

The social science model

Human society is made up of individuals who engage in activities by which they adapt to their environment and exchange resources with each other so that the society is maintained and individual needs are satisfied.

These activities are learned by imitation and tuition from other humans, and hence are part of the social heritage, or culture, of a society. These learned activities persist from generation to generation with only a small degree of change unless external factors interfere with the degree to which these activities succeed in satisfying social and individual needs.

Learned activities are only one part of the society's culture. Also included in the social heritage are artifacts (tools, shelters, utensils, weapons, etc.), plus an ideational complex of constructs and propositions expressed in systems of *symbols*, of which natural *language* is the most important. By means of symbols it is possible to create a rich variety of special entities, called culturally constructed objects, such as money, nationhood, marriage, games, laws, etc., whose existence depends on adherence to the rule system that defines them (D'Andrade 1984). The ideational systems and symbolic systems of the social heritage are necessary because human adaptive activities are so complex and numerous that they could not be learned and performed without a large store of knowledge and a symbolic system to communicate this knowledge and co-ordinate activities.

Much, but not all, of the social heritage or culture has a normative character; that is, the individuals of a community typically feel that their social heritage—their ways of doing things, their understandings of the world, their symbolic expressions—are proper, true and beautiful, and they sanction positively those who conform to the social heritage and punish those who do not.

Individuals perform the activities and hold the beliefs of their social heritage or culture not just because of sanctions from others, and not just because they find these activities and beliefs proper and true, but because they also find at least some cultural activities and beliefs to be motivationally and emotionally satisfying.