

## About Culture

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**What Is Culture? Describe the traits of culture.**

To the social scientist, *culture* is the specialized behavioral patterns, understandings, adaptations and social systems that summarize a people's *way of life*.

culture is shaped by environment: rain was a tool of God's wrath to the Hebrews, culture is shaped by social organization: the more advanced a society, the more organized it is culture is shaped by values and beliefs, and culture is learned behavior:

### Seven Major Traits of Culture

#### **1. Learned**

Not innate but something acquired because of where one is raised. If you are conceived in one culture but born and raised in another (i.e. transferred at birth), you acquired the culture of the second, not the first.

- a. *Learned through interaction, observation, and imitation*
- b. *Conscious: being told, reading*
- c. *Unconscious: most culture is learned unconsciously, i.e. through language for example*
- d. *Learned from a variety of sources*

1. Proverbs
2. Folk tales and folklore
3. High Culture: poetry, art, music
4. Mass media (especially TV in this generation)

#### **2. Transmitted**

Each generation (older) passes it on to the younger and constantly reinforces it. If not transmitted, a culture dies.

#### **3. Based on Symbols**

Language (verbal and nonverbal) is key element / but also from images, icons.

#### **4. Changeable**

No culture is static. The culture of your grandparents or parents is not identical with your own (a major cause of the so-called generation gap).

Changes occurs from:

*a. innovation (discovery) e.g. television, computer, women's movement*

*b. diffusion (borrowing) e.g. McDonalds worldwide*

*c. acculturation (long-term contact with another culture) .*

#### **5. Integrated**

One dimension affects other dimensions. Consider how the civil rights movement in the US (initially concerned with voting rights) spread to encompass multiple parts of the US.

#### **6. Ethnocentric**

A trait found in every culture: the belief that one's culture is superior and more worthy than another. While it is important to have a positive view of one's self, ethnocentrism can be a major hindrance to intercultural communication. It can shut others out, lead to derogatory viewpoints.

#### **7. Adaptive**

In order to survive, culture must adapt. Example: roles of women in US after WWII.

#### **The Most Important Characteristics of Culture:**

##### **(1) Culture is acquired.**

Culture is an acquired quality or behavior. It is not biologically inherited but learnt socially by individuals. In other words any behavior or quality which is socially acquired or learned is called culture. Behavior's learned through socialization habits and thoughts are called culture. Human beings learn or acquire culture by living in group. He learns it from society through education.

##### **(2) Culture is social.**

Culture is not individual but social in nature. As a social product culture develops through social interaction which is shared by all. Without social interaction or social relations it is very difficult and almost impossible to be cultured. Culture is inclusive of the expectations of the members of the groups. It is created or originated in society. Hence it is social.

##### **(3) Culture is transmitted.**

Culture is transmitted from one generation to another. It passes from parents to children and so on. This transmission is a continuous and spontaneous process. It never remains constant. Man inherits or learns culture from his ancestors and passes it to his successors. In this way culture constantly accumulate.

**(4) Culture fulfils needs.**

Culture fulfills many social psychological, moral etc. needs of individuals. Culture is created and maintained because of different needs. It fulfills needs of both society as well as individuals. For example, religion used to fulfill the solidarity and integrative needs of society. Our need for food, clothing, shelter, name, fame, status and position are fulfilled as per our cultural ways.

**(5) Culture is shared.**

Culture is not possessed by a single or a few individual. Culture is shared by majority of individuals. Hence culture is collective in nature. For example polytheism is our culture. It means majority of Indians believe in polytheism.

**(6) Culture is Idealistic.**

Culture is idealistic in nature. Because it embodies the ideals, values and norms of the group. It sets ideal goals before individuals which is worth attaining. In other words culture is the sum total of ideals and values of individuals in society.

**(7) Culture is cumulative.**

Culture is not created in one day or one year. It gradually accumulates through centuries. Beliefs, art, morals, knowledge are gradually stored up and became part of culture. Hence culture is the social heritage.

**(8) Culture is adaptive.**

Culture possesses adaptive capacity. It is not static. It undergoes changes. Different aspects of culture adapt with new environment or challenges posed by social and physical environment. Adaptation refers to the process of adjustment. And culture helps man in this process of adjustment.

**(9) Culture is variable.**

Culture is variable and changeable. It varies and changes from society to society. Because each and every society has its own culture. It also varies within a society from time to time. Ways of living of people of a particular society varies from time to time.

**(10) Culture is organized.**

Culture has an order or system. As Taylor says culture is a 'complex whole'. It means different parts of culture are well organized into a cohesive whole. Different parts of culture is organized in such a way that any change in one part brings corresponding changes in other parts.

**(11) Culture is communicative.**

Man makes and uses symbol. He also possesses capacity of symbolic communication. Culture is based on symbol and it communicates through different symbols. Common ideas and social heritage etc. are communicated from one generation to another. In our society 'red color' stands for danger. In Indian culture red color symbolic danger. Hence culture is communicative in nature.

**(12) Language is the chief vehicle of culture.**

Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. It never remain static. This transmission became possible through language. Culture is learned through language.

**(13) Culture is a total social heritage.**

We know culture is a social product. It is linked with the past. Through transmission past continues to live in culture. It is shared by all.