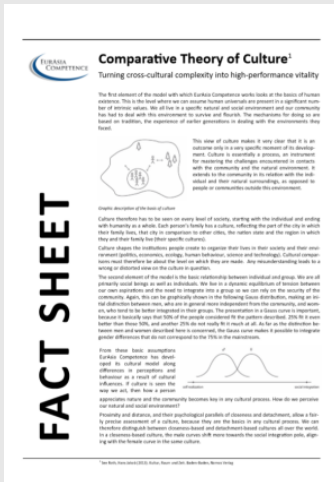# Comparative Theory of Culture

Turning Cross-Cultural Complexity into High-Performance Vitality

Hans J. Roth
EurAsia Competence © 2016

Rating

8

9 Importance

8 Innovation

7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy

Sales & Marketing

Finance

Human Resources

IT, Production & Logistics

Career & Self-Development

Small Business

Economics & Politics

Industries

Global Business

Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- All humans share intrinsic universal tendencies, but a region's unique natural environment causes culture, traditions and institutions to diverge.

- Understanding which societal level an institution emerged from is vital to cross-cultural understanding; failure to do so will distort understanding.

- Individuals must balance personal ambition against group integration.

- Cultures are either distance-based or closeness-based, and Gauss curves can illustrate the differences.

- Effective cross-cultural collaboration requires a willingness to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses inherent in cultural differences.

Recommendation

EurAsia Competence has developed a model to understand cross-cultural interactions. Understanding starts with the intrinsic universal tendencies shared by all humans, but at some point cultures diverge and the differences can seem to outweigh the similarities. That's where the misunderstandings begin, and it's also where EurAsia Competence hopes to be able to bridge the gap. *getAbstract* recommends this fact sheet from EurAsia Competence to those who want to increase their cross-cultural competence in an increasingly globalized world.

Summary

"Each person's family has a culture, reflecting the part of the city in which their family lives, that city in comparison to other cities, the nation state and the region in which they and their family live (their specific cultures)."

"Under the EurAsia Competence approach, cultural differences are not used to discriminate against one side or the other; they are applied to define the strengths on each side so as to create a mutually beneficial awareness and understanding in order to capitalize on the bridging opportunity at hand."

Each region in the world has a unique natural environment that influences the evolution of culture and tradition, which emerge as a means of surmounting complications that arose in that region's distinct context. People create institutions – political, scientific, economic – to help to organize their lives, and culture influences these institutions. When trying to understand cultural differences, it helps to first understand which level of society produced the difference. Culture is present at all levels in society – individual families, towns, cities, and countries. When making comparisons between cultures, failing to note which level generated an institution or tradition will lead to an inaccurate view of those cultures.

It's vital to understand how individuals within a culture interact with the group. Individuals maintain a balance between their own ambitions and the security that comes from assimilation, landing somewhere on the spectrum between self-realization and social integration. Each culture has a correlating norm which is closeness-based or distance-based. Half a population will generally settle in the middle of a Gauss curve, with 25% on either end of the curve representing the people who are socially integrated to a greater or lesser degree. If you were to make social-integration Gauss curves for men and women, you would see that women exhibit a higher level of social integration and men exhibit higher levels of self-realization. The curves intersect with the most socially integrated men inhabiting the same space as the least socially integrated women.

Gauss curves can illustrate cultural differences just as they represent socialization differences between genders. Each culture succumbs to its perceptions of nature and community even though intrinsic human values remain unchanged. Closeness-based cultures are unified with their surroundings, distance-based cultures are prone to observing from afar with detachment. Distance-based cultures tend to be more analytical while closeness-based cultures tend to take a more holistic view. These different modes of perception influence thought, decisions and actions. Each approach has benefits and drawbacks, and when the two interact, the diverse approaches can cause misunderstandings. You can overcome the differences between two cultures if both sides remember their shared human values – while acknowledging the differences each engenders.

About the Author

Hans J. Roth spent 30 years as a Swiss diplomat in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. He is currently chairman of the board at EurAsia Competence.