

- Because of cultural diversity, people hold varying beliefs about how to treat illness.
- The ways in which people try to prevent illness are culturally diverse.
- Health care practices must accommodate a culturally diverse population.
- It is necessary for health care providers in a multicultural environment to become interculturally competent.
- Intercultural competence requires that health care workers know not only their own culture but also the cultures of the patients they serve.
- Language diversity is a common problem in health care communication.
- An interpreter should be used when a practitioner is not fluent in the language of their patients.
- Family members and friends generally are not good interpreters because of their connection to the patient.
- Cultural diversity affects individual beliefs about death and dying, which can lead to conflicts between providers and families about communicating bad news to patients.

ACTIVITIES

1. Identify the differences that exist between your various beliefs about the causes, treatment, and prevention of illness and those of other cultures.
2. Examine your worldview and determine how important spirituality is to your health care.
3. Interview members of your local health care community and determine what communication problems they have encountered when interacting with patients from diverse cultures.
4. Interview people from other cultures and ask them if they have encountered communication problems when seeking health care.
5. Ask members of other cultures how they view death and dying. Try to determine the role religion plays in their belief system.

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. What is necessary to achieve intercultural communication competence in the health care setting?
2. What training is necessary for health care providers to become effective intercultural communicators?
3. How does cultural diversity in language usage complicate the multicultural health care setting?
4. What policies should be in effect at a health care facility to determine when interpreters should be employed?
5. Why might it be important to incorporate more than one medical belief system into the treatment of patients in a multicultural health care setting?
6. What are some cultural differences in beliefs about death and dying? How do these different belief systems affect the manner in which caregivers relate to their patients?

Venturing into a New Culture: Becoming Competent

No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive

MAHATMA GANDHI

You cannot expect to achieve new goals or move beyond your present circumstances unless you change.

LBS BROWN

Throughout this book, we have strived to help you gain the intercultural communication skills you will need in order to successfully live and work in a global society. In Chapter 1, we recognized that there is a likelihood that you will work for a transnational organization or one of its subsidiaries. Alternatively, you may become employed by an organization that serves a multicultural clientele. Your ability to work in a multicultural workforce and interact with people from other cultures, perhaps in other languages, will be a prerequisite to your success in multinational or multicultural organizations.

As an aspect of your employment, you may well find yourself posted to another country for an assignment that could last three or more years. However, even if you are not working abroad, if you work in a multinational company you may encounter co-workers from abroad who have been assigned to work in the United States. In this situation, with your knowledge of cultural diversity and your intercultural communication skills, you can be supportive as they adjust to their new work environment and to life in the United States.

In this final chapter, our goal is to provide you with some of the knowledge, orientations, and capabilities you will need when you find yourself venturing into a new culture. We will thus (1) discuss how to become a competent intercultural communicator, (2) offer you insight into the dynamics of entering into a new culture, (3) suggest ways to adapt to your new cultural environment, and (4) promote your development of an intercultural ethic.

BECOMING A COMPETENT INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATOR

We begin our discussion of intercultural communication competence with a caution: "Communication with the culturally different is frequently associated with adverse emotional responses leading to feelings of awkwardness and anxiety."¹ You must be prepared to meet the challenges of language differences, unfamiliar and perhaps strange customs and behaviors, and cultural variability in both verbal and nonverbal communication styles, to achieve success.² Our goal here is to lay before you the skills you must develop to become a competent intercultural communicator. We also mention that the level of competence you ultimately develop will be a matter of personal preference and can range from native-like communication skills, to acceptance in the host culture, to just surviving.³ Before we move into specific techniques for developing intercultural communication competence, we will define intercultural communication competence and discuss five of its major components.

Intercultural Communication Competence

DEFINING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

We would agree with Spitzberg when he says that intercultural communication competence in its most unadorned form is simply "behavior that is appropriate and effective in a given context."⁴ Kim offers a more detailed definition when she notes that intercultural communication competence is "the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication: namely, cultural differences and unfamiliarity, inter-group posture, and the accompanying experience of stress."⁵ What these two definitions tell you is that being a competent communicator means having the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with members of another linguistic-cultural background on their terms.⁶

COMPONENTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

You should not be surprised to learn that such themes as empathy and being a good listener, which are associated with interpersonal communication competence, also emerge as characteristics of intercultural communication competence.⁷ Most of the research in the area of intercultural communication competence reveals five components of competence that influence one's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in another culture. These are

- (1) motivation to communicate,
- (2) an appropriate fund of cultural knowledge, (3) appropriate communication skills,⁸ (4) sensitivity, and (5) character. We will examine these five components as a general prelude to a detailed analysis of intercultural communication competence.



REMEMBER THIS

A competent intercultural communicator is one who has the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with members of another linguistic-cultural background on their terms.

Motivation. We begin this section on communication competence with what is perhaps the most important of all our suggestions and the simplest to state: *try to be motivated.* It is only logical and natural to assume that you are most motivated to interact with people who are close to you both physically and emotionally. Although this is a normal reaction, it often keeps you from trying to understand the experiences of people far removed from your personal sphere. We agree with Pitinsky, Rosenthal, and Montoya when they say that motivation as it relates to intercultural communication competence means that you possess a personal desire to improve your communication abilities.⁹ Thus, as a motivated communicator, you show interest, make an effort to talk and understand, and extend help. Further, you show that you want to relate to others at a personal level and have an international perspective when interacting with people from diverse cultures.¹⁰ For intercultural communication to be successful, you must be motivated to go beyond personal boundaries and attempt to learn about the experiences of people who are not part of your daily life. As anthropologist Jane Goodall reminds us, "The greatest danger to our future is apathy."

Knowledge. The knowledge component of intercultural communication competence means that you are self-aware and understand the rules, norms, and expectations associated with the culture of the people with whom you are interacting.¹¹ For instance, the need for knowledge as it applies to the health care professions is expressed here by Luckmann when she says, "Nurses who are not knowledgeable about cultural differences risk misinterpreting patients' attempts to communicate. As a result, patients may not receive the proper care."¹² Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge indicate that you need two kinds of knowledge to be fully competent—content knowledge and procedural knowledge.¹³ Content knowledge involves knowing what topics, words, meanings, and so forth are required in a situation. Procedural knowledge refers to knowing how to assemble, plan and perform content knowledge in a particular situation.¹⁴ You need both forms of knowledge in order to determine appropriate communication strategies, what constitutes proper protocol, and what cultural customs need to be observed.

Having motivation to communicate is an important first step in overcoming violence and conflict.

A. Remey/PhotoEdit



Skills. As a competent intercultural communicator you must be able to listen, observe, analyze, and interpret and apply these specific behaviors in a manner that enables you to achieve your goals.¹⁴ Smith and Bond amplify this point when they indicate that skills need to be adapted to the rules of interaction that are appropriate to the host culture.¹⁵ In actuality, you have been learning these skills all your life and thus can communicate effectively with members of your own culture. You should realize, however, that communication skills that are successful with one group might be inappropriate with other cultures.

While most of the literature dealing with communication competency includes only the three components we have just mentioned, two more features need to be added to the profile of a competent communicator. These attributes are sensitivity and character.

Sensitivity. Communication competence requires that the participants to an interaction be sensitive to one another and to the cultures represented in an interaction. Sensitivity, according to Pittinsky, Rosenthal and Montoya, involves being flexible, patient, empathic, curious about other cultures, open to diversity, and comfortable with others.¹⁶ Spencer-Roberts and McGovern add that the sensitive communicator possesses a tolerance for ambiguity.¹⁷ This means that when you encounter behaviors or customs that appear strange or unusual, you are not thrown off balance because you do not understand what may be happening, or disapprove of the custom or behavior. This leads to another thought by Pittinsky, Rosenthal and Montoya, who believe that the truly sensitive communicator must move beyond merely being tolerant of other people and other cultures and develop feelings of *alopphila*, which is a liking for others and the behavior that liking inspires.¹⁸

Character. The idea behind including *character* is simple: if you are not perceived by your communication partner as a person of good character, your chances for success will be diminished. In many ways, your character is composed of both your personal history and how you exhibit that history. As the American philosopher and teacher P. B. Fitzgerald noted, "Character is the sum and total of a person's choices." The key, of course, is how you act out those choices when you interact with someone from another culture. Perhaps the single most important trait associated with people of character is their trustworthiness. Traits often associated with the trustworthy person are honesty, respect, fairness, and the ability to make good choices,¹⁹ as well as honor, altruism, sincerity, and goodwill.

Improving Your Intercultural Communication Skills

Although this entire book is aimed at helping you improve your intercultural communication skills, our suggestions, admonitions, counsel, and proposals in previous chapters have been only tangentially related to improvement. Our recommendations here will now be very specific. More importantly, all of these suggestions for improvement should enable you to exercise your ability to make choices. Our propositions place you in the center of the activity. Whether we are asking you to learn more about a culture's view toward the elderly or appealing to you to develop some new skills, the power is all yours. What is being said here should be quite clear: you must act on what you

have learned about other cultures. The Persian poet Sa'di said much the same thing over seven thousand years ago: "Whoever acquires knowledge and does not practice it resembles him who ploughs his land and leaves it unsown."

Knowing yourself and your personal biases is a crucial element in becoming a competent intercultural communicator. The novelist James Baldwin said it best when he wrote, "The questions which one asks oneself begin, at last, to illuminate the world, and become one's key to the experience of others." We believe that in order for you to be self-reflective and know from where you are coming when you enter into an intercultural interaction, you must have learned to (1) know your culture, (2) know your perceptions, (3) know how you act out those perceptions, and (4) monitor yourself. Although these four concepts work together simultaneously, it is easier to examine them separately.

BE AWARE OF YOUR CULTURE

Your first step toward knowing yourself should begin with your own culture. Remember, all people see the world through the lens of their culture. As Kim so well points out:

Each of us is a product of our cultural background, including gender, ethnicity, family, age, religion, profession, and other life experiences. Our cultural inventory provides us with valuable insights for understanding our beliefs and attitudes, our values and assumptions. Thus, it is critical that we reflect on the various aspects of our own cultural identity and examine their positive and negative impacts on our personal and professional development.²⁰

Stewart and Bennett, when speaking about the American culture, made a similar observation when they wrote, "An awareness of American culture along with examples of contrasting cultures contributes to the individual's understanding of her- or himself as a cultural being."²¹

EXAMINE YOUR PERSONAL ATTITUDES

Not only do you need to know the values, attitudes, and perceptions of your culture, but you also need to be aware of your own belief system. We are asking you to identify those personal attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices, and opinions that you carry around that bias the way the world appears to you. If you hold a certain attitude toward gay men, and a man who is gay talks to you, your pre-communication attitude will affect your response to what he says. Knowing your likes, dislikes, and degrees of personal ethnocentrism enables you to place them out in the open so you can detect the ways in which these attitudes influence communication.

UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

The third step in knowing yourself is somewhat more difficult than simply identifying your prejudices and predispositions. It involves discovering the kind of image you portray to the rest of the world. Ask yourself, "How do I communicate, and how do others perceive me?" If you perceive yourself in one way, and the people with whom you interact perceive you in another way, serious problems can arise. If, for instance, you see yourself as patient and calm, but you appear rushed and anxious, you will have a hard time understanding why people respond to you as they do.

TABLE 11.1 Communication Style

TRAIT	COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS
Dominant	Speaks frequently, interrupts, controls conversation
Dramatic	Uses expressive language; often exaggerates and embellishes
Contentious	Argumentative and often hostile
Animated	Uses energetic and expressive gestures and facial expressions
Impression-leaving	States ideas and feelings in an indelible fashion
Relaxed	Calm, comfortable, and seldom nervous around others
Attentive	Good listener; offers encouragement to the speaker
Open	Discloses personal information; shows emotions and feelings
Friendly	Offers positive feedback and encouragement

Barnlund offers yet another insightful interpretation of what your individual communication style might include:

By communication style is meant the topics people prefer to discuss, their favorite forms of interaction—ritual, repartee, argument, self-disclosure—and the depth of involvement they demand of each other. It includes the extent to which communicants rely upon the same channels—vocal, verbal, physical—for conveying information, and the extent to which they are tuned to the same level of meaning, that is, to the factual or emotional content of messages.²²

As a starting point, we suggest that you learn to recognize your communication style—the manner in which you present yourself to others. Many communication scholars have attempted to isolate the characteristics that compose a communication personality. One such inventory, which Norton has proposed, has nine characteristics.²³ In Table 11.1, we offer a summary of each of these so that you can begin to evaluate your own communication style.

MONITOR YOURSELF

What should emerge from the last few paragraphs is that all people have unique ways of interacting. Discovering how you communicate is not always an easy task. It would be awkward and highly irregular for you to walk around asking people if they think you are relaxed, argumentative, friendly, animated, and the like. You must, therefore, be sensitive to the feedback you receive and candid in the reading of that feedback. The process of self-observation and analysis is often called “self-monitoring.”²⁴ Some of the advantages of self-monitoring are discovering the appropriate behaviors in each situation, having control of your emotional reactions, creating good impressions, and modifying your behavior as you move from situation to situation.²⁵

We conclude this section on self-awareness by reminding you once again that there is a vast difference between being self-aware and being

self-absorbed. The entire process of being a participant and an observer at the same time is not an easy assignment; it involves a balance of the two roles. As Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge note, “The key to self-monitoring is to strike a balance between attention to your environment and your own motivation, knowledge and skills.”²⁶

Be Empathic

A well-known American Indian saying tells us, “We should not judge another person until we have walked two moons in his moccasins.” Actually, what we should say is that empathy is about your trying to imagine how you would feel if you were wearing those moccasins. We used the word *imagine* here because it is physically and psychologically impossible to really know what another person is feeling and experiencing. The process of empathy is, of course, much more complicated than merely imagining.

Empathy, broadly defined, is a part of interpersonal sensitivity and social competence,²⁷ and, as Bernieri indicates, “is the ability to sense, perceive accurately, and respond appropriately to one’s personal, interpersonal, and social environment.”²⁸ Haynes and Avery further define empathy as “the ability to recognize and understand another person’s perceptions and feelings, and to accurately convey that understanding through an accepting response.”²⁹

Defining empathy in a cultural setting, Ting-Toomey describes it in the following manner: “Through empathy we are willing to imaginatively place ourselves in the dissimilar other’s cultural world and to experience what she or he is experiencing.”³⁰ While these definitions might lead you to believe that empathy is a difficult process, it is in fact a skill everyone is capable of developing.

The importance of empathy to the study of interpersonal and intercultural competence cannot be overstated. After reviewing the literature on the topic of empathy, Broome concluded, “Empathy has been recognized as important to both general communication competence and as a central characteristic of competent and effective intercultural communication.”³¹ Calloway-Thomas, Cooper, and Blake echo Broome’s commentary when they write, “Empathy is the bedrock of intercultural communication.”³²

UNDERSTANDING EMPATHY

Here, we need to mention two ideas that will aid you in understanding the role of empathy in intercultural communication. First, although we have focused primarily on culture, we also are concerned with the interpersonal aspects of intercultural communication. As Miller and Steinberg note, “To communicate interpersonally, one must leave the cultural and sociological levels of predilections and psychologically travel to the psychological level.”³³ Simply put, while knowledge about another’s culture can be used to make predictions, empathy also demands that the point of analysis be the individual’s personality. Second, it is best to view empathy as a complex activity composed of many variables. It involves a cognitive component (thinking), an affective (emotional identification) dimension, and a communication element (activity). Bell explains these three variables and how they interact with each other:

Cognitively, the empathic person takes the perspective of another person, and in so doing strives to see the world from the other’s point of view. Affectively, the empathic person experiences the emotions of another, he or she feels the other’s experiences. Communicatively, the empathic individual signals understanding and concern through verbal and nonverbal cues.³⁴



In order to know yourself sufficiently well to engage competently in intercultural interaction, you must know your own culture, your own perceptions, and how you act out those perceptions. Further, you must monitor yourself during interaction.

ROADBLOCKS TO EMPATHY

Before we look at some of the ways you may improve your empathic skills, it might be helpful to examine a few characteristics that can impede empathy.

Diverse Cultural Backgrounds. Our first hindrance reminds you that you must approach each situation and individual from your own cultural perspective. Countless studies have verified the notion that individuals from similar cultures exhibit greater mutual empathic ability than do those from dissimilar cultures. What this means is that when talking with someone from a different culture, it will improve your empathic ability if you have as much knowledge as possible about that culture.

Constant Self-Focus. Perhaps the most common of all barriers to empathy is a constant self-focus. Attending to your own thoughts, or telling your own stories, uses much of the energy that you should direct toward your communication partner. At times, everyone is guilty of behaving according to the German proverb "Everyone thinks that all the bells echo his own thoughts."

Stereotypic Notions About Gender, Race, and Culture. The tendency to note only some features of an individual to the exclusion of others can cause you to misuse the data you gather about another person. If, for example, you notice only a person's gender, skin color, or surname and from this limited information make assumptions about the nature and character of the person, you are apt to do a poor job of empathizing. Admittedly, gender, color, and name offer you some data about the other person, but you must add to this knowledge. Although it is an overused analogy, you should remember that most outward features represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Self-Protective Behavior. When you appear to be evaluating other people, whether by what you say or by what you do, you are likely to make them feel defensive toward you. If you believe others are judging and evaluating you, you will hesitate to offer information that will foster empathy. Think about how awkward you would feel if, immediately after you shared some personal information with another person, the other person lectured you on the foolishness of your act. After a few minutes of criticism and ridicule, you probably would decide not to disclose any other information to that person.

IMPROVING EMPATHY

Up to this point, we have discussed the difficulties related to practicing empathy in intercultural encounters. Although it is nearly impossible to know another person completely, with a little practice, you can develop the skills necessary to be effective in the practice of empathy.

Pay Attention. Being focused during an interaction is the first step toward improving your empathic ability. Fracaro emphasizes the importance of hearing the intended message instead of focusing on your own agenda.³⁵ Trenchholm and Jensen emphasize the importance of paying attention: "The single most important thing you do is remind yourself to pay attention to the spontaneous emotional expressions of others."³⁶ As you must know from personal experience, concentrating on one idea or one person requires a great deal of energy. This high level of attention is even more strenuous when applied to empathy, for it, like our attention span, tends to wander.

Communicate Empathy. Empathy is a reciprocal act; you and your communication partner must be expressive (unless you are interacting with someone from a culture that values interpersonal restraint). You cannot expect individuals from other cultures to offer you verbal and nonverbal messages about their internal states if you do not reciprocate their efforts. Trenchholm and Jensen also maintain that if your expressive behavior encourages others to be more expressive, and you pay attention to the wider range of nonverbal cues they are displaying, you should be more accurate in reading their emotional states.³⁷

Engage Only in Culturally Accepted Behaviors. Empathy can be enhanced through awareness of specific behaviors that members of a particular culture or co-culture might find impertinent or insulting. For instance, you would not receive vital information to use for empathy if you refused the hospitality offered by an Arab. The point here is that to be successful as an intercultural communicator, you must be empathic, and that skill can be cultivated only if you are sensitive to the cultural values and customs of the person with whom you are interacting.

Learn to Accept Differences. Our final recommendation for improving your empathic skills is that you learn to accept and appreciate cultural differences. You must learn to suspend, or at least keep in check, the cultural perspectives that are unique to your experiences. Arasaratnam and Doerfel reflect this notion when they say, "Competent intercultural communicators are person-centered, sensitive, and kind, have experience with different cultures, want to learn about cultural matters, and are good at these processes."³⁸ This link between empathy and acceptance is mentioned by Lewis when he notes, "Empathy is based on accepting differences and building on these in a positive manner."³⁹

Closely related to empathy is the skill of effective listening. In order to practice empathy effectively, you must have the ability to listen effectively in order to pick up the subtle clues given off by your communication partner. These clues make it possible for you to "experience" their feelings and states of being.

Practice Effective Listening

A major theme of this book has been that culture greatly influences how you communicate, what you communicate, and how you respond to communication. Listening skills are embedded in all three of those important intercultural communication activities because listening and culture are interconnected. Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge speak to the importance of that connection when they write, "Cultural differences in how people engage in listening are a reality, so you need to recognize and respect such culturally based differences in listening style."⁴⁰ In addition, as Brownell says, "effective listening reduces costly misunderstandings."⁴¹ To help you better understand the role culture plays in listening, we are going to examine some of ways the two go together.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT LISTENING

According to Lewis, cultural differences in listening behavior may be categorized as *direct* or *indirect*.⁴² While these orientations represent two extremes, they nevertheless provide a useful way of understanding listening. In direct listening cultures such as France, Germany, and the United States, people listen primarily for facts and concrete information.

Silence provides an opportunity to gain insight into your conversations and a clear understanding about the people with whom you are interacting.

THE VALUE PLACED ON LISTENING

As we have noted elsewhere, in many cultures in the Far East, the amount of time spent talking and the value placed on talking are very different from what happens in cultures that value conversation (the Middle East, Latin America, and the United States). Japan is a relatively homogeneous culture, and therefore most people share a pool of common experiences. This commonality helps one discern what the other is thinking and feeling without using words. The Roman philosopher Cato recognized the value of silence and listening when he said, "Never am I more active than when I do nothing." Hence, silence is often valued over talk. Think about the connection between speaking, listening, and silence in the Buddhist expression "There is a truth that words cannot reach." Place that against the Arab proverb that notes, "Your mouth is your sword." Two very different orientations—one favoring silence and one preferring talk.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING

Even the nonverbal responses to what you hear are often influenced by culture. In the United States, it is often a sign of paying attention when you make the sound "mm-hmm" or "uh-huh" when someone is talking. Within the African-American co-culture, the paralinguistic responses on the part of the listener are even more pronounced with what is termed "call and response." When this technique is employed there is an active exchange between speaker and listener that is not found in most cultures.⁴³

Eye contact is another nonverbal action that influences the listening process. In the United States and other Western cultures, a good listener is seen as paying attention if he or she makes direct eye contact with the person talking. But you will recall that direct eye-to-eye contact is not the correct custom in many Asian cultures or in the American Indian co-culture. In short, to be a good listener you need to know what nonverbal actions are appropriate and which might hamper the communication encounter.

ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK

The interactive nature of communication brings us to our next suggestion: encourage feedback. Feedback is the information generated by the person who receives the message—information that is "fed back" to the person who sent the original message. This information may be a smile, the words "No, thank you," or even complete silence, void of any outward expression. As Wood points out, "Feedback may be verbal, nonverbal, or both and it may be intentional or unintentional."⁴⁴ Regardless of the form of the feedback, it allows you the opportunity to make qualitative judgments about the

Listeners in these cultures also confront speakers directly and feel comfortable asking questions. In indirect listening cultures such as Finland, Japan, and Sweden, people listen in a very different manner. Interruptions do not occur while the speaker is talking, and politeness is part of the listener's behavior.

communication event while it is taking place. These judgments offer useful data that enables you to correct and adjust your next message. A competent communicator uses feedback both to monitor the communication process and to exercise some control over it. Feedback clearly manifests the three axioms we discussed at the beginning of this chapter—you can learn, you can make choices, and you can act differently.

Granting that feedback is critical, you must learn to create an atmosphere that encourages other people to give you feedback. Therefore, we will review a number of communication skills that encourage other people to send you messages about the current situation—messages that might be useful as you continue the communication event.

Nonverbal Feedback. The first step in improving nonverbal feedback is recognizing that it takes many forms and its meanings are culture bound. This is perhaps best illustrated by relating a personal experience of one of your authors. After missing an exam, one of his Japanese students came to office hours. During the visit, the student continually giggled, averted her eyes, and held her hand over her mouth. From a Western perspective, the student's nonverbal behavior suggested she was frivolous (laughing), deceptive (averting eyes), and very nervous (hand over mouth), which further contributed to the impression of deceptiveness. The student offered no reason for missing the exam and did not ask for a retake. She simply apologized for not being there. A third party, however, had already told your author that the student's absence was due to the death of her grandfather. This demonstrates the importance of not assuming that nonverbal feedback in one culture carries the same meaning as it does in another culture.

Verbal Feedback. Positive verbal behavior can also encourage feedback. In cultures that value conversation and openness, asking questions is an excellent method of encouraging feedback about the quality of your messages. You can ask questions such as "Perhaps we should start the meeting by introducing ourselves. Is that agreeable?" or "How do you think we should start the meeting?" Further questions can be used to seek additional clarification. If asked in a non-threatening manner, even the question "Am I clear?" assists in monitoring the level of comprehension. We should remind you before we leave this topic that in some Asian cultures, as we have already pointed out, the word *no* is often avoided.⁴⁵ Your use of words also encourages feedback if you relate the words directly to what the other person has just said. You know from your own experience that it is very disconcerting if you tell a friend that you do not feel well, and your friend responds that she or he just received an "A" on an examination.

Silence as Feedback. There are times when silence instead of words will inspire feedback. You have repeatedly seen that every culture has a unique communication style. Some cultural styles call for periods of silence and/or long pauses, and you must learn to respect these phases during the encounter. Giving the person this quiet period creates an atmosphere that promotes feedback once the silence is broken. As we noted elsewhere in the book, many people from Asian cultures do not enjoy being hurried when they are negotiating and/or solving problems. If you learn to remain silent, you will be sending them some positive feedback about the transaction. As we noted, in some cultures there is no positive compensation for a quick decision, particularly if one made that decision without sufficient feedback.

CONSIDER THIS

In this chapter three ideas were discussed: you can learn, you can make choices, and you can act differently. How can you incorporate these ideas into your daily communicative activities? What specific personal behaviors must you employ to ensure you are learning, making choices, and modifying how you act?

Offer Non-Evaluative Feedback. Although the idea of being non-judgmental might be an idea embedded in all our other suggestions, it is important enough to justify making it an independent category. The major advantage of non-evaluative feedback is that it sets a positive tone. As Gamble and Gamble point out, "When we provide non-evaluative feedback, we refrain from revealing our own personal opinions or judgments."⁴⁶ When you engage in non-evaluative feedback, you enable your communication partner to take part in the conversation without feeling that you are saying (verbally or nonverbally), "I don't think much of your ideas and beliefs." Built into our last suggestion is the recommendation that you should try to avoid negative feedback. We will now list a few of the kinds of feedback that carry negative connotations. We should mention that while some of them might have a Western point of reference, your experiences should tell you they are common enough that they can have a negative outcome regardless of the culture. Hence we suggest that you avoid (1) frequent shifting of your body as if you are bored with what the other person is saying, (2) a slouching posture, (3) engaging in other activities (talking to someone else, writing) while the other person is talking, (4) having your arms folded in front of your chest, and (5) frowning and scowling.

Before we conclude this section on developing intercultural communication competence, we have one more piece of advice for you: learn to be flexible in your communicative interactions.

Develop Communication Flexibility

Many experts in communication competence believe that one definition of competence is having the ability to adjust and fashion your communication behavior to fit the setting, the other person, and yourself.⁴⁷ As a clear rationale for malleability in the intercultural context, Gudykunst and Kim offer the following advice:

To gather information about and adapt our behavior to strangers, we must be flexible in our behavior. We must be able to select strategies that are appropriate to gather the information we need about strangers in order to communicate effectively with them. This requires that we have different behavioral options for gathering information open to us.⁴⁸

When speaking to the issue of how communication flexibility applies to international negotiations, Foster used an analogy:

The better [international] negotiators are ultimately pragmatic. They are not oaks; rather, they are more like willows. Unable to predict every situation, every twist and turn, even in a domestic situation, they know that it is nearly impossible to do so in a cross-cultural one.⁴⁹

An obvious component of being flexible is having a tolerance for ambiguity. If your culture values competition and aggressive action, and you are around someone from a culture that values cooperation and interpersonal harmony, you might find his or her behavior ambiguous and confusing; yet coping with ambiguity is a key element in intercultural competence. As Ruben and Kealey note, "The ability to react to new and ambiguous situations with minimal discomfort has long been thought to be an important asset when adjusting to a new culture."⁵⁰

There are some selective behaviors that competent intercultural communicators employ to increase their tolerance for ambiguity. Guittham suggests some specific actions that might be helpful. First, "[delay] the decision on how to approach a new person or situation until as much information as possible has been gained by observation."⁵¹ Second, "[use] trial and error rather than the same formula until what works becomes clear."⁵² Finally, perhaps the best advice on how to develop a tolerance for ambiguity is to be nonjudgmental, practice patience, expect the unexpected, and be adaptive. Remember the advice contained in the Spanish proverb, "I dance to the tune that is played."

Although intercultural communication competence is requisite to successful interactions with people from different cultures, it also gives you a huge advantage when you venture into a new culture for an extended period.

REMEMBER THIS

Coping with ambiguity is a key element of intercultural competence.

VENTURING INTO A NEW CULTURE

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "Traveling makes a man wiser but less happy."⁵³ This adage underscores how everyone likes the familiar. When you leave your familiar and comfortable surroundings and journey into new cultures, you may experience anxiety and emotional disturbances when two sets of realities and conceptualizations meet.⁵⁴ You should not find it surprising that dealing with a new culture can produce mental stress and subsequent coping difficulties. As Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern point out, "Communication with the culturally different is frequently associated with adverse emotional responses leading to feelings of awkwardness and anxiety."⁵⁵ Smith and Bond offer a more specific summary of some of the problems of moving to a new location: "Separation from previous support networks, climate differences, increased health problems, changes in material and technical resources, lack of information about daily routines (e.g., how to travel from A to B), and so forth all exact their price."⁵⁶

If you are spending a weekend in Paris or a week at Cancun, cultural adaptation should not be a problem. However, if you are entering a new culture for any prolonged period of time, you will have to adapt to that culture. Before we discuss the problems associated with cultural adaptation, you need to realize that there is a difference between people who are temporary visitors (sojourners) and those who intend to take up long-term or permanent residence in another country (immigrants, settlers). This distinction is relevant, as Bochner notes,

because their respective contact experiences, and hence their reactions, differ. For instance, the two groups have different time frames. Settlers are in the process of making a permanent

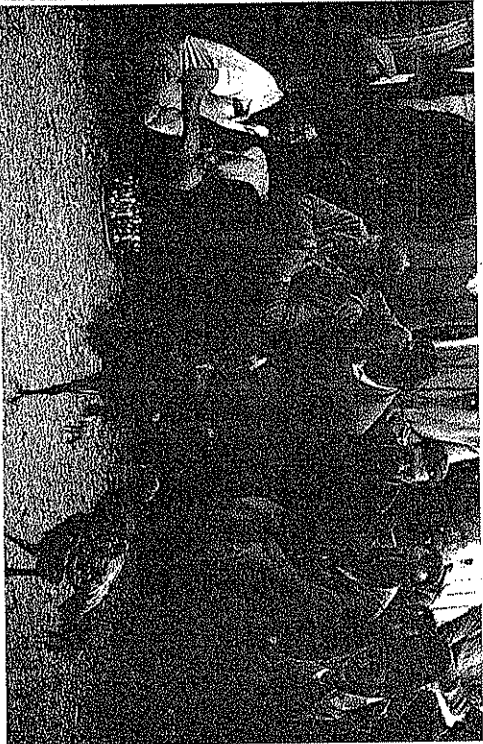
commitment to their new society, whereas sojourners are there on a temporary basis, although that may vary from a day with tourists to several years in the case of foreign students.⁵⁵

The problems facing anyone adapting to a new culture are numerous. Whether you are a sojourner, a long-term visitor, or are planning to become a permanent resident, you will initially experience various psychological and physical discomforts. This experience is known as culture shock.⁵⁷ If you are a short-term visitor, learning to recognize and cope with the symptoms of culture shock during the period of your visit is normally a sufficient adjustment to help you complete your stay. If, on the other hand, you are planning a long-term or permanent stay, you must go beyond coping with culture shock and fully adapt to the new culture. In the following discussion, we will first address culture shock, then turn our attention to full cultural adaptation.

Culture Shock

Embarking on a research project, Summer, Katherine, and Patricia arrived in San José, Costa Rica jubilant and full of eager expectations. "We had so much going for us. We were energetic, open-minded, and research-hungry explorers! Most importantly we were friends, embarking on a journey."⁵⁸ However, during the adjustment period, many new arrivals experience fear or feelings of being isolated, disliked, and even distrustful.⁵⁹ Thus, the three explorers' jubilation was short lived. "As we struggled to convert dollars to the Costa Rican currency of colones, to communicate under seemingly simple circumstances (e.g., ordering sandwiches from a deli counter), and to navigate the Costa Rican streets (which are largely unnamed and unmarked), our grand expedition seemed far away from the reality. We were foreigners. Moreover, we were experiencing culture shock."⁶⁰

Alan Oddle/PhotoEdit



Major differences in perception can produce culture shock.

DEFINING CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is a mental state that comes from the transition that occurs when you go from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one and find that your old, established patterns of behavior are ineffective.⁶¹ The term "culture shock" was first introduced in 1960 by the anthropologist Kalvero Obereg. In the following paragraph, he offers a detailed definition and account of this phenomenon:

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situation of daily life: how to give orders, how to make purchases, when and where not to respond. Now these cues, which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms, are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we are not consciously aware [of].⁶²

While Obereg's definition is important because it was the first, it fails to mention that culture shock also involves a powerful disruption of one's routines, ego, and self image.⁶³ These feelings not only apply to sojourners, businesspersons, students, government employees, and immigrants, but, as Britslin notes, can "be experienced by individuals who have face-to-face contact with out-group members within their own culture."⁶⁴

REACTIONS TO CULTURE SHOCK

The reactions associated with culture shock vary among individuals and can appear at different times. For example, the person who is constantly encountering other cultures might experience a mild and brief anxiety period. Culture shock, says Smith, can spawn a host of reactions that have the potential to create problems. At the very least, culture shock can cause you to feel "out of sorts," "fatigued," and "not wholly in the moment."⁶⁵ According to Ryan and Twibell, culture shock causes stressors that demand readjustment before you can adapt to new surroundings. These stressors may include communication problems, mechanical and environmental differences, isolation, and the experiencing of different customs, attitudes, and beliefs. These stressors can lead to a variety of individual reactions.⁶⁶ For your benefit, we have listed some of the reactions you may feel while adjusting to a new culture. We should add that this list is not intended to overwhelm you or make you apprehensive about venturing into another culture, but rather to help you be prepared when you experience some of these reactions.⁶⁷

- Antagonism toward the new environment
- A sense of disorientation

CONSIDER THIS

Based upon what you have read about their experiences in adjusting to life in Costa Rica, what advance preparations could Summer, Katherine, and Patricia have made to prepare themselves for the confusion they experienced upon arrival in San José? How would you prepare for a sojourn into another culture? To what extent do you believe it would be possible to plan well enough in advance that you could ease yourself into a new culture?

- Feelings of rejection
- Upset stomach and headaches
- Homesickness
- Missing friends and family
- Feeling a loss of status and influence
- Withdrawal
- Perceiving members of the host culture to be insensitive

THE STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK (THE U-CURVE)

Although there are variations in both how people respond to culture shock, and the amount of time they need to adjust, most of the literature in the area of culture shock suggests that people normally go through four stages. We should first mention that the veins separating the stages are almost impossible to see—that is to say, the transition from one stage to another is not as clear-cut as our description might imply. You should view the stages as a U-shaped curve. “The U-curve depicts the initial optimism and elation in the host culture, the subsequent dip in the level of adaptation, and the following gradual recovery.”⁶⁸ We will examine these four stages in more detail to give you a better understand of the complex culture shock process.

Excitement Phase. The first phase, visualized as the top of the left side of the U-curve, is usually filled with excitement, hopefulness, and a sense of euphoria as the individual anticipates being exposed to a new culture. Marx offers an excellent review of how this first phase might be perceived by someone undertaking an international management assignment:

The new life is viewed as providing endless opportunities and the manager is usually in a state of exhilaration. There is openness and curiosity, combined with a readiness to accept whatever comes. Most importantly, at this stage judgment is reserved and even minor irritations are suppressed in favor of concentrating on the nice things about the job, the country, the colleagues, the food, etc.⁶⁹

Disenchantment Phase. This second phase begins when you recognize the reality of the new setting,⁷⁰ and some initial problems begin to develop. For example, adaptation and communication difficulties begin to emerge. As Tinsand notes, “The second phase is a period when difficulties of language, inadequate schools for the children, poor housing, crowded transportation, chaotic shopping, and the like begin taking their toll.”⁷¹ Dodd adds that this phase is often marked by feelings of disappointment, discontent, and that everything is awful.⁷² It is the crisis period of culture shock.

REMEMBER THIS

Culture shock can be visualized as a U-shaped curve that displays one's initial optimism about the host culture, one's subsequent dip in feelings about the host culture, and one's gradual recovery to a point of being able to function effectively in the new culture.

People become confused and baffled by their new surroundings. This frustration can make them easily irritated,

hostile, impatient, angry, and even incompetent. In extreme cases these uncomfortable feelings “can border on hating everything foreign.”⁷³

Beginning Resolution Phase. The third phase is characterized by gaining some understanding of the new culture. Here the person is gradually making some adjustments and modifications in how he or she is coping with the new culture. Events and people now seem much more predictable and less stressful.

Effective Functioning Phase. In this final phase, at the top of the right side of the U-curve, the person now understands the key elements of the new culture (values, special customs, beliefs, communication patterns, etc.). At this stage Ryan and Twibell report, people feel comfortable in the new culture and are able to function with some degree of success.⁷⁴ One's ability to live and function within two cultures (the old and the new) is frequently accompanied by feelings of elation and satisfaction.

Some researchers suggest that there is also a kind of reverse culture shock that takes place when people return home. As Harris and Moran note, “Having objectively perceived his or her culture from abroad, one can have a severe and sustained jolt through reentry shock.”⁷⁵ Expatriates often arrive home missing the new friends they made while overseas. Some bemoan the loss of prestige associated with foreign assignments. When this happens, the returnee experiences the same four phases of adjustment we discussed in the U-curve. This gives rise to the term “W-curve,” because it joins two U-curves together.

THE LESSONS OF CULTURE SHOCK

Our discussion of culture shock was predicated on two premises. First, each year millions of people go abroad to work, travel, and study. Second, many of those experiences end up producing stress, homesickness, and confusion. Although we have placed the topic of culture shock under the category of “problems,” we would be remiss if we concluded our discussion without emphasizing the idea that culture shock can be an explicit learning experience. In fact, as Adler notes, “Severe culture shock is often a positive sign indicating that the expatriate is becoming deeply involved in the new culture instead of remaining isolated in an expatriate ghetto.”⁷⁶ This involvement helps people learn about themselves and, at the same time, other cultures. In a study examining culture shock, Kawano concluded that culture shock “gives the sojourners a chance to learn about themselves. In this sense experiencing culture shock has a strong potential to make people be multicultural or bicultural.”⁷⁷

Beyond Culture Shock

Today, widespread immigration and the movement and relocation of millions of refugees are established facts. These people are faced with the monumental task of adapting to nearly all aspects of a new culture—and for a long period of time, perhaps permanently. This impact and the importance of having to adapt to a new culture are clearly articulated by Kostic and Phalet:

International migration creates culturally and ethnically diverse societies. As people from different cultures interact with each other, they face not only different belief systems, values,

customs, and behaviors, but unfortunately also prejudice towards each other. It seems that social relationships between immigrants and local populations often lack cohesion and sometimes show strong antagonism or even racism underneath an outward appearance of tolerance. In political and public debates, immigrants are often depicted as trouble-makers.⁷⁸

Many of these newcomers experience significant difficulty while adapting to the host culture. As Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, and Barker point out, "Newcomers may not be ready to learn and practice social behaviors appropriate to the new culture in the initial period of settlement. It is not unusual for recent arrivals to be overwhelmed by the immediate demands and challenges in orienting to living in a new place."⁷⁹ Thus, the problems facing anyone trying to adapt to a new and often quite different culture are numerous. During the initial adjustment period, new arrivals will most likely experience the fears and feelings of isolation, being disliked, and distrust we described earlier as culture shock.⁸⁰ A review of some of the reasons behind these feelings is an excellent first step in developing the skills needed to adjust to a new culture.

ACCUULTURATION: ADJUSTING TO A NEW CULTURE

Acculturation, as you might guess, is the process of learning to live in a new culture. Berry defines acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members.... At the individual level it involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire."⁸¹ This process of adjustment is a lengthy process that requires gaining a large body of useful knowledge about the new culture.

As you have seen throughout this book, gathering a fund of knowledge about another culture takes a variety of forms, ranging from the apparent to the subtle. For example, it should be evident to you that learning the language of the host culture will produce positive results. Now let us turn our attention to a few issues and strategies that will expedite and facilitate the adaptation process. We will first examine the issues of language, disequilibrium, and ethnocentrism.

Language. It is obvious that someone living in a new culture "must meet the challenges of language barriers, unfamiliar customs and practices, and cultural variations in verbal and nonverbal communication styles in order to achieve successful understanding."⁸² Noting this difficulty, Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "No man should travel until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he makes himself a great baby—so helpless and so ridiculous." This problem is frequently seen among long-term sojourners and immigrants to the United States who have not mastered English. They experience social isolation and are, as Leong and Chou note, forced "into fields that require less mastery of English language and less interpersonal interaction."⁸³

When we talk of problems associated with being exposed to a new language, we are talking about two ideas: language acquisition and the ways of speaking unique to the new culture. Both of these can delay the adaptation process. Harper summarizes this view when she notes, "Lack of language skills is a strong barrier to effective cultural adjustment and communication, whereas lack of knowledge concerning the ways of speaking of a particular group will reduce the level of understanding that we can achieve with our counterparts."⁸⁴ People trying to adjust to and interact with a new culture must face challenges associated not only with learning an additional language but also with the unique cultural patterns found within each language. As we demonstrated

in Chapter 6, cultural variations in the use of language can mean many things, from the use of idioms, to different rules for turn taking, to linguistic ways of showing respect. If you cannot learn the host culture's language, then you should at least try to master some of its basics, such as greeting behaviors, proper polite responses, and words that deal with public transportation and shopping for food and other necessities.

Disequilibrium. Successful adaptation demands a certain level of knowledge about the host culture and requires you to make correct choices regarding that knowledge. Those choices can include everything from learning proper greeting behaviors (such as bowing, shaking hands, or hugging) to deciding about eating utensils (such as chopsticks, knives and forks, or fingers). According to Kim, sojourners are, "at least temporarily, in a state of disequilibrium, which is manifested in many emotional 'lows' of uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety."⁸⁵

The disequilibrium associated with adaptation raises two conflicting issues: (1) a relative preference for maintaining one's native culture and identity, and (2) a relative preference for having contact with and interacting with members of the host culture.⁸⁶ These conflicting issues lead to four forms of coping for the sojourner moving into a new culture. These range from full acceptance of the new culture to almost total rejection. The first, *assimilation*, occurs when immigrants no longer wish to maintain their native cultural identity and seek to become absorbed into the host society. The second is *separation*, which occurs when immigrants value holding on to their native culture, turn their backs on interaction with the host culture, and turn inward toward their native culture. The third form, *integration*, occurs when sojourners have an interest in maintaining their native culture during daily interactions with people from the host culture. In this situation, some degree of the sojourners' native culture is maintained, while they simultaneously try to function as an integral member of their host culture's social network. The final form is *marginalization*, which occurs where there is little possibility of maintaining one's native cultural heritage (often due to forced cultural loss) or little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination).⁸⁷ As you can see, the first three forms of coping are generally elective on the part of the immigrant. The strategy of marginalization, however, is generally beyond the choice of the individual and is a result of uncontrollable external forces.

Ethnocentrism. Barriers to acculturation often spring up because of ethnocentrism, leading to prejudice, which in turn results in mistrust, hostility, and even hate.⁸⁸ What is interesting about ethnocentrism is that it affects both the immigrant and the host culture. According to Gourevard, members of the host culture also experience many of the adaptation symptoms associated with the sojourner: feelings of anxiety, fear, depression, ineptitude, and fatigue.⁸⁹ This can lead to members of the host culture passing judgment on outsiders while the person trying to adapt cannot, or will not, expunge his or her native culture. The key to effective adaptation is for both parties to recognize the strong pull of ethnocentrism and attempt to keep it in check.

CONSIDER THIS

What kinds of problems might you encounter entering a new culture where you have little or no proficiency in the language of the host culture? How would you go about preparing yourself to overcome your language deficits?

Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic. In more recent work, Kim has developed a theoretical model that paints the cultural adjustment process as being more complex than the U- and W-curve models of culture shock that we discussed earlier. She sees adjustment as a process of "stress-adaptation-growth." From this perspective, upon entering the new culture the sojourner encounters stress as a result of developing a diminished ability to function normally. That is, he or she becomes stressed when confronted with new and different ways of dealing with daily life. To reduce the stress, the sojourner develops and incorporates new cultural norms required to function normally and thereby begins adaptation to the new environment. Through continual experience of stress-adaptation, the individual's perspectives broaden, resulting in personal growth. The three components of stress-adaptation-growth constitute a dynamic process.⁹⁰ According to Kim:

The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic plays out not in a smooth linear progression, but in a cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" representation of the present articulation of the interrelationship among stress, adaptation, and growth. Strangers respond to each stressful experience by "drawing back," which in turn activates adaptive energy to help them reorganize themselves and "leap forward" . . . The process is continuous as long as there are new environmental challenges.⁹¹

To conclude our discussion of adapting to a foreign culture, we offer several useful strategies you may employ to ease your adjustment to your new culture.

ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Make Personal Contact with the Host Culture. Direct contact with the host culture promotes and facilitates successful adaptation to a new culture. Begley accentuates the importance of direct contact when she notes, "Although insight and knowledge can be gained through prior intercultural study, additional practical wisdom is attained through everyday conversations with people from other cultures."⁹² Making friends is an excellent means of developing contacts within the host culture. In fact, studies point out "that having friends among the nationals of the host country, rather than having contacts only with fellow expatriates, is an important determinant of satisfaction."⁹³ At the same time, it is important to have periodic interaction with other expatriates so you can share problems and solutions and find a degree of comfort in speaking your native language.

Learn About the Host Culture. One of the major themes of this book has been the notion that developing a fund of knowledge about other cultures is a useful first step toward improving intercultural communication. Adaptation becomes less troublesome if you become aware of the fundamental characteristics of the culture in which you will be living. Chen and Starosta note, "Culture awareness refers to an understanding of one's own and others' cultures that affect how people think and behave. This includes understanding commonalities of human behavior and differences in cultural patterns."⁹⁴ We urge you, therefore, to learn about the culture's religious orientation, political system, key values and beliefs, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, family organization, social etiquette, and the like.

Participate in Cultural Activities. An excellent way to learn about a new culture is to be an active participant in that culture. Attend social, religious, and cultural events. If

possible, try to interact with members of the host culture while attending these events. In most instances, members of the host culture will welcome the opportunity to learn about your culture while they are sharing theirs with you.

HOST CULTURES' REACTIONS TO IMMIGRATION

We have thus far discussed the problems of people who enter a new culture for the purpose of a long-term visit or to settle as permanent residents. Berry has raised another interesting issue: the effect acculturation has upon long-settled populations as they attempt to maintain their societies in the face of increasing cultural diversity in their midst.⁹⁵ Large migrations of people moving into a new country and culture, for various reasons ranging from employment opportunities to being political refugees, have in many circumstances resulted in a backlash to immigration where members of the host society developed feelings of being invaded, overrun, and losing their culture. Liu expresses this problem in the following paragraph:

One can hardly walk along a major street for ten minutes without passing a restaurant featuring, among others, Mexican, Italian, Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, or Thai food, representing the development of a multicultural environment. The most significant contributor to this multicultural environment is the ever-increasing levels of immigration. . . . With each encounter of alternative food, clothing, architecture, lifestyle, art, language, and medicine, we learn some new things outside of our "village" culture. Living with "others," we are being multiculturalized every day. . . . Within this framework, there are bipolar reactions. Some host nationals express concerns over the threat ethnic cultures might pose [to] the mainstream cultural values, the political and economic power structure, and the distribution of employment opportunities. On the other hand, migrants may be forming state and national associations to maintain their ethnic culture heritage and promote the survival of their languages within the mainstream institutions.⁹⁶

In the United States, many small communities that have historically been predominantly white, Christian, and English speaking are now finding their neighborhoods populated by people who speak little English, practice non-Christian religions, wear strange clothing, and represent a large variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. In many circumstances, these changes result in an anti-immigrant backlash. The news media often report these anti-immigration attitudes with stories about demands for English to be established as an official language and for dress codes forbidding children who attend public schools to wear ethnic clothing, and cries about "cheap" labor taking away jobs from "real" Americans.

We can only point out that there is a natural tendency for people to react in

CONSIDER THIS

What problems are associated with a host culture being affected by the acculturation of immigrants into long-settled populations? Is it possible for large influxes of immigrants into a community to be acculturated and accepted without strife and intolerance? What responsibilities do members of the host culture have to make immigrants feel at home and accepted in their new community?

a negative manner when they perceive that their way of life is being upset and changed—especially by an influx of people from other cultures. We strongly believe that people must learn to be tolerant and adapt to the changing world. Unfortunately, as Hogland reports, “While shrinking the world, the forces of technology, trade and communications have done little to make it a more tolerant place.”⁹⁷ In order to work toward a world where diverse cultures can live side by side in a community, we urge you to be open, objective, and tolerant. With a receptive perspective, you can learn about the new cultures in your community and learn to be accepting.

We end this section on improvement by reminding you that successful intercultural communication should always begin with your trying to understand the characteristics of the culture with which you will be interacting. Once you acquire this understanding, you can decide what constitutes appropriate (and inappropriate) behavior. Nathaniel Brandon offered sound advice when he said, “The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.” We urge you, therefore, to develop your awareness and learn to be tolerant and accepting. A first step toward this goal is to develop a personal intercultural ethic.

INTERCULTURAL ETHICS

If you are interacting with members of other cultures, it is not at all unusual to find yourself in discussions where there are disagreements about what is right and what is wrong. Reflect for a moment on some of the following assertions:

- War is appropriate in some circumstances.
- War is always wrong.
- Women always have the right to be in control of their reproductive behaviors.
- Abortion is always wrong.
- Sending jobs overseas is good for the economy.
- Sending work overseas takes jobs away from hard-working Americans.

Deciding how you feel about these positions involves having to make judgments that contain some ethical implications and focus on questions of what is right, wrong, proper, and improper. Considering these positions also may require that you think about them in a global sense, considering what is appropriate for your society or for the global society as a whole, rather than what might apply to one or a few individuals. Ethics, therefore, can be seen as a reflection of your convictions, which are rooted in your culture. They also provide guidelines that influence the manner in which you communicate with other people. Ethics, therefore, help you determine what you ought to do, how you ought to act, and how you should interact with people.

What Is Ethics?

Ethics refers to judgments that focus “on degrees of rightness and wrongness, virtue and vice, and obligation in human behavior.”⁹⁸ Ethics attempts to “provide the tools for making difficult moral choices, in both our personal and our professional lives.”⁹⁹ These choices are made difficult when ethical practices collide—as they often do in intercultural interactions.

If one culture approves of such behavior as cannibalism, polygamy, or female infanticide and another culture condemns it, what does this indicate?¹⁰⁰ It mainly suggests that

there is cultural diversity among ethical systems. Day identifies this problem when he writes, “The most difficult ethical dilemmas arise when conflicts arise between two ‘right’ moral obligations.” Thus, ethics often involves the balancing of competing rights when there is no “correct answer.”¹⁰¹

This observation of seemingly diverse moral systems raises the question of whether there is an absolute morality. People do hold differing beliefs and make diverse arguments about whether there is a “true” morality, whether morality is absolute, or whether it is relative to specific cultures. It is not our purpose here to settle the dispute. Rather, we will give you a brief overview of each perspective and indicate how we will deal with the issue. In the end, you must reach your own conclusions.

FUNDAMENTALISM

The first approach is known as *fundamentalism* or *moral absolutism*. In this view, expressed by Harper, “ethical principles are universally applicable...[and] timeless moral truths are rooted in human nature and independent of the conventions of particular societies.”¹⁰² Brannigan expands this notion by saying adherents to this position “believe that there are definitive, true moral rules and codes that apply to all people at all times. These rules constitute objective moral standards and they are exceptionsless.”¹⁰³ What these writers are implying is that there is a universal morality that applies to all people at all times, everywhere. Thus, by definition people or cultures who differ from or follow practices that lie outside this universal moral concept engage in unethical behavior.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Unlike the absolutist worldview described above, the second approach follows from a relativistic worldview. This orientation is usually referred to as *cultural relativism*, *moral relativism*, or *ethical multiculturalism*,¹⁰⁴ and holds that ethical principles are culturally bound, context dependent, and only applicable to their respective cultures.¹⁰⁵ This worldview underscores the fact

that cultures differ not only in their practices and beliefs, but also with respect to their moral rules, which are strictly dependent upon a culture’s own beliefs, customs, and practices.¹⁰⁶ This view is appropriately explained by the philosopher Gilbert Harman:

Moral right and wrong (good and bad, justice and injustice, virtue and

REMEMBER THIS

Ethics is a tool that you may use when making difficult moral choices. These choices often involve the balancing of competing rights when there is no “correct” answer.

REMEMBER THIS

A fundamentalist perspective holds that there is a timeless absolute morality that applies to everyone everywhere and is independent of the conventions of individual cultures.

vice, etc.) are always relative to a choice of moral framework. What is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong in relation to a different moral framework. And no moral framework is objectively privileged as the one true morality.⁹⁷

This statement may be succinctly summarized as "There is no single true morality. There are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others."⁹⁸ Cultural relativism also includes the concept of *ethical relativism*, which, according to Robertson and Crittenden, "infers that ethical standards vary from culture to culture,"⁹⁹ and thus, one standard is as valid as another one. If, for example, bribery, or *busazzella*, is an acceptable and expected behavior in Italy, then under the ethical relativistic view the intolerance of bribery in the United States is no more or less ethical than the toleration of bribery in Italy. A secondary dynamic that follows from cultural relativism is that ethical standards are subject to change. Robertson and Crittenden suggest that the dynamic of *convergence* will cause standards and norms everywhere to shift as globalization leads to common values regarding economic and work-related behavior.¹⁰⁰

It is not our purpose here to argue for either the correctness of, or your acceptance of, the fundamentalist or relativistic worldview. We will defer to the Taoist philosophical tradition, which holds that humans exist simultaneously in both an ontological and an axiological order. In a simplified explanation, the *ontological* order is the world that is, and the *axiological* order is the world that ought to be. In the world that is, ethics and morality are culturally relative. Perhaps, in the world that ought to be, ethics and morality would be absolute. But, as we primarily exist in the ontological order, we will proceed on the assumption that righty or wrongly, ethics and morality are culturally relative.

Before we move into the remainder of this section, there is one more concern about moral and ethical behavior that we wish to raise. Although we have discussed both fundamentalist and relativistic ethical perspectives, we have not addressed the concept of evil in the world. We believe that evil is independent of culture and is borne by individuals. In the words of noted Austrian psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, "There are but two races of humankind: the decent and the indecent." These two characteristics transcend all other demographic categories and are found everywhere. Thus, the "indecent" are found in all cultures, but the unethical activities exhibited in those cultures are those of individuals and not those of their culture.

The remainder of this section will focus on orientations and behaviors you may adopt that will assist you in the practice of ethical behaviors when interacting with people from diverse cultures.

REMEMBER THIS

The relativistic perspective of ethics holds that values and morality are culturally bound and dependent only on the perspective of their respective culture.

THE PRACTICE OF ETHICAL INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The remainder of this section will discuss five orientations and recommended behaviors that follow from those orientations to help you develop your intercultural ethic.

Communication Elicits a Response

We have previously stressed that the messages you send may elicit both intentional and unintentional responses. When you are communicating within your own cultural sphere, it is sometimes difficult to predict what unintended responses you might elicit. And in the intercultural environment, where cultural diversity is a factor, it is much more difficult for you to assess and predict the type of response your messages will elicit. For example, you have learned, as part of your cultural endowment, the appropriate way to respond to, and thank someone for, a compliment or a gift. You can predict with a high degree of accuracy what others expect from you as well as how they will respond to your signs of appreciation. Forecasting the responses of people from other cultures is far more difficult. Let us for a moment stay with our simple example of thanking someone. In Arab cultures, gift recipients are expected to be profuse in offering thanks, whereas in England, recipients are expected to offer restrained thanks, because too much exuberance is considered offensive.

Messages carry the potential to have powerful effects on the people with whom you may interact. You must, therefore, always be keenly aware of the effects your message have on other people. Tead explains the potential power of communication when he writes:

Without indulging in too great refinements, let us remind ourselves that communication also has at bottom a moral aspect. It does, when all is said, anticipate a change in the conduct of the recipient. If the change has any large significance it means an interposing or interference with the autonomy of the other person or persons. And the tampering with personal drives and desires is a moral act even if its upshot is not a far-reaching one, or is a beneficial result. To seek to persuade behavior into a new direction may be wholly justifiable and the result in terms of behavior consequences may be salutary. But the judgment of benefit or detriment is not for the communicator safely to reach by himself. He is assuming a moral responsibility. And he had better be aware of the area with which he concerns himself and the responsibility he assumes. He should be willing to assert, as to any given policy, "I stand behind this as having good personal consequences for the individuals whom it will affect." That judgment speaks a moral concern and desired moral outcome.¹⁰¹

Respect the Other

How would you feel if someone made a fool of you, put you down, or treated you as if you were insignificant? The answer is obvious: you would feel hurt. No one likes being diminished. Each and every person requires respect, dignity, and a feeling of worth. Although you have no ethical responsibility to hold everyone in high esteem, during your interactions you should display respect for the dignity and feelings of all people. Barbulles refers to this behavior as employing "the rule of reciprocity," in which you develop a "reversible and reflexive attitude and reciprocal regard for others."¹⁰² In intercultural interactions, this means that you must reach beyond your own cultural norms and respect the norms of other cultures, rather than diminishing behavior that does not coincide with that of your own culture.

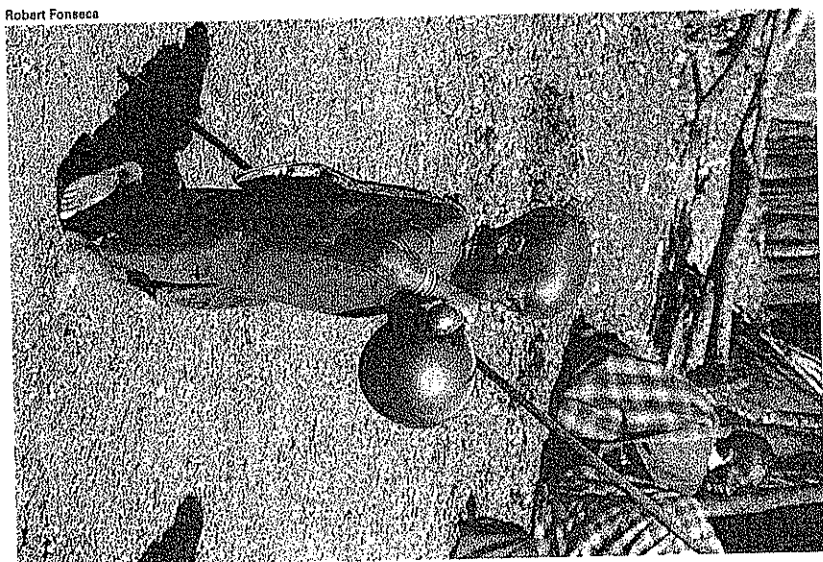
Search for Commonalities Between People and Cultures

We have spent considerable time in this book talking about cultural differences that influence intercultural communication. Yet you must not overlook the similarities among people and cultures, because those similarities can act as an ethical guide. DeGenova has some words that illustrate this suggestion:

No matter how many differences there may be, beneath the surface there are even more similarities. It is important to try to identify the similarities among various cultures. Stripping away surface differences will uncover a multiplicity of similarities: people's hopes, aspirations, desire to survive, search for love, and need for family—to name just a few.¹¹³

This search for similarity is an important ethical component because it enables you to seek out important common ground that helps you decide how to treat other people.

At the core of a meaningful ethic is the belief that all cultures share many of the same beliefs and values about children and family.



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regardless of their culture. The similarities that unite people, and in a real sense make everyone part of "the global village," may range from the obvious to the subtle. For example, it is apparent that all six billion plus people inhabit the same planet for a rather short period, and that all people share the same desire to be free from external restraint: the craving for freedom is basic.

Respect Cultural Differences

Although we just finished discussing the need for you to seek out similarities between people and cultures, we also ask that you not ignore cultural differences. Think about the words of President Shimon Peres of the State of Israel when he said, "All people have the right to be equal and the equal right to be different." In short, we ask that you be respectful and tolerant of cultural differences. By developing this awareness, you will gain an intercultural ethical perspective. We want you keep in mind a recurring theme in this book: that people are both alike and different. Barnlund wrote of this double-sided nature:

Outwardly there is little to distinguish what one sees on the streets of Osaka and Chicago—hurrying people, trolleys and buses, huge department stores, blatant billboards, skyscraper hotels, public monuments—beneath the surface there remains great distinctiveness. There is a different organization of industry, a different approach to education, a different role for labor unions, and a contrasting pattern of family life, unique law enforcement and penal practices, contrasting forms of political activity, different sex and age roles. Indeed, most of what is thought of as culture shows as many differences as similarities.¹¹⁴

Thus, a complete and honest intercultural ethical perspective both grants similarities and recognizes differences. By accepting and appreciating both, you are better able to assess the potential consequences of your communicative acts and to be more tolerant of those of others. Thomas Jefferson said much the same thing about accepting differences when he wrote, "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God."

Accept Responsibility for Your Behavior

Earlier we mentioned that you should be aware that communication elicits responses, and that your choice of communicative behaviors can elicit both intended and unintended responses from other people. All of your decisions, actions, and even failures to act have consequences for both yourself and countless other people. The obvious ethical consequence of this fact leads us to what the Dalai Lama has called "our universal responsibility." This relationship between making ethical choices and communication is clearly underscored by Angrosino when he points out that ethics come into play "when we act on our thoughts and our actions impinge on others."¹¹⁵

The central message is that if you are going to live in this crowded, interconnected world, and if this planet and you, one of its "temporary residents," are to survive, you must accept your individual role within that world. Remember, as we have shown throughout this book, people and cultures are inextricably linked. As the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson noted, "What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And me to you?"

SUMMARY

- Communication with the culturally different may lead to adverse emotional responses that trigger feelings of awkwardness and anxiety.
- Intercultural competence means having the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with members of another linguistic-cultural background.
- The basic components of communication competence are motivation, knowledge, skills, sensitivity, and character.
- Potential problems in intercultural communication include failure to recognize differences, anxiety, the desire to reduce uncertainty, stereotyping, prejudice, racism, misuse of power, ethnocentrism, and culture shock.
- To improve intercultural communication, you must know your culture, know your personal attitudes, know your communication style, monitor yourself, be empathic, be aware of cultural differences in listening, encourage feedback, develop communication flexibility, and learn about cultural adaptation.
- Venturing into a new culture can cause anxiety and emotional disturbances.
- Culture shock is a mental state that comes from the transition that occurs when you go from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one and find that your established patterns of behavior are ineffective.
- Culture shock has four phases: excitement, disenchantment, beginning resolution, and effective functioning.
- International immigration causes culturally and ethnically diverse societies that must learn to interact with each other.
- Acculturation means dealing with issues of language, dis-equilibrium, and ethnocentrism.
- The stress-adaptation-growth model provides a theoretical view of cultural adaptation in which sojourners reduce the initial stress of a new cultural environment, learn to adapt to the new culture, and eventually achieve personal growth.
- Dis-equilibrium may be dealt with through four coping mechanisms: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization.
- Adaptation strategies include making personal contact with the host culture, learning about the host culture, and participating in cultural activities.
- Host cultures may react negatively at times to immigration because they see their familiar cities and neighborhoods being transformed into multiethnic, multicultural societies.
- Ethics focuses on appropriate behavior in interpersonal interactions, both within your own culture and when you are in another culture.
- There are two major perspectives on ethics: fundamentalism and cultural relativism.
- Messages elicit responses that may have negative consequences for the message recipient.
- It is important to have respect for others when engaged in intercultural communication.

- Searching for commonalities between people and cultures helps develop an intercultural ethic.
- Respecting cultural differences is essential to ethical intercultural communication.
- Above all else, you must accept responsibility for your communicative behavior.

ACTIVITIES

1. Locate someone from a culture different from your own, and interview him or her regarding the characteristics of a successful communicator in that culture. Include some of the following questions in your interview:
 - a. What are the elements of credibility within your culture?
 - b. What communicative behaviors are least desirable in your culture?
 - c. What communication skills are most valued in your culture?
2. Define your communication style to the best of your ability by answering these questions:
 - a. Do I give my full attention to people?
 - b. Do I seem at ease or tense?
 - c. Do I often change the subject without taking the other person into consideration?
3. Think about planning a trip to another country. What preparations would you make to minimize the effects of culture shock?
 - a. As a member of a host culture, what responsibilities do you believe you have to make immigrants feel comfortable in their new cultural environment?
5. In a group, discuss the components of an intercultural ethic. How would you recommend that such an ethic be internalized so that it is always present during intercultural communication?

DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. In a small group, discuss the following topic: Why is it difficult to know your own culture?
2. In a small group, discuss the following topic: Given that individual and cultural differences exist, can we ever truly empathize with another person?
3. With other class members, decide how you could best prepare to enter a new culture and deal with culture shock.
4. In a small group, discuss how might you help an immigrant who has been hired by your company adapt to living in the United States.
5. In a small group, discuss the relative merits of a fundamentalist and a relativist approach to developing an intercultural ethic.