TECH3501-18 Lecture 009 – Culture and Conflict

1   Introduction – Nature of Conflicts
Interpersonal conflicts are unavoidable, and in fact give spice and flavour to our social lives" (Hample & Zhan, 2017, p. 179).

Culture "shapes our conflicts,… it affects our values and self-definitions, and… it even influences our under-standings of how to proceed with disagreements" (Hample & Zhan, 2017, p. 179)

1.1   Agency
"People have agency. That is, they are agents: they can do things by themselves, they can think and say indi-vidualised things, and they construct, reconstruct, and reinforce their personal lives. No government or prison has ever been so repressive as to erase human agency completely (excepting executions, of course)" (p.179).

"The freedom that agency implies also gives rise to the inherency of conflict between people" (p.180).

"If we were all identical in every respect – values, thoughts, interactions, capabilities, full commitment to the other's needs – it wouldn't be at all clear that any of us had agency because we would all act indistinguishably. Difference should be celebrated, even if it is inconvenient in the moment" (p.180).

2   Interpersonal Conflict
"Interpersonal conflict is therefore inevitable due to the complexity and interdependence of people's everyday lives" (p.180).

"Interpersonal conflict is the social experience and expression of differences in values, beliefs, goals, desires, or expectations, and it induces 'complex, goal-directed reactions' that lead to costs and benefits for the parties involved" (p.180).

2.1   Guz Khan Roadman Ramadan
Mobeen, aka Guzzy Bear, guides his newly converted friend Trev through his first Ramadan.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p02tkfvh/british-muslim-comedy-guz-khan-roadman-ramadan

2.2   Social Conflicts
"Conflicts are fundamentally social" (p.180).

"Some conflicts do not find public expression, either because they are internal to one person (e.g., feeling con-flicted between family loyalty and an attractive out-of-town job offer) or because a person can feel upset about what someone else has said or done, but swallowing the annoyance and never act it out" (p.180).

2.3   Ronny Chieng - International Student
Ronny Chieng arrives at Melbourne University from Singapore to read law, with his mum's pleas to study hard still ringing in his ears. He soon learns it is not as simple as that when a deranged law professor, a drunken so-cial secretary and a bunch of rich, uptight, racist fellow students make for an interesting first day.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p05hkxxp/ronny-chieng-international-student-series-1-episode-1

2.4   Social Sense-Making
"Facts do not speak for themselves – they are interpreted, and people (re)construct them mentally as part of a process of sense-making" (p.180).

"Conflict results from some general elements of human experience, and it is very rare for only one of these to be involved in causing a disagreement to appear. Some people have personal characteristics that lead them to seek conflict, to enjoy it, to persist in it beyond reason, and other people are the opposite" (p.180).

"This last example helps illustrate again that values colour the facts to control the sense-making that is crucial in realising you have a conflict with someone" (p.181).

3   Dispositions & Cultural Situations

"These personal situational conflict elements come from somewhere. Our personalities are strongly influenced by our genetic inheritance from our parents" (p.181).

"This shaping of children and adults occurs in the home, at school, in church, in the workplace, on the sports field, and in many other particular places, all of which we can summarise as being contained and defined within a culture. In our lives, we find these structural systems already waiting for us, making certain demands and creating certain affordances" (p.181).

"A culture is something that stands outside an individual person. Culture surrounds each of us with religion, language, an economic organisation, an approach to government and collective life, and values about self and others" (p.181).

"People come into contact with this system of meanings in predictable ways: through the family, through a school system, through organised religion, through the media, and through direct contact with grandmothers, stores, clinics, voting places, police officers, and so forth" (p.181).

"Not everyone participates enthusiastically in his or her culture, but it is not quite right to think that we choose our own culture. The circumstances of our birth and upbringing restrict our choices and limit the inventory of interpretation available to us and the values we can apply. Sometimes a person completely escapes his or her home culture, but this is rare" (p.181).

3.1   Cultural Reproduction

"Culture is passed on (reproduced) in two main way. It is evoked or transmitted. All humans share a considerable amount of genetic similarity and capability" (p.181).

"The immediate environment (farm, city, poverty, wealth, etc.) evokes (that is, energises and cements) certain of our human possibilities. If the key environmental characteristics are enduring, people in that environment will continue to have similar characteristics for many generations" (p.182).

4   Cultural Appropriation

"Culture can also be transmitted in the home or other common settings. Children are taught to repeat proverbs, the same little stories are told to most young children living in a particular region, children's cooperative/competitive play is regulated, and supervised, and televised cartoons deliver various messages about courage, friendship, and whether good triumphs over evil. These are all methods of cultural transmission" (p.182).

4.1   Cultural Expression

"Conflict is inherent to human social life, so it is unsurprising that cultures address the nature of difference and competition. Everyone has the ability to disagree and to participate in conflict. One's culture sketches out roles about when open disagreement is allowed, and how a person should act. However, because cultures are complex and because everyone is not a perfect instantiation of any culture, it is important to recognise that a specific thing that seems to be generally true of a culture does not always express itself within individuals" (p.182).

"It does serve as a warning against expecting one cultural feature to control individual views and behaviour. Harmony is valorised in those cultures, but apparently so too are self-expression, justified assertiveness, and competition" (p.182).

"Readers should also note that 'nation' and 'culture' do not cover the same ground, because many nations contain distinct cultures. The study of the cultures within one country is sometimes called intergroup communication" (p.183).

PrincessCece - CUTE JAPAN HAUL! ♥ | Clothes, Toys, Makeup + More!! ~ ♡
https://youtu.be/HWmYPfARm2g

5   Reasons for Conflict
"Conflicts are about topics" (p.184)

"Normally it is the topic – and people's conflicting goals on that matter – that directly instigate the conflict. The disagreement can take on an additional layer of complication if the participants come from different cultures and therefore have different understandings of how people should act while disagreeing" (p.184).

5.1   What we argue about | Japanese/American marriage
https://youtu.be/V0reQCDL968

5.2   Value Orientations
"In addition, they might also have unanticipated value orientations to the matter at issue" (p.184).

"Culture contributed to the participant's challenges" (p.184).

"Sometimes, however, cultural differences themselves can stimulate a conflict. People with different cultural backgrounds usually speak different native languages, so in intercultural interactions one or more parties need to accommodate to others and communicate in their second language. The use of non-native languages and possible accents associated with them may lead to miscommunication or prejudice, which could result in conflicts" (p.184).

5.3   Cultural Differences
"People raised in different cultures may also have different belief structures based on their life experiences and training. They might have different assumptions and understandings of the world, and expectations about future events. Therefore, people may have quite divergent views about some simple event. For no reason apparent to a person from one culture, a member of another culture might become upset about a casual remark and express an objection" (p.184).

"People naturally tend to look out at the world from the viewpoint of the group they feel they live with. Therefore, they may have biased perceptions about in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination when they are interacting with someone from another group. These effects are particularly marked when a person's identity group is a minority within the larger society" (p.184).

5.4   Do 'Foreigners' in Tokyo Speak Japanese? (Social Experiment)
https://youtu.be/Y8-YLAKW7DU

6   Cultural Values
"We can point to several things that distinguish one culture from another – its most common language, its religious traditions, its form of government, how its families work – but a particularly important (and summarising) difference is its values" (p184).

"Values are abstract psychological elements that attach meaning and valence to various things or patterns" (p.185).

"Values can direct a person's position and behaviour in a conflict. Conflicts are only about things you care about, and your values summarise your carings" (p.185).

"The other way cultures could differ is they could have the same values, but in a different priority order. So two cultures could both be committed to the idea that equality is good, but it might be the first or second most important value for one culture and the fifteenth for the other. In complex situations, it is common for

several values to be potentially relevant, and each participant will trade values off for one another. A person's value hierarchy will be a guide as to what values will be subordinated to others" (p.185).

7   Value Orientations
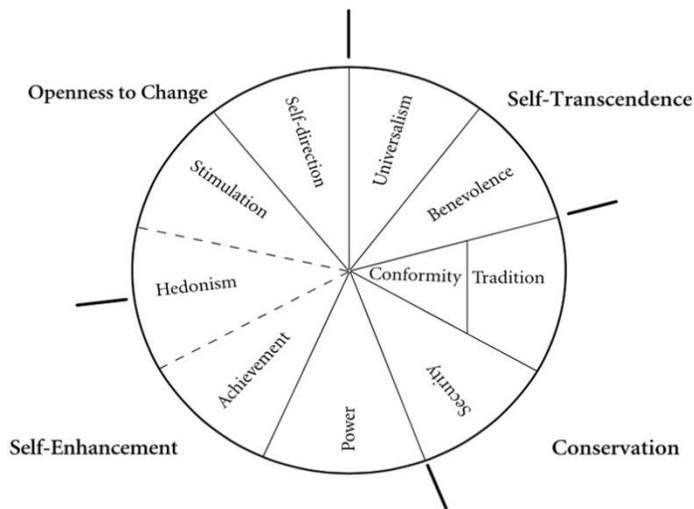
"Those values are power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security" (p.185).

"Some nations are more immediately aligned with one another than others in terms of their value hierarchies, but even the lower correlations indicate recognisable level of similarity" (p.185).

According to Hofstede it is possible to distinguish value orientations between a worker in one nation and a worker in another nation:

"**Power Distance** reflects the degree to which people who are more or less at the bottom of a nation's social and economic system are accepting of the differences in power that separate them from people on top."

"**Individualism versus collectivism** refers to whether people are expected to be self-determining or whether they are entitled to depend on their networks (e.g., family, friends, co-workers) to help them. Loyalty to your group is part of the bargain for collectivist societies."

"**Masculinity versus femininity** now seems somewhat misnamed. Hofstede hada notion as to what characterised masculinity (achievement, ambition, heroism, assertiveness) and he measured whether nations were more oriented to that pole or what he regarded as its opposite (nurturing, caring, modest)."

"**Uncertainty avoidance** indicates whether a culture is comfortable with uncertainty ambivalence, and ambiguity. Does a culture try to control the future to make it more predictable or just let it unfold?"

"**Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation** contrasts cultures that prize tradition (the short-term norms) with those that re willing to create changes in a pragmatic effort to change the future (long-term orientation)."

"Finally, Hofstede studies **indulgence versus restraint**. This contrasts instant gratification societies with those that restrain indulgence with norms and regulations. All these are a matter of degree" (p.186).

"How might these differences be manifest in face-to-face conflict?" (p.187).

8   World Value Survey
"The two main value systems WVS [World Value Survey] are secular and emancipative. Each of these is a term that covers more specific matters. Secular values include defiance, disbelief, relativism, and scepticism, all of

which are measured separately and then combined into the summarising 'secular' construct. Highly secular societies permit defiance, scepticism, and similar resistance to tradition, especially religious tradition. They do not reflexively respect the establishment as much as they establishment might wish. Emancipative subscales include autonomy, equality, choice, and voice. Highly emancipative cultures believe in personal autonomy and equality, and grant voice to many kinds of people" (p.188).

9   Face

"Across the globe, all people have 'face needs. In fact, face has two elements, positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to the identity you want to project affirmatively" (p.188).

"Positive face is what you try to project, and you need other people to cooperate with you in the projection" (p.188).

"Negative face is our wish to be unimpeded in thought or action. Telling someone what to do or think is an imposition on his or her negative face" (p.188).

"Even though both kinds of face needs seem to be pan-cultural, once we move to the details they can become culture-specific" (p.188).

"'Face-work' refers to the communicative behaviours (i.e., both verbal and non-verbal) people use to manage face-threatening scenarios, such as resorting or upholding their face or that of the other person" (p.189).

9.1   Saving Face in India
https://youtu.be/HwwyiYKsAPs

9.2   Face Negotiation

"Face negotiation theory assumes people negotiate and maintain face regardless of the culture they come from, but their cultural values (e.g., individualism-collectivism, emancipatory, and so forth), together with individual, relational, and situational factors, influence their use of face-work behaviours in conflict situations" (p.189).

"Face-negotiation theory predicts people form collectivist cultures with large power distance tends to express a greater degree of other-face and mutual-face concern, and thus are more likely to use avoidance or conflict styles that respect the other person's goals. In contrast, people from individualistic cultures with small power distances tend to focus on self-face maintenance concerns, and thus are more likely to use dominating conflict styles" (p.189).

"In individualistic cultures, conflict was addressed in a fairly direct manner, but in collectivist cultures, because of the high-levels of other-face concerns, smoothing over or avoidance of conflict were preferred tactics for conflict management" (p.190).

10   Conflict Styles

"People high on concern for people but low on concern for tasks prefer a smoothing (or obliging) conflict style, in which they essentially concede.

People low on concern for people and also low on concern for tasks pref a withdrawing (avoiding) style. They have no real commitment to the conflict, so they just leave if they can.

People with low concern for people and high concern for tasks prefer a forcing (competing, dominating) style, in which they press hard to 'win' the conflict.

People moderate on both concerns try compromise, or work things out in the middle.

Finally, people high on both concerns want to use problem-solving (integrating, collaborative) style, in which they are equally committed to their own and other's goals. This last style is held to be the ideal on normative grounds" (p.190).

10.1 Conflict Preferences

"Common hypotheses are that collectivist cultures will prefer avoidant styles and that independent cultures will prefer aggressive tactics" (p.190).

"People's reports about their preferred conflict styles do not necessarily indicate how they will actually behave in a conflict" (p.192).

"An explanation for this mismatch between preference and behaviour is that the conflict style preferences are just that – preferences. When one is anticipating a conflict, or reporting on conflicts in general, these preferences are reflective of what the person intends to do. But once the conflict begins, things become concrete, another person is there disagreeing with you, you may have to defend yourself, you have face needs to manage, and so forth" (p.192).

11 Summary

"So what advice can we offer to someone on the verge of an intercultural conflict interaction?" (p.193).

"If the interaction is part of a long-term relationship with the other party, it makes practical sense to make sure that you are protecting the other party's interests as well" (p.193).

First, interrogate yourself" (p.193).

"Second, try to anticipate the values and face needs of the other person" (p.193).

"Perhaps you can find research about their generally preferred conflict styles. Take this information as no more than a background briefing, whose details are hypotheses but not conclusions. Your preparation should tell you what to be alert for, but it will not tell you what is going to happen in a concrete interaction with a particular individual. If you have social opportunities with the other party prior to the conflict, try to find out these sorts of things about him or her without being pushy about it. Share your own background, too" (p.193).

"When engaged in conflict with a person from another culture, your most important communication attributes will probably be self-awareness, perceptiveness and flexibility" (p.194).

11.1 10 Surprising Ways To Offend People In Other Countries
https://youtu.be/UTE0G9amZNk

12 References
Hample, D., & Zhan, M. (2017). Culture and Conflict. In S. M. Croucher (Ed.), *Global Perspectives on Intercultural Communication*. London: Routledge.