UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A FREE E-BOOK FROM CULTUREWISE'S TRAINING TEAM

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CHAPTER 1- WHAT IS CULTURE?

`Culture' means different things to different people. For our purposes culture can be defined as the set of learned values, assumptions and norms which are shared to varying degrees with members of a group, and which influence the way in which members of that group perceive, think and act.

This chapter attempts to help you come to an understanding of the phenomena of culture. It aims to do this through an examination of a range of questions faced by those who have to negotiate cultural barriers in their daily lives, including individuals working in global teams, living and working in a different country, or managing and working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. These are the questions:

- Why does culture exist?
- What does culture look like?
- What types of culture exist?
- How is culture transmitted?

WHY DOES CULTURE EXIST?

Two characteristics of human beings and social groups can help us understand why culture exists: first, the human mental tendency to categorize; and second, the human need for social interaction.

CATEGORIZATION

Despite appearances, none of us has sufficient mental capabilities to respond fully to every single piece of information we receive. Instead, we have an in-built tendency to organize information about the world around us into categories - labels that help us make sense and find meaning in the otherwise confused environments we inhabit. These categories are a function of the challenges we face and the way in which we respond to them. Thus, there is little need for gardeners living in south-western France to have more than one or two categories for snow, or those living in snow and ice of the far north of Canada to have more than a single concept of lawn fertilizer. Based in part on these categories, people make attributions - conclusions or judgements about the causes of the behaviour they see and the things that happen in their world. In making attributions about situations we categorize them as challenging, or dangerous, or full of possibilities. In making attributions about people we assess whether they are intelligent, aggressive, polite or any of a myriad number of judgements.

Of course, this type of natural categorization helps us organize a great deal of information in a limited amount of time. It can be extremely helpful. But, like most helpful things, it can also bring with it some negative aspects. First, research suggests that humans tend to actively emphasize the similarities between items within categories. Thus, the category of dogs contains a large number of distinct animals within it, each of which shares certain similarities. The limited set of out-of-date and often negative generalizations that we call 'stereotypes' are a good example of this tendency. Once a stereotyped label is attached to someone, all the information we attach to that stereotype comes to the surface - for example, that the British are cold and unfriendly, or the Americans loud. In this way, we mask the many differences between people in these categories by applying a simple, and often not very complimentary, label to each of them. In this way we fail to question or reinterpret what we see, and the uniqueness of each individual is masked.

The second challenge that categorization brings with it is the tendency to emphasize the differences between different categories. We hold relatively positive attitudes towards people we see as similar, and less positive attitudes towards those we perceive as different. This phenomenon of distinguishing 'in-groups' from 'out-groups' is common to all human cultures. Our own groups are seen as sources of comfort and security whereas other categories of people are

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seen as distant, untrustworthy and inferior. In-groups and out-groups are clearly visible in the difficulties many people have making friends in different cultures. Unfortunately, to those in unfamiliar or distant cultures you are, by definition, a member of an out-group, and they may have little desire to engage with you. For individuals who have left their own in-groups behind when they moved abroad and consequently have a greater need to establish new close relationships, this can be a difficult problem to resolve.

HUMANS AS SOCIAL BEINGS

Humans are social animals with an instinctive inclination to form groups in order to achieve goals, or merely to survive. Any group thus formed faces a twin set of challenges: how to adapt to the surrounding world in all its complexity, and how to manage relationships and communication among group members in order to remain integrated and effective.

Many groups face such challenges explicitly. Corporate leaders and public-sector managers (amongst others) invest considerable time and energy in analysing market conditions, client demands, competitors and opportunities. Armed with this information about the world outside, they set about creating suitable strategies and refining appropriate internal structures to put strategy to good effect. These strategies, designed around the organization's unique circumstances, explicitly define the tasks to be faced and the internal processes through which these tasks will be achieved. In theory at least, it helps everyone in the organization 'fill in the blank spaces' about what needs to be done and how. This leads to a shared understanding of how problems and conflicts can be solved. Correctly executed, strategy increases the probability that the company or organization will survive and prosper, resulting in satisfaction for all concerned. Without it, life would be full of ambiguity and uncertainty.

In some ways, culture can be thought of as analogous with strategy. After all, finding an effective approach to external adaptation and internal integration is a challenge faced by nations as much as corporations or teams. To take one example: Japan and the USA face very different challenges of population, climate, geography and topography, each of which has influenced the adaptive strategies that each country has adopted for survival. For Japan, isolated, crowded, racially homogenous and lacking in resources, an appropriate adaptive response was the development of an interaction style focused on group support and the maintenance of harmony. For the USA in contrast, individualism, ambition and 'time is money' attitudes can be seen as adaptive responses to the need to tame wide open spaces and manage the needs of a diverse immigrant population. Thus culture, like strategy, helps individuals understand the rules underpinning how things are done in any particular situation. Without a minimum of shared cultural values, attitudes and expectations we simply could not engage successfully in day-to-day life. Faced with ambiguity and uncertainty about how people are going to behave in a particular situation we would begin to doubt what we know to be true of the world. In these circumstances, everything in life would become unpredictable. Unable to depend on things continuing to happen in predictable ways, we would become paralysed with insecurity and unable to function. To put it another way, if we could not be fairly sure that drivers shared the same understanding of red lights, that trains would stay on the tracks and that doctors wanted us to live, how would we ever leave the certainty of our homes? We want people around us to think and act in ways that are predictable and understandable. We need this in order to survive.

Of course, the analogy with corporate strategy is not completely valid. Although culture exists for a purpose it is rarely the result of explicit planning. Neither the Japanese or Americans (or anyone else) are necessarily aware of the uniqueness of their culture's approach to external adaptation and internal integration. People did not, for the most part, sit down and actively create American or Japanese ways of seeing the world or doing things. However, characteristics such as American individualism or Japanese respect for group consensus have developed and persisted nonetheless, and are promoted and espoused as the 'right' way to do things by politicians, parents and schools. These phenomena are not random. They have come about not simply as a result of conscious political decision-making, but because it was adaptive for these groups of people to think and act in these ways. For America or Japan these ways of doing things have, for the most part, worked. So, culture enables us to look around and see that we are not mad; it gives coherence and sense to our existence.

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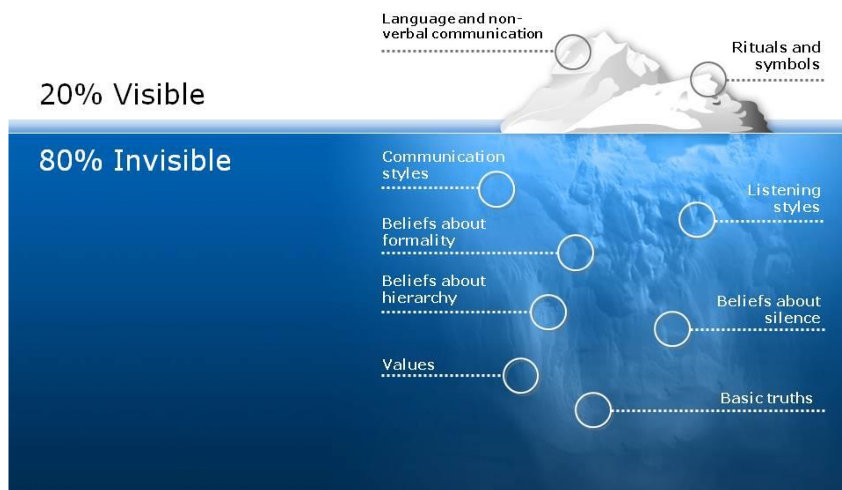
Clearly, none of this is to deny that each of us is an individual and capable of making many personal choices. Cultural beliefs are dynamic; they can and do change. Culture is not a static one-way process that imprisons individuals within a rigid programming from which they can never be set free. Instead, there is a dynamic two-way interchange between who we are and the groups to which we belong. Culture sets the range of parameters for acceptable (and unacceptable) ways of thinking and acting. We are not, however, ciphers or stereotypes or hapless victims of culture. We are capable of individual thought - of recognizing the cultural influences on us and learning the rules of other cultures. We can influence the way in which our team works, our company works and even, on occasion, the way in which our country works.

WHAT DOES CULTURE LOOK LIKE?

Culture can be seen as multi-layered like an Iceberg.



Surface level cultural products and behaviours are visible. We can (with effort and with varying degrees of objectivity) identify the language, body language, rituals and symbols that mark cultural groups. The jargon and rituals of the legal profession, and the white coats and bedside manner of medical workers are examples of such manifestations.

Somewhat less visible, but still accessible through questioning and interpretation, are behavioural orientations associated with cultures - for instance, how people tend to communicate and listen. When prompted, we can usually come up with a relatively objective description of how we ourselves behave. These descriptions may be ill-formed because we are rarely asked to reflect on actions and experiences that seem natural to us.

Deeper still, beneath these visible experiences and manifestations are other much more subjective phenomena. These values, norms and basic truths require questioning and interpretation, and address the question of 'why' cultures teach people to act in one way but not another.

Values can be defined as ideas or beliefs to which strong emotions are attached. Each of us has our own unique value system; influenced by our upbringing, group membership, peers and the personal choices we make. However, many of the things we strongly believe are influenced by our membership of cultural groupings. Eastern cultures are typically seen to place more value on family and group responsibilities than do Western cultures. This pattern is reflected at the individual level in the values people claim to hold and, at the surface level, in the way people act towards their family and friends.

Norms can be seen as the practical embodiment of these shared cultural values; the 'right' and 'wrong' ways of doing things that people routinely live by. Whether written down or simply implicit, norms separate the acceptable from the unacceptable. Of course, what people in one culture value or have extensive norms and rules about, others simply consider irrelevant or have no rules for. Some cultures accept a greater variation in behaviour than others, at least in certain areas. Western norms with regard to sexual freedom or Eastern norms towards extended family responsibilities

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are cases in point. Because many of our norms are implicit or simply givens, problems can arise when individuals fail to recognize the other different or unfamiliar norms that matter to people from another culture. Cultural differences at the levels of basic norms and values are powerful. Being confronted with a value system that can appear wholly different from one's own is difficult in our own culture, and doubly so in an unfamiliar culture.

At the very deepest level of the iceberg are basic 'truths' about human identity and purpose, space, time, social organization, ways of thinking and communicating. For the most part, groups and their members are wholly unaware that there basic 'truths' are often culturally unique. Individuals take on board, to a greater or lesser extent, the core assumptions of their groups without any conscious awareness of doing so. Most cross-cultural misunderstandings occur at this subjective level. As a result, it is cultural conflict at the level of core assumptions that can be the most damaging, as individuals and groups find their most basic notions of their own identities challenged.

WHAT TYPES OF CULTURE EXIST?

There are, potentially at least, as many different layers of culture as there are different types of human grouping.

Thus regions such as Europe, the Middle East or Latin America have certain defining cultural characteristics that each share and that distinguish each from the other. As we have seen, industry and corporate cultures also differ. Steelmaking has assumptions, values and norms very different from the pornography business.

Within large organizations functional cultures can also vary considerably. What the marketing department wants from a product can sometimes be very different from what finance budgets for and production actually delivers. Last but not least, professional cultures vary. The competitive wheeler-dealers in Wall Street may have little in common with the inner-city social worker. Each of these distinct groupings has unique beliefs and world-views. The important point for us is that none of us is ever influenced by just one set of cultural influences. We are never simply British, or purely FCO people. It is never helpful or productive to assume that, simply because we are in Japan, we are likely to understand precisely how any particular Japanese company operates or individual behaves.

Instead, what will help is being able to recognize the particular cultural differences that are relevant in any given situation. We can then assess the areas in which contrasting assumptions, values and norms are likely to create barriers to (and opportunities for) successful interaction. To give an example, in questioning a French politician the relevant cultural barrier to getting a simple answer to a simple question may be that he is a politician, rather than that he is French.

Why, then, do organizations and teams spend so much time focusing on cultural differences and similarities at the level of national culture? There are a number of reasons for this. First, the country or region of origin often influences the context in which other cultural levels (company, team and so on) form. In other words, an Australian cricket team will tend to exhibit a culture that draws on the competitive and individualistic nature of Australian culture. Of course, this team may progress out of all recognition into something quite 'un-Australian'. They may become uncompetitive and begin to feel empathy with other less adequate teams. However, research evidence suggests that when there is uncertainty or ambiguity about how to behave in any given situation, the team will respond by reverting back to the rules applied at the national level. Thus, our touchy-feely Aussies will revert to their core cultural values, when faced with ambiguity.

Second, national culture often resides less in practices and more in taken-for-granted values and assumptions. In contrast, corporate or team differences often reside much more at the levels of behaviour, and less in core values and assumptions. Yet it is at the surface levels of behaviour that culture can more easily be changed. When dealing with the core assumptions and values of a nation that has been in existence for 500 years, changes can be glacial. It is the tip of the iceberg that melts. The centre stays frozen.

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Finally, cultural differences are often most apparent along linguistic fault lines as it is in the relative isolation of a shared language that a distinct culture can emerge. Given that many nations are formed around linguistic groupings, long-lasting cultural distinctions often run along national frontiers.

HOW IS CULTURE TRANSMITTED?

One way of coming to understand the process by which culture is transmitted is to look at how we learn to behave and think in the way we do. Generally, we learn from the people around us. Assumptions, values, norms and behaviours are transmitted, generation to generation by parents, teachers, the media and a variety of other influences. Of course, parents and others rarely actually sit down and explain values or assumptions; for the most part, they are not even aware that they hold them. Rather, these cultural attitudes are inherent in what they do and say (which they have learned from their parents and teachers).

As children, we grow through absorbing and internalizing these values and behaviours. What once required conscious reflection now becomes unconscious and instinctive. Gone is the persistent question 'why?'. We no longer have to think about what to do or say in a given situation; instead, we draw on the behaviour which has always worked and which appears, on the surface, to be instinctive. At home we 'know' how to deal with the family and respond to authority. At work we 'know' the styles of behaviour that enable us to get things done. We can tackle problems, communicate with others and build relationships in a manner to which others will recognize and respond reasonably predictably. All this we have taken in from observing the world and the people around us. This is the reason, incidentally, that people from a particular culture often cannot explain, when asked, why they talk to colleagues, manage staff or learn in a certain way. 'That is the way things are done,' they say, baffled that the question should even arise. After all, people have always 'done' things this way, or at least frequently enough to lead to the conclusion that everyone else behaves similarly.

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CHAPTER 2 - WHY IS CULTURE IMPORTANT?

One of the consequences of being brought up in a particular culture is that many of us come to assume that, deep down, other people are much the same as we are. This ethnocentric, or 'own-group' focus on the world becomes closely bound up with our own identity. We are oblivious to the idea that much of what is apparently instinctive or universal in human behaviour is, in fact, peculiar to a particular group or culture. For the most part this assumption has rarely been challenged. We have grown up with people who think in similar ways to us. We work with individuals trained in the same professional and academic disciplines as us. We rarely consider the fact that others, far away in different cultures, learn their lessons just as well as we do but that those lessons are not the same as ours. They end up with a very different notion of how to 'be'. In reality, what is `natural' to a person from one cultural environment is not necessarily all that natural to someone from a different culture.

Even those who accept the idea that people are different in theory, often find it more comfortable to seek similarities than to accept the relevance of cultural differences. Learnt attitudes and behaviours are so central to our way of viewing the world that it can be difficult to see these challenged. Moving beyond a mono-cultural outlook entails looking closely at one's own values and attitudes — something that may not come easily to many. It sometimes takes considerable motivation, tolerance and sensitivity to accept that culture is learned and that, if we learned our own cultural rules, we can learn those of others.

Of course, if all cultures were the same, then culture would not matter. If both parties to any interaction understood things in the same way (technically called an isomorphic attribution) then problems would rarely arise. All we would need to do is understand each other's personality and the context in which we find ourselves. This is, in fact, the way in which some people approach life; they believe they know full well what others are like.

Unfortunately there are dangers associated with using our own way of categorizing things in inappropriate places or making assumptions about the motivation behind other people's behaviour. Whenever we leave our group (to live, work, or do business abroad, for example) or come in contact with people from another group, we are required to come face-to-face with the fact that our categories may be different from other people. We may, for instance, include wearing tight-fitting miniskirts, using handkerchiefs or maintaining strong eye contact in the category of `acceptable behaviour'. Others in different cultures place these things very firmly in the category of 'unacceptable behaviour'. My neighbours may place the asking of quite personal questions of complete strangers within the category of `politeness'. It fits more neatly within my category of 'extreme rudeness'.

It is because of these differences in categorization that cultural differences often first become evident in well-meaning clashes. We see symbols, artefacts and ways of behaving in other cultures that are the same as (or similar to) those in our own culture and we use our own categories to decipher them. We assume that they have the same meaning in other cultures as they do in our own, and interpret what we see from an ethnocentric perspective. Both sides assume that they are acting according to the only 'natural' way of categorizing things and simply do not have the vocabulary to recognize or discuss the differences they encounter.

Of course, people rarely have the time or inclination to stop and ask why certain ways of thinking and behaving are considered correct in their culture. Many people simply have never thought about their culture — about the concepts, values and assumptions that underlie how they think and what they do. They may simply have failed to even realize there is a culture. Many of the situations where we blame people from a different background for being difficult or lazy or unprofessional could be attributed to a general lack of awareness about our own culturally influenced expectations about the `right way' to do things. People from some cultures `naturally' assume that failing to complete a task on time indicates laziness or ignorance, or that insisting on having the entire extended family by the hospital bed indicates a desire to be difficult. After all, they mean these things in their own culture.

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Until recently relatively few of us had to work for long outside our own culture. Now, with globalization, the telecommunications revolution and increased immigration, many of us have come face-to-face with the fact that some of our most cherished instincts do not travel very well. What is expected and understood in our culture can appear shocking or uncomfortable to those from another. In cross-cultural situations where we have to work in a different cultural environment, or inter-cultural situations where a number of cultures work together, these cultural differences can lead to all manner of misunderstandings. These misunderstandings, in turn, can result in a wide variety of undesired consequences ranging from culture-shock (hurt feelings, anger and hostility resulting from cultural misunderstandings) to missed business opportunities, failed exams and dissatisfied patients or clients.

Of course, if we could become cross-culturally effective and learn to recognize and reconcile these misunderstandings, we would stand a very good chance of sidestepping some of the unpleasant consequences that can quickly sour relations between people from different cultures. One goal of learning about culture is to recognize the limits of what one really knows and thinks, and try to make sense of the different ways in which people categorize things from their own perspectives.

DISTINGUISHING THE CULTURAL FROM THE PERSONAL

One of the common criticisms made about the Iceberg model of culture described in chapter 1 is that it treats individuals as objects, doomed forever to remain trapped in a world of cultural subjectivity and unable to express real personal choices. In fact, this criticism reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of different influences on the individual mind.

Culture is clearly not the only influence on the way we think and act. At a very basic level each of us responds to influences which are truly instinctual. We also have a range of inherited and learned personality characteristics that exist in all cultures equally (although the way in which personality types are manifested across cultures differs).

Where, then, does culture fit in with personality and instinct to drive individual behaviour and thought? One way of answering this question is to view culture as the organization, rather than the imposition of uniformity. Culture guides us merely in a mutual understanding of the range of acceptable ways of looking at, or behaving in, a situation. Each of us, as an individual, is capable of making our own choices, but this individuality is expressed within the parameters set by the cultures in which we live. We can, if we so choose, shake hands at the outset of a business meeting. Alternatively, we could rub noses, or embrace, or kiss, or bow or any of a hundred other things. Doing some of these things in some cultures and situations will gain respect. In other cultures and situations they will invite a punch in the face. The point is that the way we understand what is appropriate in which situation is a reflection of what we have learnt from our own unique background and the cultural influences on us. From this understanding we derive choices. It is the acting out of these choices in any culture that directly drives much of the behaviour we exhibit and observe. One way of understanding these choices is by considering the range of ways in which cultural tendencies can manifest themselves at the level of personal behaviour.

For example, two broad approaches to communication have been identified. Cultures that favour 'direct' communication (such as that of the USA) value being explicit and clear in conversation. Cultures that favour indirect communication (such as that of Japan) avoid causing themselves or their counterparts to lose face, even at the risk of appearing ambiguous and unclear. Although people from all cultures demonstrate both types of behaviour, the tendency to prefer one style of behaviour over another is widely reported to vary across cultures. An American's 'default' preference is a direct communication style — in other words, an American will tend to use this style in the absence of any situational clues indicating that a different style may be appropriate. Neither the Japanese nor Americans would necessarily be completely direct when breaking news of bereavement; the situation indicates otherwise. And faced with an oncoming train the Japanese are likely to be every bit as direct in their warnings as anyone else. However, in the absence of any such contextual indicators, the default American inclination is to 'say what they mean and mean what they say', whereas

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the default Japanese inclination is to maintain harmony and protect face — and it is culture that influences them to make that type of choice.

Several important points follow from this view of culture and individuality described above. First, trying to understand where culture ends and the personal or universal begins is not an easy thing to do. Indeed, at an individual level, being part of a particular culture may not necessarily be a predictor of how a given person will behave in any given situation. Personality and context may be just as important. Second, in order to understand what a person's intentions are when they behave in certain ways, we must understand the individual — both in context and as part of their culture. To put it another way, it is certainly not true to say that if I understand your culture I will understand you, although I may well understand some of the things you do, and think, and say. However, knowing your cultural background, I am likely to understand you in a different way than I have understood you before. Knowledge about your background will probably help me to be more accurate in the judgements I make about you. Finally, the fundamental attribution error - making judgements about people's behaviour based on their personal traits rather than the situation or context – is more likely to occur in cross-cultural situations. This is simply because we have less information about what any given situation or context means and assume that the explanation for behaviour lies at a personal level. Assuming that someone is behaving in a certain way because of their personality can be as restricting and unfair as the assumption that culture is the cause for their behaviour.

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CHAPTER 3 - CULTURAL CHALLENGES AT WORK

At work, people have certain expectations about the outcomes of their own behaviour and the motivation of others they encounter. These expectations are based on their past experience and the knowledge they have acquired of how people 'should' respond to certain situations or events. In situations where people from different cultures interact, these expectations may be wrong. Others may challenge our ways of looking at things or only partially comply with our understanding of how they should behave. Recognizing the difficulties that can arise when cultural misunderstandings occur is the first step in being able to deal more effectively with cross-cultural encounters. This chapter explores some of the difficulties that can be encountered by individuals as they interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in the workplace and beyond.

THE CHALLENGE OF CULTURE AT WORK

The challenges that arise from cultural differences at work can be identified at three different levels.

- Emotional and attitudinal challenges include the subjective feelings of anxiety and stress that we sometimes experience when we do not know why people behave as they do and we are unable to influence their behaviour in the way we wish.
- Cognitive challenges occur when we come face-to-face with our own incorrect assumptions about how things operate within any particular context — when we realize that we need to develop appropriate knowledge about how things actually work.
- Practical challenges occur when we recognize that we lack the appropriate skills for dealing effectively with any given situation, or for handling cross-cultural misunderstandings

EMOTIONAL AND ATTITUDINAL CHALLENGES

Our own expectations about how things should be are closely bound up with our sense of self-identity. Challenges to these expectations can be challenging to our identity and sense of being, arid may consequently be highly emotional experiences. A number of common emotional and attitudinal challenges are associated with cross-cultural encounters at work. Although most often associated with work assignments overseas, elements of each phenomenon can occur during any form of cross-cultural contact.

ANXIETY AND OTHER INTENSE EMOTIONS SUCH AS FEAR OR ANGER

The causes of anxiety and stress are many. One key cause is a perceived lack of control over our environment and the inability to get the responses we desire from others. Unsurprisingly, faced with the ambiguity and uncertainty apparent when we interact with someone behaving according to different cultural rules, we may experience feelings of nervous tension, unease or apprehension. At extreme levels this anxiety can be reflected in a number of physical symptoms. If not recognized and addressed, even mild anxiety over a long period can result in the burn-out and emotional exhaustion associated with 'culture-shock'. Of course, not all anxiety is bad. Moderate anxiety can motivate people to learn and perform better. Without any anxiety at all, individuals may feel a distinct lack of motivation to venture beyond their comfort zones. However, beyond a certain threshold of tolerance, anxiety moves from being a motivating force to one of discomfort and debilitation.

A common response to the experience of extreme emotional upset and stress is to refrain from further contact; in a bid to escape from these negative emotions many of us try to physically or mentally distance ourselves in whatever ways we can. Ethnocentric reactions to cross-cultural encounters and misunderstandings (denial, defence and minimization) can be seen as just this type of mental distancing. Other types of distancing include finding ways of changing the stressful

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situation, changing one's attitude towards stressors, or accommodating the stress by reconciling the difference between expectations and reality.

A SENSE OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

Belonging, whether to families, tribes or larger groups, is a fundamental requirement of human life. Much of the meaning and security in our lives comes from our networks of personal relationships. Defining in-groups and out-groups and viewing other cultures negatively is one way of establishing which groups we do, and do not, belong to. It is perhaps inevitable, then, that when we are deprived of sufficient contact with other member of our in-groups, or when confronted with members of out-groups, feelings of loneliness, alienation and low self-esteem surface. Feeling isolated and separated from others who can understand and validate your view of the world can be a lonely and challenging experience.

A SENSE OF UPROOTEDNESS AND LACK OF ADJUSTMENT

Particularly during extended periods in unfamiliar cultures, we can experience feelings of being an outsider, or of not belonging. We may not be recognized as the individuals we know ourselves to be, especially when separated from others who can reinforce our identity. We commonly feel a sense of uprootedness when there are few others around to reaffirm the validity of our world-view, and who share our values. This is particularly the case when cross-cultural encounters involve a dramatic change in relative status. The respected expert in one culture may become simply another illegal immigrant in a different culture. A relatively low-paid factory worker can become a rich foreigner after a flight of just a few hours. Adjusting to such dramatic changes can be difficult.

A SENSE OF LACK OF CONTROL

The reality of much cross-cultural contact is that many of the expectations of how much we can achieve are wholly inaccurate. Functioning in unfamiliar environments, with individuals whom we may not respect or even understand, can bring about feelings of loss of control, even of helplessness. This is compounded by the fact that incorrect, inappropriate or disconfirmed expectations are often magnified in importance when viewed subjectively. Inevitably, when there is a mismatch between expectations and reality, considerable frustration and discomfort can result.

FEELINGS THAT ONE HAS BEEN SINGLED OUT FOR ATTENTION

During periods of anxiety and uncertainty, time can be spent brooding over feelings. Unchecked, this can lead to the development of mild paranoia. 'These people are talking about me' can be a common complaint. I can clearly recall my distinct and certain conviction that the residents of the city I lived in on my first long trip overseas were deliberately going out of their way to walk into me on the pavement. Paranoia is likely to both compound the other emotional consequences described above and make it more difficult to handle cross-cultural encounters.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGES

Cross-cultural interactions can present considerable cognitive challenges. Recognizing what we do not know, and taking steps to develop appropriate cultural understanding is an essential part of managing cultural differences at work. Of course, even with the correct knowledge at an intellectual level we may not completely avoid the emotional challenges associated with cultural misunderstandings: recognizing the reasons for actions does not necessarily correspond with accepting them at an emotional level.

Nevertheless coming to understand why people think and do what they do is an important step in dealing with cross-cultural encounters.

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RECOGNIZING THAT OTHERS DO NOT SHARE ONE'S OWN WAYS OF THINKING OR PERCEIVING, AND THAT OUR PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE MAY BE INADEQUATE

Most situations in life have elements of ambiguity and uncertainty. To handle doubt we often fill in the information gaps in any encounter from our own frame of reference: we see what we expect, or want, to see in ambiguous situations, without really looking. These 'guesses' often work in familiar cultures. Unfortunately, in unfamiliar cultures, the lack of clarity or reference points can make ambiguity more intense and hence more difficult to manage. For example, individuals from cultures with 'direct' communication styles sometimes perceive the communication of those from more 'indirect' cultures as deceptive or unclear. When we come to realize that what we are 'seeing' may not really be there, we are confronted with the fact that some of our knowledge may be both inaccurate and not useful. Life and work situations that used to be predictable suddenly become unpredictable and confusing. This leads to unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved and a recognition that we need to improve our knowledge of other people and the cultural contexts in which they exist.

RECOGNIZING THAT ROLE EXPECTATIONS MAY BE DIFFERENT

We all hold expectations of how those in certain roles (for example, parents, police officers, teachers and so on) should and should not behave. Although some elements of these roles are universal (for example, that parents should care for, and support, their children), others are entirely culture-bound. Individuals in any particular culture are both socialized into their own roles and taught to expect certain behaviour from other roles. Behaviours that diverge from our expectations about how someone in a particular role should behave can be quite unsettling.

The role of families and family members provides clear examples of cross-cultural variation. For example, does the 'family' mean the nuclear form common in the west or the pattern of extended clan-like relationships common in Arab cultures? Are older family members venerated as in many Asian cultures? Or is youth more valued, as in the West? Are children expected to contribute to adult decisions or to be seen and not heard? Sex and gender roles also vary. The role of romantic partners, the level of intimacy acceptable in public and the extent of female involvement in the world of work or outside the home are other examples that may also differ. Also important are the relative rights and responsibilities of those at higher or lower status levels. Whether selected through age, birth, election, expertise, family, gender or any other category, cultures differ in the degree of hierarchical differentiation, the manner in which it is shown, and its desirability.

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Conceptions vary from culture to culture about what education is, where it takes place, who it is with, and how individuals learn. This can be a particularly difficult challenge for those involved in teaching multicultural learning groups.

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENT RITUALS AND SUPERSTITIONS

Ritual refers to standardized behaviours in which the relationships between the means and the end is not intrinsic. All societies have rituals, ranging from shaking hands or bowing, saying 'how are you?' (without the slightest expectation that anyone will really tell you how they are) to reinforcements of belief such as religious services, and rituals of kinship such as family parties and anniversaries. There is no clear or logical reason why we should associate handshakes or bowing with the demonstration of courtesy or respect. In fact, these associations are based not on facts, but on symbolic concepts. Such symbols can vary dramatically across cultures. Rituals that earn respect in one location or context may invite scorn in another. Superstitions also vary across cultures. Some cultures may have more than others. There is perhaps little that is wholly rational or wholly superstitious; rationality can be just as culture-bound as superstition. To some, refusing to touch someone else with the left hand might be perceived as irrational. To others, with the history of using the left hand for bodily functions as in Muslim societies, it is highly rational. It might be said that superstition itself

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is a rational by-product of the constant search for meaning and understanding that underpins culture, however irrational it may appear to people from outside that culture.

RECOGNIZING DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF TIME AND SPACE

Concepts of time are not innate to the human species. Some researchers claim that Europeans and Americans divide the working day into 'blocks' of five minutes. As a result, being more than five minutes (or one block of time) late in these countries can cause annoyance. The researchers suggested that Arab cultures, in contrast, prefer to work in blocks of 15 minutes. Attitudes towards past and present differ. Some cultures attach considerable value to addressing the historical and background perspective of any work issue. Others value the urge to 'cut to the chase' and focus on opportunities in the present. Space is also important. Humans are territorial animals that react when their personal space is encroached upon. Individuals from cultures that tend towards smaller personal distances can be misperceived as 'pushy' or overtly sexual, while those from cultures that use larger personal distances can be misperceived as 'unfriendly', 'distant' or 'cold'.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Emotional and cognitive challenges aside, cross-cultural encounters bring with them practical difficulties that need to be dealt with.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Conceptions of work - particularly differing ideas about what constitutes good or poor, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate work performance - can differ radically between cultures. In multi-cultural work environments, such as project teams or expatriate assignments, we may bring into the workplace expectations and behaviours that are very different from those of our counterparts. American and North European attitudes towards precision, perseverance, punctuality and task completion may be meaningless in more socially-oriented cultures where maintaining relationships with other people takes precedence. Other areas where workplace approaches may clash include the amount of planning required for any particular project, the timescales involved, the way in which rewards are distributed, the expectations of initiative by team members, and the ways in which control is maintained and decisions arrived at.

DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Where different languages or communication rules apply, simple tasks can suddenly become very difficult. There are a number of different ways in which communication can break down in cross-cultural encounters:

- Words can mean different things in different situations. Second languages are not easy to master. This can lead to an unintended cycle of confusion and miscommunication in which neither individual understands the other's behaviour.
- In some cultures silence indicates an absence of communication, whereas in others it represents an essential part of communication.
- The intensity of verbal communication can vary, both in terms of sound and in the degree of disagreement that can be openly expressed.
- Who is permitted to talk in any given situation often varies, depending on the status of the particular individuals involved.
- In some cultures, particularly those where 'face' is important, explicitly saying 'No' can be considered rude. In such circumstances it is often difficult to know when agreement about a particular decision has been reached
- It is often assumed by native speakers that those who are best at speaking their language must, by default, have an understanding of their culture. Being a 'fluent fool' (knowing the language but nothing about the culture) is a potential risk in these circumstances. Paradoxically, it can also mean that people who do not speak the language very well may get the benefit of more cultural 'doubt' that those who do.

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DIFFICULTIES IN COMPLETING ASSIGNED TASKS

In the absence of appropriate knowledge, our behaviours may be incorrect or simply inappropriate and this may create a considerable obstacle to our ability to achieve what we need to do. In such circumstances, it is unwise to assume that others necessarily share our understanding or approach to a particular project.

DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS OR FRIENDSHIPS

In the absence of good relations, past prejudices, however much rejected at a conscious level, may come to the fore. This makes developing and maintaining good professional relationships essential. Of course, not every individual possesses the social skills necessary for excellent communication or developing intimate relationships, and even those who do may still encounter problems in a different culture.

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CHAPTER 4 - TOWARDS CROSS-CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

Encountering individuals with very different cultural values, attitudes and behaviours can be a challenge. Subjective feelings of anxiety and stress can surface when we do not know why people behave or communicate as they do and why we are unable to influence their behaviour in the way we wish. As a result, we may have to deal with a lack of knowledge or understanding as well as the practical difficulties that can occur when we recognize that we lack the appropriate skills for dealing effectively with cross-cultural misunderstandings.

This chapter initially aims to explore some of the unproductive, ethnocentric ways in which individuals, teams and organizations typically respond to these challenges. It then moves on to introduce a checklist to help people overcome barriers to cross-cultural communication and benefit from the potential for learning and growth that cross-cultural contact brings. The chapter draws on Basic Concepts of Inter-cultural Communication (Inter-cultural Press, 1998) by Milton Bennett, one of the foremost writers in the area of cultural learning.

Bennett suggests that developing cross-cultural effectiveness involves moving in six stages, or steps, from what he calls an 'ethnocentric' view of the world, to an 'ethno-relative' one.

THREE STAGES IN DEVELOPING CROSS-CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

The first three stages of Bennett's model involve us in recognizing and overcoming attitudes and beliefs that place our own culture at the centre of our world.

STAGE 1: DENIAL

Individuals in the first stage - we can usefully call them *missionaries* - are wholly unaware that cultural differences even exist, possibly because they have never left their own culture or met with individuals from different backgrounds, or because they have simply segregated themselves from others. Missionaries are most common among those who have lived their lives in relatively homogenous communities or countries. Brought up amongst people who share the same values, attitudes and behaviours, they simply cannot conceive that others can operate successfully on a completely different value system. For missionaries, their way is right and no other. On the rare occasions when missionaries encounter others from different backgrounds three reactions are possible:

1. They may judge others based either on second-hand stereotypes ("I always heard the xxxxxx were lazy").
2. They may assume that the behaviour they see is a reflection of individual whim ("She is a lazy person").
3. They may, particularly when travelling overseas, simply assume that locals are somehow less developed, educated or able than compatriots. They may even believe that it is their duty to educate the natives - show them the way things 'should' be done.

STAGE 2: DEFENCE

The second stage, defence, involves a recognition that cultural differences exist, but a belief that our own ways are (in some ill-defined form) better than those of other cultures. Individuals at the defence stage - we can usefully call them *expats* - recognize that there are, indeed, other ways of doing things, but in general judge them to be vastly inferior to 'our ways of doing things' back home. Ex-pats recognize the existence of other values and behaviours, but continue to make faulty attributions or interpretations from their own ethnocentric perceptions, often with negative judgements attached. Thus when dealing with individuals from different backgrounds, expats may defend the things they themselves do as 'right and good' and view those things that others do as wrong or bad. In the expats' world there is limited space

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for shades of grey and precious little empathy for the expectations and assumptions of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Defence can also be exhibited in an entirely opposite fashion - by denying that our own style of doing things has any validity and instead believing that another culture is inevitably superior. Such individuals (we can call them *neo-natives*) swap labels and begin to assume that everything about the new culture is good, and nothing is bad. Those who 'go native' eschew or stereotype their own culture and may even go out of their way to avoid coming into contact with people from their own background.

STAGE 3: MINIMIZATION

In the third stage, minimization, cultural differences are acknowledged to exist, but only at a surface or objective level. These differences are not condemned or judged as inferior; indeed, they may be valued. What is missing, however, is any understanding that culture exists at a deeper level than objective artefacts such as taboos and rituals Individuals at this stage - we can usefully call then *global villagers* - admit to a minimal number of differences between cultures, but only at a superficial behavioural level. They consider that 'underneath, everyone is the same'. The assumption is that what works here will, with perhaps some simple superficial amendments, work everywhere else.

For some, it may not be altogether clear why the belief that 'We are all the same' should be seen as negative or maladaptive. Indeed, some cultures posit the minimization of cultural differences as a form of social ideal. In fact, it is the denial of any differences in the deeper assumptions and values of other cultures that makes the global villager so ineffective. All humans are, in some basic ways, the same. They are also, in some other very basic ways, very different. Culture is the application of organization to both differences and similarities. Ignoring what is different and recognizing only what is similar can be extremely unhelpful in trying to understand others, either at the group or individual level. Businesspeople with this type of reaction may, quite correctly, say that everyone on earth is in business to make money, but will blithely ignore differences in the way people go about making money, what ethical standards they work to, what making money means in terms of family and group responsibilities, and who the business is ultimately meant to serve.

MOVING FORWARD

In identifying the stages described above, a number of provisos need to be made:

- Not everyone accepts the existence of such neatly defined steps or stages. In fact they can just as productively be viewed as representative of a range of responses deriving from cross-cultural differences, each of which contains elements that detract from, rather than contribute to, cross-cultural effectiveness.

- Individuals, teams and organizations may well prosper while remaining in any one of these stages. The purpose of these classifications is to identify situations in which performance and cross-cultural effectiveness can potentially be enhanced, rather than stereotype others in a negative fashion.

- Sometimes it is easy to overestimate problems that may arise in cross-cultural interactions. Those with experience and motivation may well have recognized and moved beyond defence, denial and minimization without ever having been exposed to those terms. The importance of these terms lies not so much in what they mean as in the foundation they provide for a structured and explicit strategy for becoming more culturally effective.

Moving beyond the stages of denial, defence and minimization towards cross-cultural effectiveness involves both overcoming mono-cultural attitudes and beliefs and developing practical cross-cultural skills. This process can be conceived as a handy checklist of six steps. The first three steps involve moving beyond ethnocentrism and a mono-cultural outlook through recognizing the existence of culture, refraining from passing judgements about people from different backgrounds and coming to recognize the influence of culture on ourselves. The second three steps involve

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beginning to understand some of the ways in which other cultures are similar to and different from our own, adapting behaviour in response to differing cultural contexts and reconciling cultural differences in order to learn or create value from cross-cultural interactions

SIX STEPS TO CROSS-CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

1. Stop thinking that your way is the only way. It is just a different way.
    - Recognize why culture exists, what it looks like and how it is transmitted.
    - Make a conscious decision to accept and respect cultural differences.
    - Recognize the challenges that can arise during cross-cultural interactions.
2. Move beyond stereotypes. Separate description from interpretation and evaluation.
    - Make your own stereotypes explicit.
    - Avoid assumptions, suspend judgement and look for the complexity in other groups.
    - Aim for shared understanding and avoid labels of 'good' or 'bad'.
    - Describe (what?), then interpret (so what?) and then evaluate (now what?).
3. Know yourself to know others. Identify and question your own assumptions.
    - Recognize the range of cultural influences on you.
    - Develop an awareness and understanding of your own core values, attitudes and assumptions.
    - Attitude is everything: review, evaluate and modify - but be consistent.
    - Learn to identify your own reactions to ambiguity and uncertainty.
    - Have realistic expectations of yourself.
4. Look at the individual in context. Consider culture, circumstance and character.
    - Make a conscious effort to learn about others.
    - Accept differences and seek commonalities; compare and contrast cultures.
    - Anticipate and prepare fully to avoid unnecessary surprises.
    - Develop realistic expectations about what you can achieve.
    - Identify potential barriers to communication.
5. Treat others as they would wish to be treated. Use your RADAR and when in doubt, ask.
    - Be patient, open and flexible.
    - Learn and allow for different learning, communication and work styles.

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- Expect misunderstandings and conflict once in a while. Deal with them, learn from them and move on.

6. Profit from difference. Look for the value that comes from reconciling different ways.

   - Acknowledge mistakes and accept responsibility.
   - Maintain your own sense of identity and integrity.
   - Be sincere — artificiality is obvious in any culture.

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CHAPTER 5 - MOVING BEYOND STEREOTYPES

The term 'stereotype' originally referred to a printing stamp that was used to make multiple copies from a single model or cast. It was the journalist and commentator Walter Lippmann in his 1922 book Public Opinion who adapted the term to refer to generalizations made about a person or category of persons. Stereotypes are often made around characteristics of age, sex, race, religion, vocation, nationality and ethnicity, although potentially any characteristic that distinguishes one group of people from another can lead to stereotyping.

Of course, generalizing about a category of people is a natural function of the human mind. Generalizing helps find ways of classifying others by virtue of certain characteristics we perceive them to hold. It enables us to simplify complex realities and give meaning to customs, values or behaviours that are alien to us.

Generalizations can be useful in allowing us to observe and understand others within the context of the groups and categories to which they belong. In the absence of complete information about any particular individual, generalizations allow us to 'fill in the blanks' and make judgements about others with a certain probability that we are correct. Armed with these generalized notions of others we can, at least in theory, better determine how best to act in any given encounter with them.

Generalizing, then, is a natural pattern of human behaviour that is, in and of itself, neither good nor bad, moral nor immoral. Stereotyping, in contrast, can be seen as a pattern of behaviour based around inappropriate generalization. It occurs when we make unwarranted assumptions about members of our own or another culture. At their worst, stereotypes can affect the judgements made about other individuals and lead to prejudice, discrimination and even persecution on the part of those stereotyping, and self-fulfilling prophecies on the part of those being stereotyped. Several characteristics of stereotypes and the process of stereotyping can be identified.

STEREOTYPES EXIST FOR A PURPOSE

Stereotypes make reality easier to deal with because they simplify the complexities that make people unique. Using stereotypes is a way of coping with the uncertainty of the world and of making life more predictable. Stereotypes, consciously or unconsciously, inform much of how we perceive and think about others and how we view the world we live in. It is therefore important to recognize that stereotypes exist and make a conscious decision to be aware of them in our encounters with those who come from different backgrounds.

Of course, being aware of stereotypes in a theoretical way is necessary but not sufficient for moving beyond stereotyping. It is reported that Lenny Bruce, the infamous American comic, would begin his stage routines by using taboo words for every racial group in the USA. Faced with audience consternation he would say something along the lines of 'Now that I have your attention, let's get down to business ...'.

Perhaps the most important key to overcoming stereotyping is simply recognizing and making explicit what the stereotypes that you hold as truths actually are. Although this may not be a particularly pleasant or comfortable experience, it is a step towards finding a productive way of overcoming them. Common stereotypes directly reflect our beliefs and, like other more pleasant beliefs, we must under-stand them if we are to understand ourselves.

STEREOTYPES ARE SIMPLISTIC

Try a simple exercise. Identify a stereotype that other cultures commonly hold about people from one of the groups to which you belong. Now write it down. Does the stereotype consist of more than a few words or, at most, two to three sentences? It is an integral part of the function of stereotyping that a range of complex and multi-faceted attitudes and behaviours be refined into a simple, easily digestible 'rule of thumb'. Dealing with stereotypes means recognizing this

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simplicity and making active efforts to gain a more complex understanding of the cultural background of those you interact with.

STEREOTYPES ARE OFTEN SECOND-HAND

We acquire and absorb stereotypes from a number of different sources including family, education, media and friends. Even if we have very little direct experience of individuals from the groups being stereotyped, we are still able to draw on a cultural store of stereotypical images of these groups. Thus while we may never have been near England, many of us are still convinced that English food is inedible and the dentistry prehistoric. The 'truth' of stereotypes is rarely based on our own observations but on a 'distillation' of reality through persistent repetition in books and magazines, films or television, or related by friends and family. Moving beyond stereotypes means gaining firsthand knowledge and awareness of individuals from the culture in question, for it is only by recognizing the individuality of others that stereotypes can be challenged.

STEREOTYPES DO NOT REFLECT THE INDIVIDUALITY OF GROUP MEMBERS

Stereotyping involves defining each member of a group through the 'average' perception we have of that group and represents an attempt to claim that each individual human being in a certain group shares a set of common qualities. This standardized conception of a specific group of people forces a simple pattern upon a complex mass, and assigns a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group. Thus all British people are seen as cold, Americans as loud, Germans as fastidious and Japanese as inscrutable. Stereotypes are not, on the whole, complex or rich enough to take into account the vast range of behaviours that the British, Americans, Germans and Japanese are capable of. The best, then, that can be said about stereotypes is that some are less false than others and (more importantly) some are less harmful than others. Ascribing characteristics to a person based on a stereotype is inevitably done in the absence of the total facts, or a consideration of individual uniqueness. In moving beyond stereotypes, it is essential that we find a way of talking about cultural differences in a way that is not prescriptive and does not deny individual differences. Paradoxically perhaps, it also means avoiding getting stuck in a loop, not generalizing for fear of stereotyping and, as a result, not coming to any understanding at all of other cultures.

STEREOTYPES OFTEN SAY MORE ABOUT THE VALUES, NORMS AND BEHAVIOURAL ORIENTATIONS WITHIN OUR GROUP THAN WITHIN ANY OTHER GROUP

Popular stereotypes are images that are shared by those who hold a common cultural mind-set. They are the way a in which a culture, or significant subgroup within that culture, defines and labels a specific group of people and, as such, are direct expressions of that particular culture's beliefs and values. Stereotypes can therefore provide an important and revealing expression of the hidden beliefs and values of those who hold them. For example, American stereotypes of Russians during the Second World War (fur-hatted vodka-drinking comrades-in-arms) changed dramatic-ally during the Cold War to a vision of brain-washed communists in an evil empire. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union a new stereotype of Russians as poor, hungry victims of a disorganized and self-defeating socialist system has emerged. The point is that these changing stereotypes can be explained more clearly by shifts in American values, beliefs and priorities than by changes in Russian culture itself. The way in which we simplify our view of other groups reflects important beliefs and values that are widely shared in our own culture, as much as those in other cultures. Moving beyond stereotypes requires us to separate description of what we see from the way in which we interpret and evaluate what we see.

STEREOTYPES RESTRICT THE FREEDOM OF THOSE WHO ARE STEREOTYPED

Stereotypes function to reduce and simplify complexity and thus make dealing with ambiguous or unfamiliar people and situations easier. Society has powerful motives to encourage people to 'live up to their stereotypes': to encourage them to act like the images a culture already has of them so that they fulfil their 'proper' social roles. Stereotypes are therefore not

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merely descriptions of the way in which a culture views a specific group of people, but are also often prescriptions of how a group of individuals 'should' behave. Imposing our stereotypes on others and encouraging them to internalize a particular cultural image may well be damaging to them as individuals. In particular, if we require others to accept our stereotyped image of what they ought to be, even if the image is a positive one, we limit their personal choices about what they wish to be. Moving beyond stereotypes means not imposing our categories or ways of stereotyping on others.

STEREOTYPES DO NOT CONSIDER THE CONTEXT IN WHICH BEHAVIOURS OR CUSTOMS BECOME APPARENT

A blunt stereotype of Americans is that of Informality'. Unfortunately for those stereotyping, whilst it may well be true that Americans are more likely to wear casual clothing to certain social events, and to greet colleagues and clients by their first name, there are situations and environments in which considerable formality is the norm. Stereotypes almost inevitably lack sufficient complexity to recognize that most types of behaviour can be witnessed in most cultures. Superficially at least, what distinguishes one culture from another is the likelihood that certain things will be done and said (and certain things will not) and the context within which these behaviours occur. Viewing all Americans as informal, in all situations, fails to take account of the importance of context in determining appropriate behaviour. Moving beyond stereotypes means learning to understand the individuals you encounter in context. This involves distinguishing when people are acting according to their culture, when they are acting according to the context they find themselves in, and when according to their own personal set of values.

STEREOTYPES DO NOT REFLECT THE DYNAMIC AND CHANGING NATURE OF CULTURE

Stereotypes are resistant to change. Even after more than half a century, old stereotypes about Germany stubbornly colour the perceptions of those whose grandparents fought against Nazism in the Second World War. Despite its status as one of Europe's wealthiest economies, Spain is still occasionally plagued by images of `mañana, mañana'. Moving beyond stereotypes means recognizing and accepting when a perception of another cultural grouping is well and truly out-of-date.

STEREOTYPES ARE MORE OFTEN POSITIVE OR NEUTRAL ABOUT OUR OWN GROUP, AND LESS POSITIVE ABOUT OTHER GROUPS

Try another simple exercise. Write down ten adjectives to describe your own culture or country. Now write down another ten to describe your neighbouring culture or country. Read through each list and mark each adjective with either + for 'positive', N for 'neutral' and — for 'negative'. Which culture has the most positive or neutral adjectives — the one you belong to, or the other one?

Most people who honestly complete this exercise consistently view their own cultures in more positive or neutral terms than they view others. The belief that those from other cultural backgrounds are less civilized, advanced or moral than our own is a common stereotype, often simultaneously held by a number of cultures about each other. Of course, not all stereotypes are negative. A ‘countertype' is a positive stereotype (one which arouses 'good' emotions and associates a group of people with socially approved characteristics). Examples of countertypes include the 'good' German beloved of wartime British and American propaganda films or the Sidney Poitier-type character in a number of 1970s films, denounced by one critic as 'little more than a racist command for black males to clean up their acts, cut their hair, learn to speak English clearly and 'properly% and pursue professional goals'.

Unfortunately, countertypes are still oversimplified views of the group being stereo-typed and cannot be accepted at face value any more than the negative stereotype they seek to replace. Moving beyond stereotypes means finding a way of describing cultural differences and similarities that is mutually agreeable to everyone involved. It means finding a shared vocabulary and language acceptable to individuals from many different backgrounds.

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STEREOTYPES TEND TO CREATE A PERCEPTION OF 'THEM' AND 'US'

It is a natural fact of human evolution that individuals try to surround themselves with others who provide social acceptance in times of need. As a result, individuals make considerable investment in learning and conforming to the norms and behaviours of the groups to which they belong. With so much investment in conforming to our own groups, it is hardly surprising if we sometimes see the way in which others do things as less than perfect. This most damaging effect of stereotyping encourages simplistic distinctions between those who belong to our own groups and those who do not. People simplify the intellectual images they maintain of specific ethnic groups, including their own, often in cruel or damaging ways. Of course, contrary to popular belief, racial or ethnic stereotypes are not always negative. Stereotypes can, in fact, be positive (for example Asians are also regarded as intelligent and Germans as diligent). Regardless of their nature, however, stereo-types are damaging because, when they are accepted as truth, they lead to sweeping assumptions about entire races of people. When we judge people and groups based on our prejudices and stereotypes and treat them differently, we are engaging in discrimination. As individuals in any given culture base at least some of their behaviour on shared beliefs and values, negative stereotypes can be associated with actions of an exceedingly harmful nature. Moving beyond stereotypes means avoiding simplistic labels of 'good' or 'bad', and developing a more balanced and considered way of viewing one's own and other cultures.

MOVING BEYOND STEREOTYPING

Based on the description of stereotypes above, you can put into place a checklist of simple but practical strategies to move beyond stereotyping and find more productive ways of looking at those who are different.

1. Be aware. We all stereotype, whether we want to or not.
2. Make your own stereotypes explicit. Confront your prejudices and stereotypes. Only when you understand them can you hope to challenge them. And, remember, coming to terms with past prejudices can be an emotional experience.
3. Look for the complexity in other groups. Recognize the simplicity of most stereotypes and learn to distinguish variety in other groups.
4. Separate description from interpretation and evaluation. Stereotypes often say more about those making the stereotypes than those who are the subject of stereotypes.
5. Don't impose your stereotypes on others. It restricts and impoverishes them.
6. Focus on the individual, in context. Focus on the individuality of people you encounter and the situation you are in, not simply the groups they belong to.
7. Be up-to-date. Understand where cultures are now, not where they were 30 years ago.
8. Look for shared understanding. Find mutually acceptable ways of describing cultural similarities and differences.
9. Avoid labels of 'good' or 'bad'. Cultures are rarely better or worse, just different. Try to find a balanced attitude towards your own and other groups.
10. Distinguish moral relativism from cultural relativism. Accepting that others have different values and attitudes does not imply a challenge to your basic moral beliefs.

If you are working with groups or teams where stereotyping and mutual distrust has been a problem, the following 'rules of thumb' are likely to improve interaction and communication:

1. Bring people into a situation in which they enjoy equal status.
2. Create a climate of interdependence.
3. Arrange for personal interaction so that people can appreciate their uniqueness as well as their similarities.
4. Start a meaningful dialogue with an individual whose group is being stereotyped.
5. Try to keep communication lines open, especially throughout conflict, to avoid misunderstandings.

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CHAPTER 6 - DEVELOPING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Many of us take great comfort from a strongly held belief in individual freedom and accountability. We come to prize our 'individuality', stemming, as it does, from a combination of inherited personality characteristics and the values and beliefs we have developed from the unique range of personal and life experiences to which we have been exposed. We cherish our freedom to make conscious choices about what to think and how to behave, and value our right to express our individuality in a variety of different ways. For many of us, it both easy and desirable to believe that our thoughts and actions are driven purely by our personal beliefs and own free will, rather than by external factors of which we may not even be aware.

Of course, at the same time most of us accept that we do not always think and act in a complete vacuum. Our individuality, however innovative and unique it may be, is necessarily expressed within the parameters established by basic human needs. We recognize that inherited instincts (pre-wired human tendencies to behave in certain ways in certain situations) influence our behaviour. Thus, our instinctive desire to keep ourselves relatively free from hunger or thirst means that, for most of us, the conscious choices we make about eating, for example, revolve around deciding on the when, where and what, rather than whether to eat at all. In general, we do not even consciously entertain the thought of not eating for a prolonged period.

On further reflection, most of us will also acknowledge that, in addition to inherited instincts, there are other influences on the way in which we think and act. We may well accept and value such visible manifestations of culture as art, folk traditions and religious rituals. Indeed, part of our individuality can be seen in our conscious choice to accept (or reject) the behaviours and rituals associated with the groups to which we belong.

However, for some of us it can be harder to accept that there may be other influences operating at a level outside our conscious awareness, or that our perceptions and behaviours may be influenced by assumptions and values about what is 'natural' or 'normal' that lie outside our own subjective day-to-day experience. This is perhaps unsurprising when we consider that we usually cannot see or touch the beliefs shared by members of the groups to which we belong. Indeed, the existence of such assumptions may only become apparent when we come into contact with others who hold very different assumptions and values.

The term 'global villager' has been used to describe those who acknowledge cultural differences at a surface level, while at the same time failing to accept that there may be deeper level cultural assumptions and values impacting on their own (and other people's) way of thinking and acting. Their assumption (conscious or otherwise) is that, whilst on the surface we are all different, 'underneath, everyone is the same'.

In fact, there may not be much wrong with assuming that 'underneath, everyone is the same' when we are communicating with people who have been brought up to believe and act in the same way as we have. The problem arises when we come into contact with others from different cultural back-grounds. In such circumstances the global villager's assumption tends to be that 'underneath, everyone is the same as me'. Thus, others are all children of my god; the basic beliefs and values that hold true all around the world are my beliefs. In other words, 'you may well speak a different language, and wear different clothes, but fundamentally you think the same way as I do'.

Unfortunately, when confronted with evidence that other people manifestly do believe different things and act in different ways, global villagers will tend to interpret these differences entirely as the consequence of personal choices. Thus, their rationale runs, if you choose not to turn up for your appointment on time you are probably 'lazy', 'discourteous', 'backward' or, in some ill-defined way, simply 'wrong'. After all, if 'underneath, everyone is the same', it is only natural that everyone should share my assumptions about timekeeping. As a result, the global villager never addresses the possibility that their own basic assumptions about timekeeping may merely be a reflection of what they have learnt from their own culture. Indeed, the global villager may never even have thought about the particular range of cultural influences to which they have been exposed. The possibility that others may have learnt different basic

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assumptions about time from their own cultures and consequently behave in fundamentally different ways is not even considered.

A lack of cultural self-awareness on both sides lies at the heart of many of the problems encountered during cross-cultural interactions. The simple message for all of us is: before we can truly understand others, we must first understand the range of cultural influences that impact on us, and develop an insight into our own basic values and assumptions. To truly 'know others', we must first 'know ourselves'. Thus, the third of the six steps involved in developing cross-cultural effectiveness (after developing an awareness of culture and moving beyond stereotypes) requires us to explore the impact of culture on our own ways of thinking and acting. It requires us to move beyond a theoretical understanding of what culture is to an understanding of ourselves within the context of the groups to which we belong. We must make what we know about culture real and visceral through an exploration of who we are, where we come from and how culture impacts on us. Only with this self-awareness can we begin to move beyond our deep and unspoken assumptions that our way of looking at things is the norm.

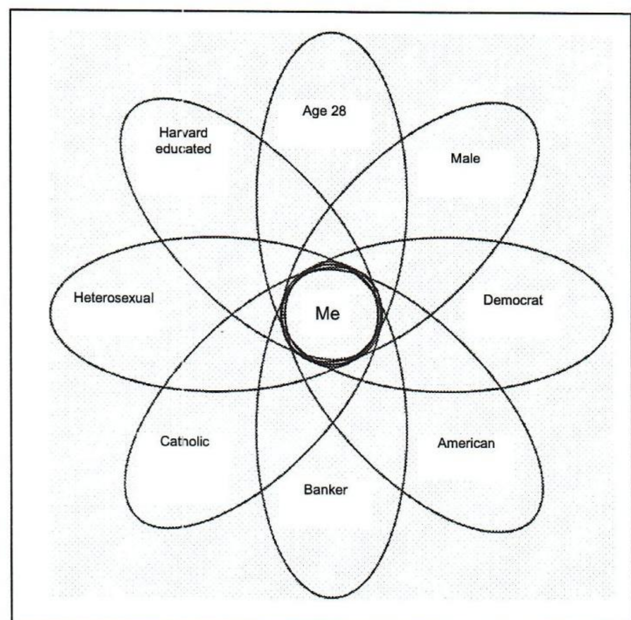
In particular we need to:

1. recognize and explore the range of cultural influences that impact on us as individuals or group members;
2. develop an awareness and understanding of our own basic values, attitudes, assumptions and behaviours;
3. learn to recognize our cultural 'red flags' - the labels we apply to people from different cultures when we are faced with unexpected or apparently inappropriate behaviour;
4. learn to recognize our own personal and emotional reactions to ambiguity and uncertainty.

RECOGNIZING AND EXPLORING THE RANGE OF CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON YOU

Culture is often associated with the country in which individuals were born and raised. However, other social groupings also have distinctive cultures that influence individual values, attitudes and behaviours. Region, gender, age or generation, profession, job function, organization, religion and many other groupings can all (depending on the context) have an impact on who we are. At the centre of all these groups lies the individual, influenced not only by these many cultural groupings but also by personality and life experience.

Cultivating the ability to reflect on, identify and make explicit the cultural influences that impact on each of us is a vital element in developing cultural sensitivity. One way of approaching this is by mapping the range of key influences on us through the use of a 'culture-flower'. The figure below shows a completed culture-flower. At the centre of the flower lies the individual. Each petal describes a different cultural and social group to which the individual belongs. The purpose of the culture-flower is to enable individuals to make explicit those cultural affiliations that can be expected, to a greater or lesser extent, to influence their individual values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in any given situation. The individual completing this culture-flower has chosen to highlight nationality, religion and gender (amongst other things) as key influences on his core assumptions and values. Other individuals might well identify very different petals.



At this point, you may wish to reflect on how you yourself might complete your own culture-flower.

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The culture-flower is a tool to help us explore the range of cultures we consider to be influential on our own values and identity. Armed with this information, about ourselves and others, we can begin to move from seeing individuals as distinct from their environment towards seeing them in context — intimately connected with the cultures in which they exist.

A number of points need to be made about the culture-flower tool:

- The purpose of the culture-flower is not to stereo-type or to claim that we are somehow prisoners of culture without the freedom to make our own choices, but instead to make explicit some of the many external influences on the way in which we think and behave. The culture-flower does not deny individuality, but rather seeks to place individuality in a cultural and social context.
- The culture-flower does not aim to prescribe how others should be treated; it is simply a starting-point to help us find out more about them as individuals.
- The petals represent influences that apply more or less strongly to any given individual. Not all petals apply to all people, and some petals will be relevant in certain situations but not in others.
- Petals also interact: a French sports team will share certain characteristics with French national culture.
- In Figure 6.1 .1 there are eight petals. In reality, each of us is influenced by a myriad of different groups in different situations. Nevertheless, eight is usually a good number for the purposes of identifying our most important external cultural influences and enabling productive self-analysis and reflection.
- Culture-flowers are not fixed. The culture-flower which each of us draws up today may be very different from that which we may draw in five years' time. Indeed, it can be productive to compare flowers from different periods in our lives as it will reveal that both individuality and culture are dynamic and changing entities.

DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OWN BASIC VALUES, ATTITUDES, ASSUMPTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS

Whilst much cultural misunderstanding occurs at the level of explicit personal experience, much also reflects differences between our own unconscious core values and those of others. As a result, 'knowing ourselves' cannot stop at developing an understanding of the cultural influences to which we are (and have been) exposed. It also requires expending effort in understanding our own hidden core values and assumptions and how these are reflected in the way in which we think and behave. Such an understanding of own basic beliefs and values, provides a tool with which to compare our values with those that others hold: it is often only in comparison that the true nature of things, values or otherwise, becomes apparent.

A useful example of the importance of knowing one's own core values can be seen in the workplace cultural clashes that can arise between 'task-focused' values on the one hand and 'person-focused' values on the other, and between a more 'decisive' or more 'consensual' leadership style.

In cultures that value a 'task focus', business interactions tend to concentrate on achieving a deal that satisfies the requirements of the situation in which both parties find themselves. This can be achieved in the absence of any close relationship between the two parties involved. The logic of the deal drives its completion, and considerations of building and maintaining relationships are secondary. In contrast, in cultures that value a 'relationship focus', the aim is to complete deals through good personal and professional relationships. Thus, the logic of the relationship drives the details of any deal.

In cultures that value 'decisive' leadership the expectation, amongst both those who manage and those who are managed, is that the power to influence and make decisions is restricted to those at senior levels. Only those with the necessary authority (whether through role or expertise) make decisions within a certain sphere of influence. In contrast, cultures which value 'consensual' leadership expect consultation and discussion about decisions to be extended to a wider range

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of those affected by the decision. Thus, the expectation is that a wider variety of individuals and interest groups should be consulted before: a decision is reached. Of course, in any culture both types of behaviour are likely to coexist. These labels do not prescribe how any given individual or team will behave in any given situation; rather, they can be thought of as 'default' settings. They are most likely to apply where there is no contextual or situational information to indicate that an alternative way of behaving may be appropriate.

At this point, you might wish to reflect on which of the descriptions above most closely reflect your core attitudes towards relationships and leadership (something you may well not have done before). Once you have been able to identify your own values, you can then move on to explore how these may differ from (or be similar to) those with whom you come into contact. This, in turn, will allow you to speculate on some of the possible challenges and opportunities you may encounter when attempting to work effectively with others from different backgrounds. In the case of the values described above, those with a more task-focused approach may well find it challenging to recognize and manage their counter-parts' need for closer personal relationships. They may even misperceive others as inefficient or slow. Those with consensual values, by contrast, may misperceive others as dictatorial or authoritarian, yet may themselves be seen as weak and indecisive.

The strategy outlined above - identifying our own basic beliefs and values and then using these as a sounding-board with which to compare ourselves to others - can be useful in many situations. It implies an acceptance that culture affects everything we do and an understanding that although part of us (or our team or organization) is personality, part is also human nature and part is culture. Of course, identifying one's own core values (and those of the cultures to which we belong) requires effort and determination, even if the questions that we need to ask are fairly clear:

- What are the various things that have impacted on me to make me the person I am?
- How much of what I do is truly me?
- How much of what I think and do is a consequence of my background and culture?

The fundamental aim is to build up a picture of our own beliefs, feelings, attitudes and behaviours so that we may understand how these are likely to affect the way in which we interact with people from very different backgrounds. We also need to develop strategies for analysing the values that exist in the cultures to which we belong and from which we draw.

Daily newspapers often provide extremely accurate reflections of the key values, attitudes and assumptions of their readerships. Given that the readership of national newspapers is mainly restricted to those living and working in a particular country, the range of values and attitudes expressed in national papers can provide a useful insight into the preoccupations and values of the country in question. Our heroes, along with symbols, taboos and rituals we ascribe to, can also be seen as useful starting points for analyses.

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE YOUR CULTURAL 'RED FLAGS'

Cultural misunderstandings can provoke strong reactions. When faced with attitudes or behaviours that are unfamiliar or apparently out of place, it is human nature to try to understand what is happening by making reference to our own set of cultural expectations and assumptions. Thus, rather than trying to find cultural or contextual explanations for the apparently' illogical behaviours we can encounter in foreign cultures, we may sometimes simply label the individuals involved as, among other things, 'rude', 'uneducated' or 'inept'. The labels we apply to people from different cultures when we are faced with unexpected or apparently inappropriate behaviour (such as rudeness, ignorance and so on) are sometimes known as 'red flags'. They are called red flags because they should be warning us, loud and clear, that culture, rather than personality or situation, may provide the best explanation for what we see.

Research suggests a number of negative 'red flags' consistently reported in cross-cultural encounters. The 'they' in all the following examples are those 'others' who are different from us:

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- They are rude or insulting.
- They are dishonest or corrupt.
- They are disrespectful, over-familiar or lacking in respect.
- They are bossy or inflexible.
- They are servile or weak.
- They are confrontational or hostile.
- They are cold, unfriendly or patronizing.
- They are inscrutable or unpredictable.
- They are hypocrites who don't say what they mean.
- They are slow or stupid.
- They are old-fashioned, primitive, uncultured or uneducated.
- They are unprincipled or immoral.
- They are irresponsible and untrustworthy.
- They are prejudiced or bigoted.

Of course red flags can also be positive. For example:

- They are so friendly.
- They are so hospitable.

At this point It might be useful to identify a cross-cultural situation in which you have recently applied one or more of these labels and reflect on whether cultural factors; might have been at play.

Of course, on reflection you may feel that the labels you applied in this situation were indeed correct. As a leading British businessman once noted 'an arsehole is an arsehole in any culture'. Not all red flags signal a cultural misunderstanding. Nevertheless, labelling others with simplistic and negative descriptions often says more about us and our lack of cultural understanding than it does about the characteristics of anyone else involved. Learning to recognize our own subjective reactions and use t hem as warning signals, or red flags, can help to reduce the amount of miscommunication and misunderstanding that can occur in cross-cultural situations.

Responding to red flags initially requires us to keep an open mind towards whatever situations have been detected by using them, and to take a step back from automatically interpreting and evaluating our observations. This means consistently keeping in mind that rushing to judgement, in the absence of a full understanding of any situation, can close off considerable opportunities for learning. Once we recognize the presence of red flags, we can use this insight as a cue to identify the perceptions that led to these labels, check their veracity and, where necessary, find a more productive way of looking at the situation. Red flags, used in this way, prompt us to think about cultural differences, and about the possible meaning of similar behaviours in different cultures. Our own reactions and those of others should serve as warning signals that further analysis may be required in order to fully understand the situation we are in and the people we are with.

Obviously, it is not always easy to find out why others are behaving in the way that they are, even in our own cultures. One useful strategy when you detect a 'red flag' is to look for parallels between your own culture and the culture you are dealing with. Many people from Western cultures are inclined to label those who pay small amounts of money to officials to get things done as 'dishonest' or 'corrupt'. They may even feel a sense of moral superiority. It might perhaps be more helpful for them to reflect on the various mechanisms that exist in their own cultures to get things done (for example, tipping, using personal contacts, drawing on favours) and reflect on how these might be perceived by those from elsewhere.

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LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN REACTIONS TO AMBIGUITY AND UNCERTAINTY

None of us can know everything there is to know about a culture, regardless of how much investigation we have undertaken. However well prepared we may be, stress and anxiety are common responses to the ambiguity present in cross-cultural situations. Learning our reactions to stress, and how to recognize these reactions in time to respond to them, are important elements in developing cultural sensitivity. Several common reactions to stress can be identified:

- displacement - taking it out on someone else;
- projection - complaining about other people being edgy and rude:
- rationalization - thinking that there are no other suitable ways to behave;
- denial and repression - stress being expressed in physical symptoms;
- regression - doing things you should have outgrown;
- passive-aggressive behaviour - Quiet rebelliousness;
- acting out - repeating ineffective behavioural scripts.

There are innumerable articles and books detailing ways of coping with stress (mainly revolving around changing one's attitude towards the situation causing stress, accommodating the situation or changing the situation itself) and it is not the purpose of this chapter to repeat them here. Nevertheless, once we are aware of how we commonly respond to stressful situations, we can usefully begin by posing three key questions:

1. How productive have these types of response been for us?
2. How productive are they likely to be for us?
3. How can we begin manage them effectively?

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CHAPTER 7 - THE INDIVIDUAL IN CONTEXT

Given time to reflect, most of us would probably agree with the assertion that if humanity were a single, uniform, homogenous mass, then we would have few ways of distinguishing one group, nationality or culture from any other. We would probably also accept that the groups to which we ourselves belong are in some ways similar to, and in some ways different from, the groups to which we do not belong. For example, most of us would probably accept that the French are in some ways different to (and in some ways very similar to) the Americans, and that doctors are in some ways different to and in some ways similar to 'lawyers'. If pushed (and however uncomfortable we might feel) we could probably identify certain characteristics of both our own and other groups, however stereotypical these characteristics might be.

At the same time, most of us also recognize that not everyone within a particular group necessarily shares the characteristics that we ascribe to the group as a whole. There are many Americans and French people who most certainly do not share the stereotypes commonly, if sub-consciously, associated with both those nations. So, even if an understanding of French culture can tell us a great deal about range of influences impacting on any given Frenchman, it may be a poor predictor of how that particular person will respond in any given situation.

This leaves us with an apparent contradiction: If everyone shares only some of their assumptions, attitudes and ways of behaving with members of their cultures, then assuming that they are behaving in a certain way because of their cultural background runs the risk of stereotyping them. In reality, their personality and the context in which we encounter them may be just as (or more) important in determining the behaviour we encounter. Conversely, assuming that others are behaving in a certain way purely because of their personality can be also be just as restricting and unfair. It may well be that the behaviour we encounter in any given situation is, in fact, driven by the cultural values and attitudes the individuals in question have learnt from the cultures around them.

One way of resolving this apparent paradox is by viewing culture as the set of learned values, assumptions and norms which are shared to varying degrees by members of a group, and which influence the way in which members of that group perceive, think and act. This definition implies that, in order to understand what a person's intentions are when they behave in certain ways, we must understand the individual, the individual in context and the individual as part of their culture. To put it another way, in order to be able to come to a reasonably accurate understanding of why we, and others, do the things we do, we need to be able to 'paint a picture' of the various cultural influences that each of us are subject to. Armed with this picture of the way in which things are often perceived and done in our own and other cultures, we can then assess the extent to which culture may or may not be relevant to the situation at hand. This in turn helps us avoid stereotyping, recognize individuality and enhance the possibility of creating a productive environment in which to communicate with people from different backgrounds.

Of course painting a picture of the range of cultural influences to which we, and others, are subject is only one element in developing cross-cultural effectiveness; we also need to look at what implications this picture has for the way in which we interact and communicate with other individuals. For example, if our picture of other cultures paints a vista of a group considerably more formal and hierarchical than our own, then we need to decide what this implies for our personal interactions with an individual or individuals from that group. On the basis of these conclusions we may then also need to put into place specific strategies to ensure that we avoid misunderstandings and communicate as effectively as possible with these individuals. Finally, we need to make a reasoned judgement about the type of outcomes we can expect from encounters from these individuals, particularly if these outcomes are likely to be different from those with individuals from our own culture.

The following seven specific strategies can help in these tasks:

1. Make a conscious effort to learn about others.
2. Use a variety of resources to develop knowledge and understanding.

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3. Resolve practical information gaps first.
4. Create a mental model of culture that connects facts, attitudes and behaviours.
5. Consider culture, context and character.
6. Identify practical behaviours to enhance communication.
7. Develop realistic expectations about the likely outcome of any given cross-cultural encounter.

MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO LEARN

To understand the 'individual in context' we need first to explore whether we have a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge of the groups in question to come to a reasonably accurate conclusion about the way in which culture can influence individual members. Of course, as pointed out earlier, most of us already have pictures in our minds of what people from other cultures are like. Our first task may therefore be to learn to distinguish the stereotypes we hold about a country or culture from verifiable and up-to-date factual information: to separate what we think we know, from what we really know. This means that -however uncomfortable it may be - we must make explicit the stereotypes we hold about others and make a conscious effort to reflect on whether these are sufficiently balanced, up-to-date, and non-prescriptive to be of any use in coming to conclusions about local values and attitudes. Armed with this understanding of our stereotypes we can then begin to identify the additional information we require for a more balanced understanding of local cultural influences. Once we have identified areas which may lack sufficiently up-to-date information about a country or culture, we can then put into place strategies for resolving this information gap.

USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES TO DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

To resolve an information gap we must utilize a number of different sources of information, rather than simply relying on second-hand and often out-of-date stereotypes. Experienced local counterparts or colleagues can prove a useful source of anecdotal information about specific issues to be faced in any particular culture. Cultural informants - perceptive members of the culture in question - can provide a useful insider's perspective on important and relevant issues. Factual background information from local websites, newspaper supplements, books, magazines and organized 'cultural briefings' can all provide relevant data. The key is to draw from as many different resources as possible in order to gain a broad range of different viewpoints.

RESOLVE PRACTICAL INFORMATION GAPS FIRST

When going overseas on short-term assignments most of us will probably require practical information about such things as visas and flight tickets. Those on longer-term assignments will probably need information about accommodation, schools, health, security and day-to-day living. None of this is, of course, particularly cultural. But unless this information is gained early on, we may very well be distracted from a focus on other important areas. Resolving practical information gaps early on allows time and space for gathering less pressing, but equally important, cultural information.

CREATE A MENTAL MODEL OF THE CULTURE THAT CONNECTS FACTS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

A useful strategy for coming to an understanding of a specific culture is to create a mental model that connects background factual information about a culture with observations about local attitudes and expectations, and in turn to connect these observable attitudes with visible behaviours and manifestations. Having armed ourselves with a range of anecdotal (and sometimes contradictory) pieces of information we can then begin to speculate about potential links between external factors (that is, history, geography, climate, religion and so on) and the values, attitudes and behaviours that tend to be exhibited by members of any given culture. Once created, this FAB (facts, attitudes, behaviours) model provides an intellectually rich structure that allows us to both explain and predict cultural influences on individuals we encounter.

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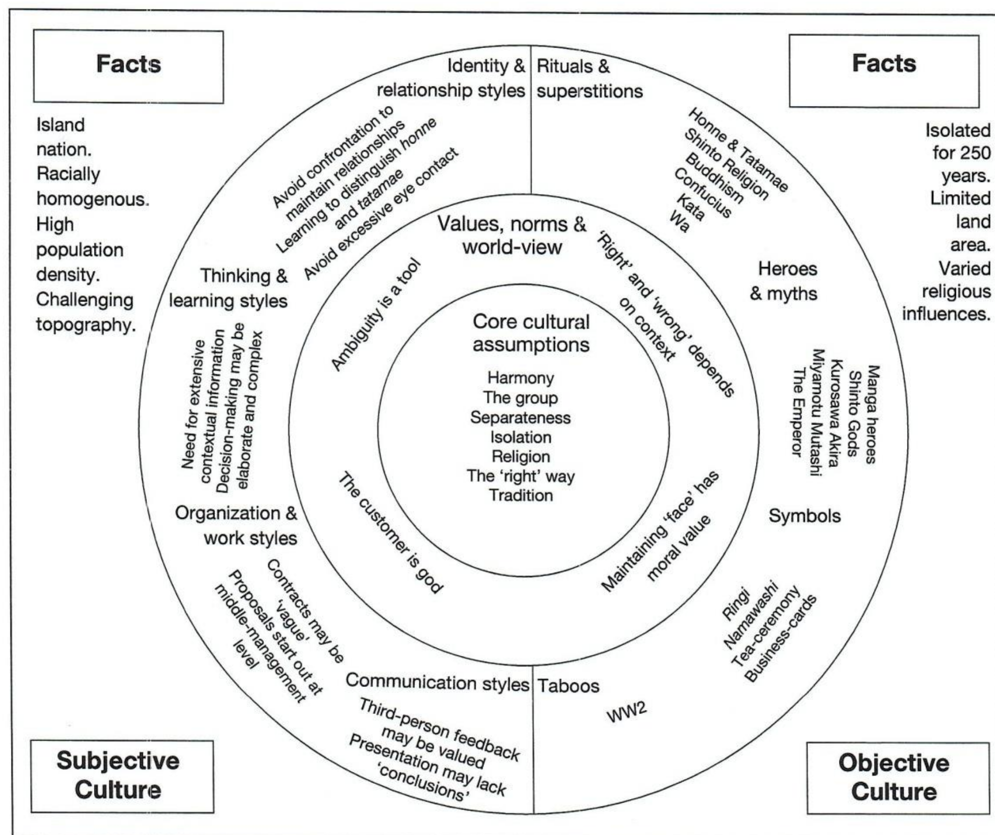
A highly effective tool for making explicit the connections between facts, attitudes and behaviours is the 'culture-wheel'. Culture-wheels are designed to provide a visible representation of the relationship between the core cultural assumptions in any given culture, the values and norms in that culture, the visible behavioural tendencies that result from these other less visible elements and the facts underpinning these various elements. Culture-wheels allow for specific information gaps about a particular culture's core values to be identified, and encourage us to integrate what we know already about a specific culture into a practical model for enhancing cross-cultural communication and resolving misunderstandings. Used effectively, they provide a structure that enables us to 'learn' about any given culture and to decide on some of the things we may need to consider when dealing with individuals from that culture.

CREATING A CULTURE-WHEEL

The purpose of the culture-wheel is to lead and support people in coming to an understanding of another culture. An example of a completed culture-wheel relating to Japan is shown below. When completing the culture-wheel, it is best to fill in details from the outside in, working through each of the following steps in turn.



IDENTIFY PERTINENT FACTS.

Cultures evolve, at least in part, as a group response to the challenges and dilemmas faced when dealing with the environment in which the group finds itself. As a result, the first step in creating a useful and effective culture-wheel is to identify the aspects of the environment that influence the particular culture concerned. For a national culture include geography, topography, climate, political structures, population density, and so on. In the case of Japan a range of relevant influences including population density, geography and historical influences have been claimed to impact on Japanese culture and values.

IDENTIFY OBJECTIVE CULTURE.

Objective cultural artefacts refer to material elements associated with a particular social grouping such as dress, food, architecture, theatre, tools and machines. It also refers to equally tangible, but less non-material, elements such as rituals and superstitions, heroes, cultural myths, traditions, folklore, symbols and taboos.

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In the case of Japan, a number of elements of objective culture are described on the right-hand side of the outer-most ring of the culture-wheel. In other national cultures, objective culture can include such things as greeting rituals, forms of address, dress codes and family structures. In business culture-wheels, key 'heroes' and management structures are likely to fit into this segment.

Unfortunately, many of us do not look much beyond objective cultural artefacts when considering how our own culture may differ from others. Completing the other elements of the culture-wheel can therefore serve as a useful reminder that there is a great deal more to culture than simply surface manifestations.

IDENTIFY SUBJECTIVE CULTURE.

In contrast to objective culture, subjective culture can be understood as the way in which a culture influences its members to respond to other people. It consists of ideas about what are natural or normal ways of behaving - what actions have worked in the past, and what should therefore be retained and reproduced in the future. Subjective culture can usefully be divided into four specific areas:

- communication styles
- thinking and learning styles
- identity and relationship styles
- organization and work styles.

Thus cultures may differ in the way in which they influence individuals to express themselves (for example, direct versus indirect communication), to think and learn (for example, learning through theory versus learning through practice), to relate to others (for example, cooperating versus competing with others) and to make decisions (for example, decision-making based on age versus ability and expertise). In the work environment, subjective culture can be reflected in willingness to delegate, the nature of management behaviour, the strategies through which leaders motivate and manage subordinates and so on.

In the case of Japan a number of different common behavioural 'styles' are described. Although not all Japanese people share these styles, they do reflect behavioural tendencies that exist in the population as a whole.

IDENTIFY VALUES AND NORMS.

Values can be identified as ideals, shared by group members, to which strong emotions are attached. For example, a belief in the importance of individual freedom and accountability is a strong value in many Western cultures. In other cultures there may be considerable value attached to showing respect to others through the use of complex formal honorary titles and forms of address. To a greater or lesser extent these values are reflected in norms - the 'right' and 'wrong' ways of doing things. Values and norms represent the middle layer of the culture wheel and can be distinguished from subjective and objective elements in that they are less directly observable. Consequently, they need to be teased out through reflection and analysis of our attitudes towards such things as time, space, privacy, gender roles and our degree of involvement with others.

To a certain extent, the process of analysing the values and norms underpinning behaviours is a natural, if unconscious, process. When we walk into the home of a friend or colleague we observe not simply the decor and ambiance, but what this says to us about who the person 'is' beneath the surface. Companies spend a considerable amount of time and expense designing corporate identities that reflect and represent core 'values' - investments designed to appeal to customers at a level that is, for the most part, beneath conscious awareness. In completing a culture-wheel, the purpose is to make values and norms explicit: to apply labels to them in order to be able to discuss, share, and in some cases shape them.

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IDENTIFY CORE CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS.

The final element in completing a culture-wheel is to look beyond behaviours, manifestations, values and norms at the core cultural assumptions that members of a group (to a greater or lesser extent) share. Assumptions, of course, are not visible or tangible. Instead they must be extrapolated from the other elements in the culture-wheel: from the things we see, hear and reflect upon. Such basic assumptions generally relate to the core dilemma underpinning culture, which is how to manage interaction with the external environment and the human relationships between members of the group.

Managing the challenges of external adaptation and internal integration lead directly to assumptions about, amongst others things, the amount of control that can be exercised over the environment, the need for control or certainty in life, the nature of the relationship between the individual and the group, and the extent to which individuals with the highest relative status exercise the most power.

A number of important additional points need to be considered when creating culture-wheels. First, the technique is best viewed as a process of looking for and attaching meaning to what we encounter, rather than creating a rigid and fixed model. Cultures are not static and unchanging and consequently culture-wheels need to be continually revised, extended and expanded in order to ensure that they remain useful.

Second, culture-wheels can only be useful if the association between the facts, attitudes and behaviours described connect logically and explicitly. For example, in the case of Japan, the basic assumption that group harmony should take precedence over the individual can be related directly to the environment in which that particular culture merged. In a country the size of California with a population nearly equal to that of Russia, the maintenance of relationships has been critical to survival.

Without the 'elbow room' of an American-style frontier environment, where individuals could move away if relationships with neighbours became difficult, the Japanese have relied on internal restraint in order to maintain a functioning social order. These core assumptions, determined by environmental facts, lead directly to the social values of 'courtesy' and 'politeness', and in turn drive common behaviours such as avoiding confrontation by giving ambiguous responses to direct questions.

Third, while the example given in this chapter relates to a specific country, culture-wheels can equally be used to identify any culture, whether corporate or national.

Finally, the culture-wheel allows us to see similarities as well as differences. It is often just as important to be aware of attitudes and behaviours in other cultures that are similar to our own as it is to know the differences.

USING A CULTURE-WHEEL

Culture-wheels can be used in a number of ways:

- as a route to detecting and understanding the range of differing cultural spheres of influence (national, professional and so on) we are likely to encounter in any given situation;
- as a strategy for learning what we may need to find out about our counterparts' personal attitudes and behaviours;
- as a tool to help us understand others' attitudes and behaviours from their own perspective;
- as a strategy for making explicit how similar (or otherwise) any given corporate or team culture is to others;
- as a tool for teams to map out both the current team and organizational culture, and explore what a more desirable or appropriate culture would look like.

CONSIDER CULTURE, CONTEXT AND CHARACTER

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The point was made earlier that, while we are all individuals, our individuality can only be truly understood within the context of the groups to which we belong and our individual personalities. Consequently, in attempting to understand why an individual, or group of individuals, are behaving in a certain way in any given situation we need to consider the three different elements of culture, context and character.

CULTURE

None of us are members of just one social group. In coming to understand the 'individual in context', it is therefore essential to make explicit all the different cultural influences operating on them before attempting to identify those influences that are most relevant to the situation in question.

CONTEXT

Many Eastern cultures attach value to behaviours that ensure that everyone involved in an interaction can `maintain face'. This drives a style of communication that tends to be less 'direct' than that commonly found in Western cultures. Nevertheless, faced with crashing into an oncoming train, the Japanese are likely to be every bit as direct in their shouted warnings as anyone else. In such potentially lethal circumstances the context in which the behaviour takes place has considerably more influence than the cultural background of the individuals involved. The default cultural preferences (that is, for direct or indirect communication) simply do not apply.

CHARACTER

Carl Jung was amongst the first (of many) psychologists and researchers to attempt to identify and categorize personality 'types'. While the details of Jung's theory are not relevant to this chapter, it is important to highlight the fact that he and other writers assume that personality types exist in every culture, and operate independently of the cultural background of the individuals concerned. Personality type will influence how individuals behave, regardless of where they come from and what context they are in. This means that understanding the individual in context involves considering what type of person you are dealing with.

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIOURS TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

Research suggests that visitors who understand something of the culture they interact with are likely to be better received by their hosts than those who are less well informed. This is mainly because understanding pertinent facts, attitudes and behaviours in the cultures we deal with can enable us to identify specific behaviours that will help us communicate more effectively and avoid causing unintentional offence. It is important that the behaviours we identify (often described as 'dos and don'ts') are not prescriptive or too specific, but instead focus on enabling us to achieve whatever outcome we want to achieve from the interaction in question.

DEVELOP REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF ANY GIVEN CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTER

Going into an encounter with the wrong expectations about what we can hope to achieve is potentially damaging for everyone involved. The final element of coming to understand 'the individual in context' is therefore coming to a judgement about what is likely to emerge from our encounter with this individual.

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CHAPTER 8 - CULTURES IN COMPARISON - TYPES

In creating a framework that will allow us to explore a range of interactions and responses we encounter in different cultures, two types of approach can be useful. The first approach - developing 'culture-specific' knowledge - focuses on creating an awareness of the distinct characteristics of a particular culture. The second aims to develop 'comparative' knowledge that provides data with which to compare one culture with one or more others. Developing comparative knowledge is an important element in coming to understand cultural differences because each of us interprets and evaluates what we see in ways that have, at least in part, been conditioned by the cultural environments in which we grew up and now live. As a result, it is impossible to be truly objective when describing either our own or any other culture. Cultures can only ever be understood in comparison, one with another.

This chapter focuses on 'comparative' knowledge. It outlines strategies for comparing cultures, looking in particular at the advantages and problems in using value 'types' and 'dimensions' as a source of comparative knowledge. It then looks at practical applications of value dimensions and their worth in anticipating, managing and reconciling cultural differences in work and professional environments.

DATA FOR COMPARING CULTURES

There are three types of data on which we can compare cultures.

1. Factual. Practical information, such as the proportion of women in the labour force or the number of people affiliated to a given religion, can be a very useful basis for comparing different countries. However, such comparisons are likely to remain largely anecdotal unless strategies are found for linking this information into the expectations and behaviours likely to be encountered in any given situation.
2. Behavioural. It has long been observed that certain types of behaviour are common to certain cultures. Cataloguing these behaviours, and then using this catalogue as a basis for cultural comparisons, would therefore seem a sensible approach to understanding similarities and differences. This approach does yield useful and valuable lists of practical 'dos and don'ts' or etiquette guides. Its disadvantage is that it focuses on actions and disregards the reasons behind those actions.
3. Values types. Beneath the level of visible behaviours, cultures can be distinguished by the basic values and assumptions that are, to a greater or lesser extent, shared by individuals within that culture. The assumption is that these values and assumptions drive the way in which we think, and this in turn drives the way in which we behave. Thus, identifying the basic beliefs and attitudes of a particular culture, and then comparing these with those of another culture can be a useful way of understanding similarities and differences. Drawing on these comparisons, cultures can be classified as belonging to certain basic 'types', which are seen as being fairly consistent over time.

VALUE TYPE MODELS

Three writers, Edward Hall, John Mole and Richard Lewis provide useful models with which to compare different 'types' of culture.

EDWARD HALL

An American writer who first came to prominence in the 1960s, Edward Hall identified two contrasting basic value types relating to communication and two that relate to cultural attitudes towards time.

- High-context versus low-context

In high-context cultures, a significant amount of communication is carried in the context in which communication takes place. Individuals are expected to read between the lines in order to correctly understand the meaning being transmitted

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by others. This can be contrasted with low-context cultures in which most communication is carried in explicit verbal forms. Here, people are expected to say what they mean and mean what they say.

- Polychronic versus monochronic

In polychronic cultures, people are expected to do a number of different things at the same time; actions are driven mainly by what is perceived to be of highest priority at any given instant. By contrast, in monochronic cultures schedules and timetables dominate, and actions are driven by structure and the logic of a 'step-by-step' attitude.

JOHN MOLE

British writer John Mole has also defined two contrasting basic value types that underpin how organizations are led, and two types underpinning how they are organized. These definitions are mainly designed to help compare organizational cultures in Europe and North America

- Leadership

In organizations that value individual leadership the belief is that 'individuals are intrinsically unequal and that the most effective knowledgeable and competent take decisions on behalf of the others'. This is contrasted with group leadership in which 'everyone has the right to be heard and to contribute to all the decisions that affect them'.

- Organizations

In systematic organizations 'people believe that an organization is like a machine, designed and built to certain specifications to achieve a precise objective'. This is contrasted with organic organizations in which the belief is that 'an organization is a social organism growing out of the needs and relationships of its members'.

RICHARD LEWIS

Richard Lewis categorizes cultures into three basic value types: linear-active, multi-active and reactive.

- Linear-active cultures are 'task-oriented, highly organized planners' who tend to focus on structure and fact-based decision-making in the work environment.
- Multi-active cultures are 'people-oriented, loquacious inter-relators' who tend to focus on human relationships and intuition-based decision-making.
- Reactive cultures are 'introvert, respect-oriented listeners' who listen carefully and aim to see the entire picture in context before making decisions.

Each of the three writers above, when distinguishing between these differing value types, broadly aims to identify the ways of thinking and behaving associated with each type, and use this information to underpin more effective cross-cultural interactions. All three assume that individuals within any culture hold a mix of different types of belief, but that one particular type is more dominant than any other in a given cultural environment. Thus, for example Hall compares 'high-context' and `polychronic' France, with 'low-context' and `monochronic' Germany. Mole compares 'systematic' organization in northern Europe with 'organic' organization in southern Europe. Lewis compares linear-active' Germans with 'multi-active' Latin Americans and 'reactive' Chinese.

The work of Hall, Mole and Lewis has the benefit of not merely describing different behaviours, but also of providing an explanation of those behaviours. They offer useful and productive ways of comparing cultures and have considerable practical value in developing an explanation of cultural misunderstandings. There are, however, three key problems with these approaches. First, they are essentially static snapshots of current cultural mores. Although they offer a broad model for comparing cultures, they do not account for how cultures change and develop over time. Second, they do not

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provide a convincing account of individual variation within cultures. Third, they are, for the most part, impressionistic - that is, there is little empirical research-based evidence to back up their existence.

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CHAPYER 9 - CULTURES IN COMPARISON - DIMENSIONS

VALUE DIMENSIONS

Two highly influential writers, Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars, have provided models for comparing cultures that account for the dynamic development of cultures over time and for individual variation. Both writers have also based their research not on impressions or anecdotal evidence, but on statistical analysis of an extensive database of responses to questionnaire-type instruments.

GEERT HOFSTEDE

Probably the most influential of all the 'dimensionalists', Hofstede uses the following five dimensions to analyse cultural characteristics.

- Power distance

Power distance reflects the degree to which a society accepts the idea that power is to be distributed unequally through hierarchical distinctions. The more this is accepted, the higher the country's ranking in power distance. High power-distance culture can be characterized by a strong hierarchal structure within their organizations. In such societies, managers are respected in and out of the organization and are rarely publicly contradicted.

By contrast, low power-distance societies tend to value notions of empowerment for employees and consensual decision-making. In Europe, current levels of power distance rather neatly match the boundaries of the former Roman Empire. Former Roman spheres of influence tend to resolve the essential tension between low and high power distance in favour of the latter. The opposite is true in areas that were not influenced by Roman values.

- Individualism versus collectivism

Individualism reflects the degree to which individual beliefs and actions should be independent of collective thought and action. Individualism contrasts with collectivism, which is the belief that people should integrate their thoughts and actions with those of a group (for example, extended family, or employer). In individualistic societies people are more likely to pursue their own personal goals.

In collective societies people are more likely to integrate their own goals with those of other group members and tend to avoid putting people in situations where they might lose face. The cohesion of the group plays a more important role than pursuing one's own individual achievement.

- Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which a society feels threatened by ambiguous situations and tries to avoid them by formulating rules and refusing to tolerate deviance. In essence, it relates to an essential tension about the nature of 'truth'. The more a society accepts that truth is 'absolute', the higher it ranks on uncertainty avoidance. Societies that rank high on uncertainty avoidance have highly structured working environments. Employees and managers pay attention to precise objectives and clear rules, detailed assignments and schedules set up well in advance.

- Masculinity versus femininity

This dimension relates to essential tension between attitudes towards gender. Masculinity describes the degree to which the focus is placed on assertiveness, task achievement and the acquisition of material goods. This is contrasted with femininity in which quality-of-life issues such as caring for others, group solidarity and helping the less fortunate are valued.

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- Long-term versus short-term orientation CDI (Confucian Dynamism Index)

The essential conflict in this dimension relates to attitudes towards what is, and what is not, considered 'virtuous'. Long-term cultures focuses on the distant future and emphasize the importance of saving, persistence and achieving goals that may only come to fruition after several generations. Short-term cultures emphasize the past and the present, and there is respect for fulfilling social obligations and a consistent understanding of morality.

Hofstede claimed that Chinese people have a relatively high Confucian dynamism index value, while American people have a relatively low Confucian dynamism index value. He suggested that this distinction is reflected in business. In China top management emphasizes thrift and perseverance and respect for tradition, and also maintains a long-term orientation (that is, the company is regarded as a family). In contrast, in the USA, top management is said to focus on current needs, creativity and adopting a short-term orientation.

FONS TROMPENAARS

Trompenaars' model differs from that of Hofstede in a number of ways, although it is also based on a statistical database of questionnaire responses from a wide variety of countries. He identifies seven basic opposing ways in which cultures respond to the challenges of relating to each other, managing time and dealing with the world around them. As with Hofstede, it is the changing tension between the attachment to one or other pole of each dimension that defines what a culture or individual looks like at any given time.

- Universalism versus particularism

The values of universalism suggest that right and wrong, good and bad, are distinct concepts that can be explicitly defined and apply in all situations. In contrast, particularism suggests that the personal relationships and obligations involved are more influential in deciding what is right or wrong in any given situation.

- Individualism versus communitarianism (collectivism)

Essentially the same as Hofstede's dimension, this defines the tension between the value associated with following your own individual wishes and desires and the responsibilities you hold to the groups to which you belong.

- Neutral versus affective

This dimension describes how cultures tend to express their emotions. In neutral cultures feelings and sentiments are kept carefully under control and are exhibited only in a limited range of generally private situations. By contrast, in affective cultures people are said to express their emotions more openly using mime, gesture and other forms of non-verbal communication.

- Specific versus diffuse

In cultures that value specificity, the behaviour appropriate in any given situation depends largely on the specifics of that situation - I may do what you tell me at work, but outside I am my own person and I am free to ignore what you say. In diffuse cultures my relationships in one part of life spill over into other parts of life. My boss is my boss, wherever I encounter him or her.

- Achievement-oriented versus ascription-oriented

All cultures ascribe differing levels of status to different people. In achievement-oriented cultures status is ascribed on the basis of what we have achieved in our lives, whether professional or personal. In ascription-oriented cultures, such status relates more to who we are — characteristics such as our family, age, gender or education.

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- Sequential time versus synchronic time

Essentially the same as Hall's monochronic and polychronic distinction, this dimension relates to the perception of time as a series or discrete events, one after the other, or an interrelated cycle in which past, present and future are intimately connected.

- Inner-directed versus outer-directed

Inner-directed cultures value the notion that the external environment can be shaped and (to a certain extent) controlled. Outer-directed cultures in contrast value the notion that we must adapt ourselves to the external environment.

In contrast to the static approach of Hall, Mole or Lewis, Hofstede and Trompenaars view any given culture as being shaped by the dialectic tension between each opposing value dimension. What is important is the relative preference for one or other value on each dimension at any given time, or in any given situation. Thus, their value dimensions reflect continuums, not an absolute scale. Cultures, however, can only really be understood in comparison with other cultures. The utility of the value dimension approach is that it allows people to compare different values and approaches, rather than come to a conclusion about where the average data for any particular country or culture lies. Thus, it is the relative position on each dimension that is most important. The tendency of some people to communicate is a way that is, for example, more or less direct than our own, is only relevant if our purpose is to understand and reconcile these tendencies in a way that satisfies our mutual requirement to communicate effectively.

For Hofstede and Trompenaars, individual variations in the way in which people think and act can also be seen as different personal interpretations of the same basic tension between opposing values. Thus, in dealing with people from different backgrounds, what is of interest to us is whether (and how) people from other cultures differ from us on each dimension in the particular situation in which we find ourselves.

Both Hofstede and Trompenaars accept that cultures and individuals change over time as the particular balance between each pair of opposing values moves. They also accept that basic values are only one cause of observable behaviour among many and that there are other complex sets of factors influencing the way in which we think and act, including individual personality and the social context.

PROBLEMS WITH VALUE DIMENSIONS AND VALUE TYPES

Both value dimensions and types have been hugely influential in providing strategies for comparing cultures and exploring what type of behaviour to expect (and how to adapt) when dealing with people from other cultural backgrounds. However, they are not without problems.

First, when faced with such a variety of different models, the question is often asked as to which of the various writers described above are correct. This is probably the wrong question. Cultural values are, by their very nature, not open to clear observation. As a result, all models of them are necessarily approximations based on the only thing that is observable: behaviour. What is important, therefore, is not whether the models are correct, but whether they are useful, and this depends on how well they allow us to understand and respond to the particular range of situations each of us encounters.

A second, more serious but related, problem is that the same values can be seen to drive a range of different behaviours, depending on the context. Thus, while the UK, the US and France are all seen as highly individualistic, the manifestations of this value differs from country to country. In Britain, individualism in often seen as being reflected in eccentricity and dislike of authority. In France it is described as egocentricity, and in the US as self-reliance. Likewise, Japanese collectivism is not the same as Chinese collectivism or Latin collectivism. So, even if manifestations of cultural values may have certain things in common, they can only at best be seen as variations on a theme.

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Similarly, the same experiences and manifestations are often described as originating from differing values. For example, group decision-making is valued in both US and Japanese business culture. However, in a US context this is described as resulting from the need to integrate individual perspectives (individualism) and resolve the competition that might result from not being consulted (masculinity). In a Japanese context, it is seen as a way of preserving harmony and maintaining relationships (collectivism). Once again, it must be emphasized that the utility of each model of cultural values depends on how well it allows us to understand and respond to the particular range of situations each of us encounters.

A third common criticism is that real cultures are multi-dimensional rather than simply the result of a tension between two opposing poles. The argument runs something like this: Cultures differ from, and are similar to, others in many different ways. Consequently, using just one or two dimensions runs the risk of viewing the world in simplistic terms of 'we' and 'they'. People are too complex to fit permanently into such classifications. Given that it is the natural human tendency to classify and categorize people that underpins stereotyping, the question arises is attaching a label drawn from one or other pole of a dimension (for example, individualist or collectivist) simply just another way of stereotyping people?

In fact, the assumption behind value types and dimensions is that virtually all forms of behaviour are visible in virtually all cultures. Although those sharing certain cultural values will generally draw on one or other pole of each dimension as a 'default approach', this is not prescriptive. Both sides of the behavioural dimension exist in all cultures; it is only the context and frequency of their exhibition that differs. The US penchant for directness in speech (a manifestation of US individualism) does not necessarily apply when talking about sexual issues (an uncomfortable topic for some Americans) but may be an accepted part of conversation for the Dutch or Scandinavians. At the individual level, values and behaviour result from a whole range of contextual and personal factors that are more than just cultural in origin. Another way of looking at this argument is to turn the question around and explore why some people (mainly from individualistic cultures - one safe generalization that can made about Anglo-Saxons is that they do not like generalizations) have such difficulty in accepting that cultural values impact on behaviour. The reality is that value models are only useful in analysing and reconciling any given cross-cultural situation; analysis must start afresh with any change in situation or context.

USING VALUE TYPES AND DIMENSIONS

The comparative models provided by value types and dimensions can be used in a number of ways:

At an individual level:

- To provide a vocabulary for describing our own and other people's values.
- To provide a tool for understanding the context in which we and others make choices.
- To understand and explain previous cross-cultural misunderstandings and develop empathy with alternative ways of thinking and acting.
- To identify potential value similarities with others that can be used to establish common ground and shared understanding.
- To anticipate potential value differences with others arid explore how to recognize and overcome them.
- To explore the range of choices we have about how to think and act, and what can be learnt from others from different backgrounds.
- For teams and organizations:
- To create an understanding of what we may need to find out about the other teams and organizations we work with.
- To paint a picture of what we 'want' our culture to look like, including the behaviours we expect of our members.
- To provide an understanding of what each member may need to do to change and adapt to the team and organizational cultures.

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- To identify specific strategies that can be put in place to enhance team and organizational communication.

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CHAPTER 10 - CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The primary importance of non-verbal communication in a cross-cultural context lies in the fact that the meaning of any given behaviour may differ from culture to culture. In other words, although certain aspects of non-verbal communication (such as facial expressions that at indicate sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise) are universal, other forms of non-verbal communication may differ from one cultural group to another.

Even when dealing with universal behaviours such as smiling or frowning, the situations in which these expressions are demonstrated and the intensity with which feelings and emotions are expressed varies between cultures. For example, to outsiders, people from Mediterranean and Arabic cultures appear to exaggerate their expressions of grief or joy. In contrast, many Anglo-Saxon cultures are stereotyped as encouraging the stiff upper lip and the absence of emotional expression. In reality, individuals from both types of culture are capable of effectively transmitting information about their feelings; they simply do it in different ways and at different times.

The potential for misreading and misunderstanding, non-verbal communication is compounded by the fact that so much of non-verbal communication is outside conscious control. For example, a Japanese student may not be consciously aware of averting eye contact when interacting with a high-status university professor, although this is commonly observable behaviour in that culture. The British university professor who encounters this Japanese student may not be consciously aware of this lack of eye contact, but may still subconsciously interpret it as demonstrating disinterest or a lack of courtesy. In this situation, cultural differences in non-verbal communication have generated feelings in both teacher and student that are difficult to recognize and hence difficult to rationalize and reject.

CULTURE AND PARALANGUAGE

Sometimes when people learn a second (or third or fourth) language, they retain certain features of their mother tongue. As a result, when they speak the other language, they can unintentionally offend or give the wrong impression. These misunderstandings can be difficult to sort out because their cause is rarely recognized. We assume that people sound how they mean to sound. Misunderstandings are particularly likely when people are anxious, distressed or under pressure. Some examples illustrate this more clearly:

In Arabic cultures loudness often indicates strength and softness indicates weakness. That same loudness may indicate confidence and authority to the Germans, impoliteness to the Thais and loss of control to the Japanese. British-English speakers, in particular, tend to speak with less volume than many other nationalities. As a result, the British sometimes feel disconcerted when they encounter people from other cultures (such as Latin or American) who seem to be shouting.

Conversation requires people to take turns. Different languages use different conventions to indicate when one person has finished and another can begin. In British English it is considered normal and polite for only one person to speak at a time and for people to pause to allow each other to speak. In other cultures talking at the same time as another person and talking over them (which is known as a 'high-involvement style') is regarded as friendly and polite, and proof that you are involved in the conversation.

In British English the words 'please' and 'thank you' are extremely important. People who do not say 'please' and 'thank you' may be regarded as arrogant and intentionally ill-mannered. In many other languages, including most Asian and African languages, politeness is managed differently. For example, instead of the formulaic 'please' and 'thank you', politeness may be indicated by a different choice of verb form or pronoun (like `tu' or `vous' in French), or by a different tone of voice.

British English uses emphasis to signal important or new information, or to contradict. For example, the spoken phrase told her to take Air France, not British Airways' suggests a certain disappointment with someone's choice of airline. Emphasis also indicates emotions such as anger or excitement. In other languages, new information or contradiction

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may be indicated by speaking faster or more slowly, by adding words or phrases, by repetition or by lowering the voice. All these can confuse British English speakers.

In British English it is normal for the voice to rise and fall in friendly conversation. Changing the tune can also modify the meaning of a phrase or sentence. A raised tone at the end of a statement can turn it into a question: 'You've done your last shift?' And raising the tone of the whole sentence is often associated with intense emotion such as anger, shock or excitement: 'You've won the lottery?' or 'You've flooded the whole ground floor?'. In other languages a raised tone over the whole sentence may, in contrast, indicate importance or friendliness rather than intense emotion.

In British English, the activity of 'asking' is signalled by rising intonation and 'ordering' is signalled by falling intonation. In contrast, in Indian English, one-word questions are not marked by such marked rising intonation. A study in a restaurant in London showed how British and Indian participants in conversation turned a casual exchange into a hostile encounter, because neither was able to recognize the way in which the other was using intonation. When the Indian waiters used falling intonation to ask customers if they wanted gravy on their meat, the British customers thought they were being impolite because they interpreted the falling intonation as an 'order' (I'm giving you gravy whether you like it or not'), rather than a question. The British customers heard statements that were intended as neutral by the Indian speaker as aggressive and hostile. Of course, this was not a case of Indians who did not speak English well but, rather, two highly proficient English speakers from different speech communities.

Silence is tolerated more in some cultures than in others. It also means different things. In some cultures younger and more junior people use silence to indicate respect and affection for older people. In other cultures it is normal for people to sit in silence for long periods before they say anything, or to take long pauses while they are speaking. In British culture silence is generally most acceptable between people who are close; in other circumstances it can feel awkward or rude. In British English it is also important to indicate that you are listening by nodding occasionally and making encouraging noises.

In tonal languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai, the tune or tone is part of each word. Changing the tone of a word completely changes its meaning. So, for example, the sound 'ma' in Vietnamese may mean 'ghost', 'horse', 'appearance', 'cheek', 'rice seedling', 'but', 'which' or 'tomb', depending on whether it is said with a high rising, low falling, low rising, low broken, high broken or mid-level tone. People speaking a tonal language have to get the tone of each word absolutely right in order for a word to mean what they want it to mean. The flexible rising and falling tones that English speakers use in a sentence to indicate friendliness are not possible. Friendliness is indicated in other ways. To British-English ears, the tunes of tonal languages may sometimes sound brusque, imperious or angry.

CULTURE AND KINESIC COMMUNICATION

Whether conscious or unconscious, the various meanings communicated through body movements (and the frequency with which body movements are made) can sometimes vary from culture to culture. This can lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings, as the examples below demonstrate.

- Emblems. The meaning of emblems can differ from culture to culture. For example, the American OK sign means 'zero' in France and has a potentially obscene meaning in some Latin American cultures.
- Illustrators. In some Asian cultures the extensive use of hand gestures is often interpreted as a lack of intelligence, whereas in Latin cultures the absence of hand gestures may be seen as demonstrating a lack of interest in the conversation.
- Affective displays. Although basic affective displays such as sadness, happiness or anger are usually understood across cultural barriers, the degree and frequency with which affective displays are used is much less universal. Thus, the comparative absence of facial gestures in Japanese culture directly gives rise to the Western stereotype of the Japanese as Inscrutable'. The counter-stereotype of 'hot-tempered' Latinos can also be attributed to the greater use

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of affective displays in Latin culture. People from Scandinavia tend to smile less at people they do not know, or who are not personally introduced to them, than American people.

- Regulators. In India a slight shake or circling of the head indicates an affirmation or agreement with what is being said. In North America this shaking head gesture signifies `no', whereas in Greece `no' is indicated by tilting the head back sharply. In Bulgaria, the former Yugoslavia,
- Turkey and Iran, nodding the head up and down often means `no', while shaking the head back and forth means 'yes'.
- Adaptors. Adaptors can sometimes be misperceived as emblems when crossing cultural boundaries. Crossing the legs while sitting may be an adaptor in Western cultures carrying a limited amount of communication meaning. However, the unintentional by-product of crossing the legs — showing the soles of the feet or shoe — may be strongly emblematic (and quite offensive) in some Asian or Arab cultures. Even the act of crossing the legs itself can be considered rude in both Ghana and Turkey.

CULTURE AND OCULESICS

Scientists have found that the amount and type of eye contact that people use varies from culture to culture.

- People from strong eye-contact cultures (for example, Arabs, Latin Americans, and Southern Europeans) tend to focus their eyes on their conversation partners when talking. Those from less strong eye contact cultures (East Asians, Indians, and Northern Europeans) often use a 'peripheral gaze' in which the gaze moves first to the eyes, then away from the face, then back to the eyes. This can be deeply confusing to people from other backgrounds.
- The British demonstrate less frequent and intense eye contact than their French neighbours, just 20 miles across the Channel. Some authors have suggested that the old French stereotype of the British as hypocritical and untrustworthy may be partially related to this difference in eye contact.
- In some Arab cultures it is considered rude to engage in strong eye contact with people of a different gender who are not family members. Individuals can experience some discomfort when visiting Western countries where they perceive that these norms are being broken. They may attempt to avert their gaze when speaking to someone of the opposite sex. This can, in turn, lead people from Western cultures to misperceive the individuals concerned as unfriendly, uncommunicative, or even rude.

CULTURE AND HAPTICS

Expectations about touch can sometimes be unclear even in a single culture. Indeed, most of us have our own ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate touch. However, research suggests that we learn many of our attitudes towards touch from the cultures in which we grew up, and that there are some marked cultural differences in the frequency with which touch takes place and the type of touch that is acceptable (or taboo).

- Handshakes differ in degrees, length and strength across cultures. In some cultural traditions (for example, Muslim), handshakes between men and women who are not married or family members are considered unacceptable. Many Asian cultures (for example, Japan, Indonesia) favour a light handshake. This can be seen as weak, diffident or even disinterested by people from Northern Europe. People from Latin and Arab cultures, in contrast, may shake hands for much longer than is normal, and, consequently, Northern European's can experience Latin hand-shakes as rather too 'intimate'.
- Touching the head is taboo in some cultures with Buddhist religious influences and can be seen as condescending in African-American culture.
- In many Arab countries men frequently touch each other in public, or walk arm-in-arm down the street — behaviour that might imply an intimate sexual relationship elsewhere.
- In Islamic and Hindu cultures there is typically limited touch with the left hand of food or of other people.

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- Sikh turbans are an integral aspect of the Sikh religious faith that can be worn by both men and women. Sikhs often find it uncomfortable when other people touch or examine their turbans.

CULTURE AND PROXEMICS

Some cultures structure their personal space closer than others:

- It is common in Latin American or Arab cultures for individuals to sit or stand closer to each other than people from Northern European cultures. This can sometimes lead to a phenomenon known as the 'conversational tango'. When a Northern European is suddenly confronted by someone who appears to be standing too close, their first reaction is to step backwards. But the Latin or Arab, trying to maintain their preferred distance, will follow. So the European steps back again. The Latin follows. And so it continues with both parties taking part in an unconscious tango. The dance only stops when the European is backed against the wall.
- Even within Europe there are considerable differences in the proximity between people during conversation: people from Southern
- European countries, such as Greece and Italy, generally maintain a closer distance than, for example, people from England or France.

CULTURE AND OLFACTICS

Cultural differences in personal hygiene contain considerable potential for conflict:

- Some cultures use smelling (for example, Eskimo 'kissing') as a formalized component of greeting rituals
- In the USA, a multi-billion-dollar perfume and toiletry industry exists to mask objectionable smells, yet many Asian cultures (Filipino, Malay, Indonesian, Thai, and Indian) stereotype Americans as not bathing often enough. In other cultures body odour is seen as natural and acceptable.
- The potential for conflict exists because our thoughts and attitudes towards personal hygiene are strongly ingrained, and we can object violently when other people apparently do not fit into our idea of what is acceptable hygienic practice. The temptation, when faced with unfamiliar behaviour, is to jump to the conclusion that other people are somehow dirty or uneducated.

CULTURE AND CHRONEMICS

In many Anglo-Saxon cultures, it is socially permissible, in a business context, to be up to five minutes late for meetings. Anything beyond five minutes requires an apology and an explanation. For other cultures (for example, Sweden and Germany) being five minutes late is considered remarkably lax, while in some Arabic cultures, for example, five minutes can extend to 20 minutes without generating adverse comment. Anglo-Saxon cultures place a premium on completing a project by the due deadline while other cultures, to the dismay and frustration of many international business people, understand deadlines differently.

CULTURE AND APPEARANCE

Any number of aspects of our appearance, such as hair, eye make-up and clothes, serve to communicate something about us to others. In Anglo-Saxon cultures the formality of business dress depends on a range of factors including the type of company individuals' work for, the people they are with, the exact relationship (that is, client or supplier) in place, and the weather. In other cultures different rules may apply.

OVERCOMING CULTURAL BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Some practical strategies can be useful in overcoming non-verbal communication barriers:

1. Delay attributing meaning. Non-verbal signals made by members of another culture may have a different significance to that common in your own culture. Eating with the left hand may cause a strong emotional reaction among individuals brought up in a Hindu or Muslim tradition, yet be wholly acceptable in mainstream Western cultures. Refrain from assigning a meaning to non-verbal communication until you know enough about that culture (or the context in which communication takes place) to be confident that your attribution fairly reflects the meaning of the message that is being sent. In other words, in order to understand others correctly it is essential that you take sufficient time to adequately understand what they are really trying, consciously or unconsciously, to communicate.
2. Develop an awareness of your own non-verbal communication. Becoming aware of how you use your face, voice and body to communicate and understanding the way in which others react to your non-verbal communication is a key cross-cultural skill. Pay particular attention to evidence that you are perceived as: monopolizing conversation; using irritating mannerisms or gestures; interrupting; showing boredom or impatience; losing your composure or control; fidgeting or fiddling. Not only will keeping an eye out for these perceptions sensitize you to the way in which others see you, it will also enable you to determine the differences between your own non-verbal communication and that of your communication partners.
3. Check whether non-verbal messages correspond to verbal messages. One important indication that you may be misinterpreting non-verbal communication is a feeling that verbal and non-verbal messages are in conflict. Although it is possible that your communication partner in such circumstances is being less than honest, it is equally possible that you are misunderstanding their non-verbal (or verbal) behaviour. Listening carefully and persistently for apparently contradictory signals will help you develop cross-cultural sensitivity.

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CHAPTER 11 - UNDERSTANDING CULTURE SHOCK

This chapter is designed to make you aware of some of the personal challenges you and your family may face when undertaking long-term assignments in a foreign country. It is also designed to provide you with some practical hints on managing these challenges productively and making the most of your overseas assignment.

WHAT IS CULTURE SHOCK?

When you move to a new country or a new cultural environment, it is extremely rare not to feel challenged by the difficulties involved in carrying out tasks that you could do with confidence and with relatively little difficulty at home. This state of mind is often termed 'culture shock' and can be defined as a state of bewilderment, anxiety, disorientation and distress experienced by someone who is suddenly exposed to a social or cultural environment radically different from their own. It can happen to people working overseas, and to their non-working partners and families.

First described by the anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1960, culture shock can be seen as part of the process of adjustment you and your family may face when confronted with a new cultural environment. It happens when people are not sure how to behave or what is expected of them: when familiar cues about how what is normal or desirable are missing or have a different meaning. In these circumstances, when social and communication skills that used to work do not work any longer, it is unsurprising that nagging and uncomfortable symptoms of stress and anxiety are experienced. The term 'culture shock' is used to describe some of the more pronounced reactions to spending an extended period of time in a culture very different from your own. Although many of the elements of culture shock (that is, stress, anxiety and discomfort) can be experienced at home, or even during the briefest of cross-cultural encounters, this chapter focuses on the longer-term process of cultural adaptation experienced by people undertaking overseas assignments.

THE CAUSES OF CULTURE SHOCK

One way of understanding culture shock is to explore what you may lose when you go overseas, and what you may be required to deal with when you arrive in a new location.

WHAT WE LOSE

- Contact with family, friends and the possessions we value. The loss of contact with people and things familiar to us can be a challenging experience. Indeed, in extreme cases it can lead to behaviours and feelings similar to those of grieving and mourning.
- Control and predictability in our environment. In our own cultural environment we know how to get things done. While on overseas assignment, our tried and trusted ways of getting things done either do not work or engender very different responses from others. In place of predictability, we may face unfamiliar behaviour that may even seem odd and abnormal.

WHAT WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH

- Different environmental conditions. We may confront differences in climate, food, political circumstances, housing, and standards of cleanliness, economic conditions and religion (amongst other things).
- Unpredictability in everyday life. Working through bureaucracies is a frustrating challenge in any culture and may be doubly so in foreign cultures where it may be unclear (or illogical) which bureaucracy is responsible for any particular issue. This problem may be especially acute because many basic ways of dealing with bureaucracies (such as the police, civil servants or education employees) are not written down; everyone is simply supposed to know how to behave.

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- Inappropriate expectations. Expectations about how much we can achieve or the extent to which change can be effected in our new job roles or organizations may well not be met.
- Lack of social skills. Our ability to interact with others may be impaired in situations where different rules apply about how respect, courtesy, politeness and attention are demonstrated or understood.
- Different value systems. Value systems which we have always held (for example, concerning gender equality, work, religion and so on) may not be shared or may even be rejected by members of the new culture. Other such values may relate to issues such as identity, relationships, time and space, social organization and communication.
- Difficulties in communicating. We may encounter linguistic and non-verbal barriers to effective communication.
- Changes in status. We may face a sudden change in status. For instance, if we are moving from a highly industrialized country to a developing nation, we may find that we suddenly have to deal with unfamiliar domestic staff. We may even be accorded status on account of where we are from, rather than as a result of any inherent qualities we may have. The counterpart of this may be a sudden loss in status because the symbols that sign4 respect in our own culture may be misunderstood or unfamiliar in another.
- Difficulties in making friends or establishing relationships. Meeting others, whether as friends, acquaintances or sexual partners can be particularly challenging in an unfamiliar culture. One reason for this is that local people already have pre-existing ties with family and friends, and hence have less of a need than newcomers to develop new relationships. This is particularly true in situations 'where sharp distinctions are made between in-groups and out-groups (that is, where you are seen as 'just another Westerner'), or you are seen as just another temporary visitor — here for a year and then gone.

SYMPTOMS OF CULTURE SHOCK

Symptoms of culture shock have been noted in a number of psychological, physical and functional areas.

PSYCHOLOGICAL:

- disorientation, reflected in an emotional state of anxiety, depression or even hostility;
- uneasiness, unwarranted fits of rage or intense criticism of the host culture;
- psychological instability, reflected in confusion about role and role expectations, feelings and self-identity;
- a sense of loss;
- surprise, anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding the cultural differences between old and new ways;
- feelings of impotence and frustration as a result of the inability to cope with the new environment.

PHYSICAL:

- headaches or an increased tendency to sickness (often without observable cause);
- drinking, eating or sleeping too much;
- crying over insignificant problems.

FUNCTIONAL:

- inability to function effectively: for instance, in the academic world it is estimated that about 15-25 per cent of international students suffer a diminution in their performance as a result of culture shock.

THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

Since Oberg, a number of researchers have explored the phenomenon of culture shock. Most view its experience as part of a clear process of adaptation to a new culture and as the manifestation of a longing for an environment that can be

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better understood and managed. This adaptation process can be described, recognized and explored. Although different writers disagree on exactly how many stages can be seen, and use different terms to describe each phase of the process, there is some degree of agreement about what the main stages of adaptation actually consist of.

1. Pre-assignment phase

People typically experience emotional turbulence before undertaking an assignment. Anticipation and excitement about new adventures and challenges are combined with sadness at saying goodbye to family and friends, and fear about what may lay ahead.

2. Honeymoon

The initial stage of an assignment is described as the 'honeymoon' stage. Like a new love, people tend to overlook some of the host culture's shortcomings and delight in the often intriguing and exciting environment in which they find themselves. Associations with the home culture remain strong and the dominant emotions are curiosity and interest. In a very real sense, life is put on hold for a short while.

3. Disorientation

After the high of the honeymoon stage the difficulties of living abroad, such as language barriers, absence of social cues and familiar geographic references, can come to the surface. Cultural differences intrude. Not knowing where and when to cross the street or how to communicate effectively becomes annoying rather than charming. In the absence of customary support (for example, from family or friends), continuous experience s of confusion, isolation and inadequacy' begin to create subjective feelings of frustration, anger and helplessness.

4. Shock

At this stage, what has previously been experienced as a honeymoon descends into something closer to purgatory. Excitement turns to disappointment as more and more differences become apparent. Problems that previously were merely intrusive start to become overwhelming. Faced with difficult challenges, people begin to think in terms of the other culture being 'wrong' or 'backwards'. Such are the feelings of anger, frustration or hostility that people may reject the differences they encounter and instead seek to withdraw from the local community, preferring to surround themselves with other outsiders.

5. Acceptance

At this stage, people begin to feel more relaxed and confident. Having learnt to deal with familiar situations with greater confidence, everyday tasks now become easier. Simply speaking some of the local language may give people a greater feeling of independence and self-confidence. Wholly negative attitudes change as a clearer and more balanced view of the culture takes hold. At this point, people can recognize some of the perceived qualities of their host culture without rejecting everything.

6. Adaptation and integration

In the adaptation and integration stage, people move towards fully accepting the host culture and developing a more balanced (and less idealized) attitude towards their home cultures. Instead of being seen as potential problems, the differences between home and host culture are seen as important and are valued. People begin to trust themselves in all kinds of situations and feel confident in making choices according to their own preferences and values. This is the stage at which they begin to feel at home.

7. Re-entry shock

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Re-entry shock is experienced on returning to the home country. In an echo of the feelings encountered when first going on assignment, the initial euphoria of return may be followed by disenchantment and difficulties in readjusting.

A number of points need to be made about the phases of adaptation described above:

- Culture shock is actually a quite misleading term; in fact there is nothing shocking (or even surprising) about it. Rather, it can be seen as a transitional experience that is important for the process of self-development and personal growth. As a natural reaction to involvement in another culture, it is a potential source of enrichment and learning, particularly if it motivates individuals to pay attention to culture as an issue of relevance and importance in their lives.
- Although not everyone will experience culture shock, its status as a natural part of the process of adaptation to new environments means that those who do not experience culture shock may well be less capable of managing subsequent assignments effectively.
- There is no firm or fixed agenda as to when each of the stages described above takes place. Indeed, not every individual is likely to go through every phase. Instead, people may oscillate between phases, going in and out of the shock and acceptance phases for quite a long time.
- There is considerable debate about whether anyone can actually reach the stage of adaptation and integration, or whether this is in fact an idealized state unachievable by most normal individuals.

COPING WITH CULTURE SHOCK

A number of useful strategies are available to help people deal more effectively with culture shock and move more quickly through the stages of disorientation and shock towards the stages of acceptance, adaptation and integration. The strategies involve taking actions both before the assignment takes place and during the sojourn period.

1. Anticipate culture shock - don't let it take you by surprise. The first step in preparing for culture shock is to understand the nature of the phenomenon and expect it to happen to you. Anticipating negative emotional experiences is a particularly' important element in preventing them from becoming too intense. Finding organizations that can help with the basics of locating accommodation or schools and moving property can take a considerable amount of potential stress away.
2. Find out as much as you can about where you are going. The more mentally and physically prepared you are for the assignment, the better you will be able to manage culture shock. Most importantly, you should familiarize yourself with the host country and, in particular, with the way in which it differs from your home culture. Understanding these differences can help you better understand what is going on around you and adapt to make things easier. Also important is learning about the stereotypes and categories that individuals from the host culture may, consciously or unconsciously, attach to the culture from which you originate. Such knowledge can help explain why people are treated the way they are, and potentially help you avoid difficult or embarrassing situations.
3. Physical preparations can involve packing valued photos and other items with sentimental value, reminding friends and family of the importance of writing and keeping in touch, and scheduling a specific time for calling home. Identify familiar things to keep you busy and active. Creating 'stability zones' such as hobbies or pastimes can be useful. Many sources recommend keeping a journal or diary. Starting the journal at the beginning of the trip creates continuity and is useful for reminding you of the reasons why you decided to go abroad. Recalling your original goals can put some of the hardships into perspective.
4. Fight stress - don't give into it. Learning to recognize and take stress seriously is important, as is taking steps to manage it effectively. Symptoms of stress include sleeplessness, anxiety, frustration, anger and aggression. Physical symptoms of stress include weight loss, sleeping problems, eating problems and increased alcohol intake. Reduce stress by learning to recognize your own personal stress indicators; focusing on identifying, challenging and changing negative beliefs or assumptions, and replacing them with more positive ones; identifying situations you can control and those you cannot, focusing on the former and developing a productive attitude towards the latter.

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5. Take care of yourself. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important in combating some of the physical and mental strains of culture shock. This means not drinking or eating too much, and taking time out to exercise on a regular basis. Hobbies such as chapter or sports can also be useful. Take a short trip away if things get too much.
6. Give yourself time and space to adapt. Making mistakes is a natural (even desirable) part of learning and adjustment, even if it sometimes brings with it feelings of clumsiness and failure. However, learning is also a process with a fairly predictable outcome, and the mistakes will almost always go away. The key is to be alert to problems and to learn from them. One way of doing this is by thinking of things in your new environment not as strangely different, but as excitingly new and full of potential sources of learning. This implies recognizing that other people's way of categorizing and understanding things might be a great deal more appropriate circumstances than your own.
7. Build support networks. Both local people and others from your own community are usually a good source of help and friendship: it is the quantity and quality of the social support that is important, not the sources of it. Develop strategies for forming new social support systems (church, clubs and so on), but avoid spending too much time with other expatriates, particularly to the exclusion of locals.
8. Discuss your experiences. Find a mentor, assistant or friend who can help you on a long-term basis. Discussing how you are feeling and exploring with someone else the possible behaviours that will best meet the demands to be faced can reduce anxiety. In addition, knowing that you are not the only one who has unfulfilled expectations or feels anxious can be extremely useful.
9. Set realistic goals. Coming to a fair and realistic assessment of how much you can reasonably hope to achieve is also essential, particularly in situations where you are unlikely to have as much control over goal attainment as you might at home. People who 'go with the flow a little' and are patient and relaxed are the ones who tend to cope most easily. Putting a limit on the number of projects you initially take on is also helpful. Remember that it is unreasonable to expect others to change their culture to be entirely like yours. The best that can be hoped for may be a balance in which you adapt to the norms of others, while maintaining those values that are important to you.
10. Stay positive, be yourself and retain a sense of humour. Research indicates that those who experience the greatest level of culture shock at the beginning of an assignment usually adapt better in the long run. If culture shock motivates you to learn and adapt, then you are likely to become a more experienced and rounded individual at the end of it. Besides which, what fun would there be if everything in the new culture were the same as at home? Being a foreigner can be a huge advantage as you are often allowed to behave in a different way and introduce ways of seeing or doing things that would be unacceptable if proposed by a local.

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CHAPTER 12 - THE CHALLENGES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In cross-cultural situations, where language can differ and shared values and expectations may be absent, complex challenges to communication can arise.

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Often languages have evolved alongside cultures, transmitting and reinforcing cultural values and behaviours. Thus, it is along linguistic fault lines that cultural fault lines can often be found. This is most obvious in cross-cultural situations where languages are different, and where the sender and receiver have inadequate knowledge of each other's vocabularies. Thus a Norwegian with little knowledge of Japanese and an engineer with little knowledge of medicine are both likely to face barriers to effective communication. Amongst other things, such barriers are likely to be reflected in:

- contradiction between the form of language used and its function;
- the use of inaccessible or incomplete language forms;
- the choice of an appropriate language register for particular situations;
- how listening is expressed;
- how obligation, sincerity and rudeness are expressed.

Learning the grammar structures, vocabulary and discourse rules (that is, rules governing opening or closing conversations, taking turns, knowing appropriate topics of conversation and so on) of a shared language is essential to ensuring effective cross-cultural communication.

NON-VERBAL DIFFERENCES

As stated earlier, much of our communication is carried non-verbally. Thus, even where sender and receiver share the same verbal language, they may bring to any communication very different non-verbal behaviours and expectations. Although much non-verbal behaviour (such as smiling, laughing and crying) is universal in form, some behaviours can carry different meanings depending on the cultural background of the individuals concerned. For example, in American culture crossing your legs and showing the soles of your feet has no particular mean tng. However, in Thailand or Arab cultures this same behaviour can be interpreted as insulting, as the sole of the foot is regarded as the dirtiest part of the body. The Australian tendency to raise vocal pitch at the end of a statement may be confusing to the Scot, who raises pitch at the end of a question. Cross-cultural differences in non-verbal communication can lead to misunderstandings, confusion and, potentially, hostility.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Of course, sharing the same language or non-verbal communication behaviours does not imply that the culture is the same: few would claim that the UK, Ireland, Jamaica and the USA are culturally indistinct. In addition to linguistic and non-verbal competence, effective communication requires an ability to decipher the basic values, motivating forces, desires and expectations that provide the context within which we communicate; it is these values and assumptions that often define what is considered to be an appropriate and acceptable style of communication. Cultural competence also requires that we understand basic factual information about the historical, political and social background of our counterpart's culture.

THE CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

Economic developments and the growth of the 'global' economy have led to the increased use of virtual' communication - that is, communication through various forms of technological interface (such as, telephone, teleconferencing and e-mail) that exclude face-to-face or visual contact. In such circumstances three additional barriers to communication can

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come into place. These barriers operate regardless of whether virtual communication is cross-cultural or within the same culture, although they are often more visible in cross-cultural situations.

ABSENCE OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

In face-to-face communication, non-verbal behaviours not only repeat, reinforce or add emphasis to words, but also provide a transmission route for relational information. In the absence of face-to-face contact, language (either written or spoken) takes the burden of transmitting both relational and content information. This means that relational information may not get through correctly or may be incorrectly understood. This is particularly problematic when individuals from low-context cultures (for example, the USA), who assume effective communication should be brief and economical, interact with those from high-context cultures (for example, Japan), who believe in chapter between the lines to gain important relational information. In such circumstances, misunderstandings are common.

LACK OF IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK

Face-to-face communication, if effective, involves a continuous cycle of feedback, clarification and readjustment. In virtual communication, particularly e-mails, feedback is delayed and opportunities for transmitting or clarifying information are missing, leading to greater room for misunderstandings.

LOSS OF INHIBITION

Face-to-face communication occurs in a cultural context that inhibits too much transmission of negative information. Thus, most of the time we prefer to avoid demonstrably negative non-verbal communication. The e-mail format, in particular, removes these inhibitions, causing individuals to escalate conflict to an extent they would be unlikely to replicate during face-to-face interaction.

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CHAPTER 13 - CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Although cultures differ, there is a range of generic behavioural skills that will help in any cross-cultural situation.

KNOW YOURSELF TO KNOW OTHERS

Two elements of self-understanding form an important underpinning for improved cross-cultural communication. First, it is necessary to identify and keep in mind the response you require from any communication. This knowledge will help you select the most appropriate and effective type of communication to achieve this response. Second, it is important to be aware of your own communication styles and how you may be perceived by, or affect, other people.

CLARIFY, CLARIFY, CLARIFY

Clarification is a vital way of overcoming the noise inherent in any communication. Paraphrasing what you think you have heard to make sure you under-stand the communication accurately is important, both for you and for the sender. It is also important to clarify the feelings expressed as much as the substance of the communication. Finally, even if you do not agree with what has been said, you must confirm that you accurately understand and acknowledge the message.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

A number of common behaviours are associated with being perceived as a good listener:

- Demonstrate interest.
- Acknowledge comments with head or voice.
- Adopt an enquiring attitude.
- Evaluate the meaning of words. They mean different things in different places.
- Listen for what is not being said.
- Focus on the central message.
- Listen for both content and relational information.
- Listen for the whole message, not just part of it.
- Give yourself time to think before replying.

SUMMARIZE, SUMMARIZE, SUMMARIZE

Confirm and reconfirm your understanding of other people's beliefs, arguments and intentions at regular periods in the dialogue. This provides signposts to clarify where others are coming from, and creates a shared understanding on which to base your response to others. Effective summarizing takes no more than half the time required for the original opinions to be expressed.

USE QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY AND OFTEN

Use simple, straightforward questions and make sure you get the answer to the question you asked. A useful technique is to use open-ended questions to expand the discussion and closed questions (requiring only a yes or no answer) to prompt for specifics. Avoid interrupting.

SPELL THINGS OUT EXPLICITLY

In the absence of a shared cultural and contextual understanding, individuals from different cultural backgrounds can face ambiguity when trying to decipher each other's communication. One way of removing this ambiguity is to formulate

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and describe informational and relational information a great deal more explicitly than is normal. This means saying exactly what you mean, and meaning exactly what you say.

BE OPEN AND FRIENDLY

Demonstrating patience, positive feedback and human interest works in any culture. Giving more than the minimum and mirroring your partner's tone (using humour where appropriate) will work in most situations. Keeping your language positive, constructive and optimistic at all times will help turn debate into dialogue. Maintaining culturally appropriate eye contact and body language and making statements that acknowledge the speaker also help.

INVITE FEEDBACK — DON'T JUST EXPECT IT

Different cultures have different attitudes towards the acceptability and nature of feedback. You should not assume that individuals from other cultural back-grounds will choose to give feedback under the same conditions, and in the same way, as you. Invite input, rather than simply expecting it. Also important are looking for covert or hidden signs of disagreement and watching out for suggestions that are really requests. Similarly, common assumptions about the best way to give feedback may contain cultural biases. Feedback is most useful when the receiver formulates the kind of question that the other person can answer, or when it is actively sought. The following rules of thumb about the delivery of feedback are likely to be effective in most situations, but need to be applied in a culturally sensitive fashion.

- Base feedback on concrete observable data. Avoid accusations and, instead, present data.
- Make feedback specific, not general.
- Focus on the behaviour, not on the person. Refer to what the receiver does (or your own reactions to it), rather than to your own opinion of the person. In addition don't speculate on the why of negative behaviour. Not only is such speculation ultimately unproductive, it can also lead to increased defensiveness.
- Be descriptive, not evaluative. Defensiveness is a common reaction to perceived criticism. If you describe just your own reactions to words or behaviour, the other person feels free to use or not to use the information as they see fit.
- Use 'I' messages (I think, I feel) rather than 'you' messages. Taking responsibility for your own reactions minimizes defensiveness and resistance to further communication. Other words to avoid are 'should' and 'ought'.
- Share information rather than giving advice. Giving advice denies the receiver the freedom to choose their own way of improving. Instead, allow the receiver to decide what is most appropriate, in accordance with their own goals and needs. Feel free, however, to suggest more acceptable alternatives where appropriate.
- Take into account the needs of both the receiver and giver of feedback. Feedback is only really productive when it serves a purpose for both parties involved.
- Direct feedback toward behaviour that the receiver can do something about. It is pointless informing someone of shortcomings over which they have no control.
- Aim for dialogue, not debate. If is not possible to agree on a way forward, it is still helpful to identify common goals and work towards a shared understanding and perception of equal status, without pressurizing others to change their own views.
- Time it right. Feedback is useful when well timed. Good feedback presented at a bad time may do more harm than good.
- Give the right amount of information. Overloading someone with feedback will reduce the possibility of effective change.
- Check that the feedback has been understood correctly. Decoding threatening or challenging messages can lead to considerable distortion on the part of the receiver. Have the receiver rephrase or summarize the feedback in their own terms.
- Follow it up. Be attentive to the consequences of the feedback you give, and make sure that you provide the resources and support to help change happen.

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- Be prepared for reactions. Negative reactions to threatening feedback include selective reception and selective perception, questioning your motives, denying, and attacking the feedback giver.

GRADE YOUR LANGUAGE TO YOUR COUNTERPART

Finding out your counterpart's competence in your language is an important element in effective cross-cultural communication, particularly as it is common to overestimate it. Strategies for grading your verbal communication effectively include the following:

- Speak slowly and carefully.
- Avoid shouting.
- Avoid idioms or sarcasm and take care with humour.
- Build in pauses for understanding,
- Structure your language in a clear and logical way with one idea per sentence.
- Explain complex issues, but make clear that it is an explanation and not an alternative message.
- Choose words that are appropriate for each situation.

MAKE SURE YOUR VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION AGREE

Given that the use of gestures, movements, material things, time, and space can clarify or confuse the meaning of verbal communication, it is important to make sure that your body language mirrors your spoken language: all communication channels need to reinforce the same message.

However, it is also important to be yourself and use body language that is natural to you. Skilful communicators understand the importance of non-verbal communication and use it not only to increase their effectiveness, but also to understand more clearly what someone else is really saying.

SUMMARY

In summary then, we can see that cross-cultural communication is enhanced when people:

- understand how others perceive reality;
- understand why others perceive reality in this way;
- understand how others express these perceptions;
- understand how these expressions differ from their own;
- take steps to improve communication.

HANDLING CROSS-CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

A great deal of evidence exists to suggest that people can prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings by learning about cultures that they come in contact with and by understanding how the values, beliefs and ways of behaving in other cultures differ from their own.

Nevertheless, no matter how well prepared you may be for cross-cultural contact, misunderstandings can occur in any situation where individuals with different values, beliefs and ways of doing things interact. In other words, when our own assumptions about how to think and behave are not shared by others, or when others perceive the things we say and do incorrectly, mix-ups can and do happen. Not all these misunderstandings can be resolved to the satisfaction of everyone concerned. Sometimes misunderstandings snowball out of control into open conflict, with dangerous consequences for all concerned.

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This chapter outlines a practical five-step technique for recognizing and overcoming cross-cultural misunderstandings, and identifies a range of practical skills associated with individual effectiveness in cross-cultural conflict resolution.

OVERCOMING MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The acronym RADAR identifies a five-step strategy for recognizing and overcoming cultural misunderstandings during cross-cultural interactions. It recognizes that, with the best will in the world, it may not be possible to adequately anticipate and plan for potential cultural differences prior to any encounter. Some cultural misunderstandings are inevitable and need to be addressed if they are not to spiral into something worse.

The five-step RADAR strategy is designed as a basis for resolving cross-cultural misunderstandings. It is equally useful where one or both sides involved recognize culture as a factor in the misunderstanding - that is, it can be successfully employed when either one or both parties involved in a misunderstanding want to work together to find a mutually acceptable resolution. It is also applicable as a technique to help an individual or team find a way through a misunderstanding that the other party involved has not acknowledged as being cultural in origin.

The five-step RADAR strategy stands for:

1. Recognize the cultural dimension.
2. Analyse what caused it.
3. Decide what your options are.
4. Act on the best option.
5. Review what happened.

RECOGNIZE THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

Unfortunately, because culture is so deeply ingrained, we are often unaware that our counterparts from different cultural backgrounds do not share the assumptions, attitudes and behaviours that we believe to be natural and normal. Indeed, we may not consciously be aware of the attitudes we hold, or the way in which we behave, until we encounter those who are different from us. In these circumstances, we often assume that ambiguous or difficult behaviour is due to the particular individuals in question or because they belong to groups with certain stereo-typical characteristics. Of course, it is important not to classify every misunderstanding as cultural. Mix-ups and confusion arise for any number of reasons, even in communication between individuals and groups with shared cultural backgrounds. What is required, therefore, is not a determination to see culture at work in every interaction, but a mindfulness that human behaviour is shaped by a complex set of factors including individual personality, context and cultural values. It is only by understanding influences at all three levels that we can hope to understand why the same situation is viewed in different ways by different participants.

ANALYSE WHAT CAUSED IT

Analysing the cause and nature of cross-cultural misunderstandings usefully starts with a full account of the events leading up to the misunderstanding, avoiding any kind of interpretation or evaluation. This should be accompanied by a description of the thoughts and feelings of the various people involved on both sides, phrased in a way that recognizes and respects the various cultures involved.

In the Anglo-US incident senior managers in both offices tried to identify exactly what had led to the perceptions each side held about the other. This type of analysis is not necessarily a simple matter and may require persistent questioning and investigation in order to gain a clearer understanding of the perspectives of everyone involved. Of course, this type of information-gathering has potential pitfalls. Questions that may have been innocently asked as a means of gaining additional information can put the questioned person on the defensive, making them unwilling to continue the

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discussion. Nevertheless, at the end of this period of analysis, it is important to have arrived at an account of the events that led up to the misunderstanding and an understanding of the perceptions of the various participants.

DECIDE WHAT YOUR OPTIONS ARE

Armed with a clear analysis of the root causes of a misunderstanding, it is then possible to identify a range of options for resolving the issue and, where possible, use the misunderstanding as a springboard for learning and development. In this way, cultural misunderstandings are no longer seen as threats or challenges, but instead as opportunities to develop a greater understanding of both oneself and others.

ACT ON THE BEST OPTION

Once a suitable option (or options) for action has been selected, it must be implemented. However, it is important to ensure that options are enacted sincerely and not simply because they represent the path of least resistance.

REVIEW WHAT HAPPENED

Sometimes the options chosen and enacted may not resolve the cultural misunderstanding, or may raise further issues that need to be dealt with. Organizations may need to make further structural changes in order to make the system more sensitive to culture as one of the many complex variables influencing the internal and external environment. It is therefore important that frequent reviews are built in to explore what works and what does not, and to explore what else might have to change to ensure that everyone involved learns from the misunderstanding.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

The potential for conflict is present in a great deal of human interaction, but cross-cultural conflict can arise and persist for a number of unique reasons:

- One or both parties misunderstand or misperceive culturally different behaviour to the extent that they believe they are being provoked or that their feelings are being ignored or discounted.
- The behaviours, attitudes or values exposed in cross-cultural interactions are incompatible with each other. For example, it may simply not be possible for those from a particular religious background to accept secular practices.
- Cultural differences have been exposed and highlighted in such a way as to put one or more of the parties involved on the defensive, so creating conflict.
- The normal social and cultural pressures that inhibit the expression of conflictive behaviours are absent when individuals are outside familiar environments.
- Different cultures have different ways of handling conflict. In some cultures, confrontation is a necessary part of dispute resolution, whereas in others resolution is accomplished through third parties. These differences in conflict-resolution strategies can cause conflicts to persist and escalate, without any shared understanding of how to effectively de-escalate discord.

Of course, depending on the outcome, conflict can be a positive or negative experience for an individual, team or organization. Conflict, within certain parameters, can spur individuals into action and lead to improved problem-solving. Open discussion can clear the air and lead to increased self-awareness. What is required is a strategy for managing conflict when it happens and the ability to de-escalate situations in which strong emotional responses inhibit conflict resolution.

The question then arises as to what personal characteristics are associated with individuals judged to be effective in managing cross-cultural conflict.

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They recognize and value the feelings of those with whom they are in conflict. Rather than responding directly to accusations with denials or defensiveness, those effective at dealing with cross-cultural conflict first acknowledge the obvious: that counterparts are upset, offended, hurt, or are feeling any one of a number of powerful negative emotions. Acknowledging powerful feelings implies giving control to counterparts and recognizing that they have a concern that is serious to them and deserves to be heard. Making a genuine attempt to understand counterparts in this way allows the focus to move away from conflict and towards a search for approaches that meet everyone's interests. In this way the goal is for each individual to get from the encounter what they really need, with notions of winning or losing rejected in favour of an 'everyone gains' approach.

They postpone judgement about the causes of conflict until they understand the underlying reasons. Making premature or incorrect judgements about the motives behind other people's behaviour is a key factor behind the escalation of conflict. Postponing judgement until all the facts and feelings have been aired enables both parties to de-escalate the situation while each side is heard. It also avoids the use of accusatory statements that will further inflame the situation. On occasion, it should be noted, better under-standing can make things worse, particularly if those involved come to realize that positions are further apart than they originally thought.

They elicit key information and ask questions in a way that avoids inflaming the situation. Gathering information without implying judgement almost always triggers a de-escalating reaction from those involved in conflict situations: it is very difficult to maintain an intensity of anger towards someone who is clearly trying to understand you. However, care needs to be taken to avoid using the kind of interrogatory questioning techniques that are likely to provoke, rather than reduce, hostility. People who feel criticized or defensive, find it difficult to respond constructively. They may either refuse to answer or respond in a way that increases, rather than decreases, the tension. However, used effectively, questioning and summarizing techniques not only grant both parties the opportunity for clarification and understanding, but also act as a reality check to ensure that the message sent perfectly matches the one received.

Certain types of question are usefully avoided when eliciting information. Closed questions — that is, those that require answers of just a few words (for example, 'yes', 'no', It costs $100') — generally do not lend themselves to two-way conversation and may even be perceived as hostile or provocative. Similarly, questions that begin with 'Why' can sometimes imply judgement or criticism, particularly in cultures where critical feedback is commonly delivered through third parties. In contrast, open, or open-ended, questions that invite others to participate in the discussion as equals are more likely to encourage the expression of constructive and useful information.

They find non-judgemental ways of describing and making explicit the values, attitudes and behaviours that are in conflict. People who deal effectively with conflict in cross-cultural situations know and understand their own beliefs and values. They also recognize that others may bring a different set of values and beliefs to conflict situations. Moving beyond accusations of blame and statements of self-justification requires openness on the part of those involved in conflict, together with a willingness to make explicit those areas in which values, attitudes and behaviours are not shared.

However, openness requires that the language used be as non-judgemental as possible. In practical terms this involves avoiding accusations (for example, `How could you do this to me?'), acknowledging the strong feelings involved (for example, can see you have been affected by this') and inviting suggestions how the potential conflict can be effectively addressed. When there is a clear desire to find non-judgemental ways of looking at a situation, conflicts can become opportunities to gain new information or further one's own interest, thus enabling a productive discussion to take place.

For example an individual who comments 'I'm doing double the work of everyone else in this office, but I am not getting double the money - what's fair about that?' has an underlying concern that the office workload is not being distributed fairly. A suitable response that summarizes this comment in a non-judgemental way a might be: 'Are you feeling as if you're being asked to do more than your share?'

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Similarly the comment am always the last person to know what's going on around here!' indicates a fundamental interest in being consulted. A suitable non-judgemental response might be: 'It sounds to me that you would like more to be consulted so that you can participate more in what is taking place.'

They create problem-solving discussions that are participatory and aim for dialogue. There is always more than one option for resolving a conflict. Whatever option for resolving the conflict is chosen is most likely to succeed when everyone involved participates in the problem-solving process.

Participatory discussions are characterized by a number of factors. Active listening is employed whereby individuals listen to and then restate their opponent's statements, emphasizing the feelings expressed as well as the substance. The purpose is to confirm that the listener accurately understands and acknowledges the key messages. In addition, dialogue is encouraged with the aim of enabling both sides to better understand each other and establish a positive relationship, without being pressured to change their own views. Such an approach not only permits the parties to address difficult issues, but does so in a way that focuses on arguments rather than personal attacks.

They recognize and encourage behavioural choices. Regardless of how conflict has arisen, people have choices about whether or not to continue it. Particularly in situations where others have seemingly set the rules for conflict, a legitimate choice can be to refuse to accept someone else's agenda and instead take steps to defuse it. Seeking new perspectives in the face of hostility and following your own agenda can be a highly effective response to conflictive situations.

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