TRANSCENDING CULTURE: AN INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Julia M. Gutić, B.A.

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
April 8, 2011
TRANSCENDING CULTURE: AN INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Julia M. Gutić, B.A.

Mentor: Douglas McCabe, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Over the past couple of decades, with the mushrooming of Information and Technology, the marketplace has become global. Anything that happens in any part of the world, no matter how minor, affects the entire marketplace. In the workplace, it is common for employees to work within various scenarios across cultural, societal, and national norms. As such, it is likely that American workers will encounter someone in their workplace from another culture, or partner with a co-worker half a world away. Thus, in today’s workplace, it is imperative to understand cultural differences. Understanding differences in culture can reduce conflict by eliminating frustration and increase productivity. The central question and the problem to be examined, in this thesis is: How do we learn to work in such a fluid workplace? This thesis will approach the problem by: first, understanding the intercultural environment in which we live and work, and the dimensions of culture that each individual brings to the relationship; next, discuss intercultural communication and competence; and, finally, discuss strategies for mitigating intercultural conflict.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father, John I. Clucas, a Renaissance man, and self-taught scholar, who had the answers to all my questions. Thank you for feeding my insatiable curiosity, and for demonstrating for me, in word and deed, that every person has value and deserves respect.

My thanks to Douglas McCabe, Ph.D., Professor of Labor Relations, Human Resource Management, and Organizational Behavior at Georgetown University’s School of Business who has been the bookends of my academic career at Georgetown – as the Professor of my first graduate class and the thesis mentor for my last – and to Mrs. Anne Ridder, MALS, Assistant Dean of the School of Continuing Studies and Associate Director of the Liberal Studies Degree Program, who tirelessly works with students to ensure their success, always graciously offering a mix of encouragement and tough love to push us onward to our intended goals. She has truly been a pillar of strength and sanity, and I never would have made it through my MALS without her assistance!

I would also like to thank my friend and fellow citizen of the world, Riaz Sahibzada, Ph.D., for all the talks that have stirred my imagination and focused my thoughts; for encouraging me through my academics; and, who has kept me on task to accomplish this momentous goal.

And last but not least, to my loving, patient, and helpful husband, Radovan, my love and thanks!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 – IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION OF CULTURE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 – HISTORY, LAYERS, AND DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – MANAGING CULTURAL CONFLICT THROUGH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE ART OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1</td>
<td>Bodley’s Topical Definitions of Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Hofstede Cultural Onion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Trompenaars Cultural Onion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Hall’s Cultural Iceberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Cultural Iceberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Genealogical Table of the Descendants of Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>Map of Table of Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Traits of Small versus Large Power Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Traits of Collectivist versus Individualist Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>Differences between Feminine and Masculine Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>Weak and Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>Seven Dimensions of Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Deardorff Pyramid of Intercultural Competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

CULTURE MATTERS

In today’s interconnected world, what happens in Japan or China or Indonesia also has a direct effect on the lives and fortunes of the American people, and that’s why I came here.

– President Barack Obama

The world is, indeed, an interconnected place; and whether we like it or not, believe that it should be this way or not, what America, Japan, Saudi Arabia, or France does sends ripples across the global landscape. In the quote above, President Obama was speaking at a regional economic summit in Japan in November 2010, but his message about interconnectedness is true of so many aspects of global life; and his comment could just as easily have been made at a summit on human rights or religious tolerance. The economic health of America; the dissent about employee rights in France; the price of a barrel of oil set by OPEC; a volcano in Iceland; political changes in Egypt; and the religious differences that threaten stability within a country or region all play on the world stage. These far-flung events do make a difference in how most people live their lives. No longer are we simply citizens of our own country: “We” are Armenians, Brazilians, Chinese, Egyptians, Indians, Laotians, Norwegians, Russians, Scotts, and Turks, affected by the events throughout the globe. Thus, what the government of one sovereign nation or geographic region does has the potential to affect not only us but also the global ‘Us’; often, at stake is not only our economic welfare, but our safety and security, as well. It is no wonder, then,
that anyone who keeps track of world events is nervous about people and
governments in other parts of the globe, and how they behave or react to current
events!

This all-important macro level of global culture is made up of individuals
from different nations and cultural backgrounds. This thesis will explore how
individuals learn to understand each other and to get along on both a personal
and professional level. Because we all react differently to any given stimuli,
based on the culture in which we were raised, it is imperative to have person-to-
person and group-to-group understanding. Such understanding will, we feel,
have a positive impact on our global culture.

The mushrooming of Information and Technology in the last few decades
has created this global marketplace; this global village. Anything that happens
in any part of the world, no matter how minor, affects the entire global
marketplace. As such, it is likely that American workers will encounter
someone in their workplace who comes from another culture; partner with a co-
worker half a world away; or possibly, even work for a multinational
corporation where the American is in the minority. In this intercultural
workplace there is the potential for a lot of miscommunication and
misunderstanding, and if people within a workplace are unable to collaborate
because they cannot communicate, productivity is going to suffer. Thus, it is
imperative in today’s workplace to understand cultural differences, with the
goal to reduce conflict by eliminating frustration, and increase productivity. The central question and the problem to be examined, in this thesis is: How do we learn to work in such a fluid workplace?

This thesis will approach the problem by: first, understanding the changing environment in the world, and the drivers that have brought this change; next, it will analyze the need for understanding values and ethics from an intercultural perspective; finally, it will identify differences in values and ethics, and develop strategies for effective communication to facilitate conflict reduction.

The principal hypothesis of this thesis is that intercultural conflict may be inevitable but can be effectively managed if all parties are willing to be mindful of the differences we each bring to the table, and work toward common understanding. By participating in the process of understanding cultural differences, and how differences can break down communication that leads to misunderstanding, we can reach mutual agreement.

First, I will analyze the pertinent literature to identify an appropriate definition of culture. Next, I will examine cultural differences by country or region. This will include general themes of cultural characteristics on preference scales such as equality vs. hierarchy; direct vs. indirect communication; individual vs. group orientation; rules vs. relationship; and comfort with risk vs. caution. Both extremes on these scales have distinct advantages and
disadvantages, and one is not better than the other. However, extreme differences can cause misunderstanding and conflict if left unrecognized; therefore, understanding these differences is critical to the success of intercultural relationships.

After developing a foundation of cultural dimensions, intercultural communication and the art of cultural intelligence will be explored. Finally, suggestions on mitigating intercultural conflict will be offered.

A genuine interest in culture and the cultural mores with which we come into contact is a solid starting point in creating intercultural relationships; and, the liberal studies student’s broad range of knowledge about literature, history, philosophy, and even theology, provides a distinct advantage in an intercultural world. Ultimately, well-grounded information about various cultural preferences and a willingness to utilize that information will bridge the gap among groups, and help them succeed in living and working well together.

We are an interconnected global marketplace with greater diversity in the workplace than at any time in the past, and, as such, “we must learn to move beyond the mere coping with cultural differences” and learn to “embrace the wellspring of diversity” found in the workforce, and this increasing diversity requires global knowledge, global attitudes, and global skills.¹

In order to embrace cultural differences, to understand how to live and work together, we first need to start with a firm definition of what culture is, and what it is not, and the upcoming chapters will explore the history of intercultural encounters, the research conducted to understand cultural differences and how these differences affect work, and offers some strategies to resolve intercultural conflict.
CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce.

– John Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System*

What is culture? Ask this of most people and they assume they fully understand the word and what it means, but when pressed to define it, the concept proves more difficult to explain. The collective endeavors of Raymond Williams, the Welsh academic who taught at Cambridge and Stanford, and most well known for his studies in mass media, politics, language, literature, and society, made great contributions in the field of culture and laid the foundation for the modern field of cultural studies. In his work, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Williams proposes that, “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development . . . but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.”² Further, Williams offers his three-part definition of culture:

(i) a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development;
(ii) a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general; (iii) the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. Culture is music, literature, painting, and sculpture, theatre and film. A Ministry of Culture refers to these specific

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture & Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87.
activities, sometimes with the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history...the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development applied and effectively transferred to words and practices which represent and sustain it...a progressive culture of fine arts.³

Forty years earlier, T. S. Eliot grappled with a definition of the word “culture” saying that it was a difficult concept to explain. In his chapter, “The Three Senses of ‘Culture’”, he expressed belief that culture was composed of three levels: individual, group or class, and a society as a whole. His chapter focused on the broadest level of culture, society. “When the term ‘culture’ is applied to the manipulation of lower organisms...the meaning is clear enough. When it is applied to the improvement of the human mind and spirit, we are less likely to agree as to what culture is.”⁴

Geert Hofstede, the Dutch organizational anthropologist, who studied the links between national and organizational cultures, recognizes the multiple meanings culture has in society:

A customary term for mental software is culture. In most Western languages culture commonly means ‘civilization’ or ‘refinement of the mind’ and, in particular, the results of such refinement, including education, art, and literature. This is culture in the narrow sense. Culture as mental software, however, corresponds to a much broader use of the word that is common among sociologists and, especially anthropologists...a catchword for all those patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting...Not only activities supposed to refined the mind are included, but also the ordinary, and menial things in life – for example,

³ Williams, Keywords, 91.

greeting, eating, showing, or not showing feelings, keeping a certain physical distance from others, making love, or maintaining body hygiene.⁵

Today, in the United States, people would appear to support Williams’ view on culture as: a group of people living in a country or certain region of the world, and the things and experiences a traveler would expect to encounter if visiting that particular area, or personal refinement – what Eliot called “refinement of manners – or urbanity and civility . . .”⁶, and what Hofstede called much more than “refinement of the mind.”⁷

The rich Diaspora of American people allows me to come in contact with people from a variety of cultures – some who have lived in the U.S. for many generations; others who are recent arrivals. I enjoy many ethnic foods; attend ethnic festivals; and with the world-renowned Smithsonian in my backyard, see exhibits of cultural art. Further, I have seen cultural TV shows; and unfortunately, I have heard and seen the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes in the media and in literature. From that limited viewpoint, I might expect to eat pizza and pasta, usually with red sauce, when I travel to Italy; to be served red wine with every meal when in France; to see Ming Dynasty art in all buildings and museums in China; and, to see all Middle Eastern women wearing a hijab


⁶ Eliot, Notes Toward a Definition of Culture, 21.

⁷ Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations, 2.
and an abaiyya, with only their eyes visible. However, these images are only
generalizations, thin veneers of the real story. When in Italy, I have eaten many
wonderful meals that did not involve red sauce; I have seen women from many
Middle Eastern countries on the streets of Istanbul who wore many exotic
dresses, and, at the same time, there were as many dressed in western dress; and,
I have friends who not even remotely resemble the portrayal of images
perpetuated by the media. Furthermore, even if these general assumptions held
to be true, which they surely do not, we are seeing only certain external
manifestations of a culture: food, art, and dress. These derive from but do not
wholly define the culture that created these products, for culture is much more
than a place and its products.

The other most understood definition of culture is the cultivation of tastes
and talents. This definition is more in keeping with the etymology of the word
as we use it today: culture, from the Latin cultura, which in turn, stems from the
word colere, meaning to cultivate, to build on, or to foster. As used here, cultural
refinement is to cultivate one’s intellectual or moral facilities through education,
patronage of the visual and musical arts, and heightened tastes for fine food,
wine or cigars to name only a few. In the preface to his 1869 book Culture and
Anarchy, Matthew Arnold, elaborating on the Victorian approach to literature,
philosophy, art, and music said of culture that it was, “a pursuit of our total
perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world. . . .”

Eliot had a different take on what Arnold was saying, believing Arnold’s concept of culture should be understood in the context of the reference to, “man as a member of society,” rather than viewed as speaking about culture as a whole. “Arnold is concerned primarily with the individual and the ‘perfection’ at which he should aim.” And yet, these definitions of higher education and knowledge and appreciation of the arts have carried over into a prevailing definition of culture in today’s society. Still, this is only a partial definition of what culture encompasses as Williams offered, and speaks to only the creative endeavors of a culture.

Historical periods of times such as Greco-Roman, the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, Postmodernism, and Bohemian or Hippie have their place in the cultural framework. Pop culture, which is to define the ideas, perspectives, attitudes, mores, and actions within a period of time in our history and the people who espoused them, are aspects of culture, and both historical periods and pop culture are part of Williams’ definition of culture, but only a part. Culture Wars address political battles between what is perceived as cultural values accepted by conservatives vs. liberals, or the political ideologies


9 Eliot, Notes Toward a Definition of Culture, 20.
of Western vs. Eastern culture, but political ideologies are still only part of the whole. All these aspects of culture may be what most people think about when trying to define culture, but the study of culture offers a much broader and more inclusive definition that is needed for this study. Therefore, in order to arrive at a working definition of culture, let us consider those anthropologists who, in the late 19th century, provided important and foundational definitions.

Before arriving at a definition of culture, it is important to say what this thesis will not consider. The biological idea of what Eliot called, “the manipulation of lower organisms”\(^\text{10}\) by way of the process of growing microorganisms in a Petri dish such as a bacterial culture is wholly outside the realm of this work. As important as the subject is, this thesis does not address multicultural relations as it pertains to different cultural groups within a society, such as clashes between ethnic groups – that would be another paper entirely! And although cultural interactions in the workplace will be a topic of discussion in this thesis, the concept of organizational culture will not be addressed as a culture in and of itself because businesses are not cultures as defined in this thesis.

It should also be noted that my resources and thoughts offered in this thesis are a reflection of the culture in which I was raised. They are admittedly Western in nature and in no way encompass traditions of other cultural origins.

\(^{10}\) Eliot, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, 19.
This is not to detract from the notions of the origins of life offered by other cultures. Rather, this thesis and the resources from which I have drawn show the focus and limits of my upbringing, education, and interests. As this chapter will emphasize, each person is raised in a culture that imprints us with the underlying values and basic assumptions held by our cultural group; therefore, what I present will say as much about my cultural perspective as it will about the cultures I encounter as I rely on resources steeped in my Western and Christian cultural tradition such as *The Holy Bible* and the history of the Holy Land; Egypt, ancient and Hellenistic; the study of the Golden Age of Greek history and philosophy; and, of the Roman Republic and Empire, and the resurgence of classical Greek thought during the Italian Renaissance.

**The Concept of Culture**

As Williams, Eliot and Hofstede have offered, it is a struggle to define culture. Ting-Toomey says, “Culture is an enigma. It contains both concrete and abstract components. It is also a multifaceted phenomenon.”\(^{11}\) It is much easier to define the differences than culture, and there is no consensus among scholars regarding a clear definition of exactly how culture should be defined. There is, however, a common ground or commonality, and this thesis will explore both commonality and disputes. In the introduction to the book, *Expanding Empires: Cultural Interaction and Exchange in World Societies from Ancient to Early Modern*

---

\(^{11}\) Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating Across Cultures* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 9.
Times, Wendy Kasinec and Michael Polushin borrow a definition of culture from Sydney Mintz and Richard Price, describing it as “a body of beliefs and values, socially acquired and patterned, that serve an organized group (a ‘society’) as guides of behavior.”¹² The various ideas put forth on how anthropologists arrived at a definition and how culture is manifest will follow. For the purpose of this thesis, then, culture is broadly understood to be the shared norms learned by a group of people and transmitted from one generation to the next.

As we explore the concept of culture, the reader should all along be aware of some overarching thoughts about culture which are offered in the following summary form:

- A people’s ways of thinking and doing things that consists of a whole way of life.
- The shared experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, assumptions, hierarchies, knowledge, and universal concepts internalized by a group of people.
- Socially transmitted behavior patterns, common traits, languages, practices, material culture and beliefs of human thought and work absorbed from parents and relatives, neighbors, school peers, significant others, media and persons of authority.
- A mutually agreed upon organization of society, whether inside the family, the community, the state, or enterprise.
- Shared standards of behavior of a group of people who determine what is desirable and what one should and should not do in a given situation.

• Social heritage transmitted from one generation to the next.
• Historically shared events; unwritten rules of a social group or people.
• Collective programming that distinguishes the members of one group of people from others.
• Standards of socially patterned thoughts and behaviors of individuals within a group, whether those people are grouped as citizens of a sovereign nation or ethnic group within a nation.
• Deeply rooted and a powerful structure, but in constant flux and fragile construct because it exists only in the minds of those who adhere to their particular cultural norms.

Anthropologists Definition of Culture

Moving beyond Arnold’s narrow definition of culture – what is sometimes called high culture – formulation of a modern technical definition of culture was first postulated by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). According to Tylor, “Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”13 In spite of being Arnold’s contemporary, Tylor’s utilitarian but much more in-depth definition of culture is in markedly different. Arnold’s definition reflects only the cultural refinement aspect of culture, whereas, Tylor begins the era of anthropological inquiry into culture, which is the topic of this thesis.

The German anthropologist Adolf Bastian, also a contemporary of Tylor, traveled extensively outside his native Germany, allowing him to have firsthand

experience with different cultures. According to Bastian, “all cultures have a common origin, from which they have branched off in various directions.” Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer, who were contemporaries of Bastian, offered a definition of culture that was common during the time of Social Darwinism. They believed that humans progressed “from primitive to advanced.” Bastian on the other hand, “had a monogenetic view of human origins – that all human beings (and human cultures) had a common origin.”

Influenced by Bastian, Immanuel Kant and philosophers of the German Enlightenment, American anthropologist Franz Boas also rejected evolutionary theories of culture. His: 

. . . definition of culture was radical for his time, and it remains central to anthropologists today. Before Boas, many people ranked cultures according to hierarchical ‘developmental stages’ in an inevitable evolution from the ‘lowly’ primitive to the ‘civilized’ European or American. Boas, in contrast, believed that cultures reflected human responses to the environment in which they lived, and he did not value one over another.

Boas’ ideas were developed and furthered by his talented students, most notably Albert Kroeber, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Zora Neale Hurston. These anthropologists changed the face of American anthropology. Cultural relativism and historical particularism became the most prominent. . . [and] Boasian postulates found their way into most twentieth century definitions of culture. Ideas such as ‘culture is

---


15 Marguerite Holloway, “The Paradoxical Legacy of Franz Boas,” *Natural History*, (November 1997), [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1134/is_10_106/ai_53479059/?tag=content;coll1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1134/is_10_106/ai_53479059/?tag=content;coll1) (accessed December 6, 2010).
learned and shared; culture is integrated, and culture is transmitted primarily through language and symbols’ are also Boasian propositions.16

Since Tylor’s classical definition of culture, still quoted today, many definitions have been offered. Tylor helped compile the first inventory of cultural categories in 1872, and from it came the most exhaustive list of definitions called the Outline of Cultural Materials or OCM, which was first published in 1938 and is still in use today and maintained at Yale University.17

“What is culture? This question has fascinated scholars in various academic disciplines for many decades.”18 Anthropologists continued to offer their definitions of culture to the theoretical debate, and by the 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhorn published, *Culture: a Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952) where they defined more than one hundred and sixty definitions for the term, as summarized in Figure 1-1 offered by Bodley.

John Bodley, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Washington State University, provides his own definition of culture: “I use the term culture to refer collectively to a society and its way of life or in reference to human culture as a whole.”


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical</th>
<th>Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or categories, such as social organization, religion or economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Culture is shared, learned human behavior; a way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>Culture is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Bodley goes on to say, “Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce.”¹⁹ This definition is in keeping with what Raymond Williams offered, the first academic to bring anthropology and culture down to the ordinary when he said:

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative efforts. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture

---

¹⁹ Bodley, Cultural Anthropology, 1-2.
are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.\textsuperscript{20}

In \textit{Culture Matters}, American anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines culture as “the entire way of life of a society: its values practices, symbols, institutions and human relationships.” Samuel Huntington summarizes it as “values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society.”\textsuperscript{21} “Culture . . . is influenced by numerous factors, for example, geography and climate, politics, the vagaries of history.”\textsuperscript{22}

Contemporary anthropologists offer their views in textbooks that are the foundation of introductory classes of anthropology, and these works offer that culture is the sum of all aspects of Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s definitions. In his introductory text, \textit{Cultural Anthropology}, William Haviland says:

Cultures consists of the abstract values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world that lie behind people’s behavior and that their behavior reflects. These are shared by members of society, and when acted upon, they produce behavior considered acceptable within that society. Cultures are learned, largely through the medium of language, rather than inherited biologically, and the parts of a culture function as an integrated whole.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Jan Geerinck, ”Raymond Williams: Moving from High Culture to Ordinary Culture,” Jahsonic: A Vocabulary of Culture, \url{http://www.jahsonic.com/RaymondWilliams.html} (accessed December 12, 2010).
\item \textsuperscript{21} Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington, eds., \textit{Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress} (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xv.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., xxviii.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Culture is not observable behavior, but rather the values and beliefs that people use to interpret experience and generate behavior.\(^\text{23}\)

In his textbook of the same name, Conrad Kottack agrees with Haviland that culture is shared and learned, and says, “Society is organized life in groups.”\(^\text{24}\) He then makes a distinction between general and specific meanings of culture:

All human populations have culture, which is therefore a generalized possession of the genus Homo. This is Culture (capital C) in the general sense, a capacity and possession shared by hominids. However, anthropologists also use the word culture to describe different and varied cultural traditions of specific societies. This is culture in the specific sense (small c).\(^\text{25}\)

This concept of the big ‘C’ and the little ‘c’ is an important distinction. As humans, we are all part of the human culture. According to John Hooker:

Human nature is the common genetic heritage of humankind – we all share a need for food, shelter, and nurturing. Culture, by contrast, is cultivated. It is based on a set of behaviors, attitudes, and ideas that human beings learn while living together.\(^\text{26}\)

Culture with a little ‘c’ – the culture studied by anthropologists – is specific to each group and manifests itself by way of different traditions, thought processes, ways of living, language, symbols, religion, and the other


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 37.

aspects of social heritage. This is learned behavior. It is at this level that we will explore culture and use that exploration to offer a method of intercultural relations.

*Culture Matters* is a collection of essays about culture, and two essays in the book offer two additional concepts of culture:

What do I mean by “culture”? I mean community-specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be ‘cultural’, those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary; and they must be constitutive of different ways of life. Alternatively stated, culture refers to what Isaiah Berlin called “goals, values and pictures of the world; that are made manifest in speech, laws, and routine practices of some self-monitoring group.”

By culture I mean a repertoire of socially transmitted and inter-generationally generated ideas about how to live and make judgments, both in general terms and in regard to specific domains of life. It is an information system prescribing the best way to make bagels, curried chickpeas, or Jamaican jerk pork. This information system is more than “what people must learn in order to be able to function acceptably as members of a social group in the activities in which members of the group engage with one another,” as Goodenough originally phrased it in a seminal statement. For one thing, as Eugene Hunn has pointed out, the “cultural concept must address not only what is formally appropriate, but also what is ecologically effective.” Hence, “culture is what one must know to act efficiently in one’s environment.”

Culture is not biologically inherited; it is learned, and the cultural behaviors we learn can be something as simple and as complex as crossing one’s legs or as important as knowing on which side of the road one should drive! As an example, asked by Jay Leno about the differences between American and


28 Ibid., 208.
British cultures, British actor Hugh Laurie commented that he had to be mindful about the different ways men cross their legs in Britain and the U.S. and switch his behavior accordingly, because in America the European way is seen as effeminate or gay. Trivial? Perhaps. Unimportant? Not in the least! We may all fundamentally drive a car in the same way, but if I attempt to drive on the right side of the road in Britain, I am endangering my life and the lives of all around me! Some differences are much more important than others, but even the slightest differences can cause angst at one end of the spectrum to situations of international proportions at the other end of the spectrum. Differences in behavior between family, friends, and people of authority; differences in how one worships; differences in how one creates or produces work, and how one spends their leisure time; sport preferences; how occasions are celebrated; differences in musical tastes; even differences in acquiring food, preparation of meals, and eating habits all add to the cultural divide. For most people, anything that is different is often considered inferior, suspect, or threatening, and these differences have the potential to cause conflict, and often do.

Culture is shared among people of a common group, in a variety of ways, from socialization and enculturation by family members who teach children through demonstrating the norms, values, attitudes and beliefs they need to function within the family and community, to teachers who communicate not only the knowledge needed to be properly educated within the society (and
these days, the world) but how to properly behave in society, to peers who put pressure on us to interact with each other in a socially sanctioned way. This is known as cultural transmission, which is the process of passing on culturally relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values from person to person or from culture to culture.”

Enculturation, often used interchangeably with socialization, is "a partly conscious and partly unconscious learning experience whereby the older generation invites, induces, and compels the younger generation to adopt traditional ways of thinking and behaving." Mark Twain tells of a lesson he learned as a child in his essay, *Corn-pone Opinions*: “We know that it is a matter of association and sympathy, not reasoning and examination; that hardly a man in the world has an opinion on morals, politics, or religion that he got otherwise than through his associations and sympathies.”

Because culture is a set of common learned behaviors within a given society, the analogy of culture being a pattern or a template in the sense that it is


a preformatted model that shapes individuals will often be used. Claude Levi-Strauss believed that there were universal principles and human characteristics across cultures that were the same no matter what the culture, brought about by the function of a common mental code possessed by all humans but manifest differently to suit the people within a culture. “There is no primitive mind or modern mind but ‘mind-as-such,’ in which is locked a structural way of thinking that brings order out of chaos and enables man to develop social systems to suit his needs.”32 Ward Goodenough said that culture “does not consist of things, people, behavior or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them.”33

If the premise that there are cultural forms is accepted, we must be careful not to assume that these forms equate to everyone within a culture being the same as everyone else in the culture as if stamped out by a die or a cookie-cutter. Members of specific cultures are individuals with cultural programming, but not clones. To help support this premise, investigating the layers of culture

---


through cultural metaphors will assist in understanding how cultural take us beyond our common human needs.

Cultural Metaphors

Up to this point in the chapter, what has been presented – and debated – is the concept of culture and an attempt to pinpoint a definition of what culture really is. In his book, *Riding the Waves of Culture*, Fons Trompenaars says:

> It is our belief that you can never understand other cultures. Those who are married know that it is impossible ever completely to understand even people of your own culture. The Dutch author became interested in this subject before it grew popular because his father is Dutch and his mother is French. It gave him an understanding of the fact that if something works in one culture, there is little chance that it will work in another.³⁴

If this is true, what purpose will it serve to take the time to investigate the notion of culture and intercultural communication, understanding, collaboration and management to name only a few? For me personally, I have a similar familial circumstance to Trompenaars: I am married to a foreign national and deal with the challenges of different cultural expectations every day, and family harmony would be reason enough to explore the subject. But the purpose of my investigation is to explore cultural dynamics in the workplace, and here too, I have personal involvement. I work for the US subsidiary of a multi-national company based outside of the US, and virtually all of the people for and with

whom I work came to America as immigrants. As a Director of Human Resources, my job necessitates working effectively with my superiors, participating on intercultural teams, managing employees in other countries, as well as working with employees in the US who are from a variety of cultures, and these cultural differences have presented challenges I need to investigate and from which I must learn.

On a larger scale, as quoted in the introduction of this thesis, I believe President Obama described the importance of intercultural understanding and collaboration when he said in his comments during his visit to Japan for a regional economic summit on November 13, 2010, “In today’s interconnected world, what happens in Japan or China or Indonesia also has a direct effect on the lives and fortunes of the American people, and that’s why I came here.” President Obama’s comment was about economics, but his sentiment reflects the wider importance of the cultural interconnectedness Hofstede presents:

The world is full of confrontations between people, groups, and nations who think, feel, and act differently. At the same time, these people, groups, and nations . . . are exposed to common problems that demand cooperation for their solution. Ecological, economic, political, military, hygienic, and meteorologic developments do not stop at national or regional borders. Coping with the threats of nuclear warfare, global warming, organized crime, poverty, terrorism, ocean pollution, extinction of animals, AIDS, or worldwide recession demands cooperation of opinion leaders from many countries. They in turn need the support of broad groups of followers in order to implement the decisions taken.

Understanding the differences in the ways these leaders and their followers think, feel, and act is a condition for bringing about worldwide solutions that work. Questions of economic, technological, medical, or
biological cooperation have too often been considered as merely technical. One of the reasons why so many solutions do not work or cannot be implemented is because differences in thinking among the partners have been ignored.

...dealing with the difference in thinking, feeling, and acting of people around the globe...will show that although the variety in people’s minds is enormous, there is a structure in this variety that can serve as a basis for mutual understanding.\(^{35}\)

That interconnected world in which we all live and work demands an investigation into how we must all strive toward an understanding of what it takes to live and work together. We cannot afford to ignore our differences for so many reasons in the twenty-first century, mutual respect being prime, but for the purposes of this thesis, intercultural collaboration is necessary because we can only be effective if we learn to recognize the different ways we each get work done, and even though difficult, harness those differences to a positive advantage for ourselves and our organizations.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner concept of cultural layers is important to include here because it is important to understand not only the concept of culture but the layers that make it so complex, and their work will be compared and contrasted with a fellow Dutchman, Geert Hofstede who first postulated one of the metaphors to describe the layers of culture: the onion.

The onion as a metaphor for culture works on the idea of peeling away layers to get to the inner core of an individual or the deeper cultural structure.

\(^{35}\) Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 2.
The cultural onion shown in Figure 1-2 is the idea Hofstede proposes as his concept of culture.

Hofstede believes the cultural onion has four layers. The outer layers of the onion are the practices of a cultural group, manifest as symbols, heroes, and rituals surrounding the core of cultural values. The outermost layer is the symbols of culture; what we see and experience, whether traveling to other geographical locations, or living and working in our own culture with individuals who are from other cultures. “Symbols are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who
share the culture…words in a language or jargon…dress, hairstyles, flags and status symbols.”

McDonald’s is an American fast food restaurant that has been exported all over the world. I’ve eaten at McDonalds in many countries, and the standard food is consistent and familiar. Granted, I find country-specific foods offered as well – a Greek salad in Greece; German beer in Germany – but I can always order a cheeseburger and French fries and they will taste exactly the same as every other McDonald’s burger and fries I’ve had, whether in the US or abroad. Trompenaars uses the example of McDonald’s to illustrate something that an American assumes is universal, but in fact, illustrates what Hofstede is saying about meaning being culturally defined: “Dining at McDonald’s is a show of status in Moscow whereas it is a fast meal for a fast buck in New York.” As an American, when eating at McDonald’s I do expect to get decent food quickly at a relatively economical cost, and I also expect the food to taste exactly the same in every McDonald’s I visit, and my expectations are met time and time again. That said, if I were visiting Moscow and my host offered to take me to McDonald’s for a nice dinner, I would find this very odd if I wasn’t aware of the cultural context.

---

36 Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations*. 7.

37 Trompenaars, *Riding the Waves of Culture*, 3.
In his book, *Beyond Culture*, Edward Hall relates a story about how disconcerting it was to be moved around from room to room within a Japanese hotel “like a piece of derelict luggage.”³⁸ Previously, he had stayed for an extended period in a Japanese hotel that catered to Western preferences and he was assigned a room and stayed in the same room for the duration of his visit – something most Westerners would expect. But when staying at a more traditional Japanese hotel, he was presented with the off-putting situation of being moved from one room to another within a hotel and eventually, from one hotel to another.

It was my preoccupation with my own cultural mold that explained why I was puzzled for many years about the significance of being moved around in Japanese hotels. The answer finally came after experiences in Japan and many discussions with Japanese friends. In Japan, one has to ‘belong’ or he has no identity. As soon as you register at the desk, you are no longer an outsider; instead, for the duration of your stay you are a member of a large, mobile family. *You belong*. The fact that I was moved was tangible evidence that I was being treated as a family member – a relationship in which one can afford to be ‘relaxed and informal or not stand on ceremony.’³⁹

From these illustrations of eating at a restaurant or staying in a hotel – things that one might mistakenly assume are so simple and basic as to apply across cultures – we start to understand that there may be nothing that is universally understood. And with that knowledge, it becomes clear that even something as simple as eating out at a global fast-food restaurant chain or


³⁹ Ibid., 55-56.
staying at a hotel requires some understanding of cultural symbols to be conscious of what is going on!

The next layer of Hofstede’s cultural onion is heroes, “persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in a culture and thus serve as models for behavior.” 40 Today, one could argue that sports figures and celebrities have replaced people who in past decades represented the best a society had to offer such as parents, teachers, national heroes (e.g. presidents or prime ministers, cowboys, police or firemen, astronauts in the age of space exploration, scientists) or even mythical characters as role models, at least in the West (America in particular). Rather than be role models for what is true, good, and right as outlined by a given society, some contemporary celebrities are infamous for their bad behavior while others are not really known for more than showing up on red carpets. This is a stereotype, of course, and thankfully there are celebrities who may also be genuine heroes for the good that they do, but it seems that those with the worst behavior are the most celebrated and emulated.

“Rituals,” the next layer of Hofstede’s cultural onion, “are collective activities, technically superfluous to reaching desired ends, but which within a culture are considered as socially essential. They are therefore carried out for their own sake. Examples include ways of greeting and paying respect to others,

40 Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations*, 7.
as well as social and religious ceremonies.” While one might think of rituals as associated with primitive behavior to propitiate the gods to induce rain or fertility, rituals are practiced in the lives of all and vary widely to include greetings, rites of passage, birth, marriage and funerals, holidays, styles of worship, the political process, sporting events, and organizational rituals from small clubs to multi-national organizations. Some cultures are steeped in rituals while others seem to have very few.

At the core of Hofstede’s onion are the values that drive a culture, those fundamental thoughts and feelings such as the concept of good vs. evil; normal vs. abnormal; what is considered beautiful or ugly; and what is allowed vs. forbidden. Learned at an early age from family and members of the community, and though long forgotten, these create the foundation of how people think and act. Values are the “stable elements of culture.”

Hofstede asserts that the outer layers of the onion – the practices – can and do change, sometimes relatively quickly. The inner core of values, however, remains constant or changes extremely slowly, and only as a result of a major cultural upheaval or external pressure.

Cultural change can be fast for the outer layers of the onion diagram, labeled practices. Practices are the visible part of cultures. New practices can be learned throughout our lifetime; people older than seventy

---------------------
41 Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations*, 8.

42 Ibid., 21.
happily learn to surf the Web on their first personal computer, acquiring new symbols, meeting new heroes, and communicating through new rituals. Cultural change is slow for the onion’s core, labeled *values*...those are learned when we were children, from parents who acquired them when *they* were children. This makes for considerable stability in the basic values of a society, in spite of sweeping changes in practices.\(^{43}\)

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner also offer a cultural onion as a model to explain culture (Figure 1-3). Like Hofstede, this model has external and internal drivers – what they call explicit vs. implicit culture – and the outermost layer is behavior, artifacts, and products that somewhat correspond with the Symbols of Hofstede, but norms and values are the middle of this 3-layer onion that has basic assumptions at the center of the onion. The outer layers are explicit while the core is implicit.

---

\(^{43}\) Hofstede, *Culture and Organizations*, 12-13.
The outer layer of the Trompenaars cultural onion is explicit culture, which is explained as follows:

The observable reality of the language, food, buildings, houses, monuments, agriculture, shrines, markets, fashions and arts. They are symbols of a deeper level of culture. Prejudices mostly start on this symbolic and observable level . . . [and] each opinion we voice regarding explicit culture usually says more about where we come from than about the community we are judging.\textsuperscript{44}

The norms and values of a culture make up the middle layer of the Trompenaars cultural onion. Norms are explained as the “mutual sense a group has of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’” Norms can develop on a formal level as written laws, and on an informal level as social control . . . [and say] this is how I normally should behave.”\textsuperscript{45} Values “determine the definition of ‘good and bad,’ and are therefore closely related to the ideals shared by a group. Values give us a feeling of ‘this is how I aspire or desire to behave.’”\textsuperscript{46} Somewhat similar to the definition of values at the center of Hofstede’s cultural onion, values are “a criterion to determine a choice from existing alternatives. It is the concept an individual or group has regarding the desirable.”\textsuperscript{47} Here the authors

\textsuperscript{44} Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, \textit{Riding the Waves of Culture}, 21.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 21-22.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
postulate that the norms need to reflect values for a culture to be relatively stable.

Basic assumptions about existence is at the core of the Trompenaars cultural onion; the basic survival of humans, and the response of individuals to the elements that must be overcome within their environment makes up specific cultures. "Each [culture] has organized themselves to find the ways to deal most effectively with their environments, given their available resources. Such continuous problems are eventually solved automatically."  

The reasons for basic assumptions have been forgotten long ago, and become part of the everyday fabric of life and reaction to it. But these assumptions – the core of the onion – don’t seem to be nearly as static and slow to change as they are in the Hofstede model. Since “we see that a specific organizational culture or functional culture is nothing more than the way in which groups have organized themselves over the years to solve problems and challenges presented to them” 49, it stands to reason that a group of people who have previously behaved in a certain way will make fundamental changes to their ways of thinking and doing things in order to continue their survival and this will, in turn, change the culture.

48 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, Riding the Waves of Culture, 23.

49 Ibid.
Tony Fang, Assistant Professor of International Business at Stockholm University, says on his website (www.tonyfang.com) that he is probably best known for his “debates on Geert Hofstede's culture theory.” According to Fang, culture is a dynamic structure that renders the onion too static and inflexible; too either/or oriented; too bipolar to be used as a metaphor for culture. In his article “From ‘Onion’ to Ocean,” Professor Fang, expresses his view that the cultural onion metaphor needs to be replaced with “a more dynamic view of culture”50 and he suggests the ocean as more appropriate. He says culture is paradoxical; that culture must be understood in the moment; and, that culture has a life of its own. “National cultures are living organisms, not time-free ‘fossils.’ It is useful to conceive of culture as having a life of its own.”51 His more dynamic view of culture requires a new metaphor and he suggests we utilize the ocean:

Culture can be compared to an ocean. In a given context at a given time, we identify visible values and behaviors just like we identify visible wave patterns on the surface of the ocean. Nevertheless, the culture we see at this moment does not represent the totality and the entire process of that culture. The ocean embraces not just visible wave patterns on its surface (compared to visible cultural values and behaviors) but also numerous ebbs and flows underneath the amazing depth (comparable to ‘hibernating,’ unseen and unknown cultural values and behaviors). Given internal mechanisms (yin-yang) and external forces (e.g. globalization, institutional, economic, technological, situational factors),


51 Ibid., 81.
invisible and ‘unconscious’ values and behaviors (ebbs and flows) beneath the water surface can be stimulated, powered, activated, promoted, and legitimized to come up to the ocean’s surface to become the visible and guiding value patterns at the next historical moment.  

Fang argues that Hofstede allows for no change at the core of his cultural onion: “While the outer layers of the onion come and go, the core of the onion stands firm. In other words, the behavioral part of culture may change, but the software of culture – that is, the deep-seated values – will not, because values remain stable.”  

Fang clearly has a profoundly different point of view about culture than Hofstede, and defines it as flexible and fluid, but I disagree with him that Hofstede believes culture is virtually static. “Culture changes have been brought about, and will continue to be brought about, by major impacts of forces of nature and forces of humans.”  

Trompenaars offers the same opinion as quoted earlier – culture changes in response to challenges the group must face and to which it must respond. “If values were completely stable,” Rokeach argued, “individual and social change would be impossible. If values were completely unstable, continuity of human personality and society would be

52 Fang, “From ‘Onion’ to ‘Ocean’,” 83-84.
53 Fang, “From ‘Onion’ to ‘Ocean’,” 74.
54 Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations, 16.
impossible.” The balance of social stability and change, is, I believe, allowed for in all of the theories on culture outlined here.

The most useful cultural metaphor I have encountered is the cultural iceberg, one that provides a balanced alternative to the opposing metaphors of the onion and the ocean. “It’s just the tip of the iceberg” is an oft-used phrase to indicate that one is only seeing a fraction of what is really there, and the metaphor works extremely well when referring to culture.

A real iceberg is estimated to be, on average, about one-eighth above the surface of the water while the remaining seven-eighths is unseen below the surface of the water, and the myriad aspects of culture correlate. The tip of the cultural iceberg shows the parts of culture that are easily seen and noticed – language, behavior, gestures, architecture, arts, dress, food – but these aspects of culture are only the demonstrable portion that hint at the more fundamental but invisible aspects of a culture lying beneath the surface. As shown in Figure 1-4, below the surface of culture lie what Hofstede calls values, Trompenaars calls basic assumptions, and Hall calls values and thought patterns – concept of self and one’s relationship to others, work ethic, family relations, concept of justice, values, ideologies, viewpoints, attitudes, philosophies, beliefs, taboos, priorities, and convictions that exemplify what a group of people think are good or bad, right or wrong, and worthy of consideration or not.

Edward Hall spoke of the iceberg analogy in his first book, *The Silent Language* (1959). He identified culture as both overt: “visible and easily described” and covert, “not visible and presents difficulties even to the trained observer.” He continues in the same paragraph, “explicit culture, such things as law, was what people talk about and can be specific about [while] implicit culture, such as feelings about success, was what [people] took for granted or what existed on the fringes of awareness.”

In his book, *Beyond Culture* (1976), he speaks of the conscious vs. unconsciousness aspects of culture: “Beneath the clearly perceived, highly explicit surface culture, there lies a whole other

---

world. . .”

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner called the aspects of culture explicit vs. implicit, while Triandis called them objective vs. subjective, but these scholars are all describing the same thing: the identifiable aspects of culture that we see and experience – the tip of the cultural iceberg – versus the unseen, deeper aspects of culture that are below the surface but drive beliefs and behaviors. Figure 1-5 shows this concept in more detail:

![Cultural Iceberg Diagram]

Figure 1-5. Cultural Iceberg, Joseph Shaules, *Deep Culture: The Hidden Challenges of Global Living* (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, Ltd., 2007), 40.

---

57 Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 12.

The trap in which most find themselves is assuming that we are all basically the same – that our shared humanness will carry us through cultural differences – and that the knowledge of surface manifestations of culture is all one needs to get along and work together with people from different cultures. In fact, the deep elements of culture that are out of awareness are critically important and to ignore them will inevitably result in cultural conflict. In the next chapter we will explore the origins of culture, the dimensions of culture, and the skills one needs to gain true cultural intelligence.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORY, LAYERS, AND DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

The history of our planet has been in great part the history of the mixing of peoples.

-- Arthur Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America: Reflections of a Multicultural Society

In the last chapter, various aspects of culture were discussed and it was established that the working definition of culture in this thesis is, a body of beliefs and values that are socially acquired, and serve society as guides for behavior; shared norms transmitted from one generation to the next. The argument was that much of what we “know” about culture is at the surface or outer layer of culture, and that deep culture needs to be explored further if we are to appreciate the differences between the multiplicity of world ethnicities.

After discussing the various aspects of culture, and arriving at a single, all-encompassing definition, we come to the premise that a deeper meaning of culture needs to be further investigated to close the cultural gap and to understand differences among people. This chapter will delve into cultural differences with a brief overview of the ancient origins of cultures and intercultural encounters from ancient times to modern; explore the layers that make up cultures; and move into the dimensions of culture, so that a platform for cultural intelligence can be offered.

Intercultural encounters are generally perceived as an aspect of current life; in truth, people have come into contact with people from other cultures as
far back as recorded history. From childhood memories, I was told stories from the Bible, abounding with examples of cross-cultural contact. People who identify themselves with revealed religions inhabit more than fifty percent of the world population. The followers of monotheistic Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe in some version of the stories of my childhood, starting with the creation story as outlined in *Genesis*. From this point of view, cultural history began with the creation of Adam and Eve, and their instructions from God to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”¹ These early stories in *Genesis* tell of the world’s first inhabitants as part of one large family.

Post-banishment from the Garden of Eden, *Genesis* 4 tells us that Adam and Eve had two sons: Cain and Abel. It then goes on to recount the first family dispute, which ends with the first recorded murder, that of Cain killing his brother, Abel, out of jealousy. Cain’s punishment was to be driven away from the family, and results in the first migration: “Then Cain went away . . . and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”² Here is the first hint that there were groups of people other than the nucleus family of Adam and Eve who were living in separate locations.


² Gen. 4:16.
Genesis 5 updates us with additions to the family tree of Adam and Eve, up to Noah. Genesis 6-8 recounts the Great Flood, what the commentary about the event calls, “God’s un-creation and re-creation of the world.” For the re-creation, God again instructs man - Noah and his sons - to “be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth, and multiply in it” and “the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These three were the sons of Noah and from these the whole earth was peopled.” Chapter 10 of Genesis provides us with the Table of Nations, the families who were created from the three sons of Noah, and each genealogy ends with the statement, “. . . in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations.” Here is the first mention of nations, and, by association, the cultures that were created.

Looking at the genealogy of Noah’s sons shown in Figure 2-1, and the map showing where they lived (Figure 2-2), these families lived and developed apart from each other in an area encompassing approximately 800 x 1,200 miles of the Middle East and North Africa. They encountered different circumstances and problems; became separate nations; and developed distinct cultures. As discussed in Chapter 1, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner have offered that,

---


4 Gen. 9:7.

5 Gen. 9:18-19.

“groups of people organize themselves in such a way that they increase effectiveness of their problem-solving processes. Because different groups of people develop in different geographic regions, they have also formed different sets of logical assumptions.” 7 Shared genealogy is no longer primary. Each of Noah’s sons, and their descendants, became tribes . . . nations . . . cultures – groups of people distinct from one another. The Tanakh is replete with the history of encounters of Israel – the descendants of Shem - had with their neighbors, complete with conflict and acculturation.

**GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE DESCENDANTS OF NOAH**


---

Creation stories or myths are in no way the only theory to explain from where nations and cultures emerged. According to Hofstede, “by the end of the next-to-last ice age (c. 130,000 B.C.), some ten thousand to fifty thousand [modern humans] existed worldwide – that is, in Africa.”

Living initially as hunter-gatherer nomadic groups, people started to migrate across the globe, no doubt in search of food and water. Eventually they settled down to farming communities in different climates with different resources, creating different ways of living, adapted by individual groups. These groups of people became communities; then towns and cities; and eventually, societies of large urbanized municipalities, creating the various cultures that we know today.

Modern DNA research has enabled geneticists to trace the various moves, from Africa to central Asia and from there to Europe, Australia, and finally the Americas. By the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 B.C., humans were present on all continents . . . there were obviously many different cultures in the ice-age world.

From about 3,000 B.C. onward, written accounts are available to us; sources that provide at least a version of history, mythical though it may be, including the Tanakh from which the accounts of Genesis are derived.

---


9 Ibid., 15.
Cross-cultural Encounters

Since dated history, humans have had to endure and adapt to the environments and circumstances in which they found themselves: from the way they acquired food to wholesale new ways of life after encountering or being conquered by other cultures. Whatever the cause, people adjusted to the surroundings in which they found themselves, and made necessary adaptations in order to satisfy their needs for food, shelter, clothing, and safety. In order to provide for their basic needs, people have moved, traded, engaged in war, and made political alliances through treaties and marriage.

It is certainly true that the various people of the world have never lived in isolated, self-contained civilizations or cultural groups. From the earliest days of the human experience, impulses to trade, migration, empire-building, evangelization, and other activities brought about cross-cultural encounters and challenges. Where they had the will, the world’s peoples easily overcame both geographical obstacles (deserts, mountains, and oceans) and human barriers (linguistic, cultural, and political differences) in the interest of cross-cultural commerce. Even in pre-modern times peoples of different civilizations and cultural groups exchanged goods and technologies with remarkably little resistance.\(^\text{10}\)

Biblical accounts of historical events are the inerrant word of God to some; mythical and allegorical stories to others. However, many of these stories are a version of history backed by archeological finds. The Bible as history; the Bible as literature; whatever they were, to the people who wrote and heard them, these stories try to make sense out of the two questions man has always tried to

fathom: Who am I? What am I in relation to the world? The stories can be as epic as the Biblical flood found not only in Genesis but in the Atra Hatsas and other ancient texts; or, they can be the foundation for law, or justification for behavior; however, they were surely accounts of events that were influenced by the culture and politics of the author. Are the stories of the Tanakh historically “true” as we understand history in the twenty-first century? The answer will depend on whom you ask, but they are certainly no more or less “true” than the accounts of history provided by hieroglyphs of Egyptian kings and queens, The Histories of Herodotus, the Records of the Grand Historian of China, or even modern history texts. All history has context and comes to us from authors who wrote their version of history; sometimes, truthfully to the best of their ability and understanding, as colored by their culture; and sometimes, altered to meet an agenda. Nonetheless, these “historical” accounts provide us with stories of encounters between cultures; therefore, the overarching message should not be lost, for without that understanding, it would be impossible to interact with, do business with, get along with, and live with people from other cultures, their beliefs, and their practices. In this there is a distinct message to the world today.

The Old Testament of the Bible is replete with stories of ancient Israel encountering various cultures in the quest for their “promised” land. Genesis recounts the beginning of the journey with Abram, a descendant of Noah’s son Shem, and follows the descendants of Abram and his wife Sarai through Isaac,
Jacob, and Joseph, all traveling within Canaan and Egypt. Moses enters the scene in *Exodus*; and the eventual migration of Israelites from Egypt back to Canaan, puts Israel in direct conflict with the peoples who already inhabited the land they believed was promised by God, something that is very akin to the present day migration of the Jews from Europe to the Promised Land of Israel. The *Qur’an* has similar stories about Abraham and his descendants, although the same stories are not in both books.

*Deuteronomy* 20 outlines for Israel what they are supposed to do in preparation for battle with towns that are far from their land, including first offering the inhabitants terms of peace; or, if not accepted, putting all males to death, and enjoying the spoils of war including women, children, livestock, and the personal possessions of the inhabitants of the town. But for towns considered the inheritance from God, He instructed:

> You must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the LORD your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.\(^\text{11}\)

Tolerance of different cultures far from the land of Israel but complete intolerance of cultural differences to avoid cultural influences from those within the immediate geographic area of Israel. Trees, on the other hand, were not to be destroyed – they offered food, not bad influences!

---

\(^{11}\) Deut. 20:16-18.
Not all cross-cultural encounters in the Bible, however, were about conflict. One of my personal favorites was the story of the Queen of Sheba coming to visit King Solomon. The story has fascinated not only writers of the Bible, the Qur’an, and The Ethiopian Book of Kings, but historians such as Josephus and artists of Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance.

The monarch of the ancient kingdom of Sheba – believed to be early Ethiopia or modern-day Yemen – had heard of King Solomon and his wisdom and wanted to question him personally. According to the Biblical account, Solomon had more than 1,000 wives, taken to establish political alliances and trade agreements, and some stories suggest that Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were also married to ensure the continuing lucrative caravan trade between Sheba and Israel, but the Biblical account of my childhood said “When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon . . . she came to test him with hard questions.” Satisfied with his wise answers, she returned to Sheba. Here, intercultural encounters were positive.

Herodotus, the Greek historian, who traveled extensively through the lands of the Mediterranean and up to the Black Sea, chronicled his experiences in his fifth century B.C. text, The Histories in which he gives his account of the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians a generation after the great battles. In the introduction to The Landmark Herodotus, Rosalind Thomas says:

12 I Kings 10:1.
He sought the causes of the conflict in factors that took one back deep into the past and into the characteristics of each society. He implies that he saw the deep-seated causes in cultural antagonism of Greek and non-Greek, but he went out of his way to describe the achievements and customs of many non-Greek peoples with astonishing sensitivity and lack of prejudice.\textsuperscript{13}

But more than just an account of the causes of the Greek-Persian wars, his \textit{Histories} were full of elaborate digressions, and he documented his keen and unbiased observations when trying to answer his own questions about who the people of the cultures he encountered were, and what was their approach to life? Celebrating human diversity as he did, it seems to me he was the first anthropologist, a champion of intercultural curiosity and tolerance.

Identifying some of the stark differences between Greek and Egyptian customs, Herodotus describes what he believes to be role reversals, citing among other things, the fact that men stay at home and do weaving, while the women go out to the marketplace; that men sit to urinate while women stand, and only in private (inside their homes); Egyptians eat wheat-only bread, rather than barley; that there are no women priestesses, only men who serve the gods and who shave their heads, rather than wear it long; that Egyptians write from right to left rather than the “Greek way;” wear clean clothes daily, and have the audacity to put purity before beauty by circumcising their male children.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14} Herodotus \textit{The Histories} 2.38.
Family practices, including sexual, are offered throughout The Histories:

- Auseans couples do not dwell together but, instead, “share intercourse with their women in common, promiscuously like beasts”\(^\text{15}\)

- Babylonian custom requires “every woman of the country [to] sit down in the sanctuary of Aphrodite and have sexual intercourse with a stranger” at least once in her life\(^\text{16}\)

- Caspian’s “engage in intercourse out in the open, just like animals”\(^\text{17}\)

- At the birth of a child, Trausians sit around the child and “grieve over all the evils he will have to endure later, recounting all things that humans must suffer. But when someone dies, they have fun and take pleasure in burying him in the ground, reciting over him all the evils he has escaped and how he is now in the state of complete bliss”\(^\text{18}\)

These are only a few of the strange and interesting cultural practices offered, along with a history, by Herodotus, of why the Greeks and Persians met in battle. In addition to being the world’s first historian, Herodotus was also a travel reporter, foreign correspondent, and anthropologist. The classicist and philosopher, Nussbaum, states:

> Ethnographic writers such as the historian Herodotus examined the customs and distant countries, both in order to understand their ways of life and in order to attain a critical perspective on their own society. Herodotus took seriously the possibility that Egypt and Persia might have something to teach Athens about social values. A cross-cultural

\(^\text{15}\) Herodotus The Histories 4.180.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid. 1.199.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid. 1.203.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid. 5.4.
inquiry, he realized, may reveal that what we take to be natural and normal is merely parochial and habitual.\textsuperscript{19}

Founded by Alexander the Great, Alexandrian Egypt was a wonderful mix of native Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews all living together and enjoying the world’s most extensive library and many great teachers. The Roman Empire brought with it the conquering of many, many countries and cultures, Egypt included. Often, though, they allowed the cultures and practices – social and religious – of those conquered to continue. These practices spread across the Empire over time, including belief, values, cultural, and religious practices.

“The establishment of roads, sea routes, and communication networks obviously figures as a precondition for intense cross-cultural contacts. The work of merchants and traders in opening highways and arranging accommodations along these routes quite literally paved the way for [cross-cultural] encounters. . . .”\textsuperscript{20} There are Biblical accounts of Joseph being sold to a traveling caravan heading down into Egypt, and of spice routes from Sheba into Israel. The ancient silk roads traversed Mesopotamia, the Middle East, Egypt, Persia, India, and China. Disease also traveled these routes; and these long distance commercial networks ebbed and flowed, but did not disappear.


\textsuperscript{20} Bentley, \textit{Old World Encounters}, 21.
Fast forward to more modern times, the Turks overthrew the Byzantine empire by conquering Constantinople . . . Columbus attempted a new route to India and ran into the America’s . . . the Mayflower deposited English settlers in Massachusetts . . . the British colonized India . . . America declared independence from Britain, and the constitution of the United States was signed . . . Napoleon extended French conquests and the Rosetta Stone was found in Egypt . . . Greeks proclaimed independence from Turkey and created a republic . . . the Austro-Hungarian empire was established . . . Ellis Island became the gateway to millions of immigrants into the United States . . . World Wars were fought . . . Egypt and Israel signed peace treaties . . . Yugoslavia and the USSR disintegrated, the Berlin wall was dismantled, and former communist countries established themselves as independent states . . . Apartheid ended in South Africa . . . fiber optic cables replaced copper wires for telecommunications, and underwater cables and the Internet boom allowed the world to become interconnected. All these, and so many other, cultural and technological changes have made the world smaller, and with the change in the global landscape come the need to learn about other cultures and how to properly interact and live together.

**Layers of Culture**

As has already been determined, cultures are groups of people who carry with them a set of beliefs, values, and behaviors – what Hofstede calls “common
mental programming that constitutes [a] culture.”21 When culture is discussed in this thesis, it is generally at the national level – what it means to be Chinese, Indian, Russian, and American – and does not differentiate, more specifically, along the layers or levels of culture within the national culture that Hofstede offers:

- A **national** level, according to one’s country (or countries for people who migrated during their lifetime)
- A **regional** and/or **ethnic** and/or **religious** and/or **linguistic** affiliation level, as most nations are composed of culturally different regional and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or language groups
- A **gender** level, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy
- A **generational** level, separating grandparents from parents from children
- A **social** class level, associated with educational opportunities and with a person’s occupation or profession
- For those who are employed, **organizational**, departmental, and/or corporate levels, according to the way employees have been socialized by their work organization22

While these layers of culture are important aspects of any culture, they are not dealt with in any measure of detail in this thesis. Instead, unless otherwise noted, culture in this thesis is meant to address the overarching national level.

---

21 Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 10.

22 Ibid., 11 (emphasis mine).
Cultures are not always confined to national borders. French Canadians in Quebec are a cultural sub-group inside the larger Canadian culture. Native peoples of America and Canada maintain their distinct cultures within larger cultures. The former USSR and Yugoslavia were confederations of a variety of cultural groups temporarily bound by national borders. Many Middle Eastern nations currently in the news consist of multiple cultural groups (ethnic and/or religious) with differing ideologies within national borders; while the Kurdish people have no national borders, but are a large ethnic group who live in multiple nations. There are nations who share a common language but have different cultures and their own languages based within a national border – India and Italy come to mind.

European culture is a large and diverse group united as the European Union. Divided into eastern, western, northern, and southern regions, even countries within these regions all have distinct behaviors, languages, religious affiliations, and cuisines to name only a few aspects of culture. Belgium, for instance, has a national border within which Dutch-, German-, and French-speaking peoples live; and each region within the country is quite different from the other regions.

European cultural influence has left residual influence in many parts of the world outside the geography of Europe, a legacy left by expansion of countries such as Britain, Spain, and France. America was also a recipient of all
those cultures and many others brought by people who have immigrated to our shores during our country’s history, and this has made the United States a cultural melting pot. Today, we continue to be influenced by more and more cultures as people from other nations of the world immigrate here.

Cultures can also be made up of multiple groups, with multiple languages, from many nations who share a common bond such as religion. The Orthodox Church considers itself the historically true Christian Church first established by Jesus and his Apostles. Worldwide, the practices are unchanged, since the time St. Paul established the church and practices are expected to be universal, but there are cultural differentiations such as the Russian, Greek, Serbian, or Romanian.

Even within the national culture, the layers of gender, generation, and social class play varying degrees of importance. With all these aspects of culture to consider, a study of culture presents the challenge of where to stop when it comes to determining culture. Clearly, there are many ways of looking at and dividing cultures; and the challenge becomes knowing where to stop making divisions, and how to effectively study distinct groups.

The focus of my thesis is to investigate how cultural differences affect the workplace; therefore, I have studied anthropologists who focused their professional work on studying the cultural differences of working people. Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Hall conducted their research by asking questions
of people in a workplace. As previously established, the first cultural group encountered in life is the one into which we are born, and it is here that each individual learns the foundations of cultural influences that continue through schooling and are brought into the workplace. This cultural imprinting will logically play a major role in the way people behave at work; how they feel about their work; and how they do their jobs. “Societies are composed of a wide variety of individual members, holding a variety of personal values,” says Hofstede, and “degrees of individualism obviously vary within countries as well as between them, so it is . . . important to base the country scores on comparable samples from one country to another. The IBM samples offered this comparability.” The research conducted by Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Hall was for the purpose of measuring entire societies – national cultures – and how culture affected the workplace; it is not meant to provide information about culture on the individual level.

Dimensions of Culture

In the early- to mid-20th century, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead presented the idea that all societies, whether ancient or modern, from primitive to advanced, had the same basic problems; only their response to the problems and how those problems should be solved differed from one society to another.

---

23 Hofstede, *Cultures & Organizations*, 82.

24 Ibid., 76.
Advancing this idea, social scientists attempted to devise a list of what the common problems were that all societies faced. In 1954, Alex Inkeles and Daniel Levinson suggested that there were three issues that qualified as basic problems common to all people:

1. Relationship to authority

2. Concept of self – in particular, the relationship between individual and society – and the individual’s concept of masculinity and femininity

3. Ways of dealing with conflicts including the control of aggression and the expression of feelings

In the late 1960s, Geert Hofstede was asked by IBM to conduct a study to determine how cultural differences affected the work of employees who were performing similar jobs within the multi-national conglomerate, but performing those jobs in different countries and regions of the globe. In his initial study, Hofstede had employees from more than forty countries complete questionnaires. He collected and analyzed the data from more than 100,000 respondents from which he created his initial work. Hofstede grouped people by country because he believes people carry “a set of common mental programs that constitutes its culture.”

Hofstede’s initial studies overlapped with the findings of Inkeles and Levinson, and he created his initial four-dimensional model of differences by

---

25 Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 22.

26 Ibid., 10.
which cultures can be measured. In his own words from his website, Hofstede says:

The values that distinguished countries (rather than individuals) from each other grouped themselves statistically into four clusters. They dealt with four anthropological problem areas that different national societies handle differently: ways of coping with inequality, ways of coping with uncertainty, the relationship of the individual with her or his primary group, and the emotional implications of having been born as a girl or as a boy. These became the Hofstede dimensions of national culture: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, and Masculinity versus Femininity. Between 1990 and 2002, these dimensions were largely replicated in six other cross-national studies on very different populations from consumers to airline pilots, covering between fourteen and twenty-eight countries.27

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner also offer dimensions of national cultures in their book Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business. Their studies are derived from questionnaires completed by more than 30,000 participants – employees and managers from various organizations around the globe. From this research, they produced seven dimensions of culture: universalism versus particularism, individualism versus collectivism, neutral versus affective relationships, specific versus diffused relationships, achievement versus ascription, sequential versus synchronic time, and inner versus outer directed.

Before Hofstede and Trompenaars published their research, Hall published his findings that groups of people could be divided into high-context

---

or low-context societies – the way information is communicated – and into people who had monochromic or polychromic time orientation. These three researchers have been introduced in Chapter 1, as we explored their metaphors for culture: the onion (Hofstede and Trompenaars), and the iceberg (Hall). Now, their concepts of the dimensions of culture will be explored in more detail in the remainder of this section. Hofstede’s work is foundational in my thesis; while Trompenaars and Hall are used for comparison and contrast, or to add further dimensions not explored by Hofstede.

**Hofstede**

Power Distance is the first of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. He defines it as, “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Institutions are the basic elements of society, such as the family, the school and the community; organizations are the places where people work.”

There are key differences in the behavior of individuals who come from small versus large Power Distance cultures, and Figure 2-3 outlines these differences in how people behave in their relations with their community; and in the workplace.

---

28 Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 46.
### Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power-Distance

#### Societies: General Norm, Family, and School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMALL POWER DISTANCE</th>
<th>LARGE POWER DISTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inequalities among people should be minimized.</td>
<td>Inequalities among people are expected and desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships should be handled with care.</td>
<td>Status should be balanced with restraint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be, and there is to some extent, interdependence between less and more powerful people.</td>
<td>Less powerful people should be dependent; they are polarized between dependence and counterdependence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents treat children as equals.</td>
<td>Parents teach children obedience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children treat parents and older relatives as equals.</td>
<td>Respect for parents and older relatives is a basic and lifelong virtue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children play no role in old-age security of parents.</td>
<td>Children are a source of old-age security to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students treat teachers as equals.</td>
<td>Students give teachers respect, even outside of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers expect initiative from students in class.</td>
<td>Teachers should take all initiative in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths.</td>
<td>Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of learning depends on two-way communication and excellence of students.</td>
<td>Quality of learning depends on excellence of teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less educated persons hold more authoritarian values than more educated persons.</td>
<td>Both more and less educated persons show equally authoritarian values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational policy focuses on secondary schools.</td>
<td>Educational policy focuses on universities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power-Distance

#### Societies: The Workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMALL POWER DISTANCE</th>
<th>LARGE POWER DISTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy in organizations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience.</td>
<td>Hierarchy in organizations reflects existential inequality between higher and lower levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization is popular.</td>
<td>Centralization is popular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are fewer supervisory personnel.</td>
<td>There are more supervisory personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a narrow salary range between the top and bottom of the organization.</td>
<td>There is a wide salary range between the top and bottom of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers rely on their own experience and on subordinates.</td>
<td>Managers rely on superiors and on formal rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinates expect to be consulted.</td>
<td>Subordinates expect to be told what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat.</td>
<td>The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat, or “good father.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate-superior relations are pragmatic.</td>
<td>Subordinate-superior relations are emotional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon.</td>
<td>Privileges and status symbols are normal and popular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual work has the same status as office work.</td>
<td>White-collar jobs are valued more than blue-collar jobs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Power Distance begins the same way as all enculturation begins: from birth within the family relationship; it continues as children grow, in the community, and at school. Where a person is in their culture – social class, education level, and gender – will determine their position within the culture, but will not change their cultural imprinting, and the traits learned early in life will be carried over into the workplace. As we can see from the tables in Figure 2-3, in large Power Distance cultures, parents teach their children obedience and respect for elders; teachers take all the initiative in the education of children; and the boss will be an autocrat with employees depending on the boss for direction. In small Power Distance cultures, children are brought up as equals with others in their family. This relationship continues into school; and to the workplace, where autonomy of the individual is expected. Large Power Distance cultures expect deference and respect for superiors, even in the face of corruption; small Power distance cultures will create laws to ensure equality and minimize abuse of power.

The Individual versus the Collective is the next dimension, which Hofstede defines as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.²⁹

²⁹ Hofstede, Cultures & Organizations, 76.
There are marked differences in the behavior of individuals who come from Collectivist versus Individualist cultures as shown in Figure 2-4, most notably the difference in the concept of “we” demonstrated in Collectivist cultures and “I” of the Individualist culture.

“The vast majority of people in our world live in societies in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual,” says Hofstede. This is the collectivist society, a society governed by “the power of the group.”30 This group generally consists of large extended families living close together that may include not only parents and siblings but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even non-family relations such as servants and/or close family ties. Individuals from these cultures are rarely if ever alone. They have no choice about who is part of the in-group; their friends and relationships are pre-determined by the family group; and it is likely that members of the in-group will determine even whom one will marry. To this group – the “we” – mutual dependence develops and lifelong loyalty is owed. Harmony within the in-group is necessary, and infringing on the expectations of the rules of the group produces shame.

30 Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations, 74.
### Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies: Language, Personality, and Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLECTIVIST</th>
<th>INDIVIDUALIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of the word / is avoided.</td>
<td>Use of the word / is encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent self.</td>
<td>Independent self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On personality tests, people score more introvert.</td>
<td>On personality tests, people score more extrovert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing sadness is encouraged, and happiness discouraged.</td>
<td>Showing happiness is encouraged, and sadness discouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slower walking speed.</td>
<td>Faster walking speed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption patterns show dependence on others.</td>
<td>Consumption patterns show self-supporting lifestyles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network is the primary source of information.</td>
<td>Media is the primary source of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A smaller share of both private and public income is spent on health care.</td>
<td>A larger share of both private and public income is spent on health care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled persons are a shame on the family and should be kept out of sight.</td>
<td>Disabled persons should participate as much as possible in normal day-to-day activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies: School and the Workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLECTIVIST</th>
<th>INDIVIDUALIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students only speak up in class when sanctioned by the group.</td>
<td>Students are expected to individually speak up in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of education is learning how to do.</td>
<td>The purpose of education is learning how to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomas provide entry to higher-status groups.</td>
<td>Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational mobility is lower.</td>
<td>Occupational mobility is higher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees are members of in-groups who will pursue their in-group’s interest.</td>
<td>Employees are “economic men” who will pursue the employer’s interest if it coincides with their self-interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring and promotion decisions take an employee’s in-group into account.</td>
<td>Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer-employee relationship is basically moral, like a family link.</td>
<td>The employer-employee relationship is a contract between parties on a labor market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management is management of groups.</td>
<td>Management is management of individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct appraisal of subordinates spoils harmony.</td>
<td>Management training teaches the honest sharing of feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-group customers get better treatment (particularism).</td>
<td>Every customer should get the same treatment (universalism).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship prevails over task.</td>
<td>Task prevails over relationship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4. Traits of Collectivist versus Individualist Societies. Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 97 and 104.
“A minority of people in our world live in societies in which the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group, societies that we will call individualist.”31 These families usually consist of parents and children living together, or even a single parent with children, while other relatives live elsewhere, often far away and not usually seen. This nuclear family emphasizes equality and independence – the “I” – and by adulthood, dependence on others, even parents, is considered a weakness. Selection of friends and future spouses are not pre-arranged. They are voluntary and created based on mutual personal preferences with individuals finding their relations on the playground, at school, at work, or through others with whom they associate. These relationships must be cultivated and can change over time as new friends (or even spouses) are selected, while others are relinquished. Individual conscience is developed in the individualist culture so guilt about violating rules acts as the inner compass.

In the study of culture, masculine versus feminine is not the same as the gender difference of male and female. Men and women have distinct biological differences, and generally have noticeable physical differences, of body, dress, and behavior, but their social sex roles are culturally determined and only partially based on their gender. “Every society recognizes many behaviors, not immediately related to procreation, as more suitable to females or more suitable to males, but which behaviors belong to either gender differs from one society to

31 Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations, 75.
another.”\textsuperscript{32} Since the terms of masculine and feminine are relative based on the culture and not universal, a man crossing his legs incorrectly can be seen as effeminate in one culture while not in another, and a woman seeking professional advancement may seem too masculine in some cultures, yet the norm in others. How a man or a woman should behave is socially imposed and is not universal; therefore, a distinction must be made between gender – the biological male or female – and the cultural dimension of Masculinity-Femininity, and Hofstede offers the following definition:

A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.\textsuperscript{33}

Figure 2-5 shows key difference in the feminine and masculine in societies as seen on page 68.

\textsuperscript{32} Hofstede, \textit{Cultures and Organizations}, 117.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 120.
### Key Differences Between Feminine and Masculine Societies:

#### General Norm and Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships and quality of life are important.</td>
<td>Challenge, earnings, recognition, and advancement are important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both men and women should be modest.</td>
<td>Men should be assertive, ambitious, and tough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both men and women can be tender and focus on relationships.</td>
<td>Women are supposed to be tender and take care of relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the family both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings.</td>
<td>In the family fathers deal with facts and mothers with feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both boys and girls are allowed to cry, but neither should fight.</td>
<td>Girls cry, boys don’t; boys should fight back, girls shouldn’t fight at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys and girls play for the same reasons.</td>
<td>Boys play to compete, girls to be together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridegrooms and brides are held to the same standards.</td>
<td>Brides need to be chaste and industrious, grooms don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbands should be like boyfriends.</td>
<td>Husbands should be healthy, wealthy, and understanding, and boyfriends should be fun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Differences Between Feminine and Masculine Societies:

#### The Workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management as ménage: intuition and consensus.</td>
<td>Management as manège: decisive and aggressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution of conflicts by compromise and negotiation.</td>
<td>Resolution of conflicts by letting the strongest win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards are based on equality.</td>
<td>Rewards are based on equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for smaller organizations.</td>
<td>Preference for larger organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People work in order to live.</td>
<td>People live in order to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More leisure time is preferred over more money.</td>
<td>More money is preferred over more leisure time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers are optional for both genders.</td>
<td>Careers are compulsory for men, optional for women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a higher share of working women in professional jobs.</td>
<td>There is a lower share of working women in professional jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanization of work by contact and cooperation.</td>
<td>Humanization of work by job content enrichment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive agriculture and service industries.</td>
<td>Competitive manufacturing and bulk chemistry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Figure 2-5. Differences between Feminine and Masculine Societies. Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 132 and 142.
At this juncture, the reader is reminded that Hofstede’s studies were conducted to determine the cultural differences of IBM workers who held the same position in the company but performed that job in one of over forty countries worldwide; therefore, what is being reported is the comparison of cultures of entire societies, rather than individuals within the society. The Masculinity-Femininity dimension derived its name from the discovery that it was the only category in the study, with few exceptions, where gender – whether one was male or female – proved to be a systematic difference in how a person answered the questionnaire. With that information, countries were divided into masculine with strong traits such as tough-mindedness, dealing with facts, competitiveness, and operating on survival mode; and feminine with strong traits toward tenderness, dealing with feelings, being cooperative, and interested in well-being.

“What is Different is Dangerous” is the title of Hofstede’s chapter on the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance and the measurement of the tolerance or intolerance of ambiguity that people have. Another more colloquial phrase would be, “the devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know,” which speaks to the preference that it is better to tolerate something that is undesirable, but known, rather than risk experiencing the unknown. Hofstede found this preference to be culturally based: part of the cultural heritage passed down, reinforced from the family, and from the state. He describes this cultural
dimension as follows: “Uncertainty avoidance can . . . be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or uncertain situations. This feeling is, among other things, expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability: a need for written and unwritten rules.”

Anxiety – the feeling of uneasiness or worry about what may happen – is not controllable, because it has no object. “Anxiety and uncertainty are both diffuse feelings. Anxiety . . . has no object. Uncertainty has no probability attached to it. [These are] situation[s] in which anything can happen and we have no idea what.” As humans we have created coping mechanisms for dealing with the anxiety that ambiguity brings – technology, law, and religion – but these are not foolproof nor do they protect us from all eventualities. One needs only look at the current events in the aftermath of the earthquake and subsequent Tsunami in Japan on March 11, 2011 to see that all the engineering, planning, and training put in place to prevent damage from inevitable earthquakes in Japan did not prevent the loss of life and possible nuclear disaster that is still unfolding. But anxiety over uncertainty and ambiguity is subjective and culturally based as shown in Figure 2-6:

34 Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, 167.

35 Ibid., 172.
### Key Differences Between Weak and Strong Uncertainty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Weak Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty is a normal feature of life, and each day is accepted as it comes.</td>
<td>The uncertainty inherent in life is a continuous threat that must be fought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low stress and low anxiety.</td>
<td>High stress and high anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression and emotions should not be shown.</td>
<td>Aggression and emotions may at proper times and places be ventilated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In personality tests, higher scores on agreeableness.</td>
<td>In personality tests, higher scores on neuroticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable in ambiguous situations and with unfamiliar risks.</td>
<td>Acceptance of familiar risks; fear of ambiguous situations and of unfamiliar risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenient rules for children on what is dirty and taboo.</td>
<td>Firm rules for children on what is dirty and taboo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak superegos developed.</td>
<td>Strong superegos developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar modes of address for different others.</td>
<td>Different modes of address for different others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is different is curious.</td>
<td>What is different is dangerous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life is relaxed.</td>
<td>Family life is stressful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In affluent Western countries, more children.</td>
<td>In affluent Western countries, fewer children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Differences Between Weak and Strong Uncertainty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Weak Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More changes of employer, shorter service.</td>
<td>Fewer changes of employer, longer service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be no more rules than strictly necessary.</td>
<td>There is an emotional need for rules, even if these will not work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working only when needed.</td>
<td>There is an emotional need to be busy and an inner urge to work hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is a framework for orientation.</td>
<td>Time is money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is tolerance for ambiguity and chaos.</td>
<td>There is a need for precision and formalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in generalists and common sense.</td>
<td>Belief in experts and technical solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top managers are concerned with strategy.</td>
<td>Top managers are concerned with daily operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More new trademarks.</td>
<td>Fewer new trademarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on decision process.</td>
<td>Focus on decision content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapreneurs are relatively free from rules.</td>
<td>Intrapreneurs are constrained by existing rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are fewer self-employed people.</td>
<td>There are more self-employed people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better at invention, worse at implementation.</td>
<td>Worse at invention, better at implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation by achievement and esteem or belonging.</td>
<td>Motivation by security and esteem or belonging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anxious cultures – cultures that have a high aversion to uncertainty – tend to be cultures where outward expression of emotion is acceptable: where people talk with their hands or raise their voice in public. Cultures where uncertainty avoidance is low, disapprove of emotional or noisy expression.

Uncertainty avoidance is an attempt to reduce ambiguity, which leads to anxiety, and is not the same thing as risk avoidance. Like fear, risk has a “name”; it is known and can be assessed such as the risk of driving a car or skydiving. Hofstede’s research correlated the level of uncertainty avoidance and prejudice toward minorities (present or past), immigrants, refugees, people of different faiths, and citizens of other countries generally. While unfortunate, cultures that have strong uncertainty avoidance view the differences of other people and cultures as dangerous while cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance are generally more tolerant.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Fons Trompenaars is a Dutch business consultant who administered a questionnaire to employees and managers from various organizations in various countries around the world. Feedback from this questionnaire, which he, and his British colleague and business partner, Charles Hampden-Turner devised evolved the seven dimensions of culture documented in their book, *Riding the Waves of Culture*. In the Introduction to the book, they are clear that the book is not about understanding people of different nationalities, but a book about
“cultural differences and how they affect the process of doing business and managing.”\textsuperscript{36} While their primary focus is the impact of culture on business, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner have offered seven dimensions of culture as shown in Figure 2-7:


\textsuperscript{36} Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, \textit{Riding the Waves of Culture}, 1.
This thesis will consider the five dimensions of how we relate to other people. Those dimensions are Universalism versus Particularism, Individualism versus Communitarianism, Affective versus Neutral, Specific versus Diffuse, and Achievement versus Ascription.

Universalism versus Particularism could also be called rules versus relationships, with a culture determining what is important: rules and laws or personal relationships? On which end of the spectrum a culture operates determines whether rules, laws, and standards of behavior are move valued, or interpersonal relationships govern behavior.

Universalism or rules-based cultures prefer codified laws set in place to ensure order and adherence to appropriate ways of behavior, and to determine what is right. Concepts like the Golden Rule or religious laws such as the Ten Commandments are preferred, so that everyone knows what is expected of them, and how to appropriately behave. Trains are on time, punctuality is expected, traffic laws are followed, and contracts are written to define agreements. The needs of society take precedence over the needs of the individual, including friends and family.

Particularism or relationship-based cultures put emphasis on the needs of the individual over the needs of society. There are rules in particularistic cultures, and these determine how people interact with each other, but the rules are flexible, and what is right is determined by the circumstances and the
concern of friends and intimates. Deals and agreements are made based on friendship and may be solidified with a handshake rather than a formal contract.

“In practice we use both kinds of judgment, and in most situations we encounter they reinforce each other.”

It would not be possible to define rules without acknowledging there are at least some exceptions to them, some circumstances that simply don’t fit the pre-determined laws, and that alternative ways of thinking and acting are required. There are no cultures that operate at the extreme ends of the Universalism versus Particularism spectrum, so we all operate somewhere along the continuum with the knowledge that only in relationships are rules necessary.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s second cultural dimension is Individualism versus Communitarianism, or the individual versus the group. This is the orientation of a culture toward a prime interest in being an “I” or a “we”; being self- or group-oriented. Individualist cultures expect members of the society to take care of themselves, their individual happiness and fulfillment; seek as much individual freedom as possible; work toward singling themselves out for achievement and recognition; and take personal responsibility. Communitarian cultures have a prime interest in being part of a group or groups and achieving together for the greater good of the group and society, take joint responsibility, and achieve through cooperation. The findings of

37 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, Riding the Waves of Culture, 32.
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner in this dimension are virtually the same as Hofstede’s findings for his Individualism versus Collectivism dimension.

Reason or emotion are the primary drivers of relationships between people; and whether people within a culture choose to keep their emotions and reactions carefully controlled, and subdued, or openly express their feelings is what Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner call Affective versus Neutral dimension.

Members of cultures which are affectively neutral do not telegraph their feelings but keep them carefully controlled and subdued. In contrast, in cultures high in affectivity people show their feelings plainly by laughing, smiling, grimacing, scowling and gesturing; they attempt to find immediate outlet for their feelings. We should be careful not to over-interpret such differences. Neutral cultures are not necessarily cold or unfeeling, or are they emotionally constipated or repressed. The amount of emotion we show is often the result of convention.38

Affected cultures display thoughts and feelings verbally and non-verbally, and without inhibition. They allow for free flow of emotions, are transparent and expressive, willingly display affection, and may dramatically deliver their statements. Neutral cultures attempt to keep emotions hidden, stay cool and self-controlled in their conduct, do not display affection, and choose not to reveal what they are thinking or feeling. Hofstede’s research has an element of the differences in cultures willing to outwardly express emotion in the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension, saying that cultures that have a low tolerance for uncertainty will be outwardly expressive – Affected – while

38 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture*, 70.
cultures with a high tolerance for uncertainty will tend to keep their expression of emotions to a minimum – Neutral.

How far we get involved is the idea behind the cultural dimension of Specific versus Diffuse, and relates to the extent to which members of the society keep their personal lives segregated from their professional life. In Specific societies, work life and private life are separate entities, with sharp divisions between public and private dimensions of life. A manager in a Specific culture will direct the work of individuals when on the job, but if the manager meets his subordinates outside of work, the manager/subordinate relationship does not carry over, and there can be different relationships forged with different balances of power. In Diffuse societies, work and private life are integrated and the authority a manager carries in the workplace will be maintained outside the workplace, where subordinates will continue to consider their boss a person of authority, and give their boss the appropriate respect.

How status is assigned to members of a culture is the concept behind Achievement versus Ascription. In Achievement cultures, the status of an individual is given based on their accomplishments, while in Ascription cultures, status is provided on the basis of age, class, or education to name a few. The first is based on doing; the second on being. “A culture may ascribe higher status to its better educated employees in the belief that scholarly success will
lead to corporate success”\(^{39}\), which contrasts with, “the theory . . . that once you start rewarding business achievement, the process is self-perpetuating. People [will] work hard to assure themselves of the esteem of their culture. . . .\(^{40}\) In an achievement-oriented society, titles are generally only utilized when the circumstance is appropriate – Dr. Smith when in a professional setting, but Stephen Smith when in a social setting – while titles will consistently be used in all situations to enhance the status of the individual in all aspects of life in an ascription-oriented society.

Specific and diffuse cultures are sometimes called low and high context. Context has to do with how much you have to know before effective communication can occur, how much shared knowledge is taken for granted by those in conversation with each other, how much reference there is to tacit common ground. Cultures with high context . . . believe strangers must be “filled in” before business can be properly discussed. Cultures with low context . . . believe that each stranger should share in the rule-making, and the fewer initial structures there are the better. Low-context cultures tend to be adaptable and flexible. High-context cultures are rich and subtle, but carry a lot of “baggage” and may never really be comfortable for foreigners who are not fully assimilated.

There is a tendency for specific cultures to look at objects, specifics and things before considering how these are related. The general tendency for diffuse cultures is to look at relationships and connections before considering all the separate pieces. The configuration is circular.\(^{41}\)

We will now discuss high- versus low-context cultures as presented by Hall.

\(^{39}\) Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. *Riding the Waves of Culture*, 105.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 107.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 92.
Considered the founding father of the study of intercultural communication, Edward Hall was an anthropologist, prepared foreign service agency personnel for service in other cultures, was a professor, and traveled extensively in Europe and Japan in particular to formulate his concepts of culture. “Edward Hall was the first person to use the term *intercultural communication* while studying culture as it relates to cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding.”\(^{42}\) He wrote books about his cultural experiences living on Native American reservations, and developed his concepts of proxemics – distances people keep from one another – about monochromic and polychromic time – performing tasks one at a time, or handling multiple tasks at one time, while subordinating those tasks to interpersonal relationships – and his concept of high-context and low-context cultures. He continued to write and teach about culture, but it is his concept of high- and low-context that is important for this thesis.

High-context cultures are found in the majority of cultures in the world, the result of the majority of people living in Collectivist (Hofstede) or Communitarian (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner) cultures where one’s identity is rooted within in-groups that create a high degree of stability in relations, and context or pre-programmed knowledge is built-up allowing

people to communicate without the need to explicitly explain the context – much is taken for granted. High use of the non-verbal aspects of communication like facial expression and gestures carry more significance, and verbal communication is indirect. “A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.”43

Low-context cultures are more Individualist and require much more explanation of the details surrounding the information to be transmitted to understand the context – very little is taken for granted. It is possible for high-context relationships to form in a low-context culture – twins and long-term intimate relationships can develop internalized understanding of what is being communicated. Generally, however, people in low-context cultures are people with an identity rooted in individual accomplishment, and communication is seen as a way to exchange information, ideas, and opinions with little context. Messages are carried in words rather than non-verbal communication and speed of communication is valued. “A low-context (LC) communication is . . . the mass of information . . . vested in the explicit code.”44


44 Ibid.
This chapter has offered a few theories about the origins, layers, and dimensions of culture: but what is the importance of this information? The world in which we currently live presents many of us with the opportunity to meet and work with people from outside our own narrow cultural understanding, and it is natural for cultural differences to cause misunderstanding or conflict if information and understanding are not sought. Knowledge of the layers and dimension of culture make us all cognizant of the deeper layers of culture that we cannot see but direct behavior and communication and affect relationships, whether personal or professional. Gaining knowledge and sensitivity, and approaching intercultural encounters with openness to the differences in others will allow for better relationships and increased productivity. Therefore, Chapter 3 will focus on intercultural communication, and what has been deemed Cultural Intelligence: the theory that understanding the impact of an individual’s cultural background is essential to understanding their behavior, and essential for effective intercultural business and social relationships.
CHAPTER 3

MANAGING CULTURAL CONFLICT THROUGH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THE ART OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

The real challenge for all of us . . . is to accept the idea that another culture can be different without being defective.

-- Richard Pells, Not Like Us: How Europeans have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II

This chapter applies the concepts of culture – the metaphors, layers, and definitions discussed in previous chapters – to explore management of intercultural conflict through communication and the art of cultural intelligence.

Up to this point in the thesis, research, which compares cultures on a national level, has been presented. However, cultures are made up of individuals who communicate with one another; therefore, in this chapter, we will switch from the macro level of cultural relations to the micro level in order to discuss communication between individuals and work groups. At this micro level of culture, Ting-Tooney defines a culture as:

A cultural community refers to a group of interacting individuals within a bounded unit who uphold a set of shared traditions and way of life. This unit can refer to a geographic locale with clear-cut boundaries such as a nation. This unit can also refer to a set of shared beliefs and values that are subscribed to by a group of individuals who perceive themselves as united. . . . The term culture here is used as a frame of reference or knowledge system that is shared by a large group of interacting individuals within a perceived bounded unit who uphold a set of shared traditions and way of life.”

1 Stella Ting-Toomey, Communicating Across Cultures (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 18.
As we have learned, culture is acquired behavior, and each culture creates its own traditions, norms, values, and beliefs. These are shared by a group of people in order to respond most effectively to the challenges they face in a given environment. We have also learned that intercultural contact and communication is not new; it began as soon as the first human groups encountered one another. What is new about intercultural contact is the extent to which we can now interact with others from around the world.

No longer are we limited to contact with tribal groups who live nearby or with traders who travel through the region. We live in a world where more and more people travel to and settle in cultures that are not native to them. We live in a world that lives and thinks at the speed of light; we live in the world of the Internet; we live in a world of smart phones and satellite communication. From our living rooms, people in most parts of the world can be connected via any or all of these methods, which allows for at least a “tip of the iceberg” relationship with people from myriad cultures. As such, learning about other cultures, and how to communicate with people from a variety of cultures is becoming a necessity. “In this era of global economy, it is inevitable that [people] of dissimilar cultures are in constant contact with one another.”

All communication is cultural, because it draws on the cultural constructs we have learned from birth, and because even if we are not speaking – verbal

---

2 Ting-Toomey, *Communicating Across Cultures*, 4.
communication – we are communicating via body language, expressions, and other forms of non-verbal communication. Both verbal and non-verbal communication is the basis for all human interaction, and without a common language, “a group of people would not be able to establish and perpetuate a culture. They would be unable to share their beliefs, values, social norms, and worldview with one another or transmit these cultural characteristics to succeeding generations.”³ This is how culture is learned, passed down from one generation to the next and from one segment of the culture to the next, to create a cultural community. In the interconnected world in which we now live, it is equally true that without a common language – whether as a first or second language or through an interpreter – people from different cultures cannot speak to one another and communicate to conduct business or establish relationships. Even with a common language, however, our ability to successfully interact and coexist with people who have different cultural backgrounds – norms, customs, beliefs, values, habits, lifestyles, and worldviews – can prove difficult.

Communication with people who are similar to each other – people from like social groups or cultures - is homophilous. Communications with people who are dissimilar – from different cultures for the purposes of this discussion – are heterophilous. Within the United States, both types of communication are

commonplace; therefore, learning to be tolerant of the beliefs, worldviews, values, and behaviors of people from familiar and unfamiliar groups is necessary if we are to communicate effectively.

“Cross-cultural involves comparisons of communication across cultures. Intercultural communication involves communication between people from different cultures.”

Communication on both levels is an exchange of meaning, and involves a sender and receiver. These messages are communicated via both verbal and non-verbal methods, and culture and context determine how the receiver computes and understands the message sent. Even under the best of circumstances, miscommunication occurs, and the more significant the cultural differences between the communicators, the higher the chances for miscommunication and misinterpretation.

As previously stated, I live in a Western culture, thus my views are decidedly Western. Further, Western scholars have conducted most of the research done on intercultural communication, cultural intelligence, and management of people across cultures. Therefore, the information offered here continues to be from a Western point of view.

“The study of communication in Western culture has a recorded history of some 2,500 years and is said to have begun in Greece with Aristotle’s Rhetoric

---

and Poetics, which described the process of communication as involving a speaker, the speech act, an audience, and a purpose. . .”\textsuperscript{5} The theory of communication has advanced since Aristotle. McDaniel, Sanovar, and Porter define communication as having eight components:

1. \textit{Sender} – The individual or group originating the message, be it social, occupational, or information driven.

2. \textit{Message} – The information the sender desires to have understood – what is used to create meaning. These can be verbal or non-verbal and are encoded and transmitted via a channel.

3. \textit{Channel} – Any means that provides a path for moving the message from the sender to the receiver, such as an oral message sent directly by voice or a visual, non-verbal message.

4. \textit{Receiver} – The intended recipient of the message. Because the receiver interprets the messages and assigns a meaning, which may or may not be what the sender proposed, and the receiver may (mis)interpret the message.

5. \textit{Response} – After the message is interpreted by the receiver, and an interpretation assigned, the receiver will formulate a response.

6. \textit{Feedback} – Related to but separate from the response, feedback allows for a qualitative evaluation to the effectiveness of a message. Once the sender decodes the response of the receiver, the sender may rephrase, amplify, or retract the message.

7. \textit{Environment} – Physical such as the actual place where the communication takes place and contextual, e.g. formal versus informal, depending on the situation or to whom the sender is speaking.

8. \textit{Noise} – Interference or distractions that plague every communication event can be psychological or physiological.

\textsuperscript{5} Fred Jandt, \textit{An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community}, 6\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2010), 41.
“Collectively, these eight components provide an overview of factors that facilitate and shape ongoing communication encounters. Also of importance is the role of culture in each component, which is especially influential in intercultural communication.”

Communication has both verbal and non-verbal components, and it is estimated that from fifty-five to more than ninety percent of communication is non-verbal depending on whether the individual comes from a high- or low-context culture. Factors that affect verbal communication include the speed at which one talks, intonation, and decibel level. Non-verbal communication includes body movement, posture, eye contact, touching, gesturing, facial expressions, perceptions of personal space, and use of silence. Use of verbal and non-verbal communication is inextricably linked, and differences in the use of the same word that carries different meanings; or how silence, gestures, expressions, and personal space are used in different cultures can be extreme. They can lead to misinterpretation, which, in turn, can result in confusion or even insults. As an example, the “thumbs-up” gesture is regularly utilized in the United States to convey positive affirmation or agreement with something; in Brazil is the same gesture is considered an obscenity. A word as simple as football might also cause confusion. In the United States, football is played with 11 men facing each other and attempting to run or throw an oblong ball into the end zone; in Canadian

football the team increases to 12 men and play is on a shorter but wider field; in Australia the team consists of 18 men with the object of kicking the ball between two uprights (which is only a field goal in American football); while football in other parts of the world is what an American would call soccer and is open to men and women.7

The phrase, “two nations divided by a common language” refers to England and America, but Australia and India could just as easily be added to that comment, as we all may speak English. However, we often have no idea what the other is saying because different words are used to mean the same thing or the same words have markedly different meanings as is comically illustrated by Neuliep:

Jim (American): So, Bridget, are you enjoying your first few days in the U.S.?

Bridget (British): Yes, but I am a bit paggered, you know. Got pissed last night.

Jim: Oh. . . . sorry . . . are you having problems with someone? Can I help?

Bridget: Not a’tall, oh no, nothing traumatic, just farty things, you know. Nothing to have a dicky fit over.

Jim: Ah, yeah, right.

(Jim’s girlfriend, Betsy, enters the room).

Betsy: Hello.

Jim: Hi Betsy! Hey, this is Bridget, She’s from England.

Betsy: Hi Bridget.

---

Bridget: Hello. Nice to meet you. Jim and I were just having a bit of intercourse. Won’t you join us?

Betsy: You were WHAT? (leaves the room)

Jim: (Running after her) No! Betsy, that’s not true! We were just talking! I swear!8

If people speaking the same language cannot easily communicate with each other, what hope do we have to be successful at communicating with individuals who have English as their secondary language, especially when different cultural contexts are added into the mix? Cultural awareness by use of the knowledge of cultural dimensions already outlined and developing cultural intelligence become critically important!

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

What is cultural intelligence? Pulling from academic fields of anthropology, cognitive and cross-cultural psychology, sociology, and management, the study of cultural intelligence is relatively new, but refers to “the notion that there exists a social intelligence separate from the cognitive skills often thought to underlie general intelligence.”9 As far back as 1920, Edward Thorndike postulated that, “by social intelligence is meant the ability to understand and


manage men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations.”

Since that time, various academics have attempted to measure and evaluate social intelligence which, since the late twentieth century, has morphed into studies of cultural intelligence. Earley and Ang note:

The challenge for an international sojourner is that in highly novel cultures, most of the cues and behaviors that are familiar may be lacking, so entirely new interpretations and behaviors are required. A person who is able to generate such new and appropriate response has high cultural intelligence, or CQ, in our usage.

Earley and Ang more succinctly define cultural intelligence as “A persons capacity for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context.” To expand, they offer the following three aspects of cultural intelligence:

1. **Cognitive** – Skills that are used to create new specific conceptualizations of how to function and operate within a new culture, as well as cultural specific knowledge.

2. **Motivational** – Understand the culture, at the same time feel motivated to engage others in the new setting; adapt and adjust to the cultural setting.

3. **Behavioral** – Engage in behaviors that are adaptive. Behaviors need to reflect cognition and motivation by generating appropriate behaviors in a new cultural setting.

---


11 Earley and Ang, *Cultural Intelligence*, xii.

12 Ibid., 9.

13 Ibid., 9-11.
Intercultural competence is “broadly defined as appropriate and effective communication and behavior in intercultural situations,”14 says Deardorff in her Preface to *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. She further offers, “Intercultural competence is a lifelong process; there is no pinnacle at which someone becomes ‘interculturally competent.’”15 Her research polled twenty three intercultural experts to determine the components of intercultural competence shown in Figure 3-1 on the top of page 97:

For the sojourner who is going to be sent to live in a foreign country, to work, study, or even vacation, the skills offered by Deardorff are critical to the success of the expatriate endeavor. Being respectful of the culture in which the individual will spend time; being flexible about differences; and exhibiting a willingness to accept and inculcate those differences as normative rather than judging them as right or wrong is essential. Therefore, being non-judgmental will certainly improve the endeavor for all concerned individuals who are faced with living in another culture, whether for travel, school, work; or permanently immigrating to that country. Thorndike, Earley and Ang, and other researchers have studied certain individuals whom they believe are more naturally predisposed to being open to this level of openness and flexibility; others who


15 Ibid., xiii.
have lived in multiple cultures or are less bound to their native culture, have an easier time of adapting. But what about those who do not have this naturally occurring flexibility? Can they learn these skills? If the number of intercultural business consultants and training programs available to individuals and businesses is any indication, the answer is yes - those offered an opportunity to learn about cultural differences have at least a chance to become more open to
differences. However, even the best training is only as good as a willing participant.

Firsthand experience to include living in a culture and spending time with people from that culture will always be the best way to learn about and adapt to a new culture, but that may come after the sojourner has already relocated. Reading about the culture in which an individual will visit or live to include history, geography, religion, politics, foods, arts, and dress seems to be minimum preparation. Learning the “do’s and don’ts” of a culture (e.g. thumbs-up gesture) is also helpful. A cross-cultural training program could be extremely beneficial and would cover the following information:

1. Definition of the culture to include explanation of how it will manifest in interactions with people from the culture

2. Identification of the key values and assumptions of one’s native culture

3. Identification of key values and assumptions of the target culture

4. Identification of key differences between the native and new culture, focusing on the differences, challenges, surprises, and problems and how to deal with them successfully

5. Content dealing with culture shock and cultural adjustment

Sorti also recommends the use of the cultural iceberg metaphor to emphasize the visible and invisible (unconscious) aspects of a culture.\textsuperscript{16}

Most of us will never relocate to another culture, however, so what is needed is information for the rest of us who stay at home and encounter people in our personal and professional lives? Conceptual and theoretical information about intercultural competence is helpful, but only to a point. What is needed is a practical framework to utilize the information provided in this thesis and put it to use in our daily lives, be it personal or professional.

The assumption that people are people – that we all have the same basic needs so we can all just relax and be ourselves, behaving as our native culture dictates with everyone, regardless of their native culture, and everything will work out fine - may be well-intentioned but naive, and will often cause a lot of frustration for all involved. The individual who comes from a culture where eye contact is not appropriate will often be viewed as trying to hide something or as having little self-esteem to someone from a culture where direct eye contact is the norm. In some cultures, individuals expect to be given specific instructions before beginning a project. These workers will be frustrated by managers from cultures where an expectation exists that minimal instructions should be given, since these managers respect the worker’s right to complete the work independently. In such cases, if the work is not completed, the manager will believe the worker is incompetent. These scenarios create frustration, but miscommunication between individuals from different cultures who have difficulty communicating because of the nuances of word meaning, or present
with cultural differences such as mistrust of authority figures can have tragic consequences in a healthcare setting.

In all intercultural exchanges, more sensitivity is needed, but how can this be accomplished? Within settings such as the workplace, some level of familiarity can be established, and knowledge of the cultural origin of individuals who work together can be considered. This knowledge will be very useful to create an environment of cooperation and sensitivity to different cultural norms. Difficulty will arise, however, in chance encounters with individuals from other cultures, but developing patience for non-native speakers in our culture, and trying to pick up on non-verbal cues, will allow for more productive conversation in all circumstances. Offering the other person the benefit of the doubt, practicing listening skills, speaking more slowly to individuals who are clearly non-native speakers of the language, and picking up on gestures is always appropriate!

In order to understand intercultural differences and how they affect communication and workplace cooperation, it is necessary to have a basis for how cultures differ. Chapter 2 outlined the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, and Hall; Chapter 3 goes deeper into methods for better communication and mitigation of conflict by connecting the cultural dimensions to specific situations that will increase effective intercultural relations. “Understanding where cultures fall on the various dimensions of
cultural variability alone has tremendous practical value in improving the qualities of our communications.”¹⁷ I will start with Hall’s high- and low-context communication because our ability to effectively communicate is critical to even the most basic of relationships.

To reiterate the high- and low-context communication styles, high-context generally refers to communication with a high degree of “nonverbal subtleties and interpreter-sensitive values [where] the receiver or interpreter of the messages assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meanings of the message.”¹⁸ High-context cultures are generally communitarian cultures where in-groups are the norm, as such, people don’t need to provide explicit messages – the context of the message will be indirect with high use of non-verbal communication and through channels such as silence, tone of voice, or pauses to convey the message. By contrast, low-context cultures require “explicit verbal messages to convey personal thoughts, opinions, and feelings.”¹⁹

Individualist cultures are low-context and it is assumed that the sender has the responsibility to provide a clear, direct, and persuasive message to communicate meaning with minimal non-verbal required communication. Ting-Toomey


¹⁸ Ting-Toomey, Communicating Across Cultures, 101.

¹⁹ Ibid.
offers a scenario that illustrates the frustration that may occur when neighbors from a high- and a low-context culture are in conversation:

Chinese: We’re going to New Orleans this weekend.

American: What fun! I wish we were going with you. How long are you going to be there?

Chinese: Three days. [I hope she’ll offer me a ride to the airport.]

American: [If she wants a ride, she’ll ask me.] Have a great time.

Chinese: [If she had wanted to give me a ride, she would have offered it. I’d better ask somebody else.] Thanks, I’ll see you when I get back.20

The American neighbor – low-context – has the expectation that the Chinese neighbor will be comfortable asking for a ride to the airport, if one is needed while the Chinese neighbor – high-context – has an expectation that the American will infer from their conversation that a ride is needed. These differences, even between two individuals who have a level of familiarity, have created a divide where both missed the opportunity to fully communicate. Had each known more about the different styles and expectations for the conversation, one or both could have kept those differences in mind and been better able to ask for or offer what was needed – a ride to the airport.

Hall and Hall offer the following expansion on the differences:

High-context people are apt to become impatient and irritated when low-context people insist on giving them information they don’t need.

---

20 Ting-Toomey, Communicating Across Cultures, 105.
Conversely, low-context people are at a loss when high-context people do not provide enough information. One of the great communications challenges in life is to find the appropriate level of contexting needed in each situation. Too much information leads people to feel they are being talked down to; too little information can mystify them or make them feel left out. Ordinarily, people make these adjustments automatically in their own country, but in other countries their messages frequently miss the target.\textsuperscript{21}

As shown and explained, conversations between individuals from high- and low-context cultures can cause frustration, misunderstanding, hurt feelings, anger, and, in the workplace, loss of productivity. I have personally experienced the difference between my low-context cultural assumption when communicating via e-mail, and my high-context Indian boss who finds my extensive explanations tiresome and unnecessary. Conversely, I am frustrated with his single-word or one-sentence answers to complex questions. Thankfully this situation is not a case where he believes I am talking down to him or that I assume his lack of knowledge. He just doesn’t believe so much information is necessary, while I believe he needs to have all the facts to make informed decisions about human resource matters. To mitigate this cultural difference, I have found that face-to-face communication is more productive.

Both Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst have utilized the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, and I will utilize their work to expand on practical application of

\footnote{21 Edward Hall and Mildred Reed Hall, \textit{Understanding Cultural Differences} (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990), 9.}

98
the dimensions of Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance.

Individualism emphasizes, “the importance of individual identity over group identity, individual rights over group rights, and individual needs over group needs. Individualism promotes self-efficiency, individual responsibilities, and personal autonomy.” The emphasis on “I” is pervasive in individualist cultures and values such as directness, honesty, fairness, equality, and social recognition for individual effort is valued and expected. Managers in individualist cultures should allow for employees to exercise independent judgment when performing work tasks, individual recognition for a job well done, and rewards such as pay-for-performance bonuses.

Collectivism, in contrast, “refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture in emphasizing the importance of “we” identity over the “I” identity, group rights over individual rights, in-group-oriented needs over individual wants and desires. Collectivism promotes relational interdependence, in-group harmony, and in-group collaborative spirit.” Harmony, respect for authorities and matriarchs/patriarchs of the family or group, equality of rewards, and putting the needs of others on par with or above the needs of the individual are common values in collectivist cultures.

---

22 Ting-Toomey, Communicating Across Cultures, 67.

23 Ibid., 67.
All cultures and groups have some percentage of individualist and collectivist tendencies, although the degree is stronger at one end of the continuum than the other. Labor unions are common throughout the world, but with their collectivist practices are an odd hybrid in individualist cultures. They often cause conflict in the workplace, not only because the relationship of us (union) versus them (organization) is an unfortunate standard, but because individualist workers are in a culture that expects autonomy, individual achievement, and looking after oneself; union members find themselves in the untenable position of relying on the group to succeed or fail, which, in my experiences makes the relationship between worker and employer all the more difficult.

While we all hold individualists and collectivists values, members of a work team who come from strong individualist cultures may have a hard time appreciating the value of participation in a group project, while collectivist members will excel as they naturally cooperate to achieve the group goals. Individualists will have a tendency to prefer working on their own, and it may be valuable to find tasks that require individual efforts that can be brought back to the group, rather than asking the individualist to work with one or more others. Further motivation for individualists to participate in and assist with achieving group goals is to accentuate the personal benefits of cooperation (e.g. resume building, gaining experience from more senior members of the team).
“Power distance as the ‘extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally.’”\textsuperscript{24} In large power distance cultures, workers have an expectation of a hierarchical system where they are subordinate and will have their work directed by superiors (whether because of age or title or experience, or all of these). In small power distance cultures, the general expectation would be that the organizational structure is flatter with less power distance between boss and subordinate, but there is still an expectation that a subordinate is expected to perform as their supervisor requests, and an expectation that disciplinary consequences will result, if work is not complete or expectations are not met. Further, even in small power distance cultures, the workplace is one arena where it is possible to encounter situations where the power distance is quite large, particularly in larger organizations. Nonetheless, workers in small power distance cultures have a reasonable expectation that their boss will be available to them; that their opinions will be valued; that they will have flexibility to achieve work assignments with a degree of autonomy; that they will be rewarded for individual achievements; and that the organization has avenues for reporting abuse of power.

“Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations and the extent to

which they try to avoid these situations.”

Cultures with weak or low uncertainty avoidance will be more inclined to risk taking, tolerance for new ideas, informal rules, ambiguity, and expect conflict to be natural part of relationships (personal and professional). Cultures with strong or high uncertainty avoidance will prefer stability, clear procedures and guidelines, rules and laws, established hierarchies (personal and professional), and little conflict. Workers in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures will change jobs or even careers for advancement or personal enrichment/fulfillment and expect their boss to spend his/her time on strategic problems with less involvement in day-to-day operations, which leaves the worker ample opportunity for desired personal achievement. Workers in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures will value career stability and expect their boss to be involved at every level of their jobs, including providing precise instructions and having all the answers. The mantra of those who have a strong aversion to uncertainty is: What is different is dangerous, while members of weak uncertainty avoidance cultures accept new and novel and different as exciting and even invigorating.

The work of Trompennaars and Hampden-Turner is focused on the impact of culture on business. Management solutions are often not wholly transferable from one culture to the next so the Western idea of pay-for-performance, for example, which motivates an individualist, will fail to motivate in collectivist

---

cultures where group success is valued. Their goal is to “dispel the notion that there is ‘one best way of managing and organizing’”\(^{26}\) and stress flexibility in making choices about how to create success in business across cultures.

Respecting and reconciling cultural differences is the key to working successfully together. “We are all creatures of our culture. The problem is to learn to go beyond our own model. . . .”\(^{27}\) It should be the goal of every individual who wishes to be interculturally competent to find ways to allow for the differences of others without evaluating their behavior negatively, simply because their ways are different than the norms of our own culture. Different is just different, even if frustrating; allowing for differences allows for the possibility to work toward reconciling them. Using the example of universalism versus particularism, these are not opposites but part of a continuum between rules and exceptions to rules for the sake of relationships. We all have both tendencies in our natures, and a willingness to look for an alternative way of viewing a situation – putting oneself in the shoes of the other – allows for the possibility of reconciling cultural differences. The challenge we all face in the global environment in which we all live is the willingness to be flexible enough to consider alternative views and ways of thinking and acting.


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 201.
Mitigating Intercultural Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of life, whether we are dealing with people from different cultures or friends and close personal relations. It can be managed or reduced, but cannot be eliminated. How one deals with conflict is culturally determined because conflict arises from differences in our basic cultural assumptions. Ting-Toomey defines intercultural conflict as:

In the context of intercultural encounters, conflict is defined . . . as the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties from different cultures over substantive and/or relational issues. Such differences are often expressed through different cultural conflict styles. Intercultural conflict typically starts off with miscommunication.28

Collectivist cultures, for instance, have an aversion to conflict as it is their goal to maintain harmony, while individualist cultures do not avoid conflict and disagreements are considered a normal part of live, sometimes even considered an advantageous way to arrive at the best possible solution to an issue or problem. However, regardless of how cultures handle conflict, the goal is to resolve it to the best advantage of all. Understanding and putting into practice the dimensions of culture outlined in Chapter 2 and herein; utilizing interpersonal intelligence to respectfully respond to individuals from other cultures; and open and fair communication will mitigate intercultural conflict.

Novinger offers “An Intercultural Prescription” as follows:

1. To communicate effectively with another culture, start by knowing your own. (Note: Hofstede and Trompenaars also make this recommendation).

2. Have a positive attitude. To go beyond simplistic understanding of [intercultural competence], goodwill is essential.

3. Be motivated to communicate. To avoid or overcome intercultural communication obstacles usually requires enough effort that one must engage one’s will to succeed [and] avoid interpreting anything or anyone as “different” in a negative manner.

4. Overcome ethnocentrism. Replace ignorance with knowledge through education. Through knowledge, you will become more objective and will not automatically make negative judgments about that which is different.

5. Learn the target culture’s rules and keep learning them as they may change over time.

6. Constantly seek to determine the context of the intercultural encounter and be mindful of cultural differences in communication styles.

7. Be flexible – adaptability is the meta-competence for intercultural [competence].

8. Take responsibility for successful communication if you want to achieve it. You may have to do most of the work.

9. The mind-sets that may be the most universal for successful intercultural communication [and competence] are a positive attitude, effort, and assuming responsibility.29

Cultural differences are becoming impossible to avoid, but they are not impossible to resolve. If we are all willing to approach intercultural encounters with an openness to be open to new experiences, to take the time to learn about

---

each other, to work toward understanding and adapting to each other, and to be enriched by the efforts, we have an opportunity not only to work more effectively, but to grow as individuals who are better equipped for the next intercultural encounter. The more we put into the endeavor of intercultural competence, the more satisfaction we will reap, and the easier it will be for all of us to respectfully live together – in the workplace and in the world.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


