

Definitions of Culture

Various definitions of culture

What has been termed the classic definition of culture was provided by the 19th-century English anthropologist **Edward Burnett Tylor** in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture* (1871): "*Culture . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.*" In (1881) Tylor made it clear that culture, so defined, is possessed by man alone. This conception of culture served well for some 50 years.

In their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), **A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn** cited 164 definitions of culture, ranging from "learned behavior" to "ideas in the mind," "a logical construct," "a statistical fiction," "a psychic defense mechanism," and so on. The definition—or the conception—of culture that is preferred by Kroeber and Kluckhohn and also by a great many other anthropologists is that culture is an abstraction or, more specifically, "an abstraction from behaviour."

Leslie A. White in the essay "*The Concept of Culture*" (1959) provided another vision about the issue: it is not really whether culture is real or an abstraction, he reasoned; the issue is the context of the scientific interpretation. When things and events are considered in the context of their relation to the human organism, they constitute behaviour; when they are considered not in terms of their relation to the human organism but in their relationship to one another, they become culture by definition. The mother-in-law taboo is a complex of concepts, attitudes, and acts. When one considers them in their relationship to the human organism—that is, as things that the organism does—they become behaviour by definition. When, however, one considers the mother-in-law taboo in its relationship to the place of residence of a newly married couple, to the customary division of labour between the sexes, to their respective roles in the society's mode of subsistence and offense and defense, and these in turn to the technology of the society, the mother-in-law taboo becomes, again by definition, culture. This distinction is precisely the one that students of words have made for many years. When words are considered in their relationship to the human organism—that is, as acts—they become behaviour. But when they are considered in terms of their relationship to one another—producing lexicon, grammar, syntax, and so forth—they become language, the subject matter not of psychology but of the science of linguistics. Culture, therefore, is the name given to a class of things and events dependent upon symboling (i.e., articulate speech) that are considered in a kind of extra-human context.
(Britannica ultimate)

SOME more DEFINITIONS.

*Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

*Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people.

*Culture is communication, communication is culture.

*Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning.

*A culture is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

*Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.

*Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.

*Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation.

*Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

<http://www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html>

CARLA's Definition

culture is defined as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group.

Banks, J.A., Banks, & McGee, C. A. (1989). Multicultural education. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

"Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways."

Damen, L. (1987). Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension on the Language Classroom. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

"Culture: learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day- to-day living patterns. these patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism" (p. 367).

Hofstede, G. (1984). National cultures and corporate cultures. In L.A. Samovar & R.E. Porter (Eds.), Communication Between Cultures. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

"Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another." (p. 51).

Lederach, J.P. (1995). Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. "Culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them" (p. 9).

Linton, R. (1945). The Cultural Background of Personality. New York.

"A culture is a configuration of learned behaviors and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society" (p. 32).

Parson, T. (1949). Essays in Sociological Theory. Glencoe, IL.

"Culture...consists in those patterns relative to behavior and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes" (p. 8).

Useem, J., & Useem, R. (1963). Human Organizations, 22(3).

"Culture has been defined in a number of ways, but most simply, as the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings" (p. 169).

<http://www.carla.umn.edu/culture/definitions.html>

A simpler definition

A simple way of defining culture is:

"Culture is a system for differentiating between in-group and out-group people."

"Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values." -- **Geert Hofstede**

"Culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organization's view of its self and its environment." -- **Edgar Schein**