

Universalism vs. particularism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Universalism vs. Particularism is a concept forwarded by Fons Trompenaars, a Dutch author. Basically, this dimension asks if which is more important to you, rules or relationships. The Universalist, or rule-based, approach is roughly: " What is good and right can be defined and ALWAYS applies. " In particularistic cultures, far greater attention is given to the obligations of relationships and unique circumstances. Universalism vs. Particularism indicates how a society applies rules of morals and ethics. In a Universal society such as the U. S. , rules and contracts are developed which can apply in any situation.

For example, take the case of trying to cross the street at the red light. In a very rule-based society like the U. S. , you will still be frowned at even if there is no traffic. It tends to imply equality in the sense that all persons, or citizens, falling under the rule should be treated the same. On the contrary, in Asian societies like Taiwan, where particularist judgments focus on the exceptional nature of circumstances, it is likely to be OK with one if it is his/her brothers or friends that violate the traffic rule. These people are not " citizens", but their " friends" or " brothers".

This difference probably explains why there have been difficulties in implementing a judicial system that is credible in our country. Strong universalist cultures use the court to mediate conflicts. The more universal a country is the greater is the need to protect the truth. International operating businesses think more likely in an universalistic way. When universalistic business people agree to a contract relating to a high value deal there are always lawyers involved to assure that every detail is correctly mentioned and protected by a paragraph.

In case one party would break a part of the committed deal it is possible to draw the consequences and sue the counterpart. In particularistic cultures legal contracts don't only keep their promises something is written down on paper. More than that they trust, rely and believe in the business relationship which was build up in the time before the contract was discussed. Chinese business people trust very much on relationships between the partners and strict regulations/formulations would probably offend/insult the partner because they would get the idea that they aren't trustful and are cheater.

The importance of relationships again solidity be carefully considered and taken into account especially from universalistic cultures when dealing with particularistic cultures. Chinese try to keep the contracts vague and not too tied. It might happen that Chinese business people will still try to negotiate afterwards even the contract was already signed/closed and agreed from all sites. In negotiations Chinese will spend a lot of time in building up a relationship with their business partners so the actual negotiation will be at the end of the meeting time.

While Americans dealing with Chinese, Americans often try to close deals as fast as possible. But as a result of the Chinese way to make deals the Americans might commit more advantages than first thought just to rush forward and close a deal. This can be an advantage for particularistic cultures. Universalist cultures focus normally more on rules than on relationships. For instance American employees compete hard for better job positions and to climb up in the hierarchy and earn more money.

They do this without caring for colleagues and the relationship with them. In comparison, particularistic cultures like China focus heavily on relationships. When working with/managing particularistic, universalists should build informal networks and create private understandings as well as they should try to look for fairness in doing business by treating and looking on cases each as a specific one. Particularistic cultures avoid rigid or standardized systems to manage across cultures.

They rather prefer to leave some room for changes which might occur in the future process. Some stereotypes say that Germans are talented to build infrastructure and Americans are excellent to develop and invent new products/ideas. When markets became more individual and specific the USA came into trouble with their way of mass production and mass marketing. Especially in competition with particularistic countries like France who is orientated on individual and customized products.