**The literature review of weekly readings**

Cross-cultural communication usually refers to the communication behaviors between people with different cultural backgrounds. Due to different regions, different races and other factors leading to cultural differences, cross-cultural communication may take place both internationally and among different cultural groups. The so-called cross-cultural communication occurs when the sender of information is a member of one culture, while the recipient is a member of another culture. For this assignment, I chose two weekly readings and going to write the literature reviews to help me enhance my understanding of Hofstede’s theory and the meaning of othering and stereotyping.

**Reading 1**

***Hofstede - culturally questionable?***

**Overall Themes**

Hofstede's work on culture is highly influential and widely cited in academic literature, providing valuable insights into cross-cultural relationships. However, his work has faced criticism and challenges from other scholars. This paper discusses the various arguments supporting and disputing Hofstede's work, recommends areas for further research, and applies his findings to a practical environment involving two countries, Australia and Indonesia.

**Methodology/Approaches**

Hofstede's study involved analyzing data from over 116,000 questionnaires completed by IBM employees in over 50 countries between 1967 and 1978. From this data, he identified four bipolar dimensions (Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity/Femininity) to characterize the culture of different countries. Later, Hofstede and Bond introduced a fifth dimension, Confucian Dynamism or Long/Short Term Orientation, to better fit Asian cultures. This paper reviews the various criticisms and support for Hofstede's work, as well as the problems associated with cross-cultural research in general.

**Findings**

Hofstede's research on cross-cultural differences led to the identification of four dimensions that help characterize and differentiate cultures from one another: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, and Uncertainty Avoidance. Each of these dimensions offers unique insights into the values, behaviors, and preferences that shape various societies and impact the way people interact with one another.

Power Distance refers to the degree to which unequal distribution of power and wealth is accepted and tolerated within a society. In cultures with high power distance, individuals are more likely to accept hierarchical structures and a clear separation between the rich and the poor, as well as between different social classes. In contrast, cultures with low power distance tend to emphasize equality and fairness, with less rigid social structures and a more equitable distribution of resources.

Individualism, as the name suggests, measures the extent to which people in a culture prefer to act independently or as part of a group. Highly individualistic cultures value personal achievements, individual rights, and self-reliance, with people often prioritizing their own interests over those of the collective. Conversely, collectivist cultures emphasize group cohesion, shared goals, and interdependence, with individuals often putting the needs of their family or community before their own personal desires.

Masculinity, in the context of Hofstede's research, refers to the preference for traditionally masculine traits, such as assertiveness, ambition, and dominance, over traditionally feminine characteristics, such as nurturing, empathy, and cooperation. In cultures with high masculinity, individuals may place a greater emphasis on competition, material success, and hierarchical relationships, while those in more feminine cultures are likely to prioritize interpersonal connections, quality of life, and social welfare. It is important to note that this dimension does not necessarily imply a preference for a specific gender but rather the values and behaviors typically associated with each gender.

Uncertainty Avoidance pertains to the extent to which people in a culture feel threatened or uncomfortable in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity, or a lack of structure. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to seek predictability, order, and clear rules or guidelines to help navigate the complexities of life. These societies may be more resistant to change and less willing to take risks. On the other hand, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are generally more adaptable, flexible, and open to new ideas, with individuals displaying a higher tolerance for ambiguity and a willingness to embrace change.

By examining these four dimensions, Hofstede's research provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex and varied ways in which culture influences human behavior, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. This understanding is particularly relevant in today's increasingly globalized and interconnected world, where effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration are essential for success.

**Potential Limitations**

Hofstede's work, despite its significant contributions to understanding cross-cultural differences, has several potential limitations. One of the major criticisms is the assumption of cultural homogeneity within a country, overlooking the presence of diverse ethnic groups. Furthermore, using nations as units of analysis may not accurately capture the true nature of culture, as cultures are not necessarily bounded by national borders. The timing of Hofstede's study during the Cold War and the lack of data from socialist and less affluent countries could also have influenced the results. Additionally, the use of a single company (IBM) as the basis for the study may limit the generalizability of the findings to other organizations and industries. Critics also argue that Hofstede's data, being several decades old, may no longer be relevant in today's rapidly changing global environment. Some contend that four or five dimensions are insufficient to capture the complexity of cultural differences, while others raise concerns about the statistical integrity of the study due to the use of the same questionnaire items on multiple scales and the potential for sample error. Despite these limitations, Hofstede's work remains a valuable resource for understanding cross-cultural differences and has been widely used by both scholars and practitioners.

**Application/Significance**

Hofstede's work has had a significant impact on the understanding of cross-cultural differences and has been applied to various aspects of business, management, and leadership. By identifying key dimensions of culture, his work provides a framework for understanding and navigating the challenges that arise in cross-cultural interactions. The analysis of Australia and Indonesia demonstrates the practical application of Hofstede's dimensions and highlights the importance of considering cultural differences in international business dealings.

**Overall Conclusion**

While there are valid criticisms of Hofstede's work, it remains a valuable resource for understanding cross-cultural differences and is widely used by both scholars and practitioners. Despite the need for further research to capture the dynamic nature of culture and the influence of globalization and technology, Hofstede's work will continue to have value now and into the future.

**Reading 2**

***In Intercultural Communication: An advanced resource book for Students***

**Overall Themes**

This chapter explores the major inhibition to communication by examining the concept of Othering and how we can easily construct and reduce people to be less than what they are. The chapter emphasizes the need to discipline our perceptions to communicate successfully and avoid essentialist categories. The main concepts discussed are stereotype, prejudice, Othering, and culturism. The chapter provides an experience to demonstrate how easy it is to fall into culturist traps and misconstruct people from other societies.

**Methodology/Approaches**

The chapter uses a narrative approach to illustrate the concepts of stereotype, prejudice, Othering, and culturism. By offering an example of John and his neighbor, the Smith family, the chapter demonstrates how individuals can fall into culturist traps by forming stereotypes, harboring prejudices, and engaging in Othering. The chapter then deconstructs the example to reveal the interconnected concepts and their impact on communication. The chapter also utilizes a diagram (Figure A2.1.1) to summarize the process of stereotype, prejudice, and Othering and how they lead to essentialism and culturism.

**Findings**

The chapter finds that stereotypes, prejudice, and Othering are interconnected and can lead to essentialism and culturism, which can inhibit effective communication. Stereotypes may be formed based on a priori information, which can be biased or infected by prejudice. This reduction of people through stereotypes, prejudice, and Othering prevents individuals from seeing others as they truly are, making communication difficult. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the dangers of culturism and how it can lead to the devaluation and misinterpretation of other people's realities.

**Potential Limitations**

The chapter's narrative approach, while useful in illustrating the concepts, may not be sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of stereotype, prejudice, Othering, essentialism, and culturism. Additionally, the chapter does not delve into other factors that may contribute to the formation of stereotypes and prejudices, such as social and cultural influences(Fiske, 2017). Furthermore, the chapter does not address the potential for change and growth in individuals' perceptions and understanding of others, which may impact the extent to which stereotypes, prejudice, and Othering affect communication.

**Application/Significance**

The chapter's findings are significant for improving intercultural communication and fostering understanding between different groups of people. By recognizing and avoiding the culturist trap, individuals can strive to see others as they truly are and engage in more effective communication. The chapter offers disciplines for intercultural communication that emphasize the importance of avoiding stereotypes, prejudice, and Othering to prevent misinterpretation and miscommunication. These disciplines can be applied in various settings, such as education, the workplace, and interpersonal relationships, to promote greater understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

**Overall Conclusion**

This chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding and avoiding the interconnected concepts of stereotype, prejudice, Othering, essentialism, and culturism to improve intercultural communication. By recognizing the dangers of these concepts and their potential to inhibit communication, individuals can strive to discipline their perceptions and engage in more effective communication. The chapter provides valuable insights and disciplines for intercultural communication that can be applied in various settings to promote greater understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

**References**

Fiske, S. T. (2017). Prejudices in cultural contexts: Shared stereotypes (gender, age) versus variable stereotypes (race, ethnicity, religion). Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12(5), 791–799. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617708204

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