforms often amplify cultural friction and polarization. Misunderstandings spiral into conflict, algorithms that trap us in echo chambers – self-reinforcing spaces where users encounter only information that confirms their existing views while excluding dissenting perspectives. This paradox lies at the heart of intercultural communication: even as we connect more, we understand less. Edward T. Hall, a pioneer in the field, warned that cultural differences are not merely about language but about deeply ingrained, unconscious frameworks that shape how we perceive reality (Hall, 1959). His work gains new urgency as research in cultural neuroscience reveals how culture physically rewires the brain, influencing everything from decision-making to emotional expression; These hidden patterns explain why a simple act like maintaining eye contact can signal confidence in one culture and disrespect in another.

This paper proposes that cultural assumptions operate like *invisible scripts*, repeating patterns across individual minds, social behaviors, and institutional norms. To navigate these challenges, we propose the *A–B–C framework* (Awareness, Behavior, Curiosity) – a practical toolkit for bridging divides with intentionality, not just good intentions.

Culture as a Fractal Pattern

Culture is not a static set of beliefs but a dynamic system that replicates itself across scales. It is not confined to abstract beliefs or institutional practices – it is a multi-scale phenomenon embedded in how we think, feel, and behave. Borrowing the mathematical concept of fractals (self-similar patterns recurring across scales), cultural norms replicate at the micro level of neural pathways, the meso level of daily interactions, and the macro level of societal ideologies.

Consider a classic experiment in cultural cognition: participants were asked whether a monkey should be grouped with a banana or a panda. East Asians often paired the monkey with the banana (relational reasoning), while Westerners linked it with the panda (categorical similarity).

This divergence reflects deeper cultural frameworks: Western cultures prioritize analytical, object-centered thinking, whereas East Asian traditions emphasize holistic, context-sensitive reasoning. These cognitive patterns reverberate in everyday practices. In Japan, children often sleep alongside parents, reinforcing interdependence; in Western societies, separate sleeping arrangements encourage independence. Similarly, Western classrooms reward individual assertiveness, while Asian pedagogies often prioritize group harmony – mirroring philosophical divides between subject-object dualism (West) and relational worldviews (East).

Culture is not merely learned but embodied. Neuroimaging studies show that repeated cultural practices – from emotional expression to decision-making – reshape neural pathways, embedding values like hierarchy or egalitarianism into our subconscious.

The A–B–C Framework

To navigate these invisible forces, we propose three principles grounded in intercultural research:

A – Awareness of Self and Others

Awareness begins by recognizing our own cultural «blind spots». For instance, individuals from low-context cultures (e.g., Germany) often value direct communication, while those from high-context cultures (e.g., Japan) rely on implicit cues. Without awareness, a German manager might misinterpret a Japanese colleague’s silence as agreement, rather than a polite refusal.

B – Behavior that Adapts Respectfully

Awareness must translate into adaptive behavior. This might mean modulating eye contact, silence, or speech pace to align with local norms. Importantly, adaptation is not inauthenticity but strategic empathy—expanding one’s communicative repertoire without compromising core values. For instance, a manager working in Brazil might adopt warmer small talk to build trust, while in Germany, they might prioritize efficiency.

C – Curiosity that Invites Understanding

Curiosity transforms friction into dialogue. Instead of asking, «Why are they so indirect?» we might ask, «How does indirectness serve their goals or make sense in their context?» Such questions – rooted in cultural humility – invite dialogue and foster mutual learning. Genuine curiosity builds trust and reduces judgement. In multicultural teams, leaders might invite members to share how their backgrounds shape problem-solving approaches.

Cultural assumptions operate like water to a fish – invisible yet omnipresent. By mapping their fractal patterns across mind and society, we move beyond superficial «tolerance» toward transformative understanding. The A–B–C framework offers a pathway to this goal, grounding Hall’s timeless insights in actionable strategies. As globalization accelerates, hearing the unspoken is not just an intellectual pursuit but a moral imperative – one that demands awareness, adaptability, and above all, curiosity.



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**INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
IN SHAPING UKRAINE'S IMAGE:
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

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Видання розраховано на науковців, викладачів, аспірантів, студентів.

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Forscientists, lecturers, postgraduates, students.

Редакційна колегія:

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