What Constitutes "Culture" in International Cross-Cultural Collaborations

Background: In today's globalized world, knowledge exchange and cross-cultural engagement is a welcoming trend in research and practice. While there are differing ideas about what constitutes 'culture' in international collaboration, there is a general consensus that culture needs to be understood in the local-global, sociocultural, and sociopolitical contexts. Static and taken-for-granted assumptions about culture create barriers to effective knowledge exchange and uptake.

Aims: Drawing on insights gained in Linking Hearts, a Canada-China collaborative implementation project to reduce stigma and promote mental health, we will identify the key aspects of 'culture' in international collaboration and explicate their effects on implementation.

Methods: In this presentation, we will (de)construct culture by extending the analysis of culture as social relations at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Multi-level analyses enable us to examine the effects of overlapping and contradicting cultural perspectives and practices on collaborative processes and outcomes. We focus on how culture is manifested as personal sense-making, interpersonal dynamics, interdisciplinary interactions, organizational/institutional practices, and societal norms and values.

Results: Findings of Linking Hearts show that both commonality and variation in cultural values and perspectives exist across generations, disciplines, gender, geographic origins, professional roles, social groups, and institutions. The shared and differing cultural practices were reflected in the communications, interactions and decision-making within and across the three research operational clusters. Analysis of team communication, research processes and project outcomes indicates that examining 'culture' as social relations enhances our understanding of how the top-down and bottom-up approaches work in tandem to address the project needs.

Implications: Culture as social relations is an important concept to explore in cross-cultural collaboration in mental health research. It allows us to engage in open dialogue about how cultural practices at the individual, organizational, community and societal levels shape collaborative efforts in promoting mental health within and across nations.

Learning Objectives:
1. Identify the multi-layered, multi-dimensional aspects of culture in international collaborations as embedded in social relations, transactions, and dynamic processes.
2. Develop an approach to identify and formulate an understanding on the varied challenges of cross-cultural dynamics in international collaborations.

References:
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