Golden Talk Series

Iran-Australia

Being Different or Similar?

Context 1: A tech company

Once in a thriving tech company, a new project named "Phoenix" was launched, aimed at developing an innovative software solution. The project team was an eclectic mix - Sam, the team leader, known for his meticulous planning; Mia, a creative designer **with an eye for** aesthetics; Raj, a programmer with an unconventional approach to coding; Lisa, a marketing expert **with a knack for** understanding customer needs; and Tom, a finance specialist with a conservative but effective approach to budgeting. Initially, the team faced several challenges. Sam's strict adherence to schedules **clashed with** Raj's free-form coding sessions. Mia's creative designs were often **at odds with** Tom's budget constraints. Lisa's customer-first approach sometimes **contradicted** the team's technical feasibility.

As Project Phoenix neared its critical phase, the team's initial struggles sparked a broader debate within the company. Two distinct camps emerged, each with a different perspective on the importance of similarities and differences in a team setting.

Side 1: Advocates of diversity

This group argues that the differences within the Phoenix team are not only necessary but also beneficial. They believe that each team member's unique skills and perspectives are crucial for innovation. They point out how Raj's **unconventional** coding could lead to breakthroughs in software design, Mia's creative flair could make the software more user-friendly and visually appealing, and Lisa's customer-centric approach could ensure that the product will meet market demands. They argue that the conflicts are natural and part of a process leading to a more **robust** and **well-rounded** final product. According to them, the solution lies in fostering better communication, mutual respect, and a more flexible approach to project management that could **accommodate** different working styles.

Side 2: Advocates of similarity

On the other side, some believe that a team needs a high degree of similarity in working styles to function effectively. They argue that the conflicts within the Phoenix team are a direct result of their differences, leading to inefficiencies and delays. This camp emphasizes the importance of alignment in working methods, priorities, and even thought processes. They believe that a team with similar approaches would have smoother communication, faster decision-making, and **a more harmonious working environment**. They suggest that future projects should be staffed with individuals who **share similar work ethics**, methodologies, and even personality types to ensure cohesiveness and efficiency.

Debate questions

1. *Which side are you on? Provide reasons and examples to support your answer.*
2. *Should people have similar or different qualities in a workplace for maximized efficiency? Is there a one-size-fits-all answer to this question?*
3. *In what ways can leadership and management practices evolve to accommodate and leverage the strengths of a diverse team?*
4. *Is it possible for teams with stark differences to develop a shared vision and goals, and what strategies could facilitate this process? Can you provide examples?*
5. *How can companies create a culture that values both individual uniqueness and collective identity in a professional setting?*

Context 2: A couple

Emma, an extroverted, adventurous artist, and Alex, an introverted, meticulous scientist, **crossed paths**. Their meeting was like **a clash of two different worlds** – Emma's world was full of spontaneous art shows and **impromptu** road trips, while Alex's life was a series of planned experiments and quiet evenings.

Despite their **stark differences**, there was **an undeniable spark**. Emma loved how Alex's analytical mind brought a sense of stability and depth to her life. Alex, in turn,

was enchanted by Emma's creativity and **zest for life**, which **added color** and excitement to his structured world.

As their relationship deepened, so did their understanding and appreciation of their differences. However, **it wasn't always a smooth ride**. Emma's spontaneous decisions often clashed with Alex's need for structure. Alex's preference for quiet routines sometimes stifled Emma's social nature.

Their biggest test came when deciding on their future together. Emma **envisioned** a life full of travel and adventure, while Alex saw them in a cozy home, engaged in quiet pursuits.
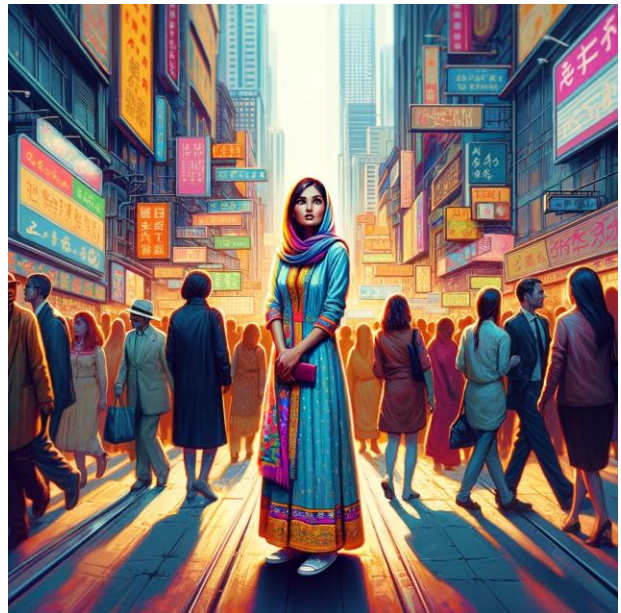
Debate questions

1. *Can things work out in a relationship like this where the couple's qualities/interests are so different?*

2. ***Will Emma and Alex's differences strengthen or weaken their relationship in the long run?***

3. ***How will their contrasting personalities affect their future decisions together?***

4. ***Is there a way to find a common ground between Emma's love for adventure and Alex's need for stability?***

5. ***Is their mutual respect and appreciation for their differences enough to overcome any challenges?***

6. ***Will their unique blend of traits and interests lead to a lasting and fulfilling partnership?***

Context 3: An immigrant

Leila, a youthful immigrant from a traditional, quiet village, started her new life in the bustling city overseas. Full of dreams and aspirations, she was also anxious about **fitting into** this new, vibrant culture. In the same city lived Daniel, who had immigrated years earlier and had since adapted to the local lifestyle, often **indistinguishable** from native-born citizens.

Leila and Daniel met at a community center for immigrants, where they **struck up a conversation** about their experiences. Leila confessed her worries about losing her **cultural identity**, fearing she would have to completely change to fit in. Daniel, on the other hand, shared his journey of **blending in**, explaining how **adopting the local customs** and language made his life easier and helped him avoid the feeling of **being an outsider**.

As they continued to meet, they often debated the merits of maintaining one's unique cultural identity versus adapting to the new culture. Leila admired the rich cultural tapestry of the city but feared **losing her roots**. She loved her traditional attire and often **felt out of place** in modern clothing. Daniel, however, felt that adapting was a necessary step to success in a new country.

Debate:

Some argue that retaining one's original culture is crucial for preserving diversity and **personal integrity**. Others believe that adapting and **conforming to** the new culture is vital for social and professional success.

Debate questions

1. *Do you agree with the saying, "When in Rome, do as Romans do"?*

2. *Is it possible for immigrants like Leila to maintain their unique cultural identity while still integrating successfully into a new society?*

3. *Which side of the debate are you on?*

4. *Can blending cultures, as Daniel suggests, lead to a richer, more diverse community, or does it risk diluting individual cultural identities?*

4

Debate Summary

In the debate between **individuality** (being unique/different) and **conformity** (becoming similar), each side presents compelling arguments shaped by differing values and perspectives. **Proponents** of individuality emphasize the importance of **self-expression** and personal growth. They argue that being unique is crucial for fostering creativity and innovation, which are essential for societal progress. Individuality, they assert, contributes to psychological well-being and self-esteem,

as people feel valued for their unique traits. This diversity in thoughts and actions is seen as enriching cultural and community life.

On the other side, advocates of conformity stress the benefits of **social harmony** and **cohesion**. They point out that shared norms and behaviors create **a sense of belonging** and ease communication within a community. Conformity, in their view, offers predictability and stability, which can be comforting and reduce societal conflicts. In environments where conformity is valued, decisions can often be made more efficiently due to a common understanding and shared expectations.

Language focus

1. **Be at odds with** - To be in conflict or disagreement with something or someone.

2. **Beat to one's own drum** - To do things in one's own way, regardless of societal norms.

3. **Being an outsider** - Feeling or being perceived as not part of a particular group or community.

4. **Blend into the crowd** - To conform so as not to stand out in a group.

5. **Break the mold** - To do something in a completely new and different way.

6. **Clash with** - To conflict or disagree sharply, often leading to arguments.

7. **Conform to** - To follow rules or standards; aligning oneself with societal expectations.

8. **Cut from the same cloth** - To be very similar, often used to describe people with shared characteristics.

9. **Indistinguishable** - So similar that differences are not noticeable; cannot be differentiated.

10. **Peer pressure** - The influence exerted by a group on individuals to fit in or conform.

11. **Personal integrity** - Maintaining one's principles and values consistently, regardless of external pressures.

12. **Square peg in a round hole** - Someone who does not fit into a particular situation or environment.

13. **Stark differences** - Extremely clear or noticeable distinctions between people or things.

14. **Swim against the current** - To go against prevailing opinions or trends.

15. **The odd one out** - A person or thing differing from all other members of a particular group or set.

16. **Think outside the box** - To think creatively, not bound by conventional thinking.

17. **Unconventional** - Not following traditional ways or norms; often unique or original.