CHAPTER ONE

Culture and Communication

Martin Walpert is the president of a family-owned business called Walpert Industries Ltd. in Montreal, Canada, that produces Christmas crackers. The company, located in French Canada, is one of the world's top five suppliers of the product (mainly to consumers in English-speaking countries), and exports two-thirds of its output to the United States. Walpert estimates that the international market for crackers is about $150 million, with the majority sold in Great Britain.

Crackers are paper tubes with small trinkets inside. When the twisted ends of the cracker are pulled, it pops or "cracks," causing the contents to spill out. Crackers are a tradition dating from Victorian England, and they are still very popular in England and in the countries Britain dominated in the 19th century.

The story of British crackers begins with an English confectioner in France, who saw Parisians selling paper twists of candy and brought the idea back to England. Instead of using candy, he filled his twists with little novelties and romantic verses. The result was a 19th-century success story of intercultural adaptation, because crackers became a tradition among British Christmas revelers. Today, crackers often have jokes instead of poems, a funny paper hat to wear at dinner, and prizes ranging from gimmicks and noisemakers to small watches. (In J. K. Rowling's book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone,* for instance, Harry Potter pulled crackers that emitted a loud explosion and produced mice and admirals' hats.) Crackers are colorful—usually red, green, and gold—and are typically laid alongside place settings at Christmas dinners or hung on Christmas trees.

Like many companies today, product manufacture at Walpert Industries Ltd. spans several countries. While its home office is in Canada, its crackers are manufactured in China, where in 1997 the company invested in a plant outside Beijing. Locating in China has given Walpert a competitive edge because labor costs are lower there than in Canada. However, due to the transnational nature of his company's production, Martin Walpert was soon to learn a valuable lesson regarding the role of culture in business.[1]

In December 2002, when some Canadian families opened their Christmas crackers made by Walpert, they had an unpleasant surprise. They discovered tiny plastic panda bears wearing military-style caps with a swastika on them. Some were saluting.

Martin Walpert is well aware that the swastika is the symbol used by the German Nazi party in the mid 20th century, and represents the horrors the Nazis perpetrated against Jews and other groups in World War II. A swastika was the last thing he wanted in his Christmas crackers. He wondered if he was the victim of a deliberate attempt to sabotage the company's business.

After receiving complaints and seeing newspaper articles about the swastika-wearing pandas, Martin Walpert launched an investigation. He already knew that in China panda bears are a cute, positive symbol appropriate for a holiday, especially a holiday for children. Furthermore, he knew that when Walpert Industries in Montreal approved the design of the red, green, and gold crackers, the panda bears did not wear swastikas. The swastikas, Walpert concluded, had been added by someone in China. But why?

Through his investigation, Walpert learned that the swastika, so negative in European cultures today, is a very old and positive Buddhist symbol of prosperity in Eastern cultures. In fact, the swastika has been used by many ancient cultures all over the world. In Greece, it is known as the G cross (*crux gammata*), because the Greek letter *gamma,* which looks like an upside-down L, appears as the four arms of the symbol. In Hindu culture, the swastika is associated with the god Ganesh.

Celts, Romans, and ancient Germanic peoples also used the swastika. In the early 20th century, English-speaking people believed it to be a good luck symbol, and the four L arms stood for luck, light, love, and life. The swastika also has been found in central Asia, as well as in Mayan and southwestern U.S. native cultures. The unauthorized addition of the swastika to the panda bears in the Christmas crackers was well-intentioned, not sabotage.

However, Martin Walpert's customers primarily saw the meaning of the swastika as negative, and his company has made sure that no more swastikas appear on its products.

The Importance of Learning about Cultures

Why learn about foreign cultures when you are doing business internationally? Because understanding others' cultures is important to success.

Understanding foreign cultures is not only important for companies that operate in more than one global area and market internationally. It is just as important for organizations at home that employ workers from more than one culture. Workplaces are increasingly multicultural around the world as employees are recruited globally. In the workplace, companies need to understand the cultural basis of behavior for everyone, and culture's role in the way people make meaning.

Understanding culture is also important for individuals who work in the global workplace. Often culture comes to our attention when something goes wrong at work. Something we feel is important seems to be overlooked or set aside. Or perhaps we know a little bit about another culture, but what we know makes us puzzled. We may hear people speak or see their actions and not comprehend it.

The two important reasons for understanding culture are to learn how others make sense of their environment, and to prevent mistakes and miscommunication.

Making Sense of Our World

An example of the challenge of making sense of our world occurred when Disney opened a theme park in Hong Kong that many visitors from China went to experience. In Hong Kong, children watch TV programs made by Disney, the American entertainment giant. For many years, Hong Kong children have grown up with these cartoon characters in their stories. Many characters are animals who act like humans—Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse—and other characters come from children's stories and folklore, like Aladdin. But the people in mainland China were not familiar with the characters. The cartoon characters had not been on their TVs. They wandered around Hong Kong Disneyland unable to make sense of it. When they encountered people in the costumes of Disney characters, they were baffled.

A similar experience awaits visitors from Europe or North America who go to Dubai and visit the Ibn Battuta shopping mall. The largest themed mall in the world, it has six sectors, each representing a region Ibn Battuta visited in his unparalleled world travels: Andalusia, Tunisia, Egypt, Persia, India, and China. If you don't know who Ibn Battuta is, however, the costumed host who greets you will baffle you, or have no meaning. To make sense of the theme of the Dubai shopping mall, you need to know something about the culture.

In Focus

Ibn Battuta, a young Islamic law scholar, was curious to travel and learn about the world. Shortly after his 21st birthday in 1325, he set out on a journey to Mecca, on the Muslim pilgrimage called the *hajj.* He returned to his home in Tangiers, Morocco, 24 years later, after traveling through almost the whole of the Islamic world. He still wasn't finished, though. He made further journeys, only coming back to Morocco for good in 1354. He has been called "the world's greatest pre-modern traveler."[2]

Like many young adults, Ibn Battuta wanted to experience the world. However, unlike most students today, he traveled more than 75,000 miles, acquired a number of wives on the way, had narrow escapes from death and imprisonment, and served many of the 14th century's most important rulers.

Fortunately, he dictated his travels to a scholar named Ibn Juzayy, at the court of the Sultan of Morocco. The resulting book, *Rihla* (the Journey), tells how Ibn Battuta first went to Mecca through North Africa and Egypt, then to Syria and Palestine. His next journey was to Iraq and Mesopotamia, then back to Mecca again. Then he traveled to Yemen, Aden, Mombasa (in east Africa), Kulwa, Oman, Hormuz, Bahrain, and back to Mecca for his third *hajj*. His fourth itinerary was to have been to India, but instead he revisited Egypt and the Middle East, then modern Turkey, the Black Sea, and the southern Ukraine to Constantinople. Then he turned east and eventually crossed the Hindu Kush mountains into Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. He next made a roundabout journey from Delhi to China, passing twice through the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean, and finally reaching Canton (southern China) via Sumatra (Indonesia), Malaya, and Cambodia. His long journey back from China took him to India, and then to Muscat (Oman), then through Iran, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, to Mecca again for his seventh and final *hajj*.

(*continued*)

When he arrived back in Tangier, he learned his mother had passed away in the Black Death pandemic. His father had died earlier. He decided to travel again, this time to Andalusia, the part of southern Spain under Muslim rule, and his final journey was by camel train across the Sahara to Niger and Timbuktu in central Africa.

Ibn Battuta described for Ibn Juzayy his culture shock, his impressions of the local scene, the people he met, and the ways of life he experienced. You can read more about him[3] and also watch trailers for the BBC television series about Ibn Battuta on YouTube.

Even if you haven't traveled to other countries, you may have met or observed people from other cultures and felt baffled. You may have been unable to figure out what their behavior meant or what meaning lay behind their symbols. If you haven't yet met people from other cultures in your work, you will. When you do, you will want to understand them. This is why we study culture. *Culture explains how people make sense of their world.*

The World Is Becoming Increasingly Diverse

All over the world, nations are experiencing more and more people from other cultures coming into their countries. Some people give newcomers a warm welcome. Some are less warm, but allow foreigners to thrive. Some reject those who come from a different culture. Tourism is expanding, migration is increasing, and people are moving in large numbers. Some governments (for example, Australia and the Netherlands) are proposing to manage immigration by having newcomers take tests to see how likely they are to fit into those nations. Other countries (Canada, for example) are trying to develop government policies to help immigrants keep their own cultures.

The United States has a long history of offering a home to people from many other countries. But in spite of its ideals of equality and tolerance, some people in the United States argue against allowing immigrants to keep their own language—in school, for instance. They say recognizing difference actually *separates* people, rather than enables people to tolerate others who are unlike them.

Because people from different cultures get jobs all over the world, you will experience cultural difference when you go to another country. At the same time, if you stay home, you will likely be working with people from other places and cultures. In order to do your job, you will need to make sense of other people's cultures.

People around the World ARE Different

People from different cultures really are different (as well as similar) in how they see the world. Cultures are the amazing products of human imagination, and that is a reason to celebrate differences. We people of this earth have created many interesting cultures throughout human history. They are a source of delight and wonder. The variety of cultures expresses what it means to be a human being.

Preventing Mistakes

The Walpert case that opened this chapter is one example of how a lack of cultural understanding can create problems for businesses. It also shows that cultural mistakes can be unconscious or unintentional, but damaging nevertheless.

Documented cultural mistakes in international business are easy to find on the Internet. The blunders-and-bloops literature is full of instances in which the error was fatal and the deal came apart, as well as instances in which the error was laughable. Many cases have led to a loss of business. The failures usually result because someone didn't understand the reasons why people think as they do and value what they do.

Today, businesses are looking for markets, suppliers, associates, partners, subsidiaries, joint-venture partners, customers, employees, and a favorable image in more than one country. Successful businesspeople must be able to communicate interculturally both at home and abroad.

Donald Hastings, chairman emeritus of Lincoln Electric, attributed many of his company's mistakes abroad to the attitude that since the company's practices were successful in the United States, they certainly would succeed in other countries.

In Focus

Donald Hastings had been chairman of Lincoln Electric, a leading manufacturer of arc-welding products, for only 24 minutes on the July day when he first learned the company was suffering huge losses in Europe. The losses meant the company might not be able to pay U.S. employees their expected annual bonuses. Since the bonus system was a key component of the manufacturer's success, with bonuses making up about half the U.S. employees' annual salary, this was a much more significant threat than simply a disappointing performance by the company. For the first time in its 75-year history, it looked like Lincoln would have to report a consolidated loss.

Lincoln Electric, based in Cleveland, Ohio, had expanded hugely, spending about $325 million to acquire foreign companies. But according to Hastings, lack of knowledge about the cultures of the acquired companies, and the cultures of the countries where they operated, was a critical factor in the company's financial nosedive.

First, the company didn't realize that a bonus system was not an incentive to European workers, who were hostile to the idea of competing with co-workers for their annual pay. Their pay scales were negotiated by labor leaders. The idea that some workers, based on individual performance, might earn more or less than the agreed income was unacceptable to European workers.

Second, Lincoln Electric learned that products not made in a European country would not be able to penetrate a European market that easily because of a cultural loyalty to domestically produced goods.

A third problem was that executives of the recently acquired European companies wanted to deal only with Lincoln's top executives, not with lower-level people sent over from Ohio. This status issue arose primarily in Germany, from the cultural characteristic of hierarchy in German culture.

A fourth cultural issue was that workers in Germany, France, and other European countries typically have a month of vacation in the summer, and so production gears down during that slow time. Lincoln wasn't used to that in its U.S. operation.

A fifth and fundamental problem was that nobody in the executive ranks at Lincoln had had international experience or had lived abroad. The Chief Executive Officer didn't even have a passport, and a last-minute panic occurred when the company scrambled to get one for him for an urgent trip to Europe. Finally, Hastings realized that he could not hope to bring Lincoln back to profitability without moving to Europe, where he could be at hand to deal with problems immediately, while learning what he and the other executives needed to know about that culture.

The U.S. workers of Lincoln Electric, who had been fully informed of the company's negative financial situation in Europe, rallied to help the company. Their enormous efforts paid off. At the same time, the chairman and executives painfully learned the lessons of culture they needed to know to operate overseas.[4]

Most businesspeople want to act appropriately and avoid offending their counterparts in foreign countries. They want to know what people in other cultures value, if only for the sake of making a sale. One researcher suggests that McDonald's is successful in 118 countries because it practices a localized approach. McDonald's succeeds because it offers what local people want.[5] That means being sensitive to the cultural needs of the immediate market.

Responding to Different Cultures

When members of different cultures find themselves face to face, a number of responses are possible. History shows that one response is to clash and struggle for dominance of one set of values over another. History also shows conflict is not the only result.

Contact and communication between people from different cultures is as old as human existence on earth. Consider, for example, the life of Moses (*Musa* in Arabic). Moses was born about 1228 B.C.E. when his mother, an Israelite, was a slave in a foreign country, Egypt. Her son was adopted into the family of the ruler, the Pharaoh. Thus, Moses was raised in two cultures. He married a woman from yet another culture, the culture of Midian, where he lived for eight to ten years. (Midian today is variously identified as southern Jordan or Ethiopia or northwest Saudi Arabia. In any case, the Midian culture was a different culture from either the culture of the Israelites or the culture of the Egyptians.)

According to some accounts, when Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, he and the children of Israel encountered Amalekites, Canaanites, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Midianites. Reports tell how Moses' people interacted with the people of these different cultures. Some encounters were in *battle* (Amalekites, Canaanites), some were in *making efforts to avoid hostility* (Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites at first), and some encounters involved sexual seduction by women (Midianites, whom the Israelites later slaughtered). The responses ranged from hostility to cooperation to close personal relationships.

Thus, the life of one person who lived long ago shows us that encounters with people from different cultures are not new, and neither are the various responses to difference. They have been going on even longer than records tell.

Hostility to Difference

Hostile responses to immigrants show up in the histories of many countries. Immigrants speak languages that may be unrelated to the host culture's languages; they may write in systems the hosts cannot decipher; they often have worldviews that have been developed without reference to the host culture. It is sometimes a shock to realize that far from wanting to become part of the dominant culture, some immigrants reject it out of fear they will lose their own culture. Immigration stories from every continent include experiences of hostility.

In the past few years, hostility toward immigrant groups has made the news in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and Italy, along with countries in the Middle East, Asia, and all the nations of the "new world."

In companies, too, people of one culture may experience hostility from people of another culture. But hostility is by no means the only inevitable response to members of other cultures.

Curiosity about Difference

Ibn Battuta was curious to experience other cultures. Seven hundred years later, people all over the world are still curious about people from other cultures. The Internet and sites like Facebook and YouTube bring us more closely together than ever before on a larger-than-ever stage. An open, respectful interest in learning about another culture motivates many people to connect around the globe and at work with members of other cultures.

In addition to satisfying one's curiosity, another reason to learn about a culture is to establish connections with people who think differently. Close personal relationships can endure between people from different cultures, to the mutual enrichment of both. Along with the connection may be a wish to compute the meanings of things by using a different mental operating environment and running different mental software. To connect with someone who is different is to affirm something that is importantly human.

Denying Difference

In some cultures, showing curiosity about difference is not good manners. Furthermore, some argue that emphasizing difference separates people, and does not help us get along with each other. They support a denial of difference, whether out of a misguided but well-meaning wish to avoid conflict, or out of fear and lack of skills for finding out about difference. Denial of difference is the opposite of curiosity.

> The productive way to respond to cultural difference is not to deny it exists, but to learn about difference and how to communicate about it.

Assumptions of Superiority

A common human response to differences in cultures is "Of course they're different, but we're better. If they really knew our culture, they'd prefer to be one of us."

English-speaking cultures encode this assumption of superiority by using words such as *backward* and *primitive* to criticize those whose cultures are different. Other languages have their own terms for the same thing. Of course, such evaluations are one cultural view, not an absolute assessment. They really say more about the person holding the opinion than about the persons being criticized.

For instance, the Japanese think of outsiders as barbarians; the Chinese call their country the Middle Kingdom and for centuries considered only Chinese to be "cooked" and all outsiders to be "raw" (uncivilized, because not familiar with the Chinese culture). Your culture has its terms for outsiders, and its attitudes—not

always acknowledged—about the superiority of your culture. All groups tend to look at their own culture as superior, and others as inferior.

Ethnocentrism

"The Germans live in Germany, the Romans live in Rome, the Turks live in Turkey, but the English live at home."[6]

You generally can depend on this: Members of other cultures, deep down in their heart of hearts, are convinced their own culture is the *normal* one. People everywhere tend to assume their own culture has got things right, and they tend to assess all other cultures by how closely they resemble their own.

The *self-reference criterion* is an important concept that explains this behavior. Through the self-reference criterion, people tend to evaluate everything they see and experience on the basis of their own background and then act on their evaluations accordingly.[7] People in all cultures use this self-reference criterion in considering other cultures. It's a kind of mental comparison that goes on consciously and unconsciously.

Those with little experience of other cultures are especially inclined to believe that their own culture (ethnicity) is normative and at the center of human experience—hence *ethnocentrism.* The further from our own another culture is, the more it seems to belong on the fringe, to be peripheral and not normal. Conversely, the closer to our own culture another culture is, the truer it seems to be. Along with a preference for cultures that are similar to our own is the view that difference is dangerous. It threatens the norm. It's only a small step from there to viewing difference as dismissible, or even *wrong*.

For this reason, ethnocentrism can lead to a complacency about one's own culture, a lack of interest in understanding another culture, and actual discrimination against people of other cultures.

Assumptions of Universality

One of the comments people often hear from travelers to foreign countries is, "They may talk (dress, eat) differently, but underneath they're just like us." This notion is profoundly incorrect. People underneath are *not* alike. Culture is the whole view of the universe from which people assess the meaning of life and their appropriate response to it, and those views are not the same. Let's put this another way: People begin with different operating environments and run different software. They have different databases and process information differently, with different goals for their information processing. They arrive at different results.

To pretend we are all alike, or should be, can lead to miscommunication or failed communication. The future of businesses and indeed of the world may well depend upon people who think differently acting together.

Cooperating with Difference

Cultural differences don't prevent us from working together. We can communicate and have productive business relationships even though we are different. Indeed, we *must* work together.

Geert Hofstede, the Dutch researcher who laid the foundation for cross-cultural studies, advises: “The principle of surviving in a multicultural world is that one does not need to think, feel, and act in the same way in order to agree on practical issues and to cooperate.”[8]

We can agree to be different and to celebrate diversity. The more we know about other cultures, the more we will know about our own. Then we can begin to explain why people from different cultures behave the way they do in business situations. Their behavior *will* differ even if their workplace is in the same culture.

When connections form between people from different cultures, similarities appear. Together we weave a fabric of cooperation, in which we see common threads. It is a source of delight to realize someone from a different culture has the same idea as you. It is very satisfying to connect in friendship and cooperation with someone who has a different culture but similar goals.

We don’t have to become like people from other cultures. We don’t have to adopt their customs. We don’t even have to like them. But we do have to learn about what makes sense in their culture, and how to communicate effectively with them.

Three things are necessary in order to minimize and prevent mistakes across cultures. Knowledge about one’s own culture is the first step. With this, knowledge about another culture is easier to learn. The second requirement is motivation—the drive to know and to use the knowledge. The third step is implementing knowledge, and behaving in a way that makes sense in the other culture, the one in which you want to do business.

Understanding Culture

Culture is difficult to define because it is a large and inclusive concept. Over 500 definitions of culture exist. Some are not helpful, because they are too general, such as “everything you need to know in life to get along in a society.” Culture involves learned and shared behaviors, values, and material objects. It also encompasses what people create to express values, attitudes, and norms of behavior.

Culture is largely undiscussed by the members who share it. E. T. Hall wrote:

> Culture [is] those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged.[9]

Culture is like the water that fish swim in—a reality that is taken for granted and rarely examined. It is in the air we breathe and is as necessary to our understanding of who we are as air is to our physical life. Culture is the property of a community of people, not simply a set of characteristics of individuals. Societies are shaped by culture, and that shaping comes from similar life experiences and similar interpretations of what those experiences mean.

If culture is mental software, it is also a mental map of reality. It tells us from early childhood what matters, what to prefer, what to avoid, and what to do. Culture

also tells us what ought to be.[10] It gives us assumptions about the ideal beyond what individuals may experience. It helps us in setting priorities. It establishes codes for behavior and provides justification and legitimization for that behavior.

In order to understand another culture, you need to understand your own. Culture determines business practices, for instance. Business practices are not neutral or value-free. Neither are communication practices. You need to understand the cultural values you transmit when you interact with someone from another culture, as well as understand the other person's cultural values. You also need to recognize the likelihood that there will be gaps in your comprehension, and holes instead of connections, in your interaction.

From among the many definitions of culture, here is the definition this book will use.

> **Culture is the coherent, learned, shared view of a group of people about life's concerns, expressed in symbols and activities, that ranks what is important, furnishes attitudes about what things are appropriate, and dictates behavior.**

This definition merits a closer examination. First, it contains three characteristics of culture—coherent, learned, and shared—and then it outlines three things that culture does.

Culture Is Coherent

Each culture, past or present, is coherent and complete within itself—an entire view of the universe. A pioneer researcher into the study of cultures, Edward Tylor, said in 1871 that culture is:

> . . . the outward expression of a unifying and consistent vision brought by a particular community to its confrontation with such core issues as the origins of the cosmos, the harsh unpredictability of the natural environment, the nature of society and humankind's place in the order of things.[11]

The fact that different groups of human beings at different times in history could develop different visions is a cause for wonder. Often, as we shall see, different cultures develop different behaviors but have similar visions. The incredible variety of cultures fascinates historians, anthropologists, travelers, and nearly everybody else. It makes all our lives richer when we glimpse, and even claim, a bit of this treasure of human achievement.

Regardless of how peculiar a fragment or single thread of a culture seems, when it is placed within the whole tapestry of the culture, it makes sense.

The completeness of cultures also means that members looking out from their own seamless view of the universe probably do not see anything lacking in their unifying and consistent vision. This is the source of ethnocentrism.

Here is a hypothetical case to illustrate the coherence of culture. Let's imagine that a boat full of south-coast Chinese sets sail for San Francisco, which has been known as "Old Gold Mountain" in China from the 19th century, a place where immigrants can acquire gold. But a storm blows the boat off course and wrecks the navigation instruments. Eventually the Chinese make landfall off the coast of

Mexico, although they don't know where they are. It is the last week of October, much later than their intended arrival in San Francisco. They wearily go ashore to the nearest town. To their horror and dismay, in every store window and every home's doorway are images of skeletons, skulls, and graves. In China, death is not mentioned, let alone broadcast by images everywhere. "What sort of people live here?" they ask each other.

The Chinese voyagers have arrived in Mexico at the time of *el Dia de los Muertos,* the Day of the Dead. It is a fiesta with deep meaning for Mexican families. It emphasizes family ties that reach beyond the grave, as departed family members are remembered and brought to join the living family through a celebration. The skulls and skeletons in the windows are made of candy and bread, and are meant to be eaten, to show how unimportant death is, and how the people are not afraid of death as the end of family relationships.

In fact, the Chinese traditionally hold a celebration with a similar objective, called *Qing Ming,* on the fifth day of the fourth month, or April 5. They too visit the graves of departed family members to reaffirm their family union in spite of death. If the Chinese were able to learn *why* Mexicans display skulls and skeletons everywhere, they would understand the Mexicans' attitudes toward death symbols. But if they were to see only the cultural fragment—a bit of behavior—they would regard it as bizarre, unnatural, and odious.

Culture Is Learned

Culture is not something we are born with; rather, it is *learned.* Much of what is learned about one's own culture is stored in mental categories that are recalled only when they are challenged by something different. We all have to be taught our culture. The process begins immediately after birth—and perhaps even earlier, according to some.

If culture is learned, it is also *learnable.* That means nobody has to remain for a lifetime locked inside only one culture. If you want to understand other cultures, you can learn them—not just learn about them but actually get inside them and act according to what is expected. Many people have learned more than one culture and can move comfortably within and among them. When circumstances dictate, they make the transition from one culture to another easily. Businesses don't have to accept failure in another culture simply because they do not have an employee who grew up in that culture.

This book is about how to learn other cultures. We believe it is not only possible to do so but also interesting, rewarding, and necessary.

Culture Is the View of a Group of People

A culture is shared by a society. Members of the society agree about the meanings of things and about the *why.* Along with everyone from whom they have learned their culture—family, teachers, spiritual leaders, peers, and legal, political, and educational institutions—they have interpreted life experiences in ways that validate their own culture's views. They agree about what the important things are—the things that truly merit respect. They agree without having to talk about it.

Societies are motivated by common views, which are a dynamic force enabling them to achieve goals such as protecting economic resources and developing alliances.

People in a culture share symbols of that culture. The most obvious set of symbols is language. Much more will be said about the role of language (in Chapter 2) and communication (later in this chapter). Visual symbols such as company logos, icons, religious images, and national flags form the visual vocabulary of a culture.

Thus, the three characteristics of culture are that it is coherent, learned, and shared. Now we'll look at three things culture does.

Culture Ranks What Is Important

Cultures rank what is important. In other words, cultures teach **values** or priorities.

What is of paramount importance to one group may be virtually meaningless to another. For instance, consider the amassing of wealth. In one Pacific Island culture, the Guru rumba of Papua New Guinea, a rich man is required to expend all the fortune he has spent long years accumulating—in this case, pigs—in the lavish entertainment of the members of his society. Being able to entertain this way is the real meaning of wealth, because it means that the giver is owed and therefore has great prestige. Try to explain that to a businessperson in the United States or Hong Kong or Italy who has spent his or her life amassing monetary wealth! Usually in these cultures, resources are saved and increased, not depleted in one big blowout. To be sure, businesspeople in these cultures often make generous charitable and philanthropic donations, but their cultures teach them to value personal wealth as something to cultivate, like a garden, and make it grow.

The term *values* crops up frequently in books about intercultural business, as does the term *attitude*. What is the difference? Values are standards we use to judge what is important. Values are mental constructs that underlie specific attitudes and that determine attitudes as well as behavior. They enable us to *evaluate* what matters to us or apply standards to our attitudes and behaviors. People go to war over values and conduct business by values.

Because values tell us how to weigh the worth of something, they indicate a relative hierarchy. We can talk about values as cultural priorities. Within a culture, values may be of greater or lesser importance. For example, a culture may

In Focus

A story is told of the Sultan of Brunei, one of the world's wealthiest men, who was shopping in a department store in Manhattan. When he made a purchase, he was asked for identification. However, he carried no identification. "I'm the Sultan of Brunei," he stated. The salesperson insisted that he had to show identification. A quick-thinking aide to the sultan darted forward, put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out a bill in the currency of Brunei. All the money in Brunei has the Sultan's picture on it. What values in the Brunei culture does this story suggest?

put a high value on honesty and a low value on making only a minimal effort. Values or priorities vary from culture to culture: Progress reports about the delivery of a component may be of great value to a Dutch firm associated with a business in Japan but of little value to a Japanese firm awaiting the delivery of a component from Holland.

Culture Furnishes Attitudes

Attitudes are learned tendencies to respond to phenomena (events, people, experiences) in a consistent way. Attitudes are feelings, positive or negative, about something, based on values. Attitudes can change, although changing some attitudes can be difficult. You can have an attitude toward eating raw fish, for example, that is positive and is based on the belief that expert preparation of *sushi* and *sashimi* by Japanese chefs results in culinary delicacies. Or you may have an attitude that is negative, based on the belief that raw fish can contain parasites that cause unpleasant consequences in the human digestive system. You can even hold both attitudes at the same time. If you do, you probably *value* both fine eating experiences and physical health.

Attitudes are based on beliefs as well as on values. **Beliefs** are convictions or certainties that come from subjective and often personal ideas rather than on proof or fact. **Belief systems,** or religions, are powerful sources of values and attitudes in cultures. We will look at religions in more detail in Chapter 3.

Attitudes vary according to how important something is (its value). In Mexican culture, when an aunt dies, the family expects that business associates understand the family has suffered a significant event. A boss is expected to have an understanding attitude toward an employee who is unable to get a report done by the deadline because of the funeral and family needs. In Britain, the attitude toward a business associate's loss of an aunt is that this is a private affair, regrettable and perhaps very sad, but something that may not affect the relative's ability to get a report done by the deadline. In fact, for a businessperson in the UK, handling the situation well means keeping it from having an impact on work.

Culture Dictates How to Behave

Behavior refers to actions. To continue the example in the previous discussion, a brief expression of sympathy by a businessperson to a bereaved work associate is appropriate British behavior. Co-workers may send a card, if they have worked together for a time. In Mexico, in contrast, much more than an expression of sympathy is appropriate behavior. Business associates may attend the funeral, send flowers, offer services such as transporting family members, and visit the family's home to show respect.

Behavior comes directly from attitudes about how significant something is—how it is valued. Values drive actions. We're back at the point made earlier: Cultural priorities motivate business behavior.

In intercultural interactions, cultural differences usually make themselves known first by behavior, which is related to attitudes and which springs from values in the culture.

Table 1.1 illustrates briefly how values, attitudes, and behaviors are related.

TABLE 1.1
Relationship of Values, Attitudes, and Behavior

Value	Attitude	Behavior
Honesty	Telling lies is wrong.	Lying
Family	Family events come first.	Choosing to attend a family party rather than go out with friends
Status	High status means one has better control over events and people.	Dressing expensively to show high status
Achievement	Achievement deserves praise.	Giving recognition for an accomplishment
Harmony	Dissent causes disruption in groups.	Refraining from disagreeing

In Focus

A Japanese employee in Tokyo has not written a report that's due to his boss. The deadline has arrived. The situation is that problems at home with his wife have encouraged him to spend his evenings drinking with fellow employees and going home very late. The result is a raging hangover that makes him unable to concentrate on writing the report. He goes to his boss and explains all this. For the Japanese worker, neither the excessive drinking nor the domestic problem is a source of shame, and his expectation is that the superior's attitude will be acceptance and a paternalistic concern for the employee's plight. The superior's behavior is probably to counsel the employee and inquire into the domestic situation in subsequent weeks.[12]

When this scenario is presented to businesspeople in the United States, however, their reaction is that an employee who explained that he had failed to complete a report because of a hangover from excessive drinking (whether or not it was to escape domestic problems) probably would be in double trouble with his superior. He would be criticized for drinking too much, and for not completing the report on time.

In the United States, the superior's behavior would probably be to tell the employee to get a grip on himself and seek some help, or else expect unpleasant consequences. The employee in the United States may be just as debilitated by a hangover as his Japanese counterpart, but he will offer some other reason for not being able to get the report done. He may stay home, telling the boss he's ill.

The Japanese employee with a hangover illustrates the *value* of group membership: The employee goes out drinking with co-workers and expects his boss to be sympathetic to his family problems. Another *value* is hierarchy: The boss is in the position of parent or counselor, one who has the ability to forgive a missed deadline. An *attitude* is the way the employee views his own situation regarding the missed deadline and his hangover: It couldn't be helped because he is struggling with problems at home, and his excessive drinking is excusable (another attitude) because he has these problems. A *behavior* is drinking until late at night with co-workers.

Onstage and Backstage Elements of Culture

Onstage culture is the behavior we display. It is what people who are in contact with one another find easiest to observe and discuss. Onstage culture involves actions such as shaking hands, bowing, or kissing upon meeting. It includes

traditional ways of celebrating with food and dances, costumes and music. When people are asked to describe another culture, they often refer to onstage behavior.

By contrast, *backstage* culture is not so visible. Backstage culture is values. Backstage culture underlies what others see onstage. The actors themselves are not always aware that their onstage behavior is culturally driven; they think their backstage culture is simply normal. Backstage cultural aspects include the ways people make decisions, respond to deadlines, accomplish tasks, rank events by importance, and conceptualize knowledge. If you can explain backstage behavior, you understand the *why* of culture.

In Japan, a foreign observer can see young people who dress like young people in the United States or Western Europe, listen to the same music, and go to the same new cinema releases. Onstage images are virtually interchangeable. The backstage cultures of Japan, the United States, and Western Europe, however, are very different. A foreign observer can misattribute reasons for onstage behavior, thinking the reasons are the same in different cultures because the observable behaviors *look* the same.

The *why* is the essence of a people's culture. If you understand why people value some things, you can make good guesses about why they value other things. If you understand why they behave a certain way, you can interpret other behavior with some degree of accuracy. Once you have insight into what people think is important and how they behave, you can do business with them. You know what makes them the way they are.

Transactional Cultures

What happens onstage when members of different cultures interact? What do we see? Does each person act out a script for behavior that is from his or her culture?

Sometimes this is exactly what happens. A person initiates an exchange that is based on expectations that come from his or her backstage culture. The following provides an example.

A businessperson from Saudi Arabia, who wants to show willingness to get to know a businessperson from England, stands close during a conversation. The English person politely maintains a distance to show respect for the Saudi. A kind of dance results in which the conversing pair move across a room. The English person backs up and the Saudi moves forward.

In another example, at an initial meeting a Mexican businessman holds out his hand to shake a Japanese businessman's hand, while the Japanese simultaneously attempts to bow toward the Mexican. We can see that each is following a script from his own culture.

But keep watching the stage. What we are likely to see next is that the Japanese quickly holds out his hand, while the Mexican attempts a bow. What happens onstage when members of different cultures interact may be *different* from their usual behavior in their own cultures. The new behavior may be temporary, compared with their enduring backstage cultures.

Consider, for example, the experience of several Western businesspeople who had taken seminars to prepare them for negotiating business deals in Saudi Arabia. As they sat down at the negotiating table, they heard the Saudi executive say,

"We can do business either the Western way or the Arab way. What's your choice?"[13] The Saudi was talking about onstage cultural adaptation, or in other words, creating a *transactional culture*.

A transactional culture exists when interactants respond to cultural cues and modify their own behavior, creating—or co-creating—a new, temporary culture. In this transactional culture, the participants can perform behaviors and act upon attitudes that are shaped primarily by the interaction. The context of the interaction becomes more important for molding actions than the individuals' cultural backgrounds. Transactional culture exists when interactants are sensitive to, and knowledgeable about, another culture, and adjust their behavior. The amount of adjusted behavior depends on several factors, including their level of knowledge about the other culture, their willingness to experiment with new behaviors and attitudes, and their previous experience with successful intercultural interactions.

For instance, a Canadian businessman may put his hands together at the palms, fingers up, to give a *wai* greeting to a Thai businessman, although the Canadian would not *wai* to a fellow Canadian. A Taiwanese businesswoman with experience of Brazilian culture may kiss the cheek of a Brazilian businessman at their first meeting but would not kiss the cheek of a Taiwanese man or woman. They have learned to act as if they were members of the other culture when interacting with the other party. Transactional cultural behaviors are transitory and last only as long as the interactants are involved in communication together.

Adopting Another Culture's Behavior

When members of a culture adapt permanently to another culture, they function as members of that culture. They may retain their old culture, but it is not activated either backstage or onstage, until they are again with members of their original culture. Adopting a new culture has historical precedents, as Kongo shows.

In Focus

In the year 578, a carpenter named Kongo, with special skills in constructing temples made of wood traveled, from Korea to Japan. He and his sons began constructing the Shitennoji temple in Osaka for the emperor. Over succeeding generations, sons worked with fathers from the Kongo family in the business of building Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines in Japan for successive emperors.

Today, the company, Kongo Gumi, is still going strong following the calling of *miyadaiku* (temple builders). They continue to be the carpenters who maintain the Shitennoji temple. The current chief executive, Masakazu Kongo, says that as the only son he wasn't allowed to go skydiving or do anything that might endanger his ability to carry on the family business, which is thought to be the oldest continuous family business in the world.

The company is strong, and in a modern twist, the CEO looks forward to having the more than 1,400-year-old family business carried on—by his oldest daughter![14]

Some sources for intercultural communication offer lists of behavioral dos and taboos as guides for success in other cultures. These lists are popular and offer some pragmatic help, such as this one governing nonverbal communication:

- Never refuse an offer of coffee from a businessman in Kuwait.
- Be very careful not to point the sole of your foot at someone in Thailand.
- Remove your jacket and work in shirtsleeves in Japan only after your Japanese colleagues do so first.
- Never help yourself to food when you are the guest of honor at a banquet in China.
- Do not become irritated if you find yourself waiting half an hour or more for an appointment with a businessperson from Venezuela.
- Use business courtesies in Dubai, such as shaking hands when introduced, except when females are involved.
- Do not offer your host gifts for his wife or children when doing business in Saudi Arabia.
- Plan to spend about two hours on lunch in France.

Dos and taboos lists are usually accurate, but their helpfulness is limited because they focus only on onstage behavior. One-sentence advice on behavior is like seeing a snapshot from a movie. It is accurate, but without the context of the whole movie, the snapshot's significance may not be understandable. Lists of dos and taboos don't explain *why* you should or should not behave in a particular way in a particular place. They don't tell you anything about backstage behavior. Even if a business traveler has a very long list, who can consult a list for every situation in every different country?

Once you begin to build a picture of a culture's priorities, you can draw fairly accurate deductions about what kind of behavior will be offensive and what kind will be pleasing. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss what questions to ask to gain an understanding of a culture that will enable you to do business effectively.

Culture Shock

Culture shock is an inevitable result of immersion in a new and unfamiliar culture. It happens to everybody. It's important to know that culture shock and its symptoms are normal and to be expected.

Culture shock is the sense of dislocation and the problems—psychological and even physical—that result from the stress of trying to make the hundreds of adjustments necessary for living in a foreign culture. Actually, the term *culture shock* is not accurate, because it refers to a range of responses that take place over time. However, it isn't a single jolt. Culture shock is experienced in four stages.

The first stage of experiencing a new culture is usually **euphoria.** Everything about the exciting new adventure is wonderful. This stage generally lasts no longer than two weeks, and some people skip it altogether. Some short-visit travelers go home before they have progressed to the next stage. All who stay for more than a short visit go on to the second stage.

The second stage is a downturn as **disillusionment and frustration** arise. This is usually the stage people refer to when they use the term *culture shock.* It is a feeling of not being in step with the members of the culture. It results from finding out that there are inadequacies in your understanding, your mental road map for navigating this new culture. You don't know what you don't know. Finding out what you don't know is exhausting, even when it is also exciting. Inevitably, there are disappointments in yourself and in others; inevitably, you make mistakes. When the adjustment to a new culture means an upward change in status, people feel good about the new culture. When the adjustment means a downward change in status, people quickly feel unhappy.

Most sojourners—travelers who stay for a longer time than a few days—experience psychological symptoms of culture shock. Some people find themselves becoming depressed. They may experience long periods of homesickness. Some are very lonely and may get involved in relationships that they wouldn't form if they were in their own culture. Nearly all sojourners and temporary residents in a new culture experience dissatisfaction with the way things are. Things that seemed acceptable when they first arrived become irritations. Sojourners can become aggressive and exhibit unpleasant behavior that they would not use at home. They may get angry easily and express hostility and suspicion toward members of the host culture. Frequently, culture shock shows itself when sojourners believe that native members of the culture are trying to take advantage of them—to overcharge them, for example—because they are foreign.

Physical symptoms also can result from this stage of culture shock. They include aches and pains in limbs, headaches, chronic fatigue and lack of energy, loss of appetite, inability to get a good night's sleep, stomach upsets, and frequent colds or flu. This stage can last longer than the first euphoric stage—perhaps months.

The third stage is **adjustment.** As the sojourner learns more about the backstage culture and how the other culture works, he or she is able to cooperate more effectively with members of the host culture. Some successes occur, and solutions are found for some of the problems that seemed so hard to resolve in stage two. At this stage, business probably can be conducted successfully.

The fourth stage, **integration,** occurs when a sojourner becomes fluent enough in the other culture to move easily within it and not be thrown by the different attitudes, beliefs, and values, and the behaviors they generate. Often, linguistic fluency helps to get to this stage. Now the sojourner is able to identify with the host culture.

Most people who work, live, study, or visit for any length of time in another culture, regardless of the length of the stay, experience all four stages of culture shock. Furthermore, the longer one stays, the more cycles one goes through. The fourth stage, in which one feels comfortable in the new culture, leads to another euphoric stage, followed by frustration and disappointment, followed by adjustment, and so on.[15]

Reverse Culture Shock

A similar adjustment period with its accompanying symptoms usually occurs when a sojourner returns home. This is often called reverse culture shock. People

often don't realize that it is normal. After all, it's somewhat ironic: The sojourner has been longing to return to the old, familiar culture of home. But once home, the sojourner finds many things to criticize and often asks why the old culture can't be more like the one so recently encountered. Friends and family members typically find the traveler impatient with things that never used to cause complaint. Another factor in reverse culture shock is that nobody wants to hear about the wonderful adventure the sojourner has had.

Returnees find that people at home have had new experiences, too, and the returnee must adjust. Things have changed at the company, and people have been promoted, achieved successes, retired, left for another employer, and so forth. The returnee is something of an outsider even after returning "home" and may have a new job to get used to as well as new contacts to make. Returnees feel they have been working for the sake of the corporation, usually at some (nonmonetary) cost and personal sacrifice, but upon returning, often they feel they are not valued. Some companies provide mentors and training programs to ease re-entry.

Businesspeople who return from years abroad often feel they have a greater problem with reverse culture shock than they had with culture shock when they were adjusting to the other culture. It may be that an inverse relationship exists between the ease of adjustment to living in an unfamiliar culture and the degree of reverse culture shock: The easier it is to adjust initially to a foreign culture, the harder it is to readjust to home.

The discussion of culture shock leads us to a key aspect of understanding cultures: self-knowledge.

Self-Knowledge and Understanding One's Own Culture

As we have seen, the best response to cultural diversity for communication across cultures is openness. The same openness needs to be applied to oneself and one's own culture. Sun Tzu, the Chinese martial philosopher, said about 2,000 years ago:

> Know yourself; know your enemies: One hundred battles; one hundred victories.

Researchers have shown that having a good understanding of one's own culture's values, attitudes, and behaviors—including communication behavior—is the best foundation for developing the ability to understand the communication behavior of people from other cultures.

If you know what your own culture believes is normal and natural, you will be able to figure out where other people's ideas are different, and what is behind other people's behavior. You will be less likely to judge other cultural values as inferior to yours, but will see them simply as different. You won't be surprised at different behavior.

Knowing one's self is not simple. As Hall says in describing a man in a foreign environment, "The more that lies behind his actions . . . , the less he can tell you."[16] For example, take an accountant. She operates with mental processes and parameters that she learned through accounting courses and through practice; they constitute her mental software about accounting. But she uses a set of values and ideas about how to act that are not only part of the accountancy software in her mind but

In Focus

What is "normal" business attire? (Also see Chapter 7.) In Indonesia, a businessman wears a loose cotton shirt over pants. A male proprietor of a small firm may not wear pants at all, but a skirt-like wrap. In Saudi Arabia, a businessman wears a long robe over his trousers and shirt, while in Japan a businessman wears a dark suit with a white shirt. In each of these countries, expectations are that a serious, responsible businessman in that culture will dress like that.

Businessmen from the United States often dress informally, in sweaters and slacks or in short-sleeved shirts without jackets. When they are in very warm countries they may wear shorts for leisure activities. This attire can be acceptable in certain situations, but it also can appear disrespectful toward the other culture's attitudes.

Recently, a U.S. automobile parts manufacturer was shown on television trying to make a sale to some Japanese automobile firms. He was dressed in a boldly patterned cardigan sweater; his hosts were all in dark suits and white shirts. The camera caught one of the host party, a woman, repeatedly looking at his sweater with something like alarm in her eyes and looking away again. The sweater could indeed have been a factor in his reported failure to get a single sale.

The salesman in this episode was acting in accordance with ideas about dress that seemed appropriate to him from his cultural windows. He may have considered the informality of his dress as signaling a willingness to put aside rigid rules of behavior and be friendly. He may have been cold and enjoyed the warmth of a large sweater. He may have spent the previous 20 hours on a plane without a chance to change his clothes and may have gone straight to the trade show because, to him, being there was more important than being dressed a certain way.

also part of the larger operating environment of unconsciously held values, attitudes, and behaviors from her society. It's easier for her to look at what makes up her view of accounting than to look at what makes up her view of life.

Most people assume that what they take for granted as *natural* and *normal* is what everyone on the planet also considers natural and normal. Most people discover only when they come into contact with something different that the ideas they hold as absolute truths are actually culture-based positions. At the same time, to assume that you know how someone else is thinking based on how you see things is called *projected cognitive similarity.* It occurs when you think you know someone else's perceptions, judgments, attitudes, and values because you assume they are like your own. In other words, it is an example of the self-reference criterion that was discussed earlier. Assuming you know what someone else is thinking can lead to disrupted communication and even conflict. Even when people may agree on goals—for example, the corporate goals of an organization—they may expect to reach those goals by different methods.

Mental Representations

One way of understanding our own culture, as well as another, is to use mental categories that hold information items grouped together.

Mental representations change with the introduction of new information. They are dynamic and can be altered to form new mental categories as more data come in. Everyone has a large data bank of mental representations. To understand yourself,

you need to be aware of your own data bank and its categories. Then, when you encounter someone from another culture, you can understand how your mental category is being transformed by reality. You can be open to new awareness and have a dynamic experience of the transformation of your mental categories.

Even incomplete, sketchy mental representations that are based on objective observation usually contain some truth. That's why they can be useful: for example, "Latin American businesspeople often talk about their families before getting down to business"; "Japanese negotiators use silence a lot more than Europeans do."

Generalizations like these have some kinship with stereotypes, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Prejudice

Generalizations that are based on limited knowledge, and that express an *evaluation—usually negative*—are **prejudices**. In other words, they are *prejudgments*. They come from people who make up their minds before they have all the facts. "Chinese always give you a fish-eye look; they don't feel any emotion"; "Irish have hot tempers and get angry easily; they can be really difficult to deal with." It may be one's experience that Chinese people do not show emotion readily, but that doesn't equal *coldness,* which is a negative evaluation. It is judging Chinese character, not simply observing behavior. It may be one's experience that Irish people easily find words to express emotion. But *hot-tempered* is a negative judgment. Prejudice, or prejudging before all the facts are known, is leaping to an evaluative conclusion, usually based on limited knowledge, without gathering information about the individual, the culture, and the context.

Prejudice often is accompanied by suspicion, fear, hatred, or contempt. Business communicators need to be aware of prejudices and consciously avoid acting on them.

Racism is one form of prejudice that leads to behavior that excludes or sidelines people on the basis of their perceived race. Sexism is another. *Ageism* is prejudice in favor of younger or older individuals that leads to older workers' being laid off or not hired because of their age, or causes favoritism of older people to the exclusion of younger, less experienced workers. *Homophobia* is a term usually used to mean prejudice against homosexuals, although it really means a phobia or irrational fear of being sexually aroused by someone from the same sex. It leads to the persecution and exclusion of homosexuals at work.

These prejudices are carried into intercultural business dealings. Not only are they often unrecognized by the people that have them, but in foreign surroundings people's prejudices can come to the forefront. People who would not allow themselves to express their prejudices in their own culture may do so in an unfamiliar culture. This is a well-documented result of culture shock, as was discussed earlier.

Eighty years ago the social psychologist E. S. Bogardus began to research the effects of prejudice. In an interesting experiment, he asked people to rate, on a social distance scale from 1 to 8, how favorably they felt toward groups of people according to their national identity.[17] The most favorable rating, number 1,

indicated a willingness to have a daughter or son marry someone of that group. An 8 meant not being willing to allow someone of that group into the country, let alone into one's home. The interesting thing was that the list of more than 60 nations included three fictitious ones: Danireans, Pireneans, and Wallonians. Bogardus found that the people who were unwilling to admit members of other, known nations also were unwilling to admit members of the unknown nations. Conversely, tolerance toward people of many nations included tolerance toward the three unknown (and nonexistent) nationalities. This finding suggests that intolerant people are intolerant across the board, and tolerant people are tolerant even of members of unknown countries.

Bias

We all have biases, and we are ready to acknowledge many of them. You may have a bias toward tough disciplinary measures for dealing with those who break the rules, a bias toward a work environment where the superior is approachable and low-key, or a bias toward a four-day workweek. A bias *for* something is really nothing more than a preference. A bias *against* something is a negative attitude that ranks it low. Many biases are recalled from long-term memory only when forced by an external challenge. For instance, you may not realize you have a bias against French cars or lime-flavored soft drinks until you are given no other choice at a car rental agency or restaurant.

Studies of job interviews show that interviewers are biased toward interviewees who appear to come from their own cultural background—who have an accent that indicates membership in the same ethnic group, for example. When other factors remain constant, the accent is the factor that determines which candidate gets the job from which interviewer.[18] In this case, the bias has an easily understandable basis; we prefer what is known and familiar because it poses little threat. Those who understand the self-reference criterion discussed earlier and who are open to making adjustments in their evaluations are likely to become more aware of their own cultures while they are learning about other cultures.

We need to be aware of our biases and be open to changing them. In addition, we need to be ready to discover unrecognized biases within us that can influence the way we understand another culture.

Discrimination

When biases or prejudices are *acted on,* the actor is showing discrimination. Discrimination is the act of sifting out and selecting according to bias toward something or someone, and treating them differently. We say someone has "discriminating taste" as a compliment because that person is able to sift carefully through a mass of items and identify the best. To be undiscriminating is to lack judgment and be unable to discern the best from the second best or the inferior. In the United States, discrimination became a widely used term for racism, the identification of others as worse based solely on their perceived racial membership. Discrimination occurs in all cultures, where negative behavior is shown toward groups.

Cultural Intelligence

Anyone with some experience of another culture has observed that people are not alike in how well they adapt to another culture. Even those who show sensitivity and delicacy when interacting with people in their own culture may fail to show the same ability to adapt in a new culture. *Cultural Intelligence* (*CQ*) is the term some have used to explain how certain people seem able to fit into another culture more easily than others.

> Cultural Intelligence is the capability of an individual to learn and understand another culture and then act accordingly.

It is called CQ because of an analogy to reasoning-based and logic-based intelligence that is measured on tests to achieve a numerical score expressed as a quotient. Logic-based intelligence is called IQ, which stands for Intelligence Quotient.

Psychologists also recognize different kinds of human intelligence. These include:

- EQ (Emotional Intelligence, the ability to read others' and one's own emotions and act accordingly)
- SQ (Social Intelligence, the ability to understand social needs and expectations, and act accordingly)
- PQ (Practical Intelligence, the ability to accomplish daily living tasks efficiently and effectively)

Furthermore, studies have shown the definitions of intelligence are culturally defined.

Cultural intelligence, "a person's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, has three main components."[19] We have already encountered these three components on page 9. They are the necessary components to have in order to understand another's environment and prevent cultural mistakes:

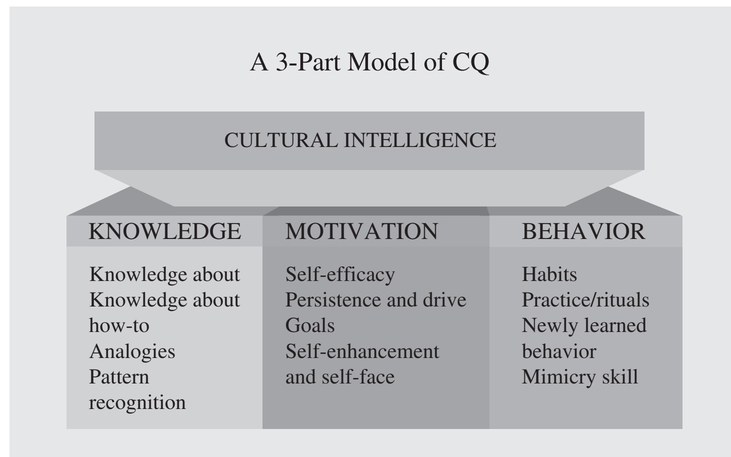
- **Cognition**, or thinking processes, including knowledge about the culture and about what to do in a new culture
- **Motivation**, or desire to adapt successfully
- **Behaviors**, or appropriate actions

Exhibit 1.1 shows the CQ model.

CQ has three main components: (1) *cognition* involving both knowledge about a culture and knowledge about how things are done that together enable one to think and solve cultural problems, (2) *motivation* to adapt to a new culture, and (3) *application,* putting one's desire to adapt and one's knowledge and ability to solve cultural problems into action. In summary, knowledge, desire to adapt, and behavior appropriate to the new culture together make up cultural intelligence.

Obviously, for people whose work takes them to other countries, high CQ is valuable. These are people who get along well. They pick up on what is important

EXHIBIT 1.1
Model of Cultural Intelligence (CQ)



(values) and what the cultural attitudes are, and they learn to behave according to the expectations of that culture. Because they adapt successfully, they also manage to accomplish many of their goals in the new culture.

The Question of Change in Cultures

Are Cultures Merging into One Global Culture?

Predictions often are made in the popular business press that all cultures are becoming alike. However, the evidence does not suggest that one global culture will one day dominate the planet.

A glance at the events in recent decades in the former Yugoslavia shows how far ethnic groups are willing to go to defend their cultures. Yugoslavia was created in 1929 when the kingdoms of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes that had come together after World War I changed their name to Yugoslavia. After World War II, the country was ruled by a communist government under Marshall Tito. But following Tito's death and the end of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe in 1991, individual cultural groups began to break away: Slovenia, Croatia, and Macedonia each splintered off, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. Today, all these groups are independent of Yugoslavia. Although Serbia and Montenegro, original components of Yugoslavia, tried unsuccessfully to coerce the others militarily into a Greater Serbia, today they stand alone. They also used armed force to expel cultural Albanians from the Serbian province of Kosovo, prompting international military intervention. Today, Kosovo is governed by a United Nations mission, but old cultural divisions continue to disrupt the governance of the state. Cultural priorities lead people into devastating armed conflict because of the strength of their allegiance to their cultures. Cultural divisions can last centuries.

Clashes of cultures are not always bloody. French Canadians who wanted to defend their culture nearly succeeded in separating from the rest of Canada in 1995

when a national referendum on the question failed by a tiny margin: less than half of 1 percent. As societies achieve more economic stability, rallying around their cultures seems to increase in importance, not decrease. In spite of spreading global technology, in spite of the availability of the same consumer goods in many countries, and even in spite of changing tastes and fads that sweep from continent to continent, the deep values of cultures remain unchanged.

Europe gives us examples, too. For example, observers in 2007–8 saw Belgium come close to breaking apart into two nations, one Flemish-speaking and the other French-speaking. Regarding the larger region, countries in the European Union still exhibit a desire to protect national cultures. For instance, the French have blocked the purchase by Italy of a French utility, in the name of national security and interest. Since countries want to protect their own labor pools, the EU is finding labor mobility a tricky issue. The EU won rulings in the World Trade Organization (WTO) that uphold the protection of brand names associated with specific national locations, including Parma ham from the Italian province of Parma, and *feta* cheese from Greece. Thus, national cultures so far are not disappearing into one European culture.

Ever-Changing Popular Taste

Much is written about the constant change cultures undergo. Global companies such as Pepsi, Sony, and Microsoft are said to be changing cultures. It is true that *popular taste* changes; fads come and go, especially in the marketplace, which is driven by changing tastes. Korean students who think of McDonald's as a Korean restaurant are no less Korean because they eat fast food that originated in the United States. Sufferers from migraine headaches in Argentina who consult acupuncturists are no less Argentine for seeking a traditional Chinese treatment. These are instances of popular taste.

Popular culture, which includes consumer products—for example, music, food, hairstyles, clothing, recreational activities and their equipment, styles of cars, and furnishings—constantly changes. But backstage culture—the values, attitudes, and cultural dimensions that have been learned from birth—change very little and very, very slowly.

Sometimes the shifting emphasis of existing values in a culture is mistaken for cultural change. As if a spotlight first illuminates one situation and then fades while another event is highlighted on the stage, circumstances—geopolitical, economic, and religious—focus attention on some values as others recede.

All cultures include values that can be in opposition to each other. In the United States, the value of independence is sometimes in conflict with the equally held value of respect for personal property. In Singapore, the value of belonging to a group is sometimes at odds with the value of asserting one's position to accomplish a task. But these values are in the culture all the time. Certain situations bring out one value or another. What looks like a change in the culture, seen in the short term, is actually a shift in emphasis.

Significant change in social organization occurs with economic change. China is a country in which offspring have always shown respect to, and eventually cared

for, their parents. The behaviors are associated with the Confucian value of filial piety. In traditional China, the eldest son and his family always lived with his parents. However, economic change created a shift in family structure. Rather than a son bringing his wife to his parents' home, married couples increasingly lived on their own. This change came about because neither parents nor young couples could afford housing large enough for everyone. However, this change in housing doesn't mean that filial piety is no longer valued in China. Filial piety is apparent in ways offspring arrange care for their parents, either having someone check on them regularly, or finding a care-giving facility for them. As more wealth is created by families in China, the traditional model is re-emerging: Parents live with their children and grandchildren.

Research will be necessary to demonstrate that backstage culture actually is changing in China, or any other culture, and that the change consists of more than proceeding and receding emphases on values that already exist within the culture. In the short term, the older members of a culture always deplore the way values seem to be abandoned by the young. When those children become parents and grandparents, the cultural values they were taught as youths often reassert themselves.

Technology often is identified as an agent of cultural change. ***Technology is the way humans relate to their physical environment.*** For example, technology has altered the way space and time affect human communication: Cell phones and e-mail have reduced both time and space constraints to almost nothing. Microchips are making smart machines possible in a wide range of applications. The constraints of the human body and the physical environment are disappearing, and activities that were not possible except through great effort and expense now occur with ease. Activities as different as online shopping and online academic research are changing the marketplace and the university. Medical innovations include the possibility of surgically embedding microchips in humans who have been physically unable to do certain things. But this marvelous technology does not change the cultural imprint of the culture on its members. Individuals still carry a map of their culture in their minds and hearts no matter what technological innovations they implement.

The Study of Communication across Cultures

Culture and communication are closely connected. Culture is learned and shared through communication, and communication is based in cultural norms. What is communicated and how it is communicated are both determined by culture.

Language is the tool for communicating and it is also related to thought processes and mental categories. But learning another language alone cannot help us understand another culture.

The study of communication and culture is relatively young, and has its roots in the United States. In 1959, American anthropologist Edward T. Hall wrote about how culture affects communication in his book *The Silent Language*. The silent language is, of course, culture. The study of cross-cultural communication began with the United States' interest in sending people to other countries and having them succeed because of their cultural training beforehand. Edward Hall worked for the United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI). After the Second World War, the United States

decided to study foreign cultures and train people in languages and cultural knowledge for working in other countries. As a result, the FSI developed training programs.

Three Characteristics of the Discipline of Cross-cultural Communication

This beginning has led to three major characteristics of the study of cross-cultural communication.

- To a very great extent, for the FSI trainees the American culture was the normative culture and other cultures were compared to it—an ethnocentric approach. Research has been **American-dominated** in the field of cross-cultural communication.
- The study of foreign cultures was based almost entirely on **observed behaviors**—onstage culture. The study of cultural values came later.
- The early study of communication and cultures was multidisciplinary—a characteristic that is still true today. Psychology, anthropology, sociology, communication, linguistics, and language training all play a part in the study of culture. More recently, management studies also have contributed to the understanding of communication and culture, along with political studies, economics, and geography.

Study of the Communication of Groups versus the Study of Individuals' Communication

Researchers gather two general kinds of information about communication. Some research looks at the way groups and cultures communicate, while other research looks at the communication of individuals. **It is important to keep these two ways of studying communication separate.** When an entire culture is the subject of study, information is gathered by very large surveys, and the results lead to generalizations about the way the culture communicates. Statistical means and averages describe the entire culture, but may not describe every person in that culture. In fact, we err if we believe that just because a person comes from a particular culture, therefore they will inevitably communicate in a certain way. People's behavior is determined by many factors, of which culture is one.

In the other approach, when individuals are the focus of study, the individuals are interviewed and observed, and the result is rich, complex information about the individuals, but that information cannot be generalized to a whole culture.

Now we will look at the difference between the two terms *intercultural* and *cross-cultural*.

Intercultural and Cross-cultural Communication Study

These two terms are often used interchangeably, which can cause some confusion. However, they can be used to mean different kinds of study. An understanding of their different use can be helpful.

Cross-cultural Communication

According to William B. Gudykunst,[20] the approach called *cross-cultural communication* ***involves a comparison.*** Communication within one culture is the focus first, and then communication within a second culture is the next focus, so the two can be compared.

For example, consider the communication styles of the United States and of Oman, one of the Gulf states on the Arabian peninsula. Americans usually greet someone from another culture with a casual and personal greeting. Americans often communicate with direct statements and questions to get information and avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. Americans often freely give their opinions without being asked, and usually show a desire to be liked.

What about communication in the Omani culture? Omanis usually use formal greetings, following established formulas, especially when first meeting someone from another culture. Politeness takes precedence over an open declaration of opinions, since Omanis usually try not to give offense and to maintain harmony in social situations. In order to have a pleasant conversation, Omanis may use indirectness to avoid saying things that could make the other person feel angry or disrespected.

Each culture's communication style is analyzed in terms of its own cultural values and practices. Then the communication is compared, and differences and similarities appear. For example, consider the language that members of different cultures use to articulate their accomplishments, perhaps in a job interview. Some cultures expect claims of expertise, even when the communicator's experience is slight. Other cultures expect modesty, not claims of expertise, even when that applicant has had recognized success. What might be called "giving yourself credit" in one culture is called boasting in another. In the culture of New Zealand, making claims for oneself is considered to be in bad taste, and one who does so is called a skite. Mothers teach children from a young age to avoid "skiting" (boasting about accomplishments) or seeking the limelight.

In Focus

In New Zealand, the game of rugby is a fervent national pastime. Rugby teams attract large crowds of loyal fans, and games are popular events. Faithful followers recall a game with Australia in which a player on the New Zealand All Blacks team got his hands on the awkward ball and plowed past the opposing team members to churn toward the goal line 35 yards away. The crowd roared with delight as he drove alone and unimpeded to the goal, but then as he got closer to scoring, the roar began to diminish until finally one All Blacks fan could be heard to yell, "Bloody skite!"

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication occurs when ***people from two or more cultures interact.*** Using the American–Omani example, we can consider what happens at the point where an American and an Omani interact. As a result of the cultural differences, the Omanis could feel somewhat insulted by the bluntness of Americans. Americans may feel the Omanis are not open and candid.

Since initial greetings are different in their formality, to the Omanis the Americans may seem too informal and therefore not serious about developing a relationship. At the same time, to the Americans the Omanis may seem too formal and therefore not serious about developing a relationship. Americans communicate with openness and want to be friendly, but often they are not sensitive about how their statements are received. Omanis may seem evasive or even deceptive when they do not declare their positions, although that is not how they want to be perceived. Both cultures value successful social interactions. Americans want to be friendly, so they disclose information about themselves, while Omanis want to be friendly, so they avoid disclosing too much about themselves in a first meeting.

Intercultural communication involves analysis of what is happening at the point when communication is taking place. Of course, the analysis involves information about each culture, which means that an understanding of each culture is necessary. That sounds very much like the first step in the cross-cultural approach. The line between *cross-cultural* study and *intercultural* study is not precise.

However, some situations clearly are intercultural. For example, when teams from different cultures are engaged in negotiation, intercultural communication is taking place. When a manager from one culture is meeting with an employee from another culture, intercultural communication is taking place.

On the other hand, when a television network is planning how to reach markets in more than one culture, cross-cultural communication is being considered.

Table 1.2 shows a summary of different categories of research within cross-cultural and intercultural approaches.

Each of these areas of research has produced theories for understanding the relationship between culture and communication.

Now we will look at two basic approaches to communication research.

Two Broad Approaches to Communication Research in the Social Sciences

Some authors say that approaches to research in "social science" differ because one approach emphasizes "social" and the other approach emphasizes "science."

The "**science**" approach is also called **positivist** or **functionalist.**

The "**social**" approach is also called **interpretivist** or **humanist.**

See Table 1.3 for the key differences in the two paradigms or models.

Positivist Research Design

The positivist approach:

- **is based on a philosophical position that what is being studied is objective.** It has an objective reality.
- **collects data through observation by the researcher (who is impartial) and by questionnaire.**
- **produces studies that can be replicated**—that is, another researcher who is equally unbiased and impartial and who observes the same phenomenon can repeat the study. (In social science, a phenomenon usually means a human behavior.)

TABLE 1.2
Some Areas of Research in Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication

Cross-cultural	Intercultural
• Compares communication in different cultures	• Examines communication interactions between people of different cultures
— Treats culture as a theoretical variable	— Uses cultural variables/dimensions in explaining interactions
— Includes cross-cultural psychological processes; e.g., perception and emotion	— Includes intercultural psychological processes; e.g., identity management, facework
— Compares nonverbal communication and other communication behaviors	— Focuses on outcomes of communication interactions and processes (such as acculturation, conflict management, teamwork, negotiation)
— Looks at verbal (language) communication differences across cultures	
— Contrasts facework negotiation behaviors; compares conflict management approaches	— Studies adaptation and accommodation of groups in other cultures
	— Examines communication networks

TABLE 1.3
The Two General Research Paradigms in Business and the Social Sciences

	Functionalist Research Paradigm	Interpretivist Research Paradigm
View of reality	Objective and can be observed by researcher	Subjective, is constructed by human mental activity
View of researcher	Impartial, observation does not affect what is being studied	Involved to some degree with what is being studied, and impacts what is being studied
Objective of research	Describe and predict communication behavior	Describe communication behavior and reasons as reported by subjects under study
Methods of study	Observation	Field research (e.g., interviews, ethnography)
What study produces	Identification of cultural variables in behavior; conclusions that may be generalizable to other cultures	Explanations of culture and communication in a social context

For example, a researcher may study the behavior of members of a culture who are responding to a request for charitable gifts for an orphanage. The behavior could be, for example, the donation of money from the reader's pocket. The researcher may want to know which key words are most effective in moving the person to make a donation. The researcher can observe and can also ask the subject at what point, if any, the decision was made to donate money.

Researchers who use the positivist approach believe their study of the phenomenon does not directly affect it. In other words, positivists believe that the behavior of the participants is not affected by the researcher doing the study.

The objective of the positivist researcher is to describe the behavior and predict it. In order to predict that certain words are successful in getting donations, the researcher has to generalize from what has happened during the study. Let's say that 40 percent of the time people who were asked to give money *did* give money. And let's say the researcher found by using a questionnaire that among several phrases that achieved that response, the most frequently successful phrase—according to the respondents—was "you will feel a reward for what you have done." Of the 40 percent who gave money, 70 percent said that phrase was what convinced them.

If the researcher has this kind of information, the researcher can predict that in the future, the phrase "you will feel a reward for what you have done" will generate donations, and may expect the phrase to work with 70 percent of the people. In other words, the positivist researcher usually gathers **quantitative** data—information that is in numerical form. Questionnaires provide responses that can be added, averaged, that can have percentages found, and so forth. The positivist researcher counts responses and analyzes data numerically. Some statistical analyses are quite sophisticated, well beyond the simple percentage figures in the example.

Now consider a positivist study involving culture and communication. Let's say the researcher wants to find out whether the phrase "you will feel a reward for what you have done" works to stimulate donations in one culture compared to another culture, and at what rate. With the results of this positivist study, a researcher may draw conclusions about the cultures represented in the study and charitable giving, and may predict the success of the phrase in a third culture.

Interpretivist Research Design

The interpretivist approach:

- **is based on the philosophical position that reality is subjective, created by the minds of people according to the way things make sense to them.** Reality, and what it means, comes from the conceptualization shared by a group of people.
- **collects data by observation and perhaps by questionnaire, but mainly by interview and focus groups.**

In this case, the researcher wants to explore reality with the subjects in the study, and that means asking questions to get as much information as possible about how the subjects see the world and where meaning comes from. The researcher often uses interviews that give the subjects a chance to talk about what

they understand. The interpretivist researcher usually wants to know *why* the participants in the study act in a certain way.

That means the interpretivist approach:

- **Studies one group in depth.**
- **Believes the act of gathering information impacts the information** since having an interviewer ask questions makes people think about associated meanings and reasons.

The objective of the interpretivist's research is to describe the phenomenon and to find out the reasons for it as reported by the participants in the study. Not every participant may have the same reasons, so the researcher may end up with a list of reasons not shared by everyone. The researcher cannot generalize from these findings, because another group of participants might have different reasons, more reasons, or fewer reasons. So the interpretivist researcher is not interested in predicting behavior in the future, but rather in carefully explaining the reasons for the conclusions in this specific study.

The **context** is part of how the researcher explains the conclusions of an interpretivist study. In a positivist study, the findings are generalized, and specific characteristics of a particular context are not taken into account.

Combined Approach

These two general approaches to research, positivist and interpretivist, are usually used in some kind of combination in communication research. Human communication behavior is complex in its motivations and often lends itself to more than one explanation. That is why the interpretivist approach is a frequent choice.

At the same time, numerical data help give an overall picture, and quantitative analysis can shed light on what the data mean, especially in large studies, so positivist elements often figure in a research project.

The Merits of Positivist Research

- **Positivist research uses data that can be generalized,** so predictions can be made about communication in other contexts (this is particularly useful in comparing communication in different cultures).
- Often data are numerical and are measurements (questionnaire responses, counts of behavior), so statistical analysis is possible. The positivist approach is also often called **quantitative** research, because the data collected are expressed in numbers.
- **Studies have high *reliability.*** Reliability is an important quality in research. It is the degree to which a study can be *replicated* (that is, repeated or reproduced) at another time, by the same or a different researcher.

We have already discussed the example of a research project about culture's impact on communication that asks for charitable donations. Let's explore this in more detail as a positivist research study.

A positivist researcher could choose several phrases that ask for donations and put them on a questionnaire. Then the researcher could use the questionnaire to

ask members of a culture to select the phrase that is most likely to make them want to give.

Next, the researcher would take the same phrases and ask the same questions in a questionnaire for another culture. The researcher would try to have the two cultural groups be as alike as possible in every way except culture, so other variables besides culture would not be factors in their answers. Other variables could be age, gender, income, location (in a city or countryside), experience with previous requests for donations, and so on. The researcher would want a large number of respondents from both cultures.

The analysis of the responses would look at how many people from each culture chose which phrase most frequently, which second most frequently, and so on. The analysis of the findings would lead the researcher to conclude which one phrase works best. It might be the same phrase in both cultures, or it might be a different phrase in each.

Then the researcher would predict which phrase will work in each culture in the future. The researcher might also predict which phrase would be most effective in a third culture.

Now let's look at the weaknesses of the positivist approach.

The Overall Weaknesses of the Positivist Approach

- **Separating out the other variables among respondents is difficult.** Even if age, gender, income, and so on are similar in both groups, people are not identical. The factors that generate communication behavior are not all the same among people of one culture.
- Respondents may choose one phrase in one situation, and another phrase in another situation, but the researcher is probably asking for one response. Questionnaires cannot ask for responses to every situation. This means **a positivist study is low in *validity*.** Validity is the degree to which research truly finds out about what it says it is studying.

In our example, a respondent about which phrase moves her to make a donation to charity might be affected by the emotions she felt when she read a story in the newspaper that day about someone in need, and her choice might be different today from what she would have chosen yesterday. Next month, she may not remember the story in the newspaper when asked the question about which phrase moves her, and her answer may be different. A questionnaire is unlikely to ask her about her emotions that day. **The positivist researcher has no way of exploring the context for the respondent's answer.**

The Merits of Interpretivist Research

The merits of interpretivist research include:

- **Rich, detailed data can be gathered from the sample.** Interpretivist research is often called **qualitative research.** That is, when researchers talk to respondents, they can uncover more information than they had expected. Respondents can reveal interrelated ways they see reality. The researcher may not even have thought

of some factors influencing the respondents' behavior and attitudes, and the researcher needs to be open to finding something different from what was expected.
- Because the researcher can explore how the participants behave, along with their reasons for doing so, **the *validity* of interpretivist research is high;** the complexities involved in information about behavior, values, and attitudes can be explored.
- The research context can be addressed. Besides the gathering of qualitative data, the analysis of data can also be qualitative.

In our example about what triggers a charitable donation, an interpretivist researcher will interview participants in the study. Together they will explore meanings, behavior, and reasons. The interviewer will probe to make sure he or she understands the participants as fully as possible. Factors affecting the participants' answers will also be investigated. The result of such a study would be a comprehensive description of the participants' responses to a certain communication.

But the interpretivist approach also has weaknesses.

Weaknesses of Interpretivist Research

The weaknesses of interpretivist research include:

- **The findings are subjective,** since the researcher/observer is also to some extent a participant. This means the researcher's opinions form part of the conclusions. The researcher and the participant collaborate to interpret the phenomena being studied. The extent of collaboration varies from project to project.
- As a consequence of the subjectivity, **interpretivist research has low *reliability.*** Because the data collected refer to one specific group, the study cannot be replicated exactly.
- Furthermore, **the results of interpretivist research cannot be generalized to any other context or group** than the one in which the study takes place. That means **predictions cannot be made** based on findings from interpretivist research, which is interested in describing behavior and interpreting it.

The Rhetorical Approach: A Kind of Interpretivist Study

Before we leave this discussion of the two primary paradigms in social science research, we need to mention one key approach in communication studies: the rhetorical approach. Rhetoric forms the basis of an important kind of *interpretivist* research for communication. Rhetoric dates from the 5th century B.C.E. and involves examining written texts or oral utterances in order to explain attitudes, values, and behavior. The goal of rhetorical research is to interpret meanings of what people have said or what they have written down, in their original context. Context plays an important role in rhetorical research.

Study of Culture and Communication: Individuals or Cultures

In this book, we are focusing on the role of culture in communication for business. Cultures have preferences about communication, and that leads to differences from one culture to another. Individuals have preferences about communication,

too, although not always the same preferences their culture has, and individuals communicate differently depending on their personalities and interaction skills. Intercultural communication researchers recognize this distinction between a focus on individual members of a culture and how they communicate with individuals in another culture, and a focus on how cultures behave.

Intercultural Business Communication

Intercultural business communication is communication by members of different cultures for business or workplace purposes.

Business activity involves specific communication acts, products, and communicators, and the field of intercultural business communication focuses on people of different cultures. People in various roles such as negotiators, writers of business messages, team members, meeting hosts and guests, and co-workers generate communication acts including meetings, memos, e-mails, letters, reports, proposals, presentations, speeches, advertisements, public relations documents, and interpersonal conversations. Culture affects all these communications.

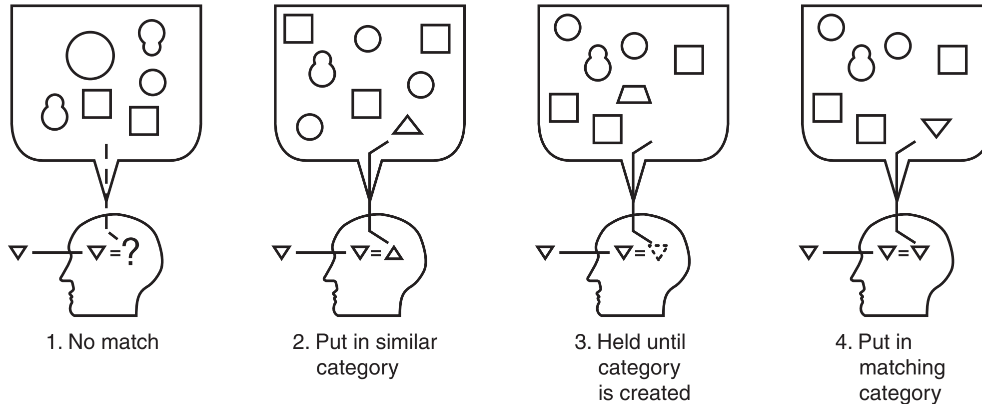
Perception and Communication

Communication is the perception of verbal (worded) and nonverbal (without words) behaviors and the assignment of meaning to them. It takes place whether the sending of signals is intentional or unintentional. Communication even takes place when the verbal or nonverbal behavior is unconscious, as long as it is observed and meaning is assigned to it. When a receiver of signals perceives those signals, decides to pay attention to them as meaningful, categorizes them according to categories in his or her mind, and assigns meaning to them, communication has occurred.

Perception is a process that can break down at any of these steps. This is true when communication takes place between members of the same group, who share values, attitudes, experiences, behavioral expectations, and even a history together. When communicators come from different cultures, however, the challenges are much greater. Perception involves four options as Exhibit 1.2 shows.

Communication signals can be verbal or nonverbal or a combination of both. Imagine a glance from someone, accompanied by a noise in that person's throat. When you encounter something unfamiliar, you have several choices: (1) You can assume it is nothing. It fits no category known to you and means nothing. At this point, you have perceived a signal but have chosen not to attend to it. (2) You can assume it is simply a variant of something familiar that is already in a mental category. It may seem that the noise in the throat is a prelude to speech that will be directed at you since the person is looking at you. In this case, you have categorized it and assigned meaning to it, but both may be wrong. The glance may, in fact, be directed past you to someone or something else, and the noise in the throat may actually be words in a language you don't understand. (3) Another option is that you can choose to perceive the signals as unfamiliar and therefore not to be matched with existing mental categories; thus, you

EXHIBIT 1.2 **Perception Model of Choices about Communication Signals**



reject them or hold them until you can relate them to something already familiar. It's hard to keep the uncategorized and unmeaningful in your mind for very long unless you have learned to do so. Finally, (4) you have the option of altering your mental category to accommodate the new information and assign it a new meaning. This is how categories are constantly being revised and increased. Meaning is assigned to verbal and nonverbal behavior based on one's accumulated experience and understanding—one's mental data bank of meanings, from one's culture.

To have good communication with someone from another culture, you need to understand meanings in that culture.

A Schemata Model for Intercultural Communication

The mental categories we create in order to make sense of the world can be called *schemata.* Among the schemata are those that categorize what we know about cultures other than our own. If you are asked to summon up what you know about a culture, say, the dominant culture of Ethiopia, you may not have many data in your schema; indeed, you may have to create a new schema because this is the first time you've thought about Ethiopia.

We can model our expanding knowledge of another culture and how we communicate with it.[21] Exhibit 1.3 shows your culture as Culture A, Ethiopian culture as Culture B, and your projection or schema about Ethiopian culture as B^1 (B *prime*).

If you imagine yourself traveling to Ethiopia for business, you now may be able to make further projections, based on the categories in your schema, of what you can expect to find. What food will you be offered by your business contacts there? What will unlikely be offered? Would it be acceptable for you to refuse refreshment? You will observe Ethiopians eating with their fingers. Why? What will you do? If the businesspeople you spend time with represent one company, what else may they have in common?

Whatever you know about Ethiopia, based on these few facts and questions or on your prior knowledge, unless you are Ethiopian, your mental schema will

EXHIBIT 1.3
Communication Is with Schemata, Not Actual Culture

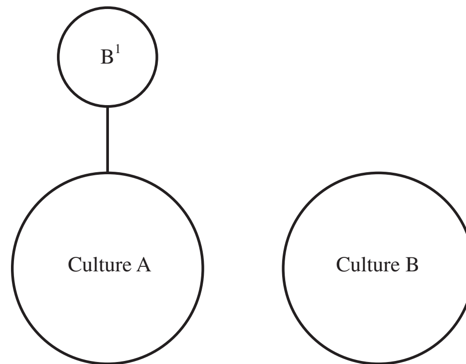
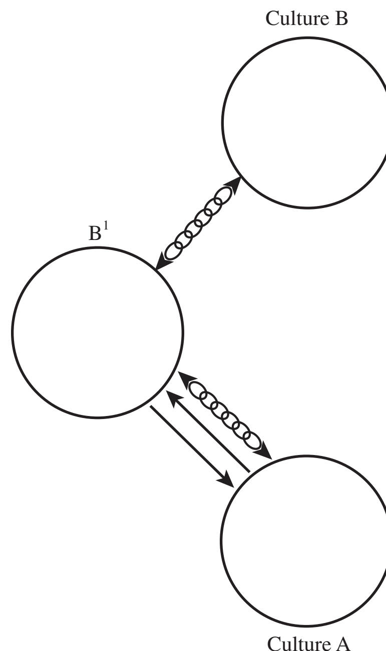


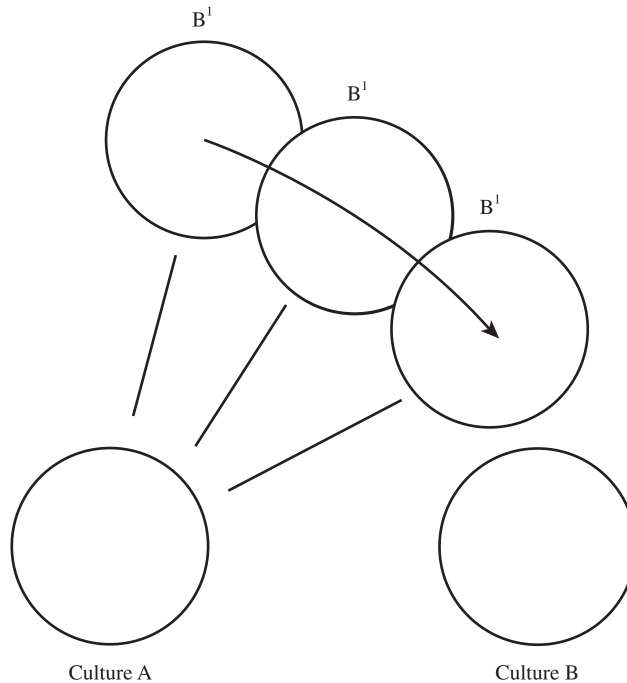
EXHIBIT 1.4
Communicators Send and Receive Messages through Schemata



not reflect accurately the reality that is Ethiopian culture. Furthermore, if you attempt to communicate with Ethiopian counterparts for business purposes, you probably will be communicating with your mental projection of Ethiopian culture. Exhibit 1.4 describes this process.

When you communicate, you are sending messages to B^1, the schema of Ethiopian culture. When you receive messages from a member of that culture, they are understood by you after being filtered through your B^1.

EXHIBIT 1.5
Schema Modified and Coming Closer to Actual Culture



In Focus

If you know Ethiopia is a country in Africa, you may make certain additions to your schema, which may or may not be accurate. Does it help to know that over 100 different ethnic groups live in this country?

Here is some more information. The dominant culture is Amharic, which is also the official language. Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world. The capital is Addis Ababa. Businessmen typically wear a white robe (*shamma*) over their shirts and trousers and may stand closer to people in conversation than Europeans do. Bureaucracy flourishes; a strong chief or leader dominates business organizations. Families are strong units, and family members may be business partners. People tend to make distinctions based on social and economic position. Business encounters are formal; hospitality is valued highly. Businesspeople are not afraid to stand up for their individual rights, but at the same time they show sensitivity to the rights of others. They have the ability to endure adversity with patience. Age is respected.

About 45 percent of the people are Muslim, and 40 percent are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Formerly, the highest levels of society were mostly Christian, but since the political upheavals in Ethiopia in past decades, Muslims as well as Christians occupy all levels. Women often own small businesses, and unlike some other Muslim cultures, the Muslim women of Ethiopia do not wear a veil or *chador.* Ethiopians are Semitic people (like Jews and Arabs). Coffee is a major export product.

The more you learn about Ethiopia, the more you can revise and adjust your mental projection of B^1, and the closer it can come to the reality (B) that is Ethiopian culture. Exhibit 1.5 shows this process as a result of induction, or the accommodation of new data that alter the schema.

The more you understand about another culture, the closer your schema will be to the reality that is the other culture and the better your communication will be. You will have fewer misunderstandings of the kind that arise when messages are assigned different meanings and different categories.

Summary

This chapter began with two reasons why intercultural business communication matters to organizations: Communicators can make sense of their interactions with people of other cultures, and understand *why* people think and behave the way they do, and then they can prevent miscommunication more often.

Next, the chapter considered how we respond to foreign and unfamiliar cultures: hostility, curiosity, denial, and cooperation.

Culture is defined as coherent, learned, and shared, using an agreed set of symbols to rank what is important, furnish attitudes, and dictate behavior for a society. Onstage culture is observable behavior; backstage culture is the deep values and meanings that give rise to behavior. Transactional culture is temporary, and is co-created between people from different cultures.

Culture shock and reverse culture shock are normal reactions to the many adjustments people must make when they find themselves in an unfamiliar culture.

Self-knowledge is critical for understanding people in other cultures and communicating successfully with them. Assessment of one's Cultural Intelligence, or CQ, is a good place for self-knowledge to start; its components are cognition, motivation, and behavior.

Cultures appear to change very little on a deep level, although popular culture and popular taste do change.

The study of communication and culture, which began in the United States, is based on the two main social science research paradigms: positivist and interpretivist. Studies can focus on groups or individuals, and can be cross-cultural or intercultural.

Finally, the chapter looked at perception and communication, and a schemata model for intercultural communication.

Learning about culture will be discussed in more detail throughout the book. The most obvious issue for communication across cultures, of course, is language, and that is the subject of the next chapter.

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