

**A CADRE Webinar**  
**Exploring the Cultural Dimensions of Conflict**  
**Presented by Sukhsimranjit Singh, February 28, 2013**  
**Transcript**

**MARSHALL PETER:** Hello and thank you for joining CADRE's webinar on *Exploring the Cultural Dimensions of Conflict*. We're delighted today to be joined by Professor Sukh Singh. Professor Singh serves as Associate Director for the nationally recognized Center for Dispute Resolution at Willamette University College of Law. He teaches Arbitration Law and Advocacy, Cross-Cultural Dispute Resolution, Negotiation, and Mediation Theory and Advocacy. He has mediated family, cross-cultural and inter-religious disputes and has spoken about cross-cultural conflict resolution in the United States, Europe and Asia. He has trained Judicial Officers in dispute resolution, consulted with the private and public sector and is an active mediator in the areas of commercial, family, and cross-cultural conflicts. He is co-chair of the American Bar Association's Section on Dispute Resolution-Committee on Associate Issues, and is a board member of the Oregon Mediation Association.

Professor Singh completed his post-graduate fellowship in dispute resolution at the Dispute Resolution Institute at Hamline University School of Law, where he taught dispute resolution courses in France and Spain. He obtained his LL.M. in Dispute Resolution with a full fellowship at the University of Missouri-Columbia, while serving as legal research associate with the UMC School of Medicine. Professor Singh obtained his B.A. and LL.B. with a gold medal from the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research, University of Law, Hyderabad, one of India's premier law schools. It's been our great pleasure here at CADRE to have a chance to get to know Sukh and we believe that he is going to deliver a tremendous training opportunity for us today. So please, Sukh, take it away.

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Thank you. Thank you everyone for your time and for joining us this afternoon. First of all I want to thank, it's my culture, to thank, who brought me here, I want to thank Marshall Peter, Phil Moses, here at CADRE and all, all of you, including Anita who is sitting next to me, for being here to listen to me. A couple of comments before I even begin, in terms of what I'm going to talk about. Culture is such a diverse and dense topic that I no way come across, and want to come across as an expert. Actually there is no expert on culture. It is such a learning journey that I will be today sharing my life experiences. I will be sharing with you some of the trainings and mediation work I've done in culture and cross cultural dispute resolution and lastly I'll be sharing with you some of the readings that I have done and some of the resources that you may take a look at moving on in your journeys of learning about cross cultural dispute resolution.

Two things as I begin. I want you to think about two questions. First, what is culture? And two, how important is culture to you? Let me repeat those questions again. What is culture? So how do you view culture? It's a very generic term today being used in at least twenty-five major fields. Media culture, popular culture, law culture, business culture, disability culture, educational culture, practice culture, global culture, so forth and so on. How, how does it affect to you is my question to you? Think about it as we move on.

Let me say a couple of more words about my introduction. Marshall has done a tremendous job saying all the wonderful things about me but I want to add few more things which are personal. Number one is my name. My full name, which hasn't been said yet, is Sukhsimranjit Singh. It is a cross cultural name. And let's begin with our American journey of thinking about culture from my name. It has been so difficult for me to reduce my name from Sukhsimranjit to Sukh. And here's the reason why. First name,

first Sukh means prosperity and happiness, simran means remembering someone above you by chanting, by mediating, and jit means when. So my first name means that I can accomplish a lot if I stay humble, if I remember there is someone above me, be it god, be it my parents, be it my mentors, and I need to stay happy throughout to spread happiness around me. So my name means a lot to me and my American friends asked me to cut my name into Sukh and I thought should I do it or not. I agreed to do it because at the end of the day I wanted to live in US because I loved US and my wife is from US and I thought I need to change, I need to adapt, I need to adopt to what America has to offer. And one thing America has to offer is short memories. Americans per se love short words, short memories, and I changed my name from Sukhsimranjit to Sukh, but having said that, if you really want to respect my name and talk to me in future, if you call me Sukhsimranjit I would love it.

Let's begin with my first slide. I posed you my first question and the question is: what is your culture? We'll come to that. I have a PowerPoint slide where I will define what is culture to me and my readings and my work. But who am I is something I also want to introduce. Again, a personal journey. I came to US in 2005, around 2005. And I want to explain to you why I came to US because that defines my culture. My sister was done arranged marriage in California. She got arranged marriage by my father and I was accomplice to the decision. After her arranged marriage I felt so burdened in some sense that I want to be close to her, make sure she's happy that I decided I need to come closer to her. My main reason to come to United States was to follow my sister's steps and I figured out the best way to go do it is through education. So I was already practicing law at Supreme Court of India and I had highest court of my state in Punjab in Haryana. I was doing a lot of human rights litigation. I was already started mediating cases between different cultures, different faiths, it was fascinating to me. But constantly inside me a cultural appeal came to me and that is I need to be close to my family and my only sibling, my sister. So I became, now I call, Indo-American, because I can't quit how I think being an Indian for most of my life and for the later part of my life, close to ten years, I'm an American. So I have this dual zone of culture. I think as an Indian and as an American. Through some of my PowerPoint slides I will show you what I mean by that.

Now I'm also a mediator. I mediate cross cultural disputes. I've mediated an extensive and dense and I call it an old and historic church dispute in Oregon successfully and I'm very proud of it and I'll share that story with you without naming the church and without naming the parties. But the core of my heart and the core of my culture is teaching. I love teaching because of the picture you see on your PowerPoint. It's the school where my father is a teacher. My father is vice chancellor of this college called Khalsa College Amritsar and I've seen him teaching since I was teenager. He's a terrific teacher. I wanted to be like him. I'm following his path at least to the point I can. And I became a teacher. I think each one of us belong to our parents at some point. That's our history, that's our, that's who we are, that's how we connect. And part of our culture comes from our parents, if not a lot of it.

I'm also a Sikh, I wear a turban. Today I wanted to talk to Marshall and ask if a video will be shown, because usually people will see my body language and they can tell a lot about my culture, but it's a challenge to show my body language through a PowerPoint, therefore I'm going to show you a lot of pictures through the PowerPoint, at least we can give away some of my body language through it if I can. Sikh means I wear a turban and a beard and I live in America. I recently published an article in Statesman Journal calling, It's Time to Unify. If you Google it you'll find it. I won't speak more about my Sikhism but the fact that I love living here and the freedom I enjoy, the wisdom I enjoy among Americans is amazing. Part of the reason we are doing this in US right now and not in India is because Americans are constantly curious to learn about new things and that's your culture which I want to bring to your mind because we usually forget what we have. We look at the other side and want to learn

about other sides, but we as Americans also have a very strong culture. I'm also a father; my daughter is three years old. She defines me in every sense. From the morning when she wakes up she asks me sometimes, "Dad, can we go out and have ice cream and candies?" when she sees that my mood is good and when she sees that my mood is not good she goes, "Daddy, let's go outside." She negotiates with me constantly. She change me how I am. I am also husband to American woman. My wife is from L.A., from Los Angeles, and she teaches me about American culture every day. And I, I can bet you on that. She does, and she changes me every day. I'm also a son as I've already said. My parents define a lot of who I am today. And I will come back to why I put the son up there in a few minutes as I show you slide on arranged marriage.

I'm going to speak about five things, after what I've already spoken about. So let's say I've already, I'm going to talk about 6 things. So next five things are: dimensions of conflict – how do we see conflict? A very small introduction into cross cultural dimensions to conflict. Second, I'll define culture with you. If you have any questions by then, please ask. Marshall, will be happy to interrupt me if he believes that he should interrupt me. Third, I will talk about cultural influence on conflict. Probably the most important part of my talk will be conflict resolution and culture. Here I will speak about my mediation life, my learnings from doing different mediations and training across the world. Particular to India, Spain, France and parts of US and lastly I'll give you resources before I, I quit. Before I move onto my first segment, dimensions of conflict, I want to say one thing about my challenge. I'm polychronic in my mind, which means I see time with very elastic...

**MARSHALL PETER:** I'm going to interrupt for a second we can hear someone talking who probably just joined the call. Please press star six to mute your phone. [Echo] [Pause]

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** I'm going to start with, with one sharing that I was going to share with you and that is polychronatism. And if you haven't thought about it yet, probably most of you have, there are two kinds of mindsets in the world, at least two kinds of mindsets in terms of how we view time. Monochronatism and polychronatism. And I want to right now acknowledge a person who is an American and who has done the most wonderful work on the time thinking. Edward Hall. E-D-W-A-R-D. Edward Hall - fantastic writer, fantastic person, a scholar that I highly admire. He's written many books including, The Dimensions of Time, that I highly recommend.

I'm going to move on to my next slide saying that I'm going to, it's a challenge for me to restrict my talk to one hour because I see time elastically. And, well, we'll see if I win today's struggle or not. But let's go on to my next slide. My initial request, before I begin my next segment, is I ask you two questions, if you remember, to think about yourself. One was, what is culture and two was why is culture important. In terms of my second question, if you look at what I have on the PowerPoint, let's take a moment to read it. There shall be, there should be zeal to learn about a new culture. There should be an honest non-judgmental approach to learning the new culture. Take it this way. A new culture will only adopt you if you are willing to accept that culture without inhibitions. And most of you have understood it by now. What I'm trying tell here is attitude. I can't teach you anything about culture. No teacher on Earth can teach you anything about culture and each other about culture if you don't have an attitude to learning. The first thing we need to know about cross culture is that there is such a vast amount of material out there; we're like a drop in the sea. There's a sea out there that we can swim in if we want to learn about different cultures but it's all about how we see it. It's all about our lenses. Are we closed to those cultures or are we open to those cultures? And I'm defining culture broadly here and I'm going to come and talk about that in a second.

To comment on different dimensions of culture, cultures perceive and addresses conflict differently. And I want to say, I have two stories for that. You can read more about this from this nice essay which is available for free on SSRN by my co-author Bee Chen Goh who's from Australia and writes wonderfully on cross cultural negotiations, specifically on how to negotiate with China and Chinese citizens. She, I and a couple of other amazing co-authors I've got, for example, Jay Folberg from JAMS, has written this article while we visited China and we were trying to see how we interact with culture in China. And we all were so different in our writing, in our approach, because we all carried our culture to China – an Australian culture, an Indo-American culture, an American culture and another culture. It was amazing experience as we wrote that essay and you can read that online.

The two stories I'm going to speak about right now when I talk about how cultures view conflict differently. Let's take a look at my first story. If you see in the right hand side of this picture in the background it says the University of Mumbai, Department of Law. This is the same university where President Obama gave a lecture a year or so ago. It's a very historic university. I am a humble man in many ways, I am young, I am Indo-American, I am learning about many different cultures, but what made me more humble was this university faculty, as you can see in this picture. They were so, so generous when I went there. I can't just explain in my words but I'm going to try to. Number one - My talk was supposed to be at nine in the morning and I reached the place at 8:45 thinking from an American lens and this is by the way March of last year, 2012 March. So I, I approached the place at 8:45 and the first question the person who was standing right to me who was the principal at that time asked me, "Have you had breakfast?" I gave an honest reply, I said, "Sir, I ate little bit, but I don't think it was a breakfast." Then came, then came my first shock. Now you have to see I'm an Indian and I'm back to India after many years living in US and see how I'm thinking when I said I had breakfast. I was honest, I gave an honest reply, I did not. Low and behold things changed dramatically. The talk which was supposed to start at nine am got postponed to eleven am. The full law faculty and myself are having breakfast and if I explained to you what the breakfast included you all will get hungry pretty soon. This was a major, major food festival. Constantly in my brain, however, I'm struggling. I've prepared notes. I'm going to teach about arbitration and mediation in US to these law students who are waiting for me and I'm thinking about those students constantly. And my Indian colleagues kept telling me, "Relax, let's enjoy the breakfast."

This could have been a problem in US if today I was late. I came here twenty minutes before my talk and I was already feeling the stress that I better be here half an hour ago. Imagine if I was late by fifteen minutes, how each one of you would have perceived it. Probably some of you would have left the phone conversation by then, you have different things to do. It's, what I'm trying to tell you is how we perceive time is so amazing and how we think in our culture is so close to us and we don't think about it constantly but we think so differently in our own cultures. What happened in Mumbai in March 2012 was amazing. The students not only waited, I gave them an hour lecture, they kept me at the school for another hour, wonderful questions, dialogues, amazing cultural experience. But here is another thing that caught my attention, I want to point it out to you. I was not allowed to pick up my laptop, my bag, nothing. There was a student who would pick up my laptop, there was a student who would pick up my bag, someone would carry my lunch. It was so humbling for me to see the Mumbai culture in US - in India - that it just brought some old memories back to my mind. And I got addicted to American ways, carry your own stuff, be there on time, start by the time, forget about breakfast, lunch. You are supposed to give a talk, give a talk. It was amazing. For the benefit about CADRE I want to mention Phil Moses did ask me about tea before I started today.

My second story – and they are going to take me out for lunch as well. My second story is about arranged marriage and conflict. I purposefully did not put a picture up there because I want you to close your eyes wherever you are and think about this word, arranged marriage, and I want you to imagine from your own minds and see what you see. [Pause] Do you see a happy couple? Do you see woman in red, wearing a red dress from India, for example? Do you see a sad couple? There must be some images that's stored in your mind like a computer that's going to pop up in brain and I want you to think about those images. Without showing you what I was going to show you I'm going to describe to you. There's a ceremony in India. It's called swing ceremony. It's a marriage ceremony among Hindu culture, Hindu religion, and broad culture. In this ceremony the husband and wife sit on a swing. Imagine that just looking at that in the picture. The elders are around these couples. Now if this was an interacting session I would have asked you a question, why do you think someone is going to sit on a swing before they get married, an arranged marriage? Folks if you remember the point here was cultures view conflict differently.

Eastern cultures have an in-built mechanism of working with conflict. That in-built mechanism is flexibility, it is time orientation that conflict can get eradicated or at least reduced with time, with passage of time. For example, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister after independence wrote a letter to his daughter, Indri Gandhi, from Gandhi family. And in this letter, which is actually wonderful letter, he said, daughter you need to know what India is. India is thousands of years of history. India can eradicate conflict in time. Let's have faith in time. It was such a wonderful way of consoling your own daughter when she was feeling, as you can imagine, merciful, she was feeling bad that her father is in a prison. And he said have faith in time. Look at the way he was trying to console someone, teach someone about how to view conflict. So arranged marriage. Let's come back to the picture that you're imaging – couple sitting on a swing. Why would they sit on a swing? The reason is they're going to get pushed pretty soon on the swing. When they go high up in the air and when they return they're going to get asked a question. Now just to remind you this doesn't happen all over India. India has multiple cultures, twenty-eight languages, one-hundred twenty-eight dialects, twenty-eight different states, about six major religions plus other religions. So it doesn't happen all over India, but some segments in Rajasthan and other parts of India. They're going to get asked a question and the question is what did you do when you were upswing, when you were up in the air. And usually they give some wrong answers, we don't know, we were scared, we looked down, we looked up, and then they give the right answer – we held our hands stronger. And then the elders around them tell them something and they say, "This is what marriage is. There's going to be upswings and low swings. When you are in conflict, you hold your hand stronger. Remember that."

Why I bring this story to you is just imagine, they're getting married in a few minutes but they're told something about conflict. How Indians generally, specifically Hindu culture, and in this case, Rajasthani marriage culture, perceive conflict is just amazing. Societies have different ways of dealing with conflict. I was in Beijing, I was introduced to something called a tea ceremony, which is the historic Chinese way of resolving conflict. And what shocked me and twenty of my colleagues who traveled from the United States to take part in an inter-cultural negotiation exercise and conference, was that sometimes conflict can be eradicated in half an hour to two hours sitting around a table on ground drinking tea without talking about conflict. Just by exchanging the tea bags that have been kept by parties for years. Similarly, India arranged marriage. I got arranged married even though I live in US and I probably call myself American when I go to India and I teach Indians, I try to teach Indians about equality, liberty, justice, our wonderful 911 service, because I miss it when I'm in India, I have an accident and I can't call 911. I know the police will not, will never arrive in two minutes, even if the police station is right across the street. And I miss the American culture; I miss my police in US. I teach those things in India but I want to share

my experiences going to India, learning from India. And I agreed to do arranged marriage, because I told you I will come back to the point of being a son on my previous slide, what do I mean by being a son in my culture. Because I as a son, I owe a lot to my parents. And in my Indian upbringing what do I owe to them, a sense of duty, a very strict sense of duty. And in that sense of duty they have done so much for me and the only thing I can do to make them happy is to agree to a woman they want me to marry to. Hence, my sister got arranged marriage and I did arranged marriage, and so do thousands of Indo-Americans living in US and Canada constantly.

I already have spoken about this little bit. This picture is of Golden Temple Amritsar, the holiest shrine of Sikhs. This is not a picture to teach you about Sikhism or to tell you this is the best religion. I believe otherwise. I believe we are one of the religions and no religion is the best religion. No religion is superior or inferior, we are all equal. And actually that point got observed, absorbed by one of our gurus, the tenth guru of Sikhs who laid the foundation stone of this temple along with a Muslim priest Mian Mir. Imagine now 16<sup>th</sup> century. You are the creator of a new religion, one of the youngest religions in the world. And you ask a different vision scholar, Mian Mir from Islam to lay the foundation stone of your temple. And it still shocks me how humble that guy must be and how much teaching he wanted to render to all of us. The teaching was, this is not your culture, this is everyone's culture and not only laid the foundation stone by a different religious person, he made four doors to this temple. And you, probably it's not very clear from this picture but the temple is lower than the ground level and the reason the temple is lower than the ground level the learning is if you want to learn, if you want to get closer to god or anyone superior, lower yourself. You can't find god looking up. And I think it's the same with culture. If you want to learn about Indian culture, even your own American culture, Islamic culture, Catholic culture, we need to lower ourselves. We can't look up to a different religion, be proud, be arrogant about our own religion and learn about their religion. We cannot.

The first step, moving on, to my three step presentation today, I have this model, which I've created six years ago, I've been creating six years ago. And I call it cross cultural model, you can call it approach, you can call it model, you can call it thinking. And I'm going to describe the model and talk about my first step. Three steps in the model are pretty simple. Number one is awareness of our own culture, number two is knowledge of the other culture and number three is a constant moment to moment awareness, knowledge, and inquiry into each other's culture when we mediate. It can't be in the beginning of mediation, in the middle of mediation, end of mediation, or negotiation or any communication. It got to be constant. And that's precisely what my model spoke about. You can read more about in one of the readings I prescribe you towards the end of the presentation and the link to the reading is in the PowerPoint that you can also access by the way afterwards, it will be stored on the CADRE website.

What do I have up there on the PowerPoint? Again I would have, I wish I could have asked you that question and you could have given me answers but it would be very chaotic if hundred of you speak at the same time so I'm not going to ask and Peter won't like it very much, Marshall won't like it. But look at this picture. This kind of depicts Americanism at some level, not from religious lens, from cultural lens. Challenge yourself, take about twenty seconds, take a look at this and kind of, kind of try to come to an answer as to what is culture about this picture. Just what is culture? What is American about this picture? And I'll give you fifteen more seconds. [Pause] Okay. So as a foreigner, as an alien, as our constitution tells me who I am coming from India, I'll tell you what I see. Because someone wrote and I can't remember and actually many people don't know who the author is. Someone said if you want to know a culture, bring an outsider, you will know your culture. He or she will tell you what your culture is. And I actually agree with that to many extent. I can see so many things in America that Americans usually don't see, starting with this picture. This picture tells America's fascination with two things –

technology number one. We put PowerPoints, cameras in our weddings and we export it to the world, which is great, there's nothing wrong about it. But number two, is perfection. Look at the color coordination. Look at how much time we spent on making everything perfect, the roof, the chairs, how much we think about different things. In my extended presentation I usually have pictures from weddings from around the world and I'll sh... Trust me other weddings, other countries don't think this deeply about many, many minor things.

A very small example. Whatever room you're sitting in, if you're sitting in a room, I want you to look at the edges of the room just above you, just edges where the, the roof and the walls touch. There is ninety percent plus chance that the edges are very good, they're sharp. If you travel to Iraq, if you travel to India, if you travel to Pakistan, even some parts in China, there is a sixty percent chance the edges are not sharp. Cultures don't pay attention to many things. Indians, let me talk about my culture, we don't pay attention to the very minute things which American's pay attention towards. Here I will say perhaps the most important thing in my talk. We have no right to judge any culture. No culture is right or wrong. The differences are important; we're going to talk about differences. If someone, if someone among you is judging American culture – oh we are too picky about things. Stop judging. It's learning the fascinating stuff. The differences we see things.

Let's continue our exploration. Take a look at this slide. Pretty simple. Does it raise anything in your mind in terms of American culture? I don't know, it should. Certainly in my mind. It talks about minimum speed forty. And we usually don't even look at the word minimum. We get to know what this sign means on a freeway, which we call highway in India. I'm going to show you another sign. [Pause] Take a look at this one. One Way. It's somehow implanted in our brains. We see it, we know what it means. Similarly we have hundreds of sign. Hundreds. We have exits. We have restroom areas in blue. We have Portland signs. I'm in Oregon right now, I'm going to talk about Portland and Salem. Actually between Salem and Portland, Oregon, there are forty plus signs. It's a forty-five mile zone. Forty plus signs on a highway, on a freeway. It's amazing to me from an Indian mindset. Why is it amazing? We love information. This is part of American culture. Just to keep exploring who are we in some sense. We love information. A professor called Hofstede, which has given so much to cross cultural negotiation, mediation world, Hofstede, H-O-F-S-T-E-D-E, will call it low context culture. He says there are two kinds of thinking, low context and high context, America is low context, because we love information. So I got curious. In my last few years of my visit to India, at least India, if not other countries, I start taking pictures and start learning about road signs, for example, in my country. Let's take a look at two different road signs in India.

This is in a place called Himachal Pradesh. It's put up by the government of Himachal Pradesh. It's a hilly area which means there are mountains. It says, don't dream otherwise you will scream. There's hardly any information about how many miles to go. Is it one way or two way? What's the speed limit? There is some code on the bottom. And remind you ninety-nine percent of Indians won't know what those, what those codes mean because they are Army codes, they're Indian Arm codes and only they will be able to tell you what they means. I'll show you another thing. This probably will never happen in US. Look at this blue sign which has recently started appearing in India. Lane driving is safe driving. These signs depict culture to you. It means that Indians usually don't drive in their own lane. They drive in the middle of the lane, they drive in the other person's lane, they'll drive anywhere but the lane. And now the government has to put up signs like this which says lane driving is safe driving. But remind you again there's nothing in terms of where are we. Is it towards Delhi? Is it towards Mumbai? How many miles to go?

So I'll give you a funny story. So recently when I'm back, went back to India last year there's a stretch of thousand miles lane. It's called Grand Trunk Road. Grand Trunk came from elephant's trunk and it means the longest road. It actually is the longest road in Asia. At least according to some books, so I don't want to make it a clear fact out here. In that road, between a segment from a village in Punjab and a capital in India, New Delhi, there used to be three or four signs. Now there's a lot more signs because of construction activity, whatsoever. And those two signs, one of them was wrongly labeled. It actually was telling you that the miles, the difference in kilometers is increasing than decreasing as you move towards New Delhi. And I asked my father-in-law, why is that? Why is the difference increasing in these miles? And he goes, "It's because you're reading it. It's because people don't read these signs." And right away came to my mind our fascination in America with information.

Check out our President's website – [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov). Check out the President of China's, Premier of China's website. Compare the information. You will be surprised how much information we have about our own government up on the website. It's amazing. Look at CADRE's website. We are putting webinars up. We have got everything in terms of history up on our website. We love information. How does that matter in a mediation folks? It matters. It matters big time. If we love information as a species, as a human species, our ears, now neuroscience is teaching us is, is tuned towards words. We look for words, we look for tone of those words, we look for words like thank you constantly, I am sorry constantly. Do we mean all of them? I don't know. Perhaps not all the time. But we love words in a mediation, in conflict resolution, in our communication. Across the world, actually by some people, including Professor Raul [Spelling?]. Seventy percent of the world does not. They are not word prone. They are body prone, they look at your body. They sense a feeling in the room. They feel the energy in the room. They look at your eyes. They look at your hand movement and they decide and they agree and they don't sometimes even listen to your words. Two different worlds altogether.

Alright. Time to move on. I will speak little more about high context and low context communication when I speak about different dimensions of culture. But I just want to introduce to you a thinking as to what is culture. And there we are. What is culture? You probably have thought about it by now. I'm going to give you another fifteen to twenty seconds now to frame some parts in your brain as to what is culture. Not what is your culture, which would be for example American, or so forth and so on. But I'm going to ask you to think about the definition of the term culture per se. So take fifteen seconds as I move on to my own definition of culture. [Pause] So in my mind culture is like the air we breathe in. It's so important as oxygen but we constantly don't think about oxygen, but we will think about oxygen if someone puts us in a space suit and throw us off to Mars or god forbid Jupiter, we'll think about oxygen. [Pause] Similarly folks, culture is something we don't think about. We see a person who is physically disabled in an airport and spend couple of glances, three glances, four glances, looking at the person. It's new to us. We see a person with a turban and beard and we have curiosity. Why? Why the maroon color? Why the black color today? Why do you wear a turban? [Pause] We look at a woman who recently wore sari which is proudly worn, worn by Indian woman after their marriage, both arranged and love marriage, and we think, why do you have to declare to the world that you're married.

Culture in my brain is constantly present. You will get to know more about your culture if you quit living in where you're living and move to an uncomfortable zone. This is not in my PowerPoint so I'm going to say a couple of things before I move onto next slide. Number one. We all feel culture, face culture, struggle with culture when we are uncomfortable not when we are comfortable. You will face a different culture and you'll get to know you are facing a different culture when you're uncomfortable. I tell my law students here at Willamette, where I'm teaching a cross cultural dispute resolution class in the law school which is offered for the first time in Oregon, as a regular law school class. [Pause] And I



ask them one thing and I ask them when you go abroad, in India, where do you live? And most of them give an honest reply. We live in this hotel, we live in that hotel, and I said, that's not how you get to know Indian culture or Chinese culture. Next time you go, go to the village, quit the metropolitan cities. In the village, quit the hotels, not the Marriott or the Hyatt or the Best Western. Let's go to someone's house. People will be happy to host you at least for few hours, if not for overnight. Have a tea with them then you'll know what their culture is.

Folks the best food I've even had in my life is not in my recent visit to Paris, ICC competition, in the center of France where I spent two-hundred euros on a dinner plate and not in New York where I've spent a hundred dollars on a dinner plate. But in a village in rural Punjab in India, relatives of my wife's family who still live without electricity, who still live and rely on one cow to make money off. And when I went to their house as a groom, even though it was been five years of marriage, they put a table full of food. First thing that's shocking to me was, how much, how much money that was spent preparing this food, because I was a visitor and they wanted to make me happy. But that was the best food ever. I would have missed that part of Indian culture if I had not gone to that house where there was no electricity. If I had just stayed with my Dad's mansion in Amritsar. How we define culture is there are multiple ways. There are actually two-hundred plus definitions by anthropologists, by psychologists, by sociologists, by neuroscientists today, and god forbid even lawyers are trying to define culture. So we move on to the definition at least in my mind. I think culture has four components. It is a patterned way of thinking of a group which is based on a value or values, a set of values, and followed over a period of time. Let me take each one of them for a few seconds and move on.

Educationists, people who educate and you as we call them educators have different culture than practitioners. Business students, I'm teaching a class in business school at Willamette, versus law students, have different culture. Now these guys, most of them, girls and boys, are born in US, lived in US, some of them even in Oregon for all their life and they are such an amazing different [inaudible] when they come to classroom. Law students, way more aggressive, way more stressful, at least in my mind in my personal observations. Business students see the world differently, little more creative, they're less stressed. So forth and so on. It's a patterned way of thinking. It's the way we think. I'll recommend a resource here. The name of the person is Richard Nisbett. He wrote a book called, How Easterners and Westerners Think Differently and Why. It's an amazing book and why do I mention it right now? Because we're talking about thinking folks. Thinking is something we can't see. Thinking is something we can only experience. Thinking is something that will make us uncomfortable because the way other person thinks, if the thinking is different, will get communicated to you when the person interacts with you either through a communication, a negotiation, a mediation, so forth and so on. And then you get to know the person thinks differently. But let's not judge the thinking, let's ask a question. Let's ask the question called "why." Why do you wear the turban you wear? Why black color? Why maroon color?

And I'll give you another suggestion here folks. The way we ask the question is also important, not just the question is important. And I'll give you a quick example. I was in San Francisco airport four years ago and a young girl came running to me and her mother was right beside her and she asked me a question, what a beautiful thing you are wearing on your head. I was wearing a purple turban at that time, and actually at that time I used to wear pink turban as well and now I'm learning American men don't want me to wear pink turban, anyhow. Some cultural nuisances which I'm learning living in America. So she comes to me and asks me politely, wonderful thing you are wearing on my head, why sir, can I ask? Oh my god I gave her a forty-five minute reply, probably she needed a five minute answer. I got excited. I gave a whole answer about my turban, my culture, Sikhism and everything.

And recently in a mediation in a Marion County court program in Salem, Oregon where I volunteer some times in a month. I had a party and this guy asked me a question, hey that thing on your head, why? Folks it's the same question asked differently. I did not give him more than a thirty second answer. I didn't feel like giving a more than thirty second answer. If you want to know about my culture at least be a little respectful if not a lot respectful. It's a two way road. You give respect, you get respect. Sometimes you can get over respect, the woman, the girl probably repented why she asked me that question. Of a group. Culture is followed by a group. Look at indigenous people. I was, I was hearing a talk today on OPB, what a wonderful talk, which is Oregon Public Radio here in Oregon, and what a wonderful talk about indigenous people. And I was, I was learning something new today. How they had to fight with UN charter on human rights to even name discrimination against indigenous people as part of UN charter on human rights. Wow. It was 1970s and 80s, till that time nobody thought about them as a group because they were a minority group.

Anyhow, culture is usually followed by a group. Business, law, religion, nation, it's a group. On a value. Quick note on a value – we usually gain our value when we are three to six years old. It's not my research. It's by different, different people. But the consensus is coming between three and six years of age we gain our value. And hence I put up my parents as part of my culture because most of us are in somebody else arm when we are three and six years old, our parents, our caretakers, and they teach us a lot about who we are. Followed over a period of time. I would love to say Sukh has his own culture but it's got to be centuries, got to be at least many, many, many years before it can be followed by all of you before I can actually claim Sukh culture. Culture also constitutes few other things which we often forget. We forget about religion. I make a comment on that. I've been studying religion and culture separately and together and I'm writing something on religious arbitration as of now, as the United States courts are looking at religious tribunals which we call religious arbitrations, and we have some resistance and some openness as a, as a, as a controversy right now as to should, for example, Christian Conciliation Services, which is a religious tribunal, should we accept their decision? Should we accept the decision of Islamic religious tribunals, etcetera, as a private settled matter? So I've been looking at religion from that angle. I'll make one comment and that's a personal comment. I think - I believe culture is broader than religion.

And I'll give you a quick example of my upbringing. Coming from a state of Punjab we have many religions, but majority of it is Sikh. We are fifty percent Sikh I should say and we have Hindus, about thirty percent or so Hindus, we have Muslims, ten or so percent Muslims, we have some Christians, five percent or so, some Jews, and some Jains, Jainism, and some Baha'ism. But we all regardless of our religion follow arranged marriage. And it's amazing. So if you study the culture of Punjab in India, why would Christians do arranged marriage? Why would Baha'i's do arranged marriage? And the reason is the culture is stronger than religion in that phase. Depending upon who your party is you may want to ask the same question. What is playing a role? Is it the religion or the culture? And just to remind you, they can be distinct. It's also identity. In my next PowerPoint you'll get to know what identity means.

Well I'll share one work. You need to Google something called group identity. You need to learn something more about group identity because in many cultures, especially my culture, Sikh culture, people see themselves differently when they are in a group versus when they're alone. Americans, we usually in America have a very strong personal identity. We are very comfortable traveling alone. We are very comfortable from young age of doing a job. Persons of my culture are opposite. We are taught to work as a group. We are taught to rely on a group to make a decision. And hence for us, even in, even when we grow up it's tough for us to come to a quick decision making. I'll come back to that point too.

Core values, our set worldviews, our belief systems and traditions. I'll make a comment on our worldviews. I'll do a quick exercise in my classroom and I'll just mention it – I don't have time today to do it. Or rather I can't do it through technology. But I want you to imagine Africa on a map. Imagine the size of Africa. How big it should be Africa on a map? Okay. I'll give you quick answer. Africa is bigger – it's as big, it can take care of US, China, India, parts of Russia. And you might be thinking, I don't think Africa is that big – and that's true. The way that's been taught to us through most of the maps on the modern era is wrong. Africa is actually much bigger than it's been portrayed, it's just a country that is not important to the developed nations somehow and we don't think about it from that angle. So if you search correct maps, best maps of on Earth, or the future maps or even the maps of Africa you will get to know at least some of the truth. Our worldview is shaped by the information we get, the information we get is the culture we live in. If you're American, you live in America all your life, that's how your worldview is shaped. If you family believes in certain belief system that's how your information is shaped. Our belief system and traditions are also another part of culture.

To me, let's try to synthesize all of this – and it's a lot, and I told you it's a lot. It's a very diverse topic for me and now I'm going to move into second segment. After this slide I'm going to go into how to think critically about culture in dispute resolution, in conflict. So, so far I've just introduced what is culture and because it's very important for me just to spend some time and make you think about the importance of culture and the way we think about culture. To me, personally, I think we can define it into a national culture, organizational culture and personal culture, which is identity based culture. Nationally I can assure you Indians are different than Americans. At least the way we think is different. I'll give you a quick example while we're here. You might be thinking Indians may think like Americans the longer they stay in US, which is not true. There is something called diaspora identity and under that identity, actually the longer you stay in a new culture the more closer you are to your previous culture because you take a snapshot of that culture before when you leave that culture. So it's so hard for us to escape our national culture. Organizational culture, I've spoken about it. Personal culture I told you identities can play a big role, especially group identity and individual identity.

Now I'm going to show you two quick PowerPoints. This is not my work. This is work of a Professor Hofstede that I've already said. You can Google him. He has a right website, which is his authentic website, which is pretty simple and a fake website which somebody else built to make money and looks very colorful and attractive. On his real website you'll find this slide, other slides, and you can learn a lot more about dimensions of culture. Quickly, if you are new to the field of cross culture, there are dimensions that you need to know. Individualism versus collectivism, high context versus low context, polychronatism versus monochronatism, internal culture versus external culture, universalism versus particularism, so forth and so on. There are actually more than fifteen dimensions. I'm just going to give one quick example of how we can think differently from individualism and collectivism sense. I am a collectivist at the deep of my heart. For me, decision making depends upon harmony and interdependence of my group. Quick example of a mediation I did recently. The parties were Indians and they'd been living in US for past ten years or so. The woman in this mediation was a divorced case, towards the end said, "I need to call my father." This woman is in her forties and she said, "I can't decide on this thing that you're offering me to decide upon unless I speak with my father." It was fascinating to me and my co-mediators because it was depiction of collectivist culture in terms of decision making.

Another, this PowerPoint was made by myself and my colleague from the University of Washington School of Law. And we think there's also something more to the dimensions in terms of internal and external. Control is within in the individual. Some things in life are predetermined. This is a very important PowerPoint for me because it's actually teaches you two ideologies to thinking on world.

Eastern cultures, primarily mostly, are external thinkers. For us, things in life are pre-determined. You'll hear a lot about things about karma or karm. You hear a lot about things like, this is destiny. For example, my father, if I tell him I got a promotion instead of saying, "Great job son I'm proud of you." He says, "It is destiny." Although I hate listening his word destiny, I accept that is his culture. He truly believes that things are pre-determined. That things are supposed to happen the way they are supposed to happen. Folks, there is a thing about it. Americans are one of the best producing nations on earth in terms of workforce. We work the most, we produce great work. Around the nation, in other nations, Indians, or let's just speak for Indian's or Chinese. We produce less work than Americans but we are more stress free. And I don't think it's the work hours, I also don't think it's the conditions of work, though they both the factors have a role to play here. I think it's primarily the way we look at the way we do the work and do the thing. I think in US we put a lot of stress on ourselves when we work because it's us who is doing the work and we take responsibility for it and in many cultures it is either pre-determined if things go wrong, it's either god, it's either parents. We share responsibility as a group so there's less stress. It's a wonderful thing to think about. Again, Richard Nesbitt's book will also help you think about it.

Last part of my presentation. I'm going to leave you some critical thinking. Moving on from what you can, how can you be culturally competent. I think there are three things you can do. I think as I said in the beginning of my approach in culture I think you can be more culturally aware of your own culture. You can gain more knowledge of different cultures. You can be more culturally aware of some of the exercises I did today and start thinking about what is your culture. Because for example if you're a mediator in a cross cultural mediation you carry a strong culture with yourself. Be it gender, be it nation, be it religion, be it law versus business, be it education versus practitioner, be it a person of some minority or disability. You carry your culture with you.

Your cultural awareness also comes from readings. I will recommend one of the first books, it is by an American woman called Ruth Benedict who never got a tenure in her university in 1930s because she was a woman. Her book is one of the first books in US to use a word culture. Edward Hall is something I've already recommended. A couple of his books on my PowerPoint you can see. And you can refer back to this PowerPoint later on. This is the project I'm involved with from a University at Hamline in St. Paul, Minnesota. These books are free of cost if you go to Hamline website you can download the chapters individually for free. I'm author in the third and fourth edition of this book so if you find these books, do read my chapter, I'll be very happy. I'm joking, you can read other chapters as well, don't have to read just my chapter. Kind of the last PowerPoint I have over here. Kind of summarizes my points folks. My presentation was indirect today, probably you can learn, you have learned by now. I did not give you direct points. Do this if a person wears a turban and walks into a room in a mediation. That's an American way of teaching. I teach things cross-culturally. I teach with my circular brain. I hope you were challenged little bit by my presentation because my point was to teach you also about my culture, my personal culture and to make you aware of your American culture. If you are looking for a very linear presentation because that's your cultural expectation. It's a longer journey because it's inward, we need to control our biases and we need to stop relying on shortcuts. We need to be more generous when we learn about different cultures. And I'll also recommend one more book here, it's called, Us and Them. The title of the book is Us and Them. It's a wonderful book on stereotypes and stereotyping.

In time, I will request you not to do cultural coercion which means don't bring your cultural stereotypes into every culture. Let's stay open. Ask the question, why? Ask the question respectfully, as to my second point. Let's say no to one-dimensional approaches to conflict. For example the slides you saw from India's arranged marriage, etcetera. Also, let's not bring culture into every conflict. Sometimes the

conflict is not about culture. Ask the parties, privately, in a caucus for example, is this about culture? Be polite about it, don't judge it. My last PowerPoint. Your culture also dictates your goals. Each one of us had different goals from today's presentation. I had a different goal, you had a different goal. Just like each one of us we have different goals. So are the parties to a conflict, be it a mediation, be it a negotiation, arbitration, trial. Our communication, parties may have different goals. We cannot judge someone's goals because it's a way of thinking and we cannot see someone's thinking. But let's celebrate. We are all one, yet so distinct. Imagine how boring the life will be if Professor Sukhsimranjit Singh did not wear his wonderful turban and his wonderful smile. Thank you for your time.

**MARSHALL PETER:** Thank you so much Sukhsimranjit, that was a, a very provocative and interesting presentation and I just as an aside, I was honored to have dinner at Sukhsimranjit's house with him and his wife Deep and his beautiful daughter Apar on Sunday night and it was just an absolutely lovely opportunity to, to probe culture and to seek a higher understanding and I think that really there's, as I've, as we spoke what becomes increasingly apparent and I think what's really an important part of today's presentation is how valuable it is to devote time to really understanding what other people are thinking and, and the why of, of their thoughts and behaviors. And so I, a really, very, very provocative and enjoyable presentation. What I'd like to do now, there are two pieces, one is I would invite you, if you have a question that you would like to ask Professor Singh if you will press star six that will unmute your phone. You're also welcome if you would like to, to type a question into the chat box that you should see on your screen and we will try to answer those as well. As Professor Singh is answering questions we will put up onto the screen a couple of quick questions about your experience with today's webinar that we track and report this data so that would be very helpful. So with that does someone have questions for Professor Singh about today's presentation? We have a question, how can we as mediators explain other cultures to professionals?

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Well, what a tough question. And by professionals, to other professionals on cultural competence. By your experiences, I think the number one, let me give quick example, quick answer to that. In my church mediation there were two big things I learned. Number one, and this is a cross cultural church, this is not a majority American church. The use of private meetings, I had to meet with 150 people privately because that's the only way they will open up to me. That's the only way I can connect with them. That's the only way they will trust me and we can create a trust. But it was very easy afterwards when I give them each time and opportunity. So I think the biggest thing I can, you have to experience this. The other thing I did in that mediation, I did it in three different languages. If I speak English to elder members of some committees from India they will get disrespected because they see I can speak Punjabi, I can speak Hindi, and if I speak English I'm showing off. If to the other members I speak Punjabi or Hindi they feel disrespected because they feel they get disrespected, because, because for them I need to talk to them in English. I'm judging them that they can't speak in English. So the maneuvering of culture is very difficult for sure. But that what is challenging to me. I love it. I say one thing and I encourage you to say the same thing too. I say that for different cultures, for cross cultural mediations, what you can say is something like this, when you mediate you can say, "Look I may not know things about your culture and I may be sorry if I overstep some cultural boundaries and some honors, I don't mean to do it." And that's called attribution error. You're attributing mistake to your, your attributing mistake to yourself instead of your intention. You're saying it will not be my intention to do this cross-cultural blunder, is what I would suggest.

**MARSHALL PETER:** So, when teaching. [Cough] Excuse me, I get all choked up. So when teaching conflict resolutions skills or courses is it best to infuse conflict in the discussion or look at it as a separate topic or use an integrated style?

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** [Pause] That's a very good question. I would do both at least in terms of discussion and integrative style. I would not bring it as a separate topic. It's a very good question in the sense because in US, let me speak from the American law market. For lawyers now it's required to take some cross cultural training and most the lawyers come to me and say, "I need this diversity credit because it's required, I got to do this." Are they really into it? I don't think so. Are they, at least some of them, some of them are really curious about it. But if we integrate it into a seamless style in which we can talk about culture without making it just a separate advanced state because at some levels culture is also basic, we need to begin with culture. Let me recommend a, a book there on that answer. It's a wonderful book called, Preparing for Peace, by John Lederach. And this Professor Lederach answers your question in detail as to how we should train people about culture.

**MARSHALL PETER:** So there was a question regarding a website where the information could be downloaded, the articles that were referenced and Phil just put up the link to that and the author of Preparing for Peace is John Paul Lederach. Other questions?

[Pause]

**PHIL MOSES:** There was a question from Erica.

[Pause]

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Can you go up and let me look at the question?

**MARSHALL PETER:** We, we got it.

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Okay.

**MARSHALL PETER:** And uh. [Pause] Well then I think maybe unless there's a parting remark you'd like to make, we'll wrap this up and I'll just share a little bit of information about our next...

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Sure. I want to take a moment to explain what I mean when I say moment to moment. Since I'm polychronic time is flexible for me and I told Marshall, I warned him in the beginning one hour is not enough for me and I want to do justice to the topic. Rushing through a topic is not my style so at least I taught you hopefully one thing and that's the importance of knowing your own culture and thinking about culture from an awareness standpoint. I mean moment to moment and I'm impacted by work of a person called Thich Nhat Hanh and I can never say his name rightly. He wrote a book on mindfulness, he wrote about hundred plus books and one of the books from Buddhist perspectives and actually it's more from mindfulness perspectives and it's called Mindfulness and I love the work. What I learned from that work is to be an effective mediator who's not only cross culturally aware, cross culturally skilled, but also who is neutral to different cultures. Because we can be empathetic to a culture, we can be hatred, we can have hatred towards a culture and we can be neutral towards a culture and the idea would be to stay somewhere in between because even empathy towards one culture will take your affection away from the other culture present in the mediation. So I highly recommend practicing some sort of meditation in which we can train our brains to stay attuned to our needs of being neutral to different cultures throughout the mediation. And that's what I mean by moment to moment consciousness and I think it's very, very important. It's the most challenging part of my work because I get, I have mediations in which people have said wrong things to me in the very

beginning and I had to forgive them even to do, to go any further. Because even with that little hatred as to that wrong remark they made to me in a mediation and I could not go on because I thought that was something which would trigger a hatred in me and I would not be able to stay cross culturally neutral throughout this presentation. So I just wanted to clarify that point.

**MARSHALL PETER:** Great. So I think with that we are going to go ahead and wrap up. I might mention a book by Thich Nhat Hanh that I really, I have personally very, very much enjoyed, is, You are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment. And so I appreciated Sukhsimranjit mentioning him as an author and someone I would certainly commend to you as well. So...

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Can I say one more thing?

**MARSHALL PETER:** Uhuh.

**SUKHSIMRANJIT SINGH:** Someone mentioning about the classes. I'm happy to have someone audit my classes. I teach at Willamette, I teach at Hamline in St. Paul, Minnesota and I also teach in India. So travel with me to India that would be your best class because not only will it be in a cross cultural class but it in a different culture, learning about different culture. And also my father told me to extend his invitation to all of you if you visit Amritsar in Punjab, India. Please tell him that you heard his son's talk, he will be happy to take you out for lunch, dinner and to Golden Temple and to show around his culture.

**MARSHALL PETER:** Well there you go, there's a generous offer. So as we look to the future on May 1<sup>st</sup> we will host our next webinar and we will be joined by Richard Birke who's the Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution at Willamette University's College of Law and we really, Sukhsimranjit has sort of opened the door for us to Willamette and so we're returning once again to be joined by one of their faculty. Professor Birke has taught dispute resolution for more than fifteen years, starting his career at Stanford University and coming to Willamette University's College of Law in 1993 to teach and direct the Center for Dispute Resolution. Under his leadership, the Center has enjoyed high national ranking among academic dispute resolution centers in the United States. He's an award-winning author in the field of dispute resolution, and has been deeply involved in the practice of ADR. Professor Birke will be talking to us about, The Mediator's Mind: Insights from Psychology and Neuroscience. And I've talked to people who have seen Professor Birke present and they say that it will be much the same as this one, a very, very informative and useful presentation.

So thank you very much at CADRE. We're always happy to, to respond to any questions, concerns you have and we'll look forward to seeing you hopefully in person, but also online in the future. Thanks for joining us! Take care. Bye.