



# Universalism vs Particularism

*Resolving Dilemmas from Conflicting Values in Cultural Diversity*

*Based on: Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars*

# Universalism

- ◆ Universalism searches for what is systematic and tries to impose the rules, laws, and norms on all of its members so that things can run more efficiently.



# Particularism

- ◆ Particularism searches for what is different, unique, or exceptional in order to create something that is incomparable or of special quality.



# Measuring Universalism

- ◆ You are in a car with a friend who is driving. Your friend hits a pedestrian who was walking on the street. You know that your friend was going 50 mph in a place where the official speed limit was 30 mph. There were no other witnesses, just you. Your friend's lawyers says that if you testify that your friend was only going 30 mph that you will save your friend from serious consequences.
- ◆ What right does your friend have to expect that you protect him?
  - ◆ My friend has every right to expect me to testify that he was only going 30 mph.
  - ◆ My friend has some right to expect me to testify that he was only going 30 mph.
  - ◆ My friend has no right to expect me to testify that he was only going 30 mph.

# The Best of Universalism

- ◆ Tries to treat all people the same
- ◆ Everyone's vote counts
- ◆ The laws apply to everyone, including the powerful and rich
- ◆ There is an acceptance of people who are different
- ◆ Favors the production for the masses

# Exaggeration of Universalism

- ◆ Creates fundamentalism, (e.g. extreme religious groups)
- ◆ Deals with emotion as if it were numerical
- ◆ Measures everything as if it were linear
- ◆ Leads to illogical quantifications (e.g., measurement of beauty)
- ◆ Creates jurisprudence, more lawyers

# The Best of Particularism

- ◆ Celebrates what is new, unique, and incomparable
- ◆ Oriented to those who have special tastes
- ◆ Everything is intimate, personal, especially for “you”
- ◆ Eliminates the monotony of universalism
- ◆ Creates vitality and energy

# Exaggeration of Particularism

- ◆ Ends up being aggressive (e.g., KKK)
- ◆ Promotes the abuse of power, coercion, mystification, conspiracy (e.g. Mafia)
- ◆ Has a tendency to favor certain groups
- ◆ Insists that something “unique” is universal, and imposes it on everyone (e.g. Prohibition Era)

# 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

# Business Examples

- ◆ Case 1: Refinery Fire (Universalism)
- ◆ Case 2: Revson's Revenge (Particularism)
- ◆ Case 3: The Indignant Client (No integration)
- ◆ Case 4: Watson's Badge (Integration of both)
- ◆ HT&T Book Rights
- ◆ Global / Multinational / International vs Transnational

# Examples from Movies

- ◆ Universalism

- ◆ High Noon

- ◆ Iron Jawed Angels

- ◆ Particularism

- ◆ Les Miserables

- ◆ Tropa de Elite

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.