

## The Non-Material Culture

We know how the material culture works. Now it is time to learn the other half, the **non-material**. This is the values and beliefs of a society which determines how a group of people behave. A **belief** is what people think is true in their lives while a **value** is how “good” or “bad” a particular person, thing, situation or act is perceived to be. The steps to learning one’s culture follow the exact same steps as learning one’s ethnic identity of the last unit.

There are systems at work here as well. All cultures teach important values and customs through **social systems**. First, people have to get together in an working group called an organization. To be called an **organization**, a group has to know who is in it, who the leader is, why they are together, what their purpose is and what resources they have to work with. For example, any club is an organization. It is a recognized social group. But for something to be called an **institution**, the group gets much bigger. It is a group of the whole society not just a small part. Institutions teach the “right” way of how something should be done for the whole society rather than just a small group of people.

These social systems are not closed systems, they are **open ones**, which make predicting what they are going to do and react a bit harder. If you remember, from the last paper, a **system** is something that is made up of two or more parts. If a system is to work well, all the parts have to work right and, in the right way. However, unlike a closed system, open systems can have things added or taken away. Things that have changed or cause something else to change are called **variables**. It is these variables that cause the differences in the cultures around the world. But, interestingly, the system rules from the material culture still apply but they apply to people and ideas not to people and the Earth. Everything is still connected to everything else, everything still must go somewhere, and there still is always a consequence for everything that happens.

The institution of the FAMILY is the very first place where children learn their values and beliefs. Here children learn how to get along with others, have their basic material needs met, and form a close sense of belonging. It is here that the culture elements of customs, dress, roles, and taboos are taught to young children.

The institution of EDUCATION helps the family teach the children society’s values in a more formal way. It is the formal way people learn the information, knowledge and methods to solve problems so children learn how to be adults in the real world. Education can happen anywhere and by anyone. Schooling, however, is what only what happens to a person within a classroom .

The institution of ECONOMICS is one belongs in both the material and non-material cultures. It involves the making of things, how to organize people so things get made, and how to get the things to the people who need them. It is money, buying and selling. It leads to the culture concept of wealth. In today’s world, your job also determines much of your status in society.

The institution of GOVERNMENT makes and enforces laws based on the values of the society. The government is supposed to keep the society running smoothly, protect people and punish those who break the laws. The laws can be written down or can just be “known” Pride in one’s government ,or nation, leads to a sense of nationalism.

The institution of RELIGION helps people deal with questions of what comes after death and how to run life according to a “higher” way of thinking. It is about beliefs about the world, how to bring order and be “good” along with the rituals and ceremonies connected to those beliefs. For many people, religion is their life. This makes them see it as a separate thing. Also, in some places, the religion and government are both the same thing which adds confusion as well.

The institution of LANGUAGE organizes large groups of people according to the meaning of the words used and the ideas they stand for. People need to be able to understand each other either by words or by actions. In this case, literature, communication forms, icons, types of language and even art play a role in people understanding each other.

Citations:

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