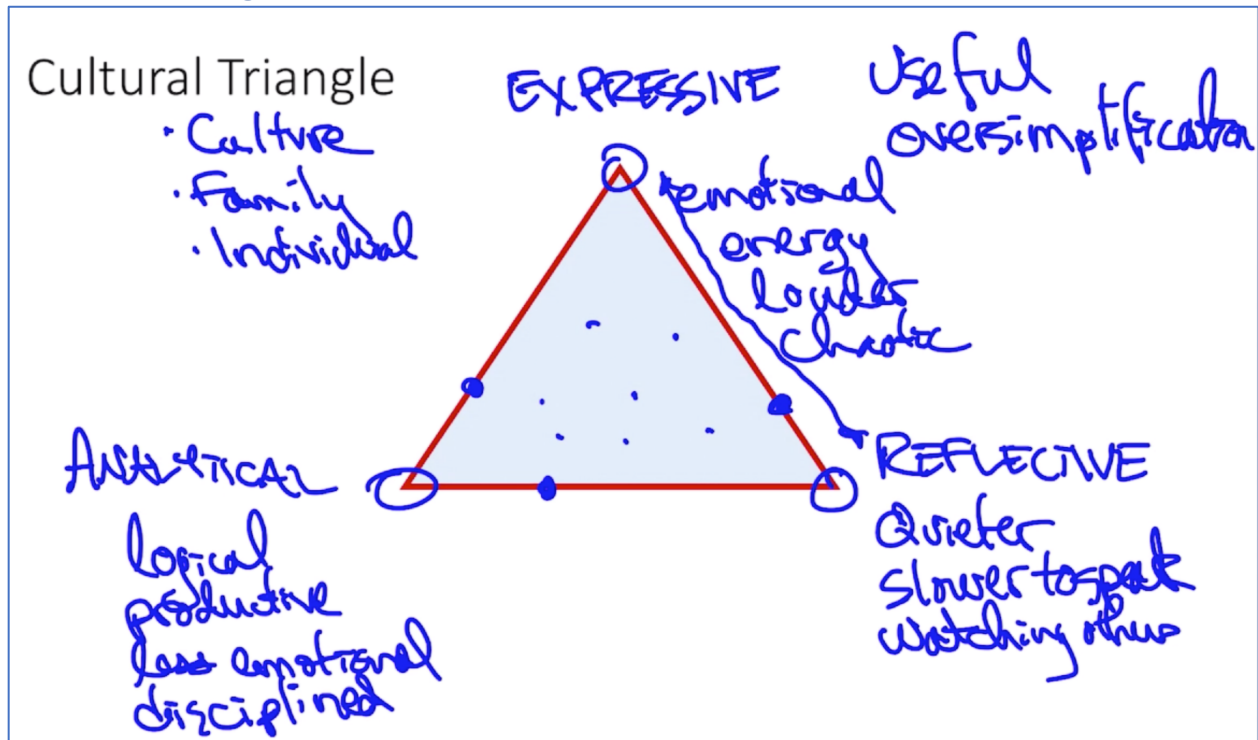


## Cultural Triangle



I want to describe a cultural triangle that has been a useful tool for us. Let me first say that we think of this as a useful oversimplification. What I mean by that is that this is too simple. It doesn't capture the which we engage in the world. And yet we have found it to be a very useful tool to help us think about our lives together and ways in which we are different from each other, in good ways.

This idea says that that we can lay out aspects of our cultures on a triangle, and each point in the triangle represents an inclination, a tendency for a way to behave. I'm going to start at the top point here and say, for some cultures or some aspects of cultures, we can be very emotional. There's a lot of energy that people have in this category. They tend to be louder and it tends to be more chaotic, less planned, less anticipation of where it's going to go.

This other corner is a group of people, or individuals, who tend to be much quieter. They tend to be much slower to speak, and they tend to spend a lot of time watching others in terms of care, of paying attention to who is being included and left out, and how is everyone experiencing this.

The third point in the triangle: this is people or cultures that tend to be very logical. They tend to focus on productivity, so they're very productive. They get their work done orderly and on time. They tend to be less emotional and they often are very disciplined. They do the one thing that needs to be done, and then they move on to do another thing.

We found it to be useful to give these some names. This first group we think of as being

"expressive." These are people or groups where there's a lot of expression, a lot of communicating what it is that I'm feeling and how I'm experiencing the world right now. There tends to be a lot of passion. You tend to know what expressive people think.

In this corner down here, we refer to these as "reflective" people. They spend a lot more time thinking than speaking. They reflect on others. They reflect on their own experience and they process things (very often) internally. It can often be much more challenging to know what a reflective person thinks because it's not as natural or common for them to be quick to tell the details of how they're experiencing the world.

In the third corner, we have people that we refer to as "analytical" people. These are people who like to analyze, who are very good at looking at the facts and finding out what's logical and figuring out an ideal path in things.

Now as I said, this is a useful oversimplification. These aren't just cultures but we do see how there's a lot of variation among these things among cultures. We also see within families in a culture, as well as individual personality. Somebody can be in a culture that is largely expressive but be a rather reflective person. Or the reverse. We also recognize that essentially nobody lives in these corners. Some of us are rather analytical people who talk a lot about our analysis. Some of us are rather analytical people but maybe we don't speak as much... we're more reflective. Whereas some of us are very reflective where we have an ability to talk about our experience, but the tendency is to be watching, slower to speak... certainly able to communicate what we're thinking and not opposed to it but being more reflective.

So we find ourselves, each person, and perhaps in different ways at different places, on this cultural triangle. So there's been an important thing for us to say: How do we behave together if this is true? You can see where, as a simple example, there can be some challenge in an expressive person and a reflective person loving each other because their ways of engaging might be very different. So it's important for us to better understand ourselves and each other, and then know how to love each other in this.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Where would you place yourself in this triangle? Remember, no one is purely a single aspect of this triangle.
2. Where would you place your home culture in this triangle? How about the subculture where you spend much of your time today?
3. What might it look like to love and value someone who lives most naturally in each of these corners?