

# Managing Through Values The Cooperative Way

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## Introduction

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is commonly regarded by most cooperators in the world as the foremost authority in defining cooperatives and in determining the underlying values and principles which provide the impetus to the cooperative enterprise. ICA states that the distinguishing hallmark of a true cooperative is its strict adherence to cooperative **values, ethics and principles** for without them, cooperatives would be no different from any other private or capitalist enterprise.

As the ICA statement stresses, “cooperatives are based on the **values** of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members adhere to the **ethics** of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others in running the cooperative” (Hoyt 1996).

History shows that cooperatives were formed initially as a reaction to the oppressive and exploitative excesses of early capitalism. The industrial revolution introduced large scale production and massive concentration of workers along assembly lines in mechanized and coal-run factories. As a result, workers were brought and sold in the open market like commodities and were subjected to low wages, excessive working hours and grueling hours of labor.

The transition from feudal to capitalist society gave birth to the cooperative as a new form of economic activity that brought dignity back to labor after being treated as a mere tool in the production process. One of the earliest cooperatives was put up in 1844 by 28 weavers and artisans who called themselves the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. The Rochdales struggled to pool together a little capital to be able to open a consumer cooperative selling a few items of butter, sugar, flour, oatmeal and candles. Learning from the lessons of floundering cooperatives, the Rochdales documented their practice and developed a set of **principles** which provided the foundation on which cooperatives around the world operate to this day. **Principles** are embodiments of values, sometimes called “instrumental values” or “operational values” because they translate values into concrete actions that guide day-to-day activities. Adherence to principles distinguishes a genuine from a pseudo cooperative.

The original Rochdale principles were officially adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in 1937 until they were updated and modified in 1995 as part of the Statement on the Cooperative Identity. These **seven cooperative principles** are as follows: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; education, information and training; cooperation among cooperatives; autonomy and independence; and concern for the community.

## Objectives

This paper seeks to explore the meaning of values and ethics as espoused by cooperatives and how they find convergence and parallelism with traditional Filipino values and ethical principles. Cooperative values and ethics are distillations of the best practices of pioneering cooperatives as they go about their daily operations. They are neither theoretical nor intellectual constructs formulated in the mind of early cooperators but are the result of dealing with the rigor and discipline of cooperative living. In much the same way, Filipino values and ethics are a consummation of cultural traditions passed from one generation to another. It is the objective of this paper to show the common ground on which cooperative and Filipino values stand and how their integration can be used to steer cooperative management in the most productive and beneficial direction.

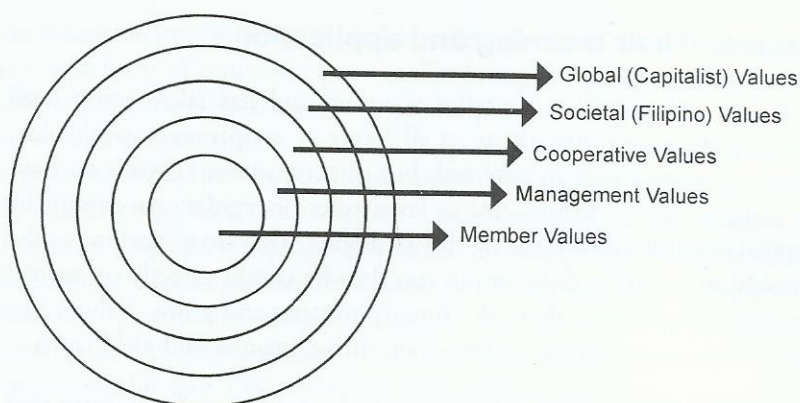
## Values: Their meaning and application

ICA has spelled out its doctrine of values and has taken upon itself the task of propagating them to all kinds of cooperatives worldwide. This may seem to be an easy task but putting values at work do have its complications. Values—unlike laws, rules or regulations—cannot be applied or enforced with the rigidity of dogma. They do not belong to the physical or cognitive domain nor can they be taught directly or learned by rote. Like morals, they take time to nurture and grow. Values, like trees, need proper climate to take root, thrive, prosper and yield fruits.

Likewise, values are internalized standards and rules of a culture that govern a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. If values are to be internalized, there is a process of internalization which may take up a length of time and may depend upon a host of factors and situations. There are variations in the application of values given the societal, cultural, economic, and socio-political differences existing from region to region, country to country, and place to place. It is not easy to imagine, for instance, how city values differ from the rural, how values differ between highly developed and developing countries, or how they vary between socialist and capitalist, modern and old, Eastern and Western societies. Values are highly contextual and what may be considered of value in some settings may be irrelevant to others. For example, family values may not be very significant in highly individualistic societies. Similarly, the value of humility hardly matters in a highly competitive corporate setting.

From an individual perspective, values take time to mature and may change as life shifts from one phase to the next or from one circumstance to the other. Values may change dramatically in moments of personal crises in love, career or fortune, or during times of war or calamity, or when one is about to die of ill health or life threatening situations. There is a wide context of places, events and situations that push an individual to rework or re-assess his or her values depending on actual needs or circumstance.

If personal values are in a constant state of flux how then do we deal with cooperative values which when applied in practice would be subject to



a variety of factors. These factors include uneven stages of development in the socio-economic-cultural climate in which a cooperative finds itself, as well as the varied psychological and behavioral backgrounds and tendencies of the people running the cooperative.

To illustrate this point, assume that values differ from context to context and may be represented by a sphere of concentric circles as shown here:

#### Illustration 1

Based on the above, it is apparent that values have different dimensions: global, societal, cooperative, management and member. These values penetrate, overlap and influence each other. Moreover, the outermost circle—like global values—have greater sphere or span of influence since they penetrate others (societal, cooperative, management and member values) within the circle. Conversely, the closer you go within the concentric circles, the lesser the sphere or span of influence becomes so that member values no longer influence the values beyond (i.e., management, cooperative, societal and global values).

Values within the inner circles have greater depth. Member values contain more or less a bit of everything: management, cooperative, societal and global values. The individual, therefore, has more choices upon which to anchor his values. Based on his particular character, background, or upbringing, he may embrace any of these values more than the rest. A person raised by modern, educated parents living in a metropolis, for instance, will undoubtedly be influenced by global values. A person raised in the countryside, on the other hand, will probably tend to have traditional values.

Like everything else, values have polarity or duality and various shades in between. There are good and bad values, negative and positive values, and conservative and modern values. By their dual nature, they always exist side by side, like two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. Some philosophers have even propounded that it is the conflict or tension between dualities that pushes for the dissolution of conflict, leading to higher order, integration and unity.

Cooperatives are not spared from the duality of values despite their avowed adherence to a code of values, ethics and principles. They are operating in environments where they are exposed to a constant stream of ideas and influences, notably the pressure of globalization. Like it or not, cooperatives need to adapt their value system to the changing times for their existence and survival.

### **Diversity of Values: The Cooperative Dilemma**

There is a diversity of values competing for inclusion and integration within the cooperative. It is the task of each cooperative to filter, delete and sort out these values in accordance with those valued by the cooperative. This alignment process does not happen overnight. Values take time to sink in and require concerted and deliberate efforts from the board down to the general body. A management imbued with a sense of vision and purpose can lead the way but the vision must be communicated to the entire members. There will be disharmony and dysfunction, for example, if the board goes one way while the management goes the other. Affirmative action is necessary but as to how and who will do it is another story.

Cooperative values are highly ideal but they exist as mere potentials and possibilities whose translation requires purposive action and conscious internalization. They are culture bound hence are subject to translation and interpretation in the transmission process. Values are embodiments of a particular way of thinking, feeling and doing and are sifted by the particular culture that gave birth to them.

### **Core Concepts of Filipino Values**

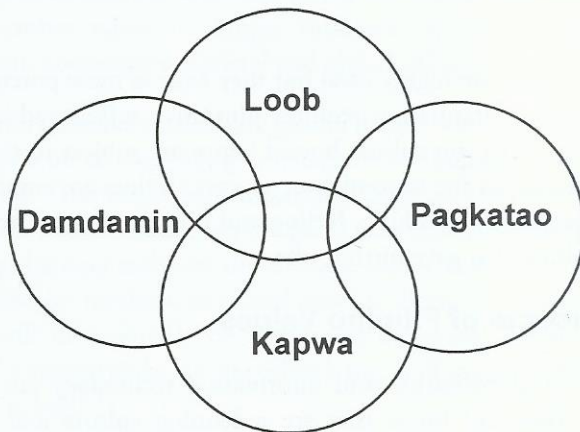
The engines of globalization and information technology are but two of the most powerful forces that are redefining culture and the way people look at the world. American culture is transforming and moving

in divergent directions because of the influx of migrants from all over the world. The Chinese who once adhered to Confucianism and later embraced the cult of Mao and its socialist fervor are now treading the capitalist path and making quantum leaps in economic development. The rapid movement of people, products, technology, capital and knowledge are just some of the forces that are flattening cultures and values into one homogenous field.

Five hundred years of acculturation with Spanish, Chinese and American influences have made the Filipino culture what it is today. Yet there is still tangible proof that core values of distinct Filipino origin are still at the heart and soul of every Filipino. This is in spite of the frequent criticism that the Filipino has lost his unique identity and has become a pragmatist who simply adapts to what is convenient or expedient to accomplish his ends.

Anthropologists like F. Landa Jocano and the eminent psychologist Virgilio Enriquez have spent a great deal of inquiry into the core of the Filipino soul or psyche and have come up with convincing arguments to prove that Filipino values, when cultivated in positive ways, can become a source of strength and pride for the race.

There are four core concepts in Filipino culture that underlie some of the enduring values of Filipinos. They are embodied in the following: *loob*, *kapwa*, *damdamin* and *pagkatao*. They are integral to a Filipino's being, united indivisibly, and spring from one source.



## 1. LOOB

Much is lost in translation and it is difficult to find an accurate English word to describe what *loob* means. Roughly, *loob* approximates the inner-self or the core of one's being. "*Kalooban* or *niloob* directs one to do, desire, and feel about things in the environment. It encompasses the individual's state of mind, will and volition" (Jocano 1999). As such it is closely related to the Western concept of "ego." But whereas "ego" is a kind of self-organizing principle of the temporal man, *loob* seems to encompass a higher, more intangible dimension of existence.

*Loob* may also mean inner space, but watch how Filipinos relate to this inner space called *loob*: *kabutihang loob* (innate goodness); *masama ang loob* (ill feelings); *kalamigan ng loob* (indifference or coldness); *lakas ng loob* (inner strength or courage). Used this way, *loob* becomes an inner frame of reference on which a person's character and well-being are measured. *Loob* has also come to mean an integrative space where the dual nature of one's being is dissolved to attain wholeness. Thus, a person who is *mahina ang loob* (weak character) can become *malakas ang loob* (strong character). Human failings are transmuted to their opposite to attain a level of existence that is compatible with this *loob*.

## 2. DAMDAMIN

*Damdamin* pertains to feelings. Jocano says "it is used as a basis for cognizing, expressing and evaluating the nature of things, seen felt and done." Thus, when Filipinos say *masama ang pakiramdam* (not feeling well) they refer not only to a physical state but also to a range of emotional, mental and psychological conditions. *Damdamin* underlies much of the Filipino way of relating to all circumstances, situations and realities of things in their surroundings. Thus *pakiramdam ko* (my intuition), *damdam ko* (the way I feel), *masigla ang damdamin* (highly spirited), *walang pakiramdam* (insensitive, indifferent) are not simply the emotional states that they are but are internal states that encompass the totality of one's being.

## 3. KAPWA

*Kapwa* encompasses the social dimension of the Filipino's character. Virgilio Enriquez views *kapwa* as the recognition of "shared identity" or the unity of self with others which accounts for much of the emphasis in

equality as the basis of inter-relationship. Thus people may have different status in the social hierarchy but they must treat each other equally as *kapwa-tao*.

*Kapwa*, according to Jocano, is used to emphasize the high premium Filipinos place on relationships. Filipinos place great importance on group relations than on individual assertion of rights and obligations. Thus, when a Filipino talks about himself he also makes reference of others as evident in the use of *amin*, *tayo* or *kami*. When he talks about others, he refers to them as *sila* or *kayo*. *Ako* is used mainly in private conversations and among peers. When used in a public forum or gathering, it is uttered simply to emphasize a factual point and not to separate oneself from others.

#### 4. PAGKATAO

*Pagkatao* refers to the essence of one's humanity. It refers to the quest for wholeness in one's being and existence, as in the saying "*madaling maging tao, mahirap magpakatao*" (it is easier to be borne human than to be humane) Hence, to say "*magpakatao*" means to be true to oneself. It almost has a very other-worldly connotation similar to the search for the divinity within.

#### *Cooperative Values thru the Filipino Lens*

Studying the cooperative values that ICA acknowledged and defined, we will find that they are congruent with Filipino values. We need only use the Filipino language as our filtering mechanism because values are best expressed in the language of the culture that conceived them.

Cooperative Values	Filipino Values
Self-help	Pag-asa sa sarili, Sariling Sikap, Kusang Loob
Self-responsibility	Pag-asa sa sarili, Sariling Pamamahala, Sariling Paninindigan
Equality	Pagkakapantay-pantay, Pakikipagkapwa-tao
Equity	Pakikipagkapwa-tao, Pagpapakamakatao
Solidarity	Pagtutulungan, Pagdadamayan, Bayanihan, Pakikipag-ugnayan



### 1. Self-help

ICA definition: based on the belief that all people can and should strive to control their own destiny. Full development can take place only in association with others.

Filipino definition: *Pag-asa sa sarili, Sariling Sikap, Kusang Loob*

- Self-help in Filipino culture is based on reciprocity and collectivity. Filipinos typically use *amin, sila, nila, tayo, kayo*; always the self in reference to others. Self-help takes the self and "others" into consideration—you and me comprising a "we"—hence, collectivity. Filipinos are more comfortable working on a collective effort rather than going solo.

### 2. Self-responsibility

ICA definition: means that members assume responsibility for the establishment of their cooperative and its continuing vitality. Members are responsible for ensuring that their cooperative remains independent from other public and private organizations.

Filipino definition: *Sariling Pamamahala; Pag-asa sa sarili*

- Self-responsibility again has a reciprocal and collective dimension. The idea of *pamamahala* and its variations of *pagkabahala, abalabin, and nababahala* refer to a deep sense of trust and reliance in doing a task or solving a problem. Inherent in *pamamahala* is the sense of trust given to the person being addressed, as in *bahala ka ryan* (be responsible there) or *ikaw ang bahala dini* (be responsible here) (Jocano 1999).

### 3. Equality

ICA Definition: means that the basic unit of the cooperative is the member who is either a human being or a group of human beings. Members have the right to participate, be informed, to be heard, as well as to be involved in decision making. Members should treat everyone equally as possible, a continuing challenge for all cooperatives.

Filipino Definition: *Pagkakapantay-pantay; pakikipag-kapwa*

- The Filipino concept of *pagkakapantay pantay* should not be seen in terms of class leveling because Filipino society is highly stratified and

hierarchical. It should be viewed in the context of “treating others as fellow human beings” as reflected in the concept of *pakikipag-kapwa*.

- *Pakikipag-kapwa* means treating others as one wishes to be treated regardless of economic or social status; it exemplifies the golden rule of doing unto others as you would want others do unto you.

#### 4. Equity

ICA Definition: is a never ending challenge and refers to how members are treated within the cooperative. Members should be treated equitably in terms of payment of patronage dividends, entitlement to capital reserve, and reduction in charges.

Filipino Definition: *Pakikipagkapwa-tao; Pagpapakamakatao*

- ICA's definition of equity takes on an economic dimension and refers to equitable allocation of resources. But the concept of *pagpapakamakatao* goes deeper than just looking after physical needs. There are other more important layers or levels in one's *pagkatao* (or humanity) which have to be nourished and sustained, such as the need for safety, security, belonging, love, esteem and self actualization. The satisfaction of one's mental, emotional and spiritual well-being gives a sense of fulfillment and a genuine feeling of being truly alive, human and divine.

#### 5. Solidarity

ICA definition: affirmation that cooperative action is not just a disguised form of limited self interest; and that the cooperative is more than just an association of members but an affirmation of collective strength and mutual responsibility. Cooperatives must stand together and aspire for the creation of a united coop movement locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Filipino Definition: *Bayanihan, Pagtutulungan, Pagdadamayan, Pakikipag-ugnayan, Pakikipagkapatiran, Pakikiisa*

- *Bayanihan* is an age-old concept of cooperative endeavor in Filipino communities which goes to show our natural affinity for cooperativism. *Bayanihan* is reciprocity and collectivity in lending assistance in times of stress and need. However, much of *bayanihan* is lost in contemporary urban living and replaced by the *kanya-kanya* (to each his own) mentality

due to the free enterprise system. Much of the spirit of *bayanihan* has been drowned by excessive opposition, division, factionalism, and crab mentality.

The notion of solidarity in the Filipino value system has to be seen in the context of the social structure in which the typical Filipino finds himself. The Filipino's sense of brotherhood emanates from his widening circle of relations starting with the family, kin, and peers. People in communities are tied by blood, affinity, kinship and long term encounters in the community. There are norms that regulate behavior in the socialization process to ensure that the levels of *pagdadamayan*, *pagtutulungan*, and *pakikipag-ugnayan* are sincere and deep. The familial and personal approach is very important. Face to face encounters are more important than simply executing orders or issuing memos. There has to be a climate of trust in social and interpersonal exchange.

### **Cooperative Ethics Translated into the Filipino Value System**

According to the ICA, ethics are behavioral manifestations of values. They refer to the code of conduct that the cooperative upholds to guide its members in determining right from wrong. We shall now attempt to put cooperative ethics squarely in the context of the Filipino value system. Ethics, according to the ICA, has the following elements: caring, honesty, openness, and social responsibility.

#### **Caring**

Filipinos are naturally caring people. Our level of caring springs from our sense of family and extends to kin, friends, and the community. This is more evident in rural areas where relatives and family members live close by. *Mapagmahal*, *mapag-aruga* and *mapagkalinga* are just some of the words to describe our sense of caring. Children are cared for even by extended family members and it is unheard of among Filipinos to abandon or give up their elders to foster homes. Because of this natural predisposition to look after one another, it is not surprising why care giving is a job most Filipinos overseas are known for.

It is said that Filipinos are basically "feeling" people. The downside, of course, is the tendency to become overly emotional and to treat criticisms as personal. Caring has much to do with *damdamin*, which, according

to Jocano, is the standard by which a Filipino thinks, believes, and does something. "It is said that to understand the Filipino, it is necessary to first understand his *damdamin* to have an intuitive feel of his *kalooban*" (Jocano 1999).

### **Honesty**

Honesty does not seem to be among the virtues Filipinos can be proud of given the blatant corruption and criminality that abound everywhere. But with proper motivation, Filipinos can rise to a high level of morality in the spirit of service. This is because concepts such as *kagandahang asal* (good moral conduct) and *dangal* (honor) are deeply embedded in Filipino culture.

*Asal* may be viewed as the inner model of external behavior and reality. It is the outward expression of one's *pagkatao* (inner being) (Jocano 1999). It is the standard for what is ideal, virtuous, beautiful and true in life. *Asal* is the measure by which human behavior is recognized, evaluated and judged as excellent or mediocre, desirable or undesirable, right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, and appropriate or inappropriate. It is very much related to the concept of *pagmamasid* (mindfulness, alertness) which means to look at certain events or actions attentively or carefully.

*Dangal* or honor, on the other hand, means being morally upright in thoughts, words and deeds, and keeping an unblemished reputation in accordance with the rules of propriety, order, continuity and coherence in the Filipino way of life. As a norm, it is used to characterize identity; pride; and commitment to ideas, principles, practices, and people (Jocano 1999).

### **Openness**

Openness means being *bukas-loob* (open-hearted). *Hayag* is its rough equivalent in Filipino, which literally translates to transparency. This is one trait that is often misunderstood because Filipinos do not open up easily and would rather keep things to themselves or *sinasarili* (keeping to one's self) due to shame, embarrassment, timidity or shyness. *Hiya* (shame or the fear of losing face) is one trait which prevents Filipinos from being totally open and above board. On a positive note though, *hiya*, can also denote protecting one's self esteem and dignity.

It is essential to establish a certain level of trust and confidence to be able to coax a Filipino from his shell. But even then, there are necessary rituals of words and actions that have to be observed in the communication process. Sensitivity (*pagkamaramdamin*) prevents Filipinos from showing their true feelings for fear of hurting other people.

### **Social Responsibility**

The Filipino's sense of responsibility has many facets: *pananagutan* (accountability), *pagkabahala* (concern) and *pagmamalasakit* (solicitude, commitment).

*Pananagutan* means looking after others. It means being our own brothers' keeper. *Pananagutan* goes hand in hand with *malasakit* or solicitous concern for other's welfare. *Malasakit* means going through the trouble or pain of caring for others.

*Pananagutan* is also related to *pagkabahala* (or to worry over something or someone) as in the phrase, "*ako ang bahala sa iyo*" (leave everything to me) or in the aphorism, *bahala ka* (I rely on you) or *bahala ka sa akin* (I depend on you). Self-responsibility in the Filipino value system has to do with mutual obligations in keeping with the spirit of collectivity and reciprocity.

### **Value-led Approach to Management: Incorporating Filipino Values in a Positive Way**

Cooperatives derive their existence and sustenance from their symbiotic relationship within the community. They were put up using the pooled resources of the people in the community. They render services to the community. Their viability also depends on the patronage and support of the community. Even the employees of the cooperative are mostly recruited from members of the community.

The life of the cooperative is intimately tied to the well-being of the community. If the fundamentals of the community—the economic, political, cultural and environmental aspects—are sound, the cooperative is bound to flourish. But if the community is floundering for various reasons, the cooperative may not become sustainable. It is, therefore, important for the cooperative to look into all aspects of community living if it wants to ensure its survival and profitability.

Management must, therefore, find congruent values that would best serve the purposes of the cooperative. An appreciation of the Filipino value system is a good starting point for they may very well fill the gaps in the search for a cooperative management system that works best for Filipinos.

The following are management approaches that are found to work best with Filipinos:

- Filipinos thrive in an atmosphere of camaraderie (*pakikisama*), adaptability (*pakikitungo*) and sympathy (*pakikipagdamayan*). Filipinos respect age, wisdom, and experience since these are ingrained by parents at home. However, a good manager would be wise to bridge the hierarchic distance by showing genuine concern for employees rather than just extracting output for a day's work. There are intangible elements in a working relationship that will pay off in the long run such as warmth, concern, and care.
- To develop a healthy relationship, there must be trust (*tiwala*) which will, in turn, generate persistence (*katapatang loob*), inner strength (*tibay ng loob*) and will power (*lakas ng loob*). A Filipino who is trusted will develop enthusiasm (*sigla*), competence (*kagalingan*) and aptitude (*kakayahan*), which in turn will bring out latent traits such as industry (*masikap*), discipline (*masinop*), and expertise (*mahusay*).
- The best leadership style for Filipinos is described as giving *gabay* or *patnubay* (guidance), which is a combination of paternalism, familism and personalism. The meaning of *patnubay* goes beyond giving orders or issuing commands and responsibilities. *Patnubayan* or to give *patnubay* is to put a person under one's stewardship and nurturing and developing him thoughtfully until he can be on his own. It means giving solicitous advice and showing true concern by being available for the person when needed.
- To get the cooperation of Filipinos, one should spend time and effort listening and seeking rapport through *pagsangguni* (consultation), *paghikayat* (persuasion) and *pagkakasundo* (consensus). The personalized approach works best even in a collective or group setting because individual attention strengthens the Filipino's sense of pride and identity.

- Communication has to take place in an atmosphere of respect (*paggalang*) so that nobody loses face (*kahihiyang*), incur hurt feelings (*maramdamin*), or hurt pride (*amor propio* or self esteem). One needs to feel his way into the Filipino's heart (*pakiramdaman*) and be sensitive to his inner feelings (*nilolooob or saloobin*).
- Filipinos are not as verbally expressive as Westerners. One should be sensitive to physical gestures or facial expressions to read the nuances of Filipino feelings. Filipinos value face to face communication more than the impersonal style of letters or memos. Informal interaction in a non-threatening atmosphere works best.

Jocano (1999) gave the following pointers in dealing with Filipino managers, supervisors, employees and workers:

- Filipinos are sensitive. Do not be confrontational; be consultative.
- Filipinos are highly personal in their ways. Do not impose; coordinate.
- Filipinos are familistic. Do not be individualistic; be consensual.
- Filipinos tend to depend on their elders. Do not be bureaucratic; facilitate.
- Filipinos give deference to their superiors. Do not be autocratic; be democratic.
- Filipinos want to be noticed. Do not be impersonal; show concern.
- Filipinos expect to be guided by their superiors. Provide direction.
- Filipinos are paternalistic in their perspective. Provide the leadership.

By a contrivance of historical or political factors, some Filipino values have been corrupted, abused or distorted such that their practice has become counterproductive in a world that gives high premium to corporatist Western and modern management approaches. Filipino values are positive per se but over the years some of these values have come to assume negative connotations. Some authors have explained Filipino values in terms of their duality or bipolarity:

POSITIVE VALUES	NEGATIVE VALUES
<i>Pakikipagkapwa-tao</i>	<i>Bata-bata/Palakasan System</i>
Familism	Nepotism
Hard work, industry	Lack of discipline/ <i>Ningas cogon</i>
Ability to survive, enterprising	<i>Ningas cogon</i> , easily discouraged
Resilience and Religiosity	<i>Bahala na</i> , Passivity
Ability to survive, enterprising	<i>Ningas cogon</i> , easily discouraged
<i>Pakikisama/Pagtutulungan</i>	<i>Kanya-kanya/crab mentality</i>

The inconsistency or discrepancy in Filipino values is also glaring in the Filipino habit of saying yes when they actually mean something else. Jocano (1999) says an average Filipino will say yes (or nod his head as if in agreement) when:

- he does not know
- he wants to impress
- he is annoyed
- he wants to end the conversation
- he half-understood what was said
- he is not sure of himself or
- he thinks he knows better than the one speaking

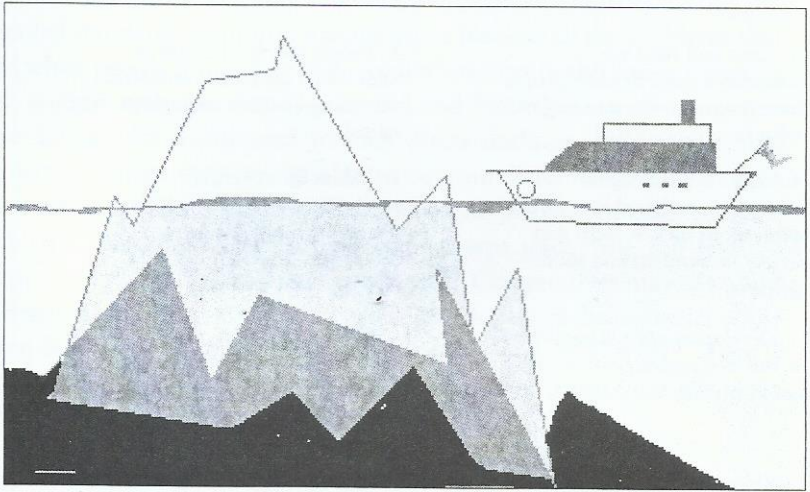
### **Cross Cultural Study: High Context vs. Low Context**

Edward Hall, an American anthropologist, made a lifelong research on cultural differences and he came to the conclusion that basic differences in the way members of different cultures perceive reality were responsible for the most fundamental of miscommunications. He popularized the concepts of "high context" and "low context" to describe broad cultural differences between societies.

Hall said that "high context" refers to societies or groups where people have close connections over a long period of time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are not made explicit because most members know what



to do and what to think from years of interaction with each other. "Low context" refers to societies where people tend to have many connections but of shorter duration. In these societies, cultural behavior and beliefs may need to be spelled out explicitly so that those coming into the cultural environment will know how to behave. Most Asian societies with long history and traditions reflect a high context culture while modern, Western societies exhibit a low context culture.



Hall popularized the "iceberg" metaphor to explain the meaning of culture. The iceberg metaphor shows a cruise ship sailing close to an iceberg. Part of the iceberg is immediately visible; part of it emerges and submerges with the tides and its foundations go deep beneath the surface (Moore n.d.).

The aspects of culture that are above the waterline are explicit, visible, and taught. Below the waterline are those aspects of culture that are implicit, non-verbal, and unconscious. They represent those assumptions, habits and beliefs that are congealed over lifetimes and communicated indirectly or unconsciously in various ways through body expressions, eye movements, and hand gestures. Thus, a person who is entering a particular "cultural world space" (a country or territory) for the first time will hear the words spoken, but not its meaning, will join in the rituals but not understand its significance, will break bread with the inhabitants but will not readily find true acceptance.

Below is a dichotomy of high context, low context cultures as explained by Hall:

**HIGH CONTEXT**

1. Relational, Collectivist, Intuitive, Contemplative.
2. Emphasis on interpersonal relationship; values closeness and ties.
3. Laws and rules are considered more flexible; people have internal understanding of what is communicated.
4. Values indirect verbal interaction and read non-verbal expressions such as facial and bodily movements and subtle gestures.
5. Developing trust is important in business transactions; avoids confrontation and debate.
6. People-centered; prefers group harmony to individual achievement; decisions and activities focus around face-to-face relationship.
7. Strong boundaries; deals with who is accepted as belonging versus who is considered an "outsider."

**LOW CONTEXT**

1. Logical, linear, individualistic, action oriented.
2. Tends to develop transitory personal relationships.
3. People play by the laws or rules which are strictly enforced; written agreements are highly valued.
4. Values direct verbal expression; emphasizes highly structured messages; gives details and places greater stress on words and technical signs.
5. Communications are expected to be straightforward, concise and efficient in telling what actions are expected; encourages open disagreement.
6. Task-centered; decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done and the division of responsibilities.
7. More fluid relationships and boundaries; the individual stands out rather than the group.

The dichotomy of cultural contexts is not as pronounced as it used to be simply because of the flattening effect of globalization and communications technology. Global commerce and trade have simplified and unified cultures such that people adopt the same taste, behavior, attitude, and outlook in life. People working in a corporate setting, for example, have no problem conforming to the company's demands and expectations because these are communicated in explicit ways through meetings, memos, manuals, bulletin boards, and the like. Likewise, people are expected to adapt specific behavior that spell recognition or

promotion such as being independent, articulate, assertive, quick-witted, and well-informed.

A corporate culture may be alien in a cooperative setting where social interactions are not bound by company rules and regulations but by the age old habits of *pakikisama*, *pakikibagay* or *pakikitungo* (conforming for social acceptance). Much as these interpersonal relationships are commendable they may not be helpful when a cooperative tries to conform to global standards. Communication gap is just one of the problems that arise when people bring their own cultural context in the background. A high context manager may appear cold and insensitive to a low context subordinate who is not used to such direct dealings. Likewise a high context employee may not be able to communicate his grievances to a low context superior because of held beliefs he has carried from his past. Problems, issues and concerns are often swept under the rug because people operate on different levels or planes. Cooperatives may thus find themselves in dilemma when they have to adopt a global mindset while doing business in a community that is used to the "old" ways. There is always the problem of achieving balance between promoting efficiency and productivity and keeping traditional values intact.

Characteristically, the Filipino's style of communication is a practical mix of low context and high context. At worse, it shifts from one extreme context to the other. Take for example the Filipino's approach to conflict situations. Filipinos are considered passive, evasive and non-confrontational but there is a tinderbox that lies within, which when ignited can rouse the Filipinos to continuous conflict, tension and opposition, and to which, there is hardly any resolution in sight.

## Notes

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