



Specific vs Diffuse

Resolving Dilemmas from Conflicting Values in Cultural Diversity

Based on: Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars

Issac Newton: William Blake

- ◆ Isaac Newton is so absorbed in the mathematics of science that he doesn't even notice the nature that surrounds him.



Imperial Gardens in Beijing

- ❖ wù yīn yì shí shū hū
- ❖ pò huài yǒng héng měi hǎo



Buzzed Driving

◆ Drive Drunk

◆ Go to Jail!

buzzed
driving is
drunk
driving
designate a sober driver

Restaurant in Santa Teresa

- ◆ “Duas Folhas Secam Suavemente as Mãos”
- ◆ Two Sheets Softly Dry your Hands



Chinese Characters



柯安良

◆ Ke, An Liang

◆ An = peace

◆ Peace = Protection + Woman

Measuring Specificity

- ◆ How does one perceive a business?
 - ◆ Specific: A company exists to perform, in an efficient way, certain functions and duties. Companies hire people to perform these functions, with the help of machines and equipment. Based on this, people are remunerated.
 - ◆ Diffuse: A company is made up of a group of people that work together. These people relate with one another and the success of the company depends a lot on these relationships.

Measuring Specificity

- ◆ How are errors that happen at work perceived?
 - ◆ Specific: The person who commits the error is responsible for this error--one error, one person. If we say that everyone is responsible, then in essence we are saying that nobody is responsible for the error .
 - ◆ Diffuse: The whole team is responsible for the error because, incidentally, every member of the team could have done more to avoid the problem, e.g., better training, more overseeing, etc.

North Americans: Specific

- ◆ Protestant Reformation (e.g. catholic cross vs protestant cross)
- ◆ Newtonian Science: objectivity, mechanism, analysis, observation
- ◆ Oriented to results, “outcomes”
- ◆ Digital revolution, binary code, everything is 1 or 0
- ◆ Congressional Debates, exaggeration of extremes

The Best of Specific

- ◆ Search of truth through analysis.
- ◆ Brings about the concept of human rights
- ◆ “My word is my bond”
- ◆ Separates reality from fantasy (e.g., Galileo and the planets)

Exaggeration of Specific

- ◆ Paralysis by analysis
- ◆ Bullet points do not show the subtleties of details.
- ◆ Keeping of data and statistics, without knowing why
- ◆ The specific focus grows disproportionally as compared with the rest
- ◆ Loss of what is human in everything, e.g. How much do we pay a nurse who holds the hand of a dying patient, and then passes this information on to family loved ones?

The Best of Diffuse

- ◆ Concentrates on quality (e.g., Taichi Ohno of Toyota who asks 5 times why?)
 - ◆ Specific = X part doesn't work
 - ◆ Diffuse = X part doesn't work because it ran too slow, because the metal was too hard, because there wasn't enough oil, because the mechanic needs more training, because we need to identify better the number of correct parts
- ◆ Concentrate on the balance of all of the parts
- ◆ While specific invent new products, the diffuse improve on the processes (e.g., combining R&D and production).

Exaggeration of Diffuse

- ◆ Objectives become so noble that they end up being impossible to realize
- ◆ Theories become so abstract that they cannot be falsified
- ◆ Rejection of those who have opposite ideas (something so noble does not allow for different opinions)
- ◆ Only a “shokku” can change the situation (e.g., atomic bomb in Japan)

Akio Morita: Sony

- ◆ Compare “specific” to those who build with bricks and “diffuse” with those who build with stones
- ◆ Traditional United States: Employ a person who works in a specific area, and who has specific abilities to perform a given responsibility
- ◆ Traditional Sony: The company continually changes an employee’s responsibilities, working for a time in sales, then in human resources, then on the factory, all to have a global understanding of the company.

Private vs Public Space

- ◆ Specific: Public space is large. E.g., Executives at a party talk to a person that they barely know, and this person tells them about their family, the drugs that their teenage son takes, the sexual activities with their spouse, their visits to the psychiatrist, and the problems with their car.
- ◆ Diffuse: Only reveal more formal, appropriate, and basic details. They are more discrete, and there are multiple levels of intimacy (e.g., du / sie, tú / usted, etc.)

Business Examples

- ◆ Ungrateful Manager - Motorola Japan
- ◆ Airline Service: American Airlines vs. Scandinavian Airlines
- ◆ Ikea: Massive Production with Design
- ◆ International Websites, e.g.
 - ◆ Ford Motor <http://corporate.ford.com/our-company/country-websites>
 - ◆ Coca Cola <http://www.coca-cola.com/webstore/sitemap.html>
 - ◆ PepsiCola <http://www.pepsiworld.com>

Resolving Dilemmas

- ◆ Dilemma: “Two lemas” We are forced to choose between two opposing options.
- ◆ Supposition: There is a reason why people have the cultural norms that they do. If they are different from yours (i.e., if there is a dilemma), discover the reason behind those norms and identify the best of what those norms have to offer.
- ◆ Strategy Options:
 - ◆ a. Focus on one extreme (and ignore the other option)
 - ◆ b. Focus on the other extreme (and ignore the other option)
 - ◆ c. Continue without integration (appease both with no advantage)
 - ◆ d. Integrate the best of both options by resolving conflicting values

Examples from Movies

- ◆ Specific

- ◆ The Scarlet Letter

- ◆ Easy A

- ◆ Diffuse

- ◆ The Apartment

- ◆ Inception

Reference:

Hampden-Turner, Charles and Fons Trompenaars. 2002.
*Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth
from Conflicting Values*. New Haven & London: Yale
University Press.