

Cultural Model Applied to Smaller Groups

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how smaller groups can adapt the components of culture. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Group Norms
2. Subculture
3. Organizational Culture

1. Group Norms

We are all influenced by the culture that we live in, but we're also influenced by the groups we belong to. Many times, these groups take on their own identities, and there are certain behaviors and ways of thinking about the world that result from those groups.

Whenever people come together in a group and stay together for a significant period of time, they develop **group norms**.

These norms are the kind of behavior that the group expects or the ways of seeing or thinking about the world that become normal. In other words, group norms signify what is right, true, or proper in a particular group.

Most groups that join together for a significant period of time do so because they have a common goal or purpose.



TERM TO KNOW

Group Norms

The variety of behaviors and perceptions considered "right", "true" or "proper" by a group.

2. Subculture

A group that shares a common goal or purpose then becomes a **subculture**, or a culture that's embedded within the larger culture.

There are a lot of different subcultures. In today's world, you don't even have to meet others to be part of a

subculture; you can often join a subculture through social networking on the internet. Some examples of subcultures are:

- **Goth:** A subculture that grew around fans of gothic rock music in the 1980s and which has continued to grow and develop to include fashion and aesthetics. The goth subculture is maintained through music festivals, nightclubs, and friendships.
- **Burners:** Many people who attend the Burning Man festival become a part of the subculture associated with Burning Man even during their regular lives. The subculture includes a commitment to a maximalist art style, free expression, and anti-materialism.
- **Survivalists / Preppers:** People who fastidiously prepare (hence "prepper") for emergencies, including wilderness survival and large-scale doomsday scenarios. People in this subculture emphasize self-reliance, training, and stockpiling of supplies.
- **Quiverfull:** A subculture within mainstream Christianity which emphasizes having very large families and opposing birth control. Members of this subculture generally share not only religion but also political beliefs.
- **Polyamory:** A subculture with a different kind of emphasis on large families, where members practice ethical non-monogamy, often through maintaining multiple loving relationships and/or group partnerships. This subculture also encompasses both family structure and political beliefs.
- **Vegans:** People who choose to avoid consuming any animals or animal by-products may or may not be part of a vegan subculture. There are lots of different reasons why someone might choose to keep a vegan diet, such as concern for the environment, care for animal welfare, religion, and health. People who choose veganism for similar reasons will often share diet (obviously), political beliefs, and attitudes towards personal responsibility.
- **Fandom:** Super fans of particular fictional worlds or media franchises may form a subculture around that fandom. Fans may interact through conventions and internet communities and may engage in activities like cosplay and making and enjoying fanfiction and fanart. Today, many media companies try to artificially create fan communities because they can be very profitable, but true fan subcultures arise organically and can sometimes even be in opposition to the original media's creators.
- **Deaf culture:** Many people who are deaf or hard of hearing are members of the Deaf subculture, which is defined by shared values, art, institutions, and history of those who use signed language. Generally, Deaf is capitalized when referring to the culture rather than the audiological condition. Some hearing people might be part of the Deaf subculture, such as if they are in a Deaf family, while some deaf or hard of hearing people might not be a part of the Deaf subculture, such as if they assimilate into the dominant hearing culture through use of cochlear implants.

As you can see from the above examples, subcultures can form around all kinds of topics, and among people of any age, background, or belief system. Some people choose a subculture, such as Burners or goths, while others may be born into it, as with Quiverfull or Deaf children.

Subcultures can sometimes be recognized by their dress, music, or diet, but also by their particular attitudes towards the world.



THINK ABOUT IT

What subcultures are you a part of? If you think that you are not connected to any subcultures, think about your friends and community, the people you have chosen to be important in your life. What attributes and interests do you have in common? How do these commonalities influence your ways of seeing the world?



TERM TO KNOW

Subculture

A group with a different cultural orientation than the larger culture around it.

3. Organizational Culture

Organizations themselves develop their own cultures. **Organizational culture** refers to the rules and the norms governing the behavior in any given organization, or type of organization.



EXAMPLE Some organizations are more formal. A law firm, for instance, is likely to have a formal culture, with a muted office decor and a dress code requiring business dress. A tech start-up company, on the other hand, might be more casual in terms of the way the office is laid out and how people are dressing.

Any particular company or organization has its own culture. Sometimes, this might be called corporate culture, or it could be more hierarchical and structured.

There may be other times when management is quite involved with the people who work in the organization. Part of the culture might be to send cards for birthdays or special occasions; there might be a lot of customer service recognizing key customers involved in the community.

Those would all be considered part of the organizational culture of a particular company.



TERM TO KNOW

Organizational Culture

The rules and norms governing behavior in a given organization or type of organization.



THINK ABOUT IT

Consider where you work and the subcultures or social groups you belong to:

- What are the group norms, expectations, or views?
- How can the cultural model be applied to these groups?
- Which aspects of the group influence your own behavior and worldview?



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the cultural model can also be applied to smaller groups within a larger culture. These groups are called subcultures, and they have their own **group norms**, or accepted behaviors and ways of viewing the world. You also learned that each organization has its own culture. This **organizational culture** could be more formal, or more casual, depending on the norms for that type of environment. You now understand that an awareness of the **subcultures** and organizations you belong to can help you understand what influences your own behavior and worldview. Good luck!



TERMS TO KNOW

Group Norms

The variety of behaviors and perceptions considered "right", "true" or "proper" by a group.

Organizational Culture

The rules and norms governing behavior in a given organization or type of organization.

Sub-Culture

A group with a different cultural orientation than the larger culture around it.