Interpersonal Communication and Diversity: Adapting to Others

Objectives

1 Describe five human differences that influence communication.

2 Define culture.

3 Identify cultural elements, values, and contexts.

4 Discuss barriers that inhibit effective intercultural communication.

5 Identify strategies to improve intercultural competence.

Outline

- Understanding Diversity: Describing Our Differences
- Understanding Culture: Describing Our Mental Software
- Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication
- Improving Intercultural Competence

> "He who is different from me does not impoverish me-he enriches me."

Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Diversity of culture, language, religion, and a host of other factors is increasingly commonplace in contemporary society. This diversity creates the potential for misunderstanding and even conflict stemming from the different ways we make sense of the world and share that sense with others. Although as human beings we share many things in common, our interpersonal interactions with others make it obvious that many people look different from us and communicate in ways that are different from ours.

In the first three chapters, we acknowledged the influence of diversity on interpersonal relationships. In this chapter, we examine in more detail the impact that people's differences have on their lives and suggest some communication strategies for bridging those differences in our interpersonal relationships. Our premise for this discussion of diversity is that in order to live comfortably in the 21st century, people must learn to appreciate and understand our differences instead of ignoring them, suffering because of them, or wishing that they would disappear. As suggested by the statistics in the following *In Canada* box, Canada is becoming increasingly diverse. With this diversity comes a growing awareness that learning about differences, especially cultural differences, can affect every aspect of people's lives in positive ways.

A central goal of your study of interpersonal communication is to learn how to better relate to others. Factors that contribute to diversity and may interfere with developing relationships include differences in age, learning style, gender, religion, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and culture. We will emphasize the role of cultural differences and how these differences affect our interpersonal communication, while also noting a variety of ways that we may seem strange to one another.

Understanding Diversity: Describing Our Differences

There is an infinite number of ways in which we are different from one another. Unless you have an identical twin, you look different from everybody else, although you may have some things in common with a larger group of people (such as skin colour, hair style, or clothing choice). Communication researchers have, however, studied several major differences that affect the way we interact with one another. To frame our discussion of diversity and communication, we'll note differences in gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, age, and social class. Each of these differences—some

Differences in age and ability are just two types of diversity that might cause barriers to effective communication.
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In Canada   A Diversity Almanac

Canada continues to be a cultural mosaic of many races and cultures, a fact which was highlighted in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Here are a few of its interestingfindings:

- The 2011 NHS enumerated 6.8 million foreign-born individuals in Canada representing 20.6% of the total population. This is the highest percentage among the G8 countries.
- After Canadian, the other most frequently reported origins in 2006, either alone or with other origins, were English, French, Scottish, Irish, and German.
- Over 200 ethnic origins were reported by the total Canadian population. Of these, 13 different ethnic origins surpassed the 1 million mark.
- In the 2006 census, 16.2% of Canadians identified themselves as members of visible minorities. In 2011, this number rose to19.1%. Visible minorities are defined by the Employment Equity Act as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."
- Combined, the three largest visible minority groups—South Asians, Chinese and Blacks—accounted for 61.3% of the visible minority population.
- Most of the 1.2 million people who immigrated to Canada between 2006 and 2011 settled in a metropolitan area. Just over 62.5 of these recent immigrants live in the three largest metropolitan areas—Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. In contrast, just over 35.2% of Canada's total population lived in these three cities.
- The 2011 NHS enumerated 6.8 million foreign-born individuals in Canadarepresenting 20.6% of the total population.
- Among foreign-born individuals, 61.2% were able to carry on a conversation in English or French and at least one non-official language.

Source: Statistics Canada, *The Daily,* De-cember 4, 2007; Statistics Canada, "Cana-da's Ethnocultural Mosaic," 2006 Census, April 2008, Catalogue No. 07-562-X.

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learned and some based on biology, on economic status, or simply on how long someone has lived—has an effect on how we perceive others and interact with them. Following our discussion of some classic ways in which we are diverse, we'll turn our attention to cultural differences and then note the barriers that cultural differences can create. We'll conclude the chapter by identifying strategies to enhance the quality of interpersonal communication with others, despite our differences.

Explore: Culture

Sex and Gender

Perhaps the most obvious form of human diversity is the existence of female and male human beings. A person's **sex** is determined by biology; only men can impregnate; only women can menstruate, gestate, and lactate. In contrast to sex differences, *gender differences* reflect learned behaviour that is culturally associated with being a man or a woman. Gender role definitions are flexible: a man can adopt behaviour associated with a female role in a given culture, and vice versa. **Gender** refers to psychological and emotional characteristics that cause people to assume masculine, feminine, or androgynous (having a combination of both feminine and masculine traits) roles. Your gender is learned and socially reinforced by others, as well as by your life experiences and genetics. Some researchers prefer to study gender as a co-culture (a subset of the larger cultural group). We view gender as one of many basic elements of culture.

In the predominant culture of North America, someone's gender is an important thing to know. Yet how different are men and women? John Gray, author of the popular book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, would have us believe that the sexes are so different from each other that we approach life as if we lived on two different planets.[1] However, communication researchers have challenged many of Gray's stereotypical conclusions.[2] Although researchers have noted some differences in the way men and women interact, to label *all* men and *all* women as

Listen: Assessing the Communication Environment

sex. Biologically based differences that determine whether one is male or female.

gender. Socially learned and reinforced characteristics that include one's biological sex and psychological characteristics (femininity, masculinity, androgyny).

acting in prototypical ways may cause us to assume differences that aren't really there.

Deborah Tannen, author of several books on the behaviour of the sexes, views men and women as belonging to different cultural groups.[3] She suggests that female–male communication is cross-cultural communication, with all the challenges of communicating with people who are different from us.

Research conclusions can result in uncertainty about sex and gender differences. Are there really fundamental differences in the way men and women communicate? Researchers have documented some differences, but the differences may have more to do with why we communicate than how. There is evidence that men tend to talk to accomplish something or to complete a task. Women are often more likely to use conversation to establish and maintain relationships. Tannen summarizes the difference as follows: *men often communicate to report; women often communicate to establish rapport*. Research suggests that many men tend to approach communication from a content orientation, meaning that they view the purpose of communication as primarily information exchange. You talk when you have something to say. Women, research suggests, tend to use communication for the purpose of relating or connecting to others. So the point of difference isn't in the way the sexes actually communicate but in their motivations or reasons for communicating.

Sexual Orientation

During the past decades, gays and lesbians have become more assertive in expressing their rights within society. Many legal battles are being fought by gays and lesbians to obtain the equal rights afforded their heterosexual peers. Their victories include the extension of Canadian Pension Plan survivor benefits to same-sex partners and the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage. However, there is evidence that gay and lesbian individuals continue to be judged negatively based solely on their sexual orientation.[4] Research further suggests that heterosexuals who have negative perceptions of gays and lesbians are more likely to have rigid views about gender roles and to assume that their peers also hold such rigid views and negative impressions of gays and lesbians.[5] In addition, those who hold negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians are less likely to have interpersonal communication with gays or lesbians.[6] It is because of the existence of these negative attitudes, as well as anti-gay violence and harassment, that some gays and lesbians continue to conceal their sexual orientation.

An effective and appropriate interpersonal communicator is aware of and sensitive to issues and attitudes about sexual orientation in contemporary society. Homophobia—the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality and gays or lesbians—continues to exist among many people. Just as you have been taught to avoid biased expressions that degrade someone's race or ethnicity, it is equally important to avoid using language that demeans a person's sexual orientation.

Although we may not intend anything negative, sometimes we unintentionally offend someone through more subtle use and misuse of language. For example, gays and lesbians usually prefer to be referred to as "gay" or "lesbian" rather than "homosexual." In addition, the term "sexual orientation" is preferred over "sexual preference" when describing a person's sexual orientation. Our language should reflect and acknowledge the range of human relationships that exist. Our key point is this: be sensitively other-oriented as you interact with those whose sexual orientation is different from your own.

Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic differences among people are often discussed and sometimes debated. According to *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, **race** is based on the genetically transmitted physical characteristics of a group of people who are also classified together because of a common history, nationality, or geographical location.[7] A person's racial classification is typically based on visible physiological attributes—phenotypes—which include skin colour, body type, hair colour and texture, and facial attributes. Skin colour and other physical characteristics affect our responses and influence the way people of different races interact.

Although it may seem neat and tidy to classify individuals genetically as belonging to one race or another, it's not quite that simple. There really aren't vast genetic differences between people who have been assigned to racial categories. That's why many scholars suggest that we think of race as a category that not only emphasizes biological or genetic characteristics, but also includes cultural, economic, social, geographic, and historical elements. The term *race*, therefore, is a fuzzy, somewhat controversial way of classifying people.

Ethnicity is a related term, yet scholars hold that it differs from race. **Ethnicity** is a *social classification* based on a variety of factors, such as nationality, religion, language, and ancestral heritage (race), that are shared by a group of people who also share a common geographic origin. Simply stated, an ethnic group comprises those who have self-labelled themselves as such based on a variety of factors that may or may not include race. In making distinctions between race and ethnicity, one researcher defines ethnicity as "a common origin or culture based on shared activities and identity related to some mixture of race, religion, language and/or ancestry."[8] In this formulation, while ethnicity may include race, race is a separate category that is based on genetic or biological factors. But other research has found that those genetic or biological distinctions are not clear-cut. A key distinction between race and ethnicity is that one's ethnicity is a *socially constructed* category that emphasizes culture and a host of other factors other than one's racial or genetic background. Not all Asians (race), for example, have the same cultural background (ethnicity). Nationality and geographical location are especially important in defining an ethnic group. Those of Irish ancestry are usually referred to as an ethnic group rather than as a race. The same could be said of Britons, Norwegians, and Spaniards.

Ethnicity, like race, fosters common bonds that affect communication patterns. On the positive side, ethnic groups bring vitality and variety to Canadian society. On the negative side, members of these groups may experience persecution or rejection by members of other groups in society.

One of the most significant problems that stem from attempts to classify people by racial or ethnic type is the tendency to discriminate and to unfairly, inaccurately, or inappropriately ascribe stereotypes to racial or ethnic groups. **Discrimination** is the unfair or inappropriate treatment of other people based on their group membership. One of the goals of learning about diversity and becoming aware of both differences and similarities among groups is to eliminate discrimination and stereotypes that cause people to rigidly and inappropriately prejudge others.

Age

Different generations, because they have experienced different cultural and historical events, tend to view life differently. If your grandparents experienced the Great Depression of the 1930s, they may have different attitudes about savings accounts than you or even your parents do. The generation gap is real and has implications for the relationships we develop with others.

race. Genetically transmitted physical characteristics of a group of people.

ethnicity. Social classification based on nationality, religion, language, and ancestral heritage, shared by a group of people who also share a common geographical origin.

discrimination. Unfair or inappropriate treatment of people based on their group membership.

TABLE 4.1	Summary of Generational Characteristics	
Generation Name	**Birth Years**	**Typical Characteristics**
Matures	1925–1942	• Work hard • Have a sense of duty • Are willing to sacrifice • Have a sense of what is right • Work quickly
Baby Boomers	1943–1960	• Value personal fulfillment and optimism • Crusade for causes • Buy now, pay later • Support equal rights for all • Work efficiently
Generation X	1961–1981	• Live with uncertainty • Consider balance important • Live for today • Save • Consider every job as a contract
Millennials	1982–2002	• Are close to their parents • Feel "special" • Are goal-oriented • Are team-oriented • Focus on achievement

Source: Information summarized from N. Howe and W. Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

Generational differences have an effect not just on communication with your parents or other family members, but on a variety of relationships, including those with teachers, bosses, classmates, and co-workers. There is considerable evidence that people hold stereotypical views of others based on others' perceived age. In addition, a person's age has an influence on his or her communications with others. For example, one study found that older adults have greater difficulty in accurately interpreting the nonverbal messages of others than younger people do.[9] Neil Howe and William Strauss, researchers who have investigated the role of age and generation on society, define a generation as "a society-wide peer group, born over a period roughly the same length as the passage from youth to adulthood, who collectively possess a common persona."[10] "Baby boomers" is the label for one such generation, people born between 1943 and 1960. Perhaps your parents or grandparents are Boomers. "Generation X" is the term used for people born between 1961 and 1981. If you were born between 1982 and 2002, you and your generation have been labelled "Millennials."[11] According to Howe and Strauss, as a group, "Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse."* Table 4.1 summarizes labels for and common characteristics and values of several generational groups.

Your generation of origin has important implications for communication, especially as you relate to others in both family and work situations. Each generation has developed its own set of values, which are anchored in social, economic, and cultural factors stemming from the times in which the generation has lived. Our values—our core conceptualizations of what is fundamentally good or bad, right or wrong—colour our way of thinking about and responding to what we experience.

*Howe and Strauss (see citation in table 4.1), p.4.

Generational and age differences may create barriers and increase the potential for conflict and misunderstanding. For example, one team of researchers that investigated the role of generations in the workforce found that, paradoxically, Generation X workers are both more individualistic (self-reliant) and more team-oriented than Boomers are.[12] Boomers are more likely to have a sense of loyalty to their employers, expect long-term employment, value a pension plan, and experience job burnout from overwork. Generation Xers, in contrast, seek a more balanced approach between work and personal life, expect to have more than one job or career, value good working conditions over other job factors, and have a greater need to feel appreciated. Of course, these are broad generalizations and do not apply to all people in these categories.

Social Class

As the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says, "every individual is equal," but there is dramatic evidence that class differences do exist and affect communication patterns. Social psychologist Michael Argyle reports that the cues we use to identify class distinctions are (1) way of life, (2) family, (3) job, (4) money, and (5) education.[13] As teacher and researcher Brenda Allen puts it, "Social class encompasses a socially constructed category of identity that involves more than just economic factors; it includes an entire socialization process."[14] Such a socialization process influences the nature and quality of the interpersonal relationships we have with others. Although sociologists are the primary academic group of scholars who study social class, psychologists, business professionals, marketing specialists, and communication scholars also are interested in how a person's social class has an effect on his or her thoughts and behaviour. Class differences influence whom we talk with, whether we are likely to invite our neighbours over for coffee, and whom we choose as our friends and lovers. Social class also is used by advertisers to target sales pitches to specific types of people.

Principles that describe how social classes emerge from society include the following:

1. Virtually every organization or group develops a hierarchy that makes status distinctions.

2. We are more likely to interact with people from our own social class. There seems to be some truth to the maxim "Birds of a feather flock together." Most of us must make a conscious effort if we want to expand beyond our class boundaries.

3. People who interact with one another over time tend to communicate in similar ways; they develop similar speech patterns and use similar expressions.

4. Members of a social class develop ways of communicating class differences to others by the way they dress, the cars they drive, the homes they live in, the schools they attend, and other visible symbols of social class.

5. It is possible to change one's social class through education, employment, and income.

Differences in social class and the attendant differences in education and lifestyle affect whom we talk with and even what we talk about. These differences influence our overall cultural standpoint, from which we perceive the world.

Canada is a multicultural country.
(© Ken Kerr/QMI Agency)

Understanding Culture: Describing Our Mental Software

We have noted a few of the fundamental ways people differ. Differences in gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, age, and social class contribute to an overall cultural perspective that influences on a fundamental level how we relate to others. **Culture** is a learned system of knowledge, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that is shared by a group of people. In the broadest sense, culture includes how people think, what they do, and how they use things to sustain their lives. Researcher Geert Hofstede describes culture as the "mental software" that touches every aspect of how we make sense out of the world and share that sense with others.[15] Just like software in a computer, our culture influences how we process information. To interact with other people is to be touched by the influence of culture and cultural differences.

Sometimes when we speak of culture, we may be referring to a subculture. A **subculture** is a distinct culture within a larger culture. The differences of gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, age, and social class that we discussed earlier are subcultures within the predominant culture. In the 2011 National Household Survey, for example, more than 200 different ethnic origins were reported; as well, significant religious subcultures included Amish, Mennonite, Mormon, Islamic, and Jewish religious groups.

Cultural Elements

Categories of things and ideas that identify the most profound aspects of cultural influence are known as *cultural elements.* According to one research team, cultural elements include the following:

- *Material culture:* housing, clothing, automobiles
- *Social institutions:* schools, governments, religious organizations
- *Individuals and the universe:* system of beliefs
- *Aesthetics:* music, theatre, art, dance
- *Language:* verbal and nonverbal communication systems[16]

How We Learn Our Culture

culture. Learned system of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that is shared by a group of people.

subculture. A microculture; a distinct culture within a larger culture (such as the gay and lesbian subculture).

enculturation. The process of communicating a group's culture from generation to generation.

acculturation. The process of acquiring new approaches, beliefs, and values through exposure to other cultures.

As we grow, we learn to value these cultural elements. You were not born with a certain taste in music, clothes, and automobiles. Through **enculturation**, the process of communicating a group's culture from generation to generation, you learned what you liked by choosing from among the elements that were available within your culture. Your friends, colleagues, the media, and, most importantly, your family communicate information about these elements and advocate choices for you to make. How you celebrate holidays, your taste in clothing styles, and your religious beliefs are learned through the enculturation process.

Cultures are not static; they change as new information and new influences penetrate their stores of knowledge. We no longer believe that bathing is unhealthy, or that we can safely use makeup made with lead. These changes resulted from scientific discoveries, but other changes take place through **acculturation**; we acquire other approaches, beliefs, and values by coming into contact with other cultures. Today, acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, and karate studios are commonplace in most cities across Canada. Hummus (from the eastern Mediterranean) and basmati rice (from South

Pomp and Circumstance. Which elements of culture are conveyed through Canada's changing of the guard ceremony on Parliament Hill? How do these cultural elements combine to shape the identity of Canadians?

(© The Canadian Press/Sean Kilpatrick)

Asia) are available in every supermarket, and restaurants offer a variety of fare, from Mexican to Italian to Thai. In less obvious ways, "new" perspectives from other cultures have also influenced our thoughts, actions, and relationships.

Cultural Values

Identifying what a given group of people values or appreciates can provide insight into the behaviour of an individual raised within that group. Although there are great differences among the world's **cultural values**, Geert Hofstede identified four variables for measuring values that are significant in almost every culture: masculine and feminine perspectives, avoidance of uncertainty, distribution of power, and individualism (see Table 4.2).* Though now dated and based primarily on males who worked at IBM (the main source for much of his information), Hofstede's research remains one of the most comprehensive data-based studies of understanding cultural values. He surveyed more than 100 000 employees in more than 50 countries; his research effort has yet to be duplicated or surpassed.

Masculine vs. Feminine Perspectives. Some cultures emphasize traditional male values, whereas others place greater value on female perspectives. These values are not really about biological sex differences but rather overarching approaches to interacting with others. People from backgrounds with **masculine cultural values** tend to value more traditional roles for both men and women. Masculine cultures also value achievement, assertiveness, heroism, and material wealth. Research reveals that men tend to approach communication from a content orientation, meaning that they view communication as functioning primarily for information exchange. Men talk when they have something to say. This is also consistent with the tendency for men to base their relationships, especially their male friendships, on sharing activities rather than talking.

*Adapted from Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

cultural values. What a given group of people values or appreciates.

masculine cultural values. Achievement, assertiveness, heroism, and material wealth.

This girl's clothing and pets reflect the aesthetics and lifestyle of her Inuit culture.

(© Mike Beedell Photography)

TABLE 4.2   Examples of Countries That Illustrate Four Cultural Values

Cultural Value	Examples of Countries That Scored Higher on This Cultural Value	Examples of Countries That Scored Lower on This Cultural Value
Masculinity: People from countries with higher masculinity scores prefer high achievement, more assertive roles for men, and more clearly differentiated sex roles than people from countries with lower scores on this cultural dimension.	Japan, Australia, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, Mexico, Ireland, Jamaica, Great Britain	Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Yugoslavia, Costa Rica, Finland, Chile, Portugal, Thailand
Uncertainty Avoidance: People from countries with higher uncertainty avoidance scores generally prefer to avoid uncertainty; they like to know what will happen next. People from countries with lower scores are more comfortable with uncertainty.	Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, Belgium, Japan, Yugoslavia, Peru, France	Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, Ireland, Great Britain, Malaysia, India, Philippines, United States
Power Distribution: People from countries with higher power distribution scores generally prefer greater power differences between people; they are generally more accepting of someone having authority and power than are people from countries with lower scores on this cultural dimension.	Malaysia, Guatemala, Panama, Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, Arab countries, Ecuador, Indonesia, India	Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Great Britain
Individualism: People from countries with higher individualism scores generally prefer individual accomplishment to collective or collaborative achievement.	United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, France	Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Columbia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Peru, Taiwan, South Korea

Source: Adapted from Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

Men and women from backgrounds with **feminine cultural values** tend to value such things as caring for the less fortunate, being sensitive toward others, and enhancing the overall quality of life. Women tend to approach communication for the purpose of relating or connecting to others, extending themselves to other people to know them and be known by them. What women talk about is less important than the fact that they're talking, because talking implies relationship.

Of course, rarely is a culture on the extreme end of the continuum; many are somewhere in between. For centuries, most countries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas have had masculine cultures. Men and their conquests dominate history books; men have been more prominent in leadership and decision making than women. However, today many of these cultures are moving slowly toward the middle—legal and social rules are encouraging more gender balance and greater equality between masculine and feminine roles.

Watch: Name Game

Tolerance of Uncertainty vs. Avoidance of Uncertainty. Some cultures tolerate more ambiguity and uncertainty than others. Cultures in which people need certainty to feel secure are more likely to create and enforce rigid rules for behaviour and to develop more elaborate codes of conduct. People from cultures with a greater tolerance for uncertainty have more relaxed, informal expectations for others. "Go with the flow" and "It will sort itself out" are phrases that describe their attitudes. One study showed that people from Portugal, Germany, Peru, Belgium, and Japan have high certainty needs but people from Scandinavian countries tend to tolerate uncertainty.[17]

Concentrated vs. Decentralized Power. Some cultures value an equal or decentralized distribution of power, whereas others accept a concentration of hierarchical power in a centralized government and other organizations. In the latter, hierarchical bureaucracies are common, and people expect some individuals to have more power

feminine cultural values. Relationships, caring for the less fortunate, and overall quality of life.

than others. Russia, France, and China all rank high on the concentrated power scale. Those that often strive for greater equality and distribution of power and control include many (but not all) citizens from Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, and Israel. People from these latter countries tend to minimize differences in power between people.

Individual vs. Group Achievement. Traditionally, North Americans champion individual accomplishments and achievements. People from Asian backgrounds often value collective or group achievement more highly. One researcher summed up the North American goal system this way:

> Chief among the virtues claimed . . . is self-realization. Each person is viewed as having a unique set of talents and potentials. The translation of these potentials into actuality is concurred the highest purpose to which one can devote one's life.[18]

Conversely, in a collectivistic culture people strive to attain goals for all members of the family, group, or community. In Kenyan tribes, for example,

> . . . nobody is an isolated individual. Rather, his [or her] uniqueness is secondary fact . . . In this new system group activities are dominant, responsibility is shared and accountability is collective . . . Because of the emphasis on collectivity, harmony and cooperation among the group tends to be emphasized more than individual function and responsibility.[19]

Individualistic cultures tend to be more loosely knit socially; individuals feel responsible for taking care of themselves and their immediate families.[20] In collectivistic cultures, individuals expect more support from others and more loyalty to and from the community. Because collectivistic cultures place more value on "we" than "I," teamwork approaches usually succeed better in their workplaces. North American businesses, for example, have tried to adopt some of Japan's successful team strategies for achieving high productivity.

RECAP Cultural Values

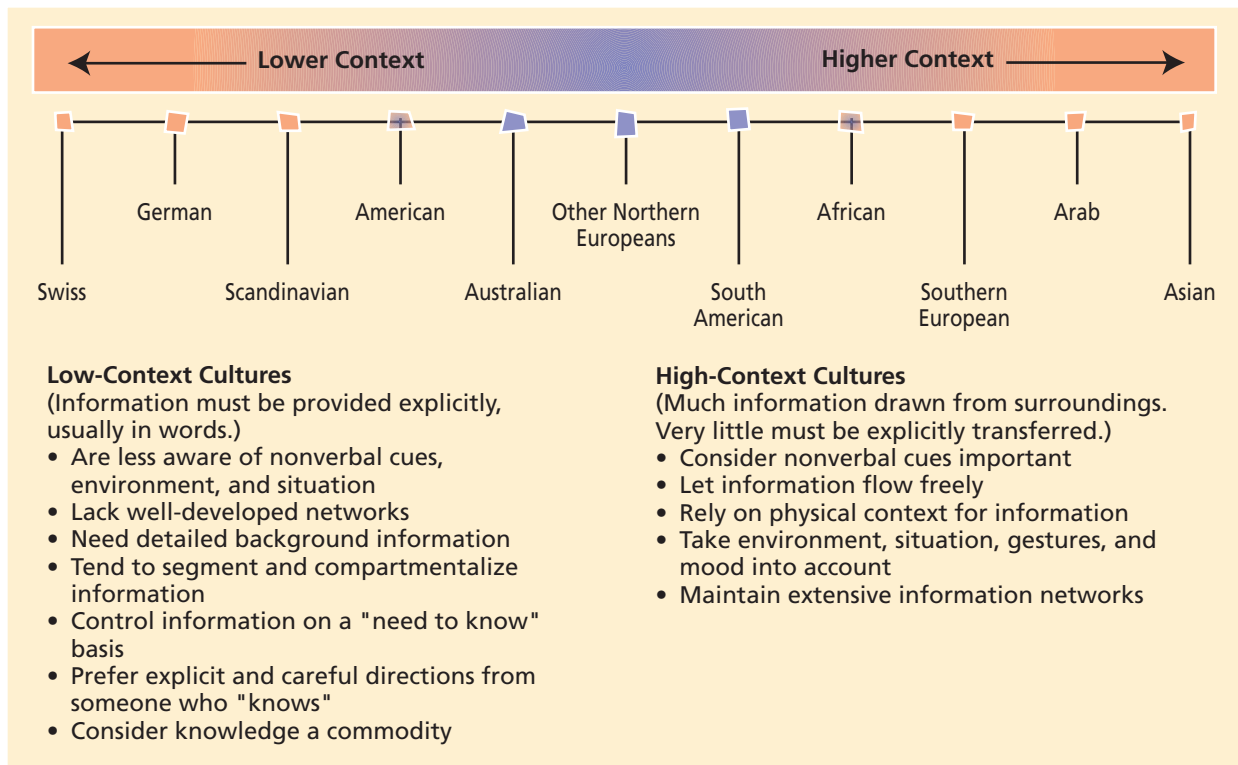|	
Masculine vs. feminine	Does the culture place the highest value on assertiveness, heroism, and wealth or on relationships, caring for others, and overall quality of life?
Tolerance of uncertainty vs. avoidance of uncertainty	Does the culture have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty or does it hold more rigid and explicit behavioural expectations?
Concentrated vs. decentralized power	Does the culture tolerate or accept hierarchical power structures or does it favour a more equal distribution of power?
Individual vs. group achievement	Does the culture value individual achievement more than collective group accomplishments or vice versa?

Cultural Contexts

Individuals from different cultures use culturally based contextual cues in varying degrees to enhance messages and meaning. These cues are known collectively as **cultural context**, a concept that led Edward T. Hall to categorize cultures as either high- or low-context.[21] As shown in Figure 4.1, in **high-context cultures**, nonverbal cues are extremely important in interpreting messages. **Low-context cultures** rely more explicitly on language and use fewer contextual cues to send and interpret information. Individuals from high-context cultures may perceive persons from low-context cultures as less attractive, knowledgeable, and trustworthy because they violate unspoken rules of dress, conduct, and communication. Individuals from low-context cultures are often not skilled in interpreting unspoken contextual messages.

cultural context. Information not explicitly communicated through language, such as environmental or non verbal cues.

high-context cultures. Cultures that derive much information from non verbal and environmental cues.

low-context cultures. Cultures that derive much information from the words of a message and less information from nonverbal and environmental cues.

Lower Context ←   **Higher Context** →

German   American   Other Northern   African   Arab
                                   Europeans

Swiss   Scandinavian   Australian   South   Southern   Asian
                                                  American   European

Low-Context Cultures
(Information must be provided explicitly, usually in words.)
- Are less aware of nonverbal cues, environment, and situation
- Lack well-developed networks
- Need detailed background information
- Tend to segment and compartmentalize information
- Control information on a "need to know" basis
- Prefer explicit and careful directions from someone who "knows"
- Consider knowledge a commodity

High-Context Cultures
(Much information drawn from surroundings. Very little must be explicitly transferred.)
- Consider nonverbal cues important
- Let information flow freely
- Rely on physical context for information
- Take environment, situation, gestures, and mood into account
- Maintain extensive information networks

FIGURE 4.1

High/Low Contexts: Where Different Cultures Fall on the Context Scale

Source: Based on research by Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) and adapted from Donald W. Klopf, *Intercultural Encounters: The Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication* (Englewood, CO: Morton, 1998), 33.

RECAP The Nature of Culture

Cultural elements	Things and ideas that represent profound aspects of cultural influence, such as art, music, schools, and belief systems.
Cultural values	What a culture reveres and holds important.
Cultural contexts	Information not explicitly communicated through language, such as environmental or nonverbal cues. High-context cultures (such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean) derive much information from these cues. Low-context cultures (such as North American and Western European) rely more heavily on words.

Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication

intercultural communication.
Communication between or among people who have different cultural traditions.

Intercultural communication occurs when individuals or groups from different cultures communicate. The transactional process of listening and responding to people from different cultural backgrounds can be challenging: the greater the difference in culture between two people, the greater the potential for misunderstanding and mistrust.

Misunderstanding and miscommunication occur between people from different cultures because of different coding rules and cultural norms, which play a major role in shaping patterns of interaction. The greater the difference between the cultures, the more likely it is that they will use different verbal and nonverbal codes. When you encounter a culture that has little in common with your own, you may experience **culture shock**, or a sense of confusion, anxiety, stress, and loss. If you are visiting or actually living in the new culture, your uncertainty and stress may take time to subside as you learn the values and codes that characterize the culture. However, if you are simply trying to communicate with someone from a background very different from your own—even on your home turf—you may find the suggestions in this section helpful in closing the communication gap.

The first step to bridging differences between cultures is to find out what hampers effective communication. What keeps us from connecting with people from other cultures? Sometimes it is different meanings created by different languages or by different interpretations of nonverbal messages. Sometimes it is our inability to stop focusing on ourselves and begin focusing on the other. We'll examine some of these barriers first, then discuss strategies and skills for overcoming them.

Ethnocentrism

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people like Us, are We,
And everyone else is They.

In a few short lines, 19th-century British writer Rudyard Kipling captured the essence of what sociologists and anthropologists call ethnocentric thinking. Members of all

culture shock. Feelings of stress and anxiety a person experiences when encountering a culture different from his or her own.

Colourful celebrations like this powwow can reinforce healthy ethnic pride. But if ethnic pride is taken to extremes, the resulting ethnocentrism may act as a barrier between groups.
(© Offiwent.com/Alamy)

BEING Other-ORIENTED

Most people are ethnocentric to some degree. But extreme ethnocentrism can be a major interpersonal communication barrier. What symptoms may indicate when an ethnocentric mindset may be interfering with the quality of communication with another person? What are examples of comments that might signal that someone believes his or her cultural approaches are superior to another person's culture?

Relating to Others in the 21st Century

Making Intercultural E-connections

You don't have to travel the globe to communicate with people who live on the other side of the world. It's increasingly likely that you will interact electronically with others who have cultural or ethnic perspectives different from yours. Research suggests that you or one or more of your work colleagues will work in an international location: according to a *Business Week* survey, most workers thought that by 2017 they would have a colleague with whom they would work closely but who lived in another country.[22] Social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, as well as other Internet-based or phone-based connections, make it easy to interact with international friends and colleagues. As more companies are outsourcing customer service to international venues, it's also increasingly likely that you may be speaking to someone in another country when making a call about a problem with your computer or your TV or some other customer-service need. It's challenging enough bridging cultural differences when you're interacting face to face. It can be even more challenging communicating electronically with others who have different cultural perspectives from yours.

Here are some tips and strategies for enriching electronic intercultural connections with others.

- If you are communicating with someone who is from a high-context culture (such as someone from Japan or another Asian country) in which nonverbal messages are especially important and you are using a leaner communication medium such as texting, consider providing more explicit references to your feelings and emotions by using emoticons or more explicitly stating your feelings and emotional reactions to messages.

- Consider asking more questions than you normally would if you were interacting face to face to clarify meanings and the interpretation of messages.

- Use "small talk" and comments about the weather, what your typical day is like, and other low-level disclosures to build a relationship. Then look for reciprocal responses from your communication partner that indicate a relationship is naturally evolving.

- Summarize and paraphrase messages that you receive more often than you might normally, in order to increase the accuracy of message content.

- Remember the difference between your time zone and the other person's time zone.

- If you find a relationship is awkward or you notice an increase in conflict, use the richest medium you can—use the phone instead of texting or sending email, or use a webcam instead of the phone. If you're merely sharing routine, noncontroversial information, a lean medium (such as texting) should be fine.

societies tend to find comfort in the familiar and often denigrate or distrust others. Of course, with exposure to other cultures and experience communicating with those who are different from them, they may learn to put themselves in others' shoes and be more accepting of differences.

> . . . if you cross over the sea,
> Instead of over the way,
> You may end by (think of it!) looking on We
> As only a sort of They.

In a real sense, a main lesson of the sociology of intergroup relations is to begin to "cross over the sea," to learn to understand why other people think and act as they do and to be able to empathize with their perspectives.

Ethnocentrism stems from a conviction that your own cultural traditions and assumptions are superior to those of others. In short, it is the opposite of other-orientation, which embraces and appreciates the elements that give another culture meaning. This kind of cultural snobbery is one of the fastest ways to create a barrier that inhibits, rather than enhances, communication.

👁 **Watch:** Talk, Talk, Talk

Different Communication Codes

You are on your first trip to Calgary. You step off the bus and look around for Stampede Park, and you realize that you have gotten off at the wrong stop. You see a corner grocery store with "Stampede Park" painted on a red sign. So you walk in and ask the man behind the counter, "How do I get to the Calgary Stampede, please?" The man smiles,

ethnocentrism. Belief that your cultural traditions and assumptions are superior to those of others.

shrugging his shoulders, but he points to a transit map pasted onto the wall behind the counter.

Today, even when you travel within Canada, you are likely to encounter people who do not speak your language. Obviously, this kind of intercultural difference poses a formidable communication challenge, and even when you do speak the same tongue as another, he or she may come from a place where the words and gestures have different meanings. Your ability to communicate will depend on whether you can understand each other's verbal and nonverbal codes.

In the example above, although the man behind the counter did not understand your exact words, he noted the cut of your clothing, your backpack, and your anxiety. From this, he deduced that you were asking for directions, and you could understand what his gesture toward the transit map meant. Unfortunately, not every communication between the users of two different languages is this successful.

Even when language is translated, there can be missed or mangled meanings. Note the following examples of mistranslated advertisements:

- A General Motors auto ad with "Body by Fisher" became "Corpse by Fisher" in Flemish.

- A Colgate-Palmolive toothpaste named "Cue" was advertised in France before anyone realized that Cue also happened to be the name of a widely circulated pornographic book about oral sex.

- Pepsi-Cola's "Come Alive with Pepsi" campaign, when it was translated for the Taiwanese market, conveyed the unsettling news that "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave."

- Parker Pen could not advertise its famous "Jotter" ballpoint pen in some languages because the translation sounded like "jockstrap" pen.

- One American airline operating in Brazil advertised that it had plush "rendezvous lounges" on its jets, unaware that in Portuguese (the language of Brazil), "rendezvous" implies a special room for making love.[23]

Stereotyping and Prejudice

All French people dress fashionably.

All Asians are good at math.

All Canadians are polite and apologetic.

👁 **Watch:** The Giving Spirit

These statements are stereotypes. They are all inaccurate. To **stereotype** someone is to push him or her into an inflexible, all-encompassing category. In Chapter 3, we saw how our tendency to simplify sensory stimuli can lead us to adopt stereotypes as we interpret the behaviour of others. When we stereotype, we "print" the same judgment over and over again, failing to consider the uniqueness of individuals, groups, or events. This becomes a barrier to effective intercultural communication.

Can stereotypes play a useful role in interpersonal communication? The answer is a resounding "no" if our labels are inaccurate or if they assume superiority on our part. However, sometimes it may be appropriate to draw on generalizations. If, for example, you are walking lost and alone in an unfamiliar neighbourhood late at night and you realize that you have heard the same set of footsteps behind you for several blocks, it would be a good idea to increase your speed and try to find a place where there are other people. You would be wise to prejudge that the person following you might have some malicious intent. In most situations, however, **prejudice**—prejudging someone before you know all the facts—inhibits effective communication. If you decide that you like or dislike (usually dislike) someone simply because he or she is a member of a certain group or class of people, you will not give yourself a chance to communicate with the person in a meaningful way. Prejudice usually involves negative attitudes toward members of a specific social group or culture.

Certain prejudices are widespread. Although there are more females than males in the world, in many societies females are prejudged to be less valuable than males. One study found that even when a male and a female hold the same type of job, the

stereotype. To place a person or group of persons into an inflexible, all-encompassing category.

prejudice. Prejudging someone before you know all of the facts or background of that person.

In Canada   Minorities in Canada: Is Discrimination Still a Problem?

A report published by Statistics Canada shed light on some interesting facts about discrimination in Canada today. The *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, the first large-scale survey of its kind, was developed by Statistics Canada in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage to provide information on the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of people in Canada and how these backgrounds relate to their lives today. Aboriginal peoples were not included in the survey as similar information was collected through the *2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey*.

The survey covers many areas of diversity, ranging from reports of ancestries to participation in Canadian society to experiences of discrimination. The area of interest in the context of this chapter is discrimination. However, the entire report is useful to anyone who is interested in Canadian multiculturalism.

The survey asked people how often they felt out of place in Canada because of their ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent, or religion. Most people (78%) reported that they never felt uncomfortable. Another 13% said they rarely felt uncomfortable or out of place.

However, 10% indicated that they felt this way most of the time or all the time because of their ethnocultural characteristics.

In addition to the above question, respondents were asked whether they had experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly by others in Canada in the five years prior to the survey because of their ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent, or religion. The good news: overall, the vast majority (86%) of respondents stated that they had never or rarely experienced discrimination. However, 7% of Canadians (or 1.6 million) said they had sometimes or often experienced discrimination in the past five years because of their ethnocultural characteristics. Perceived discrimination or unfair treatment varied considerably by minority status. About 20% of visible minorities said they had sometimes or often experienced discrimination, with blacks the most likely to report discrimination or unfair treatment. In other words, one in five Canadians who were visible minorities reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment because of their racial or ethnic background.

The other question of interest in the survey concerned the location of such

unfair treatment or discrimination: on the street; in stores, banks, or restaurants; at work, for instance when applying for a job or promotion; when dealing with the police or courts; or somewhere else. In response, the most common situation where perceived discrimination or unfair treatment occurred was at work or when applying for a job or promotion. Overall, 880 000 or 56% of those who had sometimes or often experienced discrimination or unfair treatment because of their ethnocultural characteristics said that they had experienced such treatment at work or when applying for work.

For Discussion

1. Why do you think such discrimination and unfair treatment is still prevalent, especially for members of visible minorities?

2. Canadian legislation prohibits unfair treatment in the workplace due to racial or ethnic status. How might unfair treatment still occur?

Source: Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey: Portrait of a Multicultural Society,* September 2003, Catalogue No. 89-593-XIE.

male's job is considered more prestigious than the female's.[24] Discrimination is often a result of prejudice. When people discriminate, they treat members of groups differently from their own in negative ways. In the past, people of different gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation were often victims of discrimination socially and politically. Today, discrimination of these kinds in hiring and promotion is illegal in Canada, but our social attitudes have not kept pace with the law. Stereotyping and prejudice are still formidable barriers to effective interpersonal communication. While many people do not actively engage in discrimination, many still hold negative attitudes and stereotypes of people different from themselves.

Assuming Similarity

Just as it is inaccurate to assume that all people who belong to another social group or class are worlds apart from you, it is usually erroneous to assume that others act and think as you do. Even if they appear to be like you, all people are not alike. While this statement is not profound, it has profound implications. We often make the mistake of assuming that others value the same things we do, maintaining a self-focused perspective instead of an other-oriented one. As you saw in Chapter 3, focusing on superficial factors, such as appearance, clothing, and even a person's occupation, can lead to false impressions. Instead, we must take the time to explore a person's background and cultural values before we can determine what we really have in common.

Assuming Differences

Although it may seem to contradict what we just noted about assuming similarities, another barrier to intercultural communication is to automatically assume that another person is different from you. It can be just as detrimental to communication to assume someone is different from you as it is to assume that others are similar to you. The fact is, human beings do share common experiences, while at the same time there are differences.

The point of noting that humans have similarities as well as differences is not to diminish the role of culture as a key element that influences communication, but to recognize that despite cultural differences, we are all members of the human family. The words "communication" and "common" resemble each other. We communicate effectively and appropriately when we can connect to others based on what we hold in common. Identifying common cultural issues and similarities can help us establish common ground with others.

How are we all alike? Cultural anthropologist Donald Brown has compiled a list of hundreds of "surface" universals of behaviour and language use that have been identified. According to Brown, people in all cultures

- Have beliefs about death

- Have a childhood fear of strangers

- Divide labour on the basis of sex

- Experience envy, pain, jealousy, shame, and pride

- Use facial expressions to express emotions

- Have rules for etiquette

- Experience empathy

- Value some degree of collaboration or cooperation

- Experience conflict and seek to manage or mediate conflict[25]

Of course, all cultures do not have the same beliefs about death or divide labour according to sex in the same ways, but all cultures address these issues. Linguist and scholar Steven Pinker is an advocate of common human values. Drawing on the work of anthropologists Richard Shweder and Alan Fiske, Pinker suggests that the following value themes are universally present in some form or degree in societies across the globe:

- It is bad to harm others and good to help them.

- People have a sense of fairness; we should reciprocate favours, reward benefactors, and punish cheaters and those who do harm.

- People value loyalty to a group and sharing in a community or group.

- It is proper to defer to legitimate authority and to respect those with status and power.

- People should seek purity, cleanliness, and sanctity while shunning defilement and contamination.[26]

In summary, ". . . avoidance of harm, fairness, community (or group loyalty), authority, and purity . . . are the primary colors of our moral senses."[27]

What are the practical implications of trying to identify common human values or characteristics? Here's one implication: if you are speaking about an issue on which you and another person fundamentally differ, identifying a larger common value—such as the value of peace, prosperity, or the importance of family—can help you find a foothold so that the other person will at least listen to your ideas. It's useful, we believe, not just to categorize our differences but also to explore how human beings are similar to one another. Discovering how we are alike can provide a starting point for human understanding. Yes, we are all different, but we share things in common as well. Communication effectiveness is diminished when we assume we're all different from one another in every aspect, just as communication is affected negatively if we assume we're all alike. We're more complicated than that.

BEING Other-ORIENTED

We build bridges with others who are different from us when we can identify something we may have in common with them. Can you think of times when you've been communicating with someone who was quite different from you but you sought to identify something you both had in common? What are some common human experiences that can create bridges as we seek to establish common ground with others?

▶ RECAP   Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication

Ethnocentrism	Assuming that one's own culture and cultural traditions are superior to those of others
Different communication codes	Allowing differences in language and the interpretation of nonverbal cues to lead to misunderstanding
Stereotyping and prejudice	Rigidly categorizing and prejudging others based on limited information
Assuming similarity	Assuming that other people respond to situations as we do; failing to acknowledge and consider differences in culture and background
Assuming differences	Assuming that other people are always different from and have nothing in common with us; failing to explore common values and experiences that can serve as bridges to better understanding

Improving Intercultural Competence

It is not enough just to point to the barriers to effective intercultural communication and say, "Don't do that." Although identifying the causes of misunderstanding is a good first step to becoming interculturally competent, most people need help with specific strategies to help them overcome these barriers. In this book, and in this chapter, we want to focus attention on the interpersonal communication strategies that can lead to intercultural communication competence.

👁
Watch: Shelley Lane: Intercultural Communication, Part 2 of 2

Intercultural communication competence is the ability to adapt your behaviour toward another in ways that are appropriate to the other person's culture. To be interculturally competent is to be more than merely aware of what is appropriate or simply sensitive to cultural differences. To be interculturally competent is to behave toward others in ways that are appropriate—but prior to behaving appropriately, an individual needs to have knowledge about another culture and the motivation to adapt or modify his or her behaviour.

Although we've identified stages in the process of becoming interculturally competent, the question remains: How do you achieve intercultural communication competence? The remaining portion of this chapter presents specific strategies to help you bridge differences between you and people who have a different cultural perspective from yours.

Developing Bridging Strategies

Three strategies to help you bridge differences between yourself and people from different cultural backgrounds are developing appropriate knowledge, developing motivation, and developing skill.

- *Develop Appropriate Knowledge.* One of the barriers to effective intercultural communication is having different communication codes. Improving your knowledge of how others communicate can reduce the impact of this barrier. We offer strategies to help you learn more about other cultures by actively pursuing information about others.

- *Develop Motivation.* **Motivation** is an internal state of readiness to respond to something. A competent communicator wants to learn and improve. Developing strategies to appreciate others who are different from you may help you appreciate different cultural approaches to communication and relationships. We suggest you endeavour to be tolerant of uncertainty and to avoid knee-jerk negative evaluations of others.

- *Develop Skill.* Developing **skill** in adapting to others focuses on specific behaviours that can help overcome barriers and cultural differences. As we discussed in Chapter 1, becoming other-oriented is critical to the process of relating to others.

Developing Knowledge: Strategies to Understand Others Who Are Different from Us

Knowledge is power. To increase your knowledge of others who are different from you, we suggest that you actively seek information about others, ask questions and listen to the answers, and establish common ground. Let's discuss these strategies in more detail.

Seek Information. Seeking information about a culture or even about a specific communication situation can be a useful strategy to enhance the quality of intercultural communication. Why? Because seeking information helps manage uncertainty and anxiety that we may feel when we interact with people who are different from us. Sometimes we feel uncomfortable in intercultural communication situations because we just don't know how to behave. We aren't sure what our role should be; we can't quite predict what will happen when we communicate with others because we're in a new or

intercultural communication competence. Ability to adapt one's behaviour toward another in ways that are appropriate to the other person's culture.

motivation. Internal state of readiness to respond to something.

skill. Behaviour that improves the effectiveness or quality of communication with others.

Studying interpersonal communication helps us learn to bridge differences in age, gender, race, or ability that might act as barriers to effective communication.
(© Bob Mahoney/The Image Works)

strange situation. Actively seeking information about a culture or about people from a culture other than your own can help you manage some of the anxiety and uncertainty you may experience when you communicate in new cultural contexts. Seeking new information can also help counter inaccurate information and prejudice.

Every person has a **world view** based on cultural beliefs about the universe and key issues such as death, the origins of the universe, and the meaning of life.[28] According to Carley Dodd, "A culture's world view involves finding out how the culture perceives the role of various forces in explaining why events occur as they do in a social setting."[29] These beliefs shape our thoughts, language, and behaviour. Only through intercultural communication can we hope to understand how each individual views the world. As you speak to a person from another culture, think of yourself as a detective, watching for implied, often unspoken, messages that provide information about the values, norms, roles, and rules of that person's culture.

You can also prepare yourself by studying the culture. If you are going to another country, courses in the history, anthropology, art, or geography of that place can give you a head start on communicating with understanding. One of this book's authors was invited to a wedding for a Native Canadian friend, and part of the ceremony was "smudging." Prior to attending, the author learned about what it was and how it is done (if you don't know, here is a learning opportunity). Learn not only from books, magazines, and the Internet but also from individuals whenever possible.

Given the inextricable link between language and culture, the more you learn about another language, the more you will understand the traditions and customs of the culture. Politicians have long known the value of using the first languages of their minority constituents. Speaking even a few words can signify your interest in learning about the language and culture of others.

Ask Questions and Listen Effectively. When you encounter a person from another background, asking questions and then pausing to listen is a simple technique for gathering information and also for confirming the accuracy of your expectations and assumptions. Some cultures, such as the Japanese, have rigid expectations regarding gift giving. It is better to ask what these expectations are than to assume that your good old down-home manners will see you through.

When you ask questions, be prepared to share information about yourself, too. Otherwise, your partner may feel as if you are interrogating him or her as a way to gain power and dominance rather than from a sincere desire to learn about cultural rules and norms.

Communication helps to reduce the uncertainty that is present in any relationship. When you meet people for the first time, you are highly uncertain about who they are and what they like and dislike. When you communicate with someone from another culture, the uncertainty level is particularly high. As you begin to interact, you exchange information that helps you develop greater understanding. If you continue to ask questions, eventually you will feel less uncertain about how the person is likely to behave.

Just asking questions and sharing information about yourself is not sufficient to bridge differences in culture and background. It is equally important to listen to what others share. In Chapter 5 we provide specific strategies for improving your listening skills.

Develop a "Third Culture." Several researchers suggest that one of the best ways to enhance understanding when communicating with someone from a different cultural background is to develop a **third culture**. This is created when the communication partners join aspects of separate cultures to create a third, "new" culture that is more comprehensive and inclusive than either of the two separate cultures.

world view. Perception shared by a culture or group of people about key beliefs and issues, such as death, the origins of the universe, and the meaning of life, which influences interaction with others.

third culture. Establishing common ground by joining separate cultures to create a third, "new," more comprehensive and inclusive culture.

According to one intercultural communication researcher, F. L. Casmir, a third-culture approach to enhancing the quality of intercultural communication occurs when the people involved in the conversation construct "a mutually beneficial interactive environment in which individuals from two different cultures can function in a way beneficial to all involved."[30]

How do you go about developing a third culture? In a word: talk. Developing a third culture does not just happen all at once; it evolves from dialogue. The communicators construct a third culture together. After they realize that cultural differences may divide them, they may develop a third culture by making a conscious effort to develop common assumptions and common perspectives for the relationship. Dialogue, negotiation, conversation, interaction, and a willingness to let go of old ways and experiment with new frameworks are the keys to developing a third culture as a basis for a new relationship.

Consider the example of Fiona, a businesswoman from Halifax, and Xiaoxian, a businesswoman from Shanghai. In the context of their business relationship, it would be difficult for them to develop a comprehensive understanding of each other's cultural traditions. If, however, they openly acknowledged the most significant of these differences and sought to create a third culture by identifying explicit rules and norms for their interaction, they might be able to develop a more comfortable relationship with each other.

As described by Benjamin Broome, the third culture "is characterized by unique values and norms that may not have existed prior to the dyadic [two-person] relationship."[31] Broome labels the essence of this new relationship **relational empathy**, which permits varying degrees of understanding rather than requiring complete comprehension of another's culture or emotions.

The cultural context includes all the elements of the culture (learned behaviours and rules, or "mental software") that affect the interaction. Do you come from a culture that takes a tea break each afternoon at 4:00? Does your culture value hard work and achievement or relaxation and enjoyment? Creating a third culture acknowledges the different cultural contexts and interactions participants have experienced and seeks to develop a new context for future interaction.

RECAP   Develop Knowledge to Enhance Understanding

Seek information about the culture	Learn about a culture's world view.
Ask questions and listen	Reduce uncertainty by asking for clarification and listening to the answer.
Develop a third culture	Create common ground.

Developing Motivation: Strategies to Accept Others

Competent communicators want to learn and improve. They are motivated to enhance their ability to relate to others and to accept others as they are. A key to accepting others is to develop a positive attitude of tolerance and acceptance of those who are different from us. We propose three strategies to help improve your acceptance and appreciation of others who are different from you: tolerate ambiguity, develop mindfulness, and avoid negative judgments about others.

Tolerate Ambiguity. Communicating with someone from another culture produces uncertainty. It may take time and several exchanges to clarify a message. Be patient and try to expand your capacity to tolerate ambiguity if you are speaking to someone with a markedly different world view.

relational empathy. The essence of the third culture, permitting varying degrees of understanding rather than complete comprehension of another's culture or emotions.

When Ken and Rita visited Montreal, they asked their hotel concierge to direct them to a church of their faith, and they wound up at one with a predominantly Haitian congregation. They were not prepared for the exuberant chanting and verbal interchanges with the minister during the sermon. They weren't certain whether they should join in or simply sit quietly and observe. Ken whispered to Rita, "I'm not sure what to do. Let's just watch and see what's expected of us." In the end, they chose to sit and clap along with the chanting rather than become actively involved in the worship. Rita felt uncomfortable and conspicuous, though, and had to fight off the urge to bolt; but after the service several members of the congregation came up to greet Ken and Rita, invited them to lunch, and expressed great happiness in their visit. "You know," said Rita later in the day, "I'm so grateful that we sat through our discomfort. We might never have met those terrific people. Now I understand why their worship is so noisy—they're just brimming over with joy."

Develop Mindfulness. "Our life is what our thoughts make it," said Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations*. To be **mindful** of cultural differences is to be consciously aware of them, to acknowledge that there is a connection between thoughts and deeds when you interact with a person from a background different from your own. William Gudykunst asserts that being mindful is one of the best ways to approach any new cultural encounter.[32] Remember that there are and will be cultural differences, and try to keep them in your consciousness. Also, try to consider the other individual's frame

mindful. Consciously aware of cultural differences.

Understanding Diversity   Tao: A Universal Moral Code

It's clear that there are cultural differences among the world's people, and that these differences have existed since there have *been* people. Anthropologists and communication scholars who study intercultural communication teach us the value of adapting to cultural differences in order to understand others better. However, are there any universal values that are or have been embraced by all humans? The question is not a new one; scholars, theologians, and many others have debated for millennia whether there are any universal underpinnings for all human societies. C. S. Lewis, a British scholar, author, and educator who taught at both Oxford and Cambridge, argued that there are universal ethical and moral principles that undergird all societies of civilized people, regardless of their religious beliefs, cultural background, or government structure.[1] For Lewis, the existence of Natural Laws, or what he called a Tao—a universal moral code—informs human ethical decisions. In his book *The Abolition of Man*, he presented eight universal principles, or laws. He did not claim that all societies have followed these laws—many of them have been clearly violated and

continue to be violated today—but he did suggest that they provide a bedrock of values against which all societies may be measured. Here are his eight laws:

1. The Law of General Beneficence: Do not murder, be dishonest, or take from others what does not belong to you.

2. The Law of Special Beneficence: Value your family members.

3. Duties to Parents, Elders, and Ancestors: Especially hold your parents, those who are a generation older than you, and your ancestors with special honour and esteem.

4. Duties to Children and Posterity: We have a special obligation to respect the rights of the young and to value those who will come after us.

5. The Law of Justice: Honour the basic human rights of others; each person is of worth.

6. The Law of Good Faith and Veracity: Keep your promises and do not lie.

7. The Law of Mercy: Be compassionate to those less fortunate than you.

8. The Law of Magnanimity: Avoid unnecessary violence against other people.

To support his argument that these are universal values, Lewis offered quotations from several well-known sources, including religious, historical, and political writings, both contemporary and centuries- old. Lewis implied that these eight laws may be viewed as a universal Bill of Rights, and that they constitute an underlying set of principles that either implicitly or explicitly guide all civilized society. Do you agree? Is it useful to search for underlying principles of humanness? Despite cultural differences, are there underlying values or principles that should inform our interactions with others? Is there truly a universal human theory of communication? Or might it do more harm than good to suggest that universal principles underlie what it means to behave and communicate appropriately and effectively?

Note:

1. *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis, copyright (c) C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. 1943, 1946, 1978. Extract printed by permission.

of reference or world view and to use his or her cultural priorities and assumptions when you are communicating. Adapt your behaviour to minimize cultural noise and distortion.

You can become more mindful through self-talk, something we discussed in Chapter 2. Self-talk consists of rational messages to yourself to help you manage your emotions or discomfort with a certain situation. Imagine that you're working on a group project with several of your classmates. One classmate, Suji, was born in Iran. When interacting with you, he consistently gets about 30 cm away, whereas you're more comfortable with 90 to 120 cm between you. When Suji encroaches on your space, you could "be mindful" of the difference by mentally noting, "Suji sure likes to get close to people when he talks to them. This might represent a practice in his culture." This self-talk message makes you consciously aware that there may be a difference in your interaction styles. If you still feel uncomfortable, instead of blurting out "Hey, man, why so close?," you could express your own preferences with an "I" message: "Suji, I'd prefer a bit more space between us when we talk."

RECAP   Develop Motivation to Accept Others

Tolerate ambiguity	Take your time and expect some uncertainty.
Develop mindfulness	Be conscious of cultural differences rather than ignoring the differences.
Avoid negative judgments	Resist thinking that your culture has all the answers.

Developing Skills: Strategies to Adapt to Others Who Are Different from Us

To be skilled is to be capable of putting what you know and want to achieve into action. The underlying skill in being interculturally competent is the ability to be flexible, to be other-oriented, and to adapt to others.

Develop Flexibility.   When you interact with someone from another background, your responding skills are crucial. You can learn only so much from books; you must be willing to learn as you communicate. Every individual is unique, so cultural generalizations that you learn from research may not always apply. It is not accurate to assume, for example, that all French people are preoccupied with food and fashion. Many members of minority groups in Canada find it draining to correct these generalizations in their encounters with others. Pay close attention to the other person's nonverbal cues when you begin conversing; then adjust your communication style and language, if necessary, to put the person at ease. Avoid asking questions or making statements based on generalizations.

Become Other-Oriented.   Throughout this book, we have emphasized the importance of becoming other-oriented—focusing on others rather than on yourself—as an important way to enhance your interpersonal competence. We have also discussed the problems ethnocentrism can create when you attempt to communicate with others, especially with those whose culture is different from your own. We now offer two specific ways to increase your other-orientation: social decentring and empathy.

Although our focus in this discussion will be on how to increase other-orientation in intercultural interactions, the principles apply to all interpersonal interactions. The major difference between intercultural interactions and those that occur within your

It's important to be flexible in your responses to other cultures and people with different backgrounds. Travelling in other countries can hone your intercultural communication skills.

(© Wesley Roberts/Alamy)

own culture is primarily the obviousness of the differences between you and the other person.

1. *Social Decentring.* **Social decentring**, the first strategy, is a cognitive process in which we take into account the other person's thoughts, feelings, values, background, and perspectives. This process involves viewing the world from the other person's point of view. The greater the difference between us and the other person, the more difficult it is to accomplish social decentring. There are three ways to socially decentre, or take another's perspective: (1) develop an understanding of others, based on how you've responded when something similar has happened to you, (2) base your understanding of others on the knowledge you have about a specific person, and (3) make generalizations about someone, based on your understanding of how you think most people would feel or behave.

     First, when you draw on your direct experience, you use your past knowledge of what happened to you to help you guess how someone else may feel. To the degree that the other person is similar to you, your reactions and theirs will match. Suppose, for example, you are talking to a student who has just failed a midterm exam in an important course. You have also had this experience. Your reaction was to discount it because you had confidence you could still pull a passing grade. You might use this self-understanding to predict your classmate's reactions. To the degree that you are similar to the classmate, your prediction will be accurate, but suppose your classmate comes from a culture with high expectations for success. Your classmate might feel that he or she has dishonoured his or her family by a poor performance. In this situation, understanding your own reaction needs to be tempered by your awareness of how similar to or dissimilar from you the other person is. Recognition of differences should lead you to recognize the need to socially decentre in another way.

     The second way we socially decentre—or take the perspective of another—is based on specific knowledge we have of the person with whom we are interacting. Drawing on your memory of how your classmate reacted to a previous failed exam gives you a basis to more accurately predict his or her reaction. Even if you have not observed your classmate's reaction to the same situation, you project how you think he or she would feel based on similar instances. As relationships become more intimate, we gain more information to allow us to more readily socially decentre. Our ability to accurately predict and understand our partners usually increases as relationships become more intimate. In intercultural interactions, the more opportunity you have to interact with the same person and learn more about the person and his or her culture, the more your ability to socially decentre will increase.

     The third way we socially decentre is to apply our understanding of people in general or of categories of people from whom we have gained some knowledge. Each of us develops implicit personality theories, constructs, and attributions of how people act, as discussed in Chapter 3. You might have a general theory to explain the behaviour of men and another theory for women. You might have general theories about the behaviour of people from different cultures. As you meet someone who falls into one of your categories, you draw on that conceptualization to socially decentre. The more you can learn about a given culture, the stronger your

social decentring. A cognitive process in which we take into account another person's thoughts, feelings, values, background, and perspectives.

general theories can be and the more effectively you can use this method of social decentring. The key, however, is to avoid developing inaccurate, inflexible stereotypes of others and basing your perceptions of others only on those generalizations.

2. *Empathy.* Besides thinking about how another may feel (socially decentring), we can have an emotional reaction to what others do or what they tell us. We feel empathy for another. **Empathy**, a second strategy for becoming other-oriented, is an emotional reaction that is similar to the one being experienced by another person, as compared with social decentring, which is a cognitive reaction. Empathy is feeling what another person feels. Our emotional reaction can be similar to or different from the emotions the other person is experiencing. You might experience mild pity for your classmate who has failed the midterm, in contrast to his or her stronger feelings of anguish and dishonour. On the other hand, you might share his or her feelings of anguish and dishonour.

Some emotional reactions are almost universal and cut across cultural boundaries. You might experience empathy when seeing photos or videos depicting emotional scenes occurring in other countries. Seeing a mother crying while holding her sick or dying child in a refugee camp might move you to tears yourself, as you feel a deep sense of sadness or loss. You empathize with the woman. You might also experience empathy for your brother, who has just received the devastating news that his best friend has been killed in an automobile accident. You grieve with him. Empathy can enhance interpersonal interactions in a number of ways: it can provide a bond between you and the other person; it is confirming; it is comforting and supportive; it can increase your understanding of others; and it can strengthen the relationship. We can empathize most easily with those who are similar to us, and in situations with which we have had a similar emotional experience.

Developing empathy is different from sympathizing with others. When you offer **sympathy**, you tell someone you are sorry that he or she feels what he or she is feeling. Here are examples and statements of sympathy: "I'm sorry your Uncle Joe died," or "I'm sorry to hear you failed your exam." When you sympathize with others, you acknowledge their feelings, but when you empathize, you experience an emotional reaction that is similar to the other person's; you too feel grief or sadness.

Appropriately Adapt Your Communication to Others. The logical extension of being flexible and becoming other-oriented is to adapt your communication to enhance the quality and effectiveness of your interpersonal communication. **Adaptation** means adjusting your behaviour to others to accommodate differences and expectations. Appropriate adaptation occurs in the context of the relationship you have with the other person and what is happening in the communication environment. **Communication accommodation theory**, holds that all people adapt their behaviour to others to some extent. Those who appropriately and sensitively adapt to others are more likely to experience more positive communication.

Adapting to others doesn't mean you only tell others what they want to hear and do what others want you to do. Such placating behaviour is not wise, effective, or ethical. Nor are we suggesting that you adapt your behaviour only so that you can get your way; the goal is effective communication, not manipulation. We *are* suggesting, however, that you be aware of what your communication partner is doing and saying, especially if there are cultural differences, so that your message is understood and you don't unwittingly offend others. Although it may seem common sense, being sensitive to others and adapting behaviours to others are not as common as you might think.

Sometimes people adapt their behaviour based on what they think someone will like. At other times, they adapt their communication after realizing they have done

empathy. Process of developing an emotional reaction that is similar to the reaction being experienced by another person. Feeling what another person is feeling.

sympathy. To acknowledge that someone may be feeling bad; to be compassionate toward someone.

adaptation. Adjusting behaviour in accord with what someone else does. We can adapt based on the individual, the relationship, and the situation.

communication accommodation theory. Theory that suggests all people adapt their behaviour to others' to some extent.

something wrong. When you modify your behaviour in anticipation of an event, you **adapt predictively**. For example, you might decide to buy a friend flowers to soften the news about breaking a date because you know how much your friend likes flowers. When you modify your behaviour after an event, you **adapt reactively**. For example, you might buy your friend flowers to apologize for a fight.

You often adapt your messages to enhance message clarity. There are at least four reasons that explain why you may adapt your communication with another person:

- *Information.* You adapt your message in response to specific information that you already know about your partner, such as what he or she may like or dislike, or information that your partner has shared with you.

- *Perceived Behaviour.* You adapt your communication in response to what you think the other person is thinking, what you see the person doing, and your observations of the person's emotional expressions and moods.

- *History.* You adapt your messages to others based on previous conversations, past shared experiences, and personal information that others have shared with you.

- *Communication Context.* You adapt your message depending on where you are; you may whisper a brief comment to someone during a movie, yet shout a comment to someone when attending a loud rock concert.

In intercultural interactions, people frequently adapt communication in response to the feedback or reactions they are receiving during a conversation. An other-oriented communicator is constantly looking and listening to the other person in order to appropriately adapt his or her communication behaviour. Table 4.3 describes how we adapt our verbal messages to others and provides some examples.

People in conversations also adapt to nonverbal cues. They will often raise or lower their voice in response to the volume of a partner, or lean toward a partner who leans toward them. We will discuss such nonverbal cues in Chapter 6.

Adaptation across intercultural contexts is usually more difficult than adaptation within your own culture. Imagine shaking hands with a stranger and having the stranger hold on to your hand as you continue to talk. In Canada, hand holding between strangers violates nonverbal norms, but in some cultures, maintaining physical contact while talking is expected. Pulling your hand away from this person would be rude. What may be mannerly in one culture is not always acceptable in another. Adapting to these cultural differences means developing that "third culture" we talked about earlier in the chapter.

Taking an other-oriented approach to communication means considering the thoughts, feelings, background, perspectives, attitudes, and values of your partners and adjusting your interaction with them accordingly. Other-orientation leads to more effective interpersonal communication, regardless of whether you are dealing with someone in your family or a person from another country.

adapt predictively. Modify or change behaviour in anticipation of an event.

adapt reactively. Modify or change behaviour after an event.

RECAP **Develop Skill to Adapt to Others**

Develop flexibility	Learn to "go with the flow."
Become other-oriented	Put yourself in the other person's mental and emotional mindset; adapt to others; listen and respond appropriately.
Adapt your communication to others	Adjust your behaviour to others to accommodate differences and expectations.

TABLE 4.3   How Do We Adapt to Others?

Type of Adaptation	Examples
Topical Adaptation (including self-disclosures): Choosing topics of conversation because of interests or things you have in common with your partner, including sharing information about yourself	• Talking about a class you both attend • Mentioning an article you read about a TV show your partner really likes • Telling someone about your depression because you believe he or she cares
Explanatory or Elaborated Adaptation: Providing additional information or detail because you recognize that your communication partner has certain gaps in his or her information	• Telling a story about Ike, whom your partner doesn't know, and explaining that Ike is your uncle • Describing Facebook to your grandparent, who doesn't know what the Internet is • Telling someone, "I know my behaviour might seem a little erratic, but I'm under a lot of pressure at work right now and my parents are on my case"
Adaptation Through Withholding or Avoiding Information: Not providing explanations of something your partner already knows; not providing information to avoid an anticipated undesired reaction from your partner; or not providing information because of a fear of how your partner might potentially use the information (such as sharing the information with other people)	• Not elaborating on the parts of an auto engine when describing a car problem because you know your partner is knowledgeable about cars • Not telling someone you saw his or her lover with another because he or she would be hurt • Not mentioning your interest in a mutual friend because you know the listener would blab about it to the mutual friend
Adaptation Through Examples, Comparisons, and Analogies: Choosing messages you believe your partner will find relevant	• Describing a person who is not known by your partner by comparing the person to someone your partner knows • Explaining roller-blading by comparing it to ice skating because your partner is an avid ice skater
Adaptation Through Language Choice: Choosing or avoiding specific words because of the anticipated effect on your partner; consciously selecting words that you believe are understandable to your partner; or using words that have a unique meaning to you and your partner	• Using formal address in response to status differences: "Thank you, Professor Smith" • Using slang when the relationship is perceived as informal • Using nicknames, inside jokes, or teasing comments with close friends

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APPLYING OTHER-ORIENTATION
to Diversity: The Platinum Rule

When interacting with someone who is dramatically different from you, if you want to be truly other-oriented, you may need to go beyond what is known to most Westerners as "The Golden Rule": "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Or, as succinctly stated by the Buddha, "Consider others as yourself." But when interacting with someone who is quite different from you, treating him or her as you'd like to be treated may not achieve relational benefits. If you like hip-hop music but your friend prefers Mozart, taking her to a Mos Def concert may make you feel good about following the Golden Rule (that's how *you'd* like to be treated)—but the concert might be painful for her if she'd rather be listening to Mozart's Horn Quintet in E flat, K. 407. Whether it's taste in music or food, greeting rituals, or a host of other culturally determined behaviours, the ultimate other-oriented behaviour would be what communication researcher Milton Bennett calls the Platinum Rule: Do to others as they themselves would like to be treated.[33] Rather than treating people as *you* would like to be treated, interact with others the way you think *they* would like to be treated. According to Bennett, at its essence, empathy is "the imaginative, intellectual and emotional participation in another person's experience."[34] The goal, according to Bennett, is to attempt to think and feel what another person

thinks and feels and to go beyond that by taking positive action toward others in response to your empathic feelings.

But is the Platinum Rule always helpful, or even possible? As you ponder the virtues and challenges of becoming other-oriented and adapting your communication behaviour to enhance your intercultural communi-cation competence, consider the fol-lowing questions:

- Is the Platinum Rule always desirable? Are there situations when it would be inappropriate to follow the Platinum Rule? Explain your answer.

- What are some obstacles to applying the Platinum Rule, especially with people who are culturally different from you?

- How can the Platinum Rule be useful when you are having a dis-agreement with another person?

- Think about a time when you applied the Platinum Rule. What was the effect on the person with whom you were communicating?

Understanding Diversity: Describing Our Differences (pages 82–87)

Key Terms

Sex *83*
Gender *83*
Race *85*
Ethnicity *85*
Discrimination *85*

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What type of diversity do you find on campus? In the workplace? In your community? Do you find that you communicate differently with people from different groups and cultures? Explain.

2. How have gender differences played a role in your own communication or interactions with others? Explain.

Activities

How well do you think you could predict someone's reactions to finding out that a parent or another close relative had just died? Rank each of the following from 1 (the person whose reaction you could predict most confidently) to 6 (the person whose reaction you'd be least confident about predicting).

a. _____ A close friend of your own sex, age, race, and cultural background

b. _____ A 60-year-old male Chinese farmer

c. _____ A university student 20 years older than you but of your own race, sex, and cultural background

d. _____ A 10-year-old Métis girl from Saskatoon

e. _____ A university student of a different race but your own age, cultural background, and sex

f. _____ A university student of the opposite sex but your own age, race, and cultural background

   Which characteristics of each person do you believe provide the best information on which to base your judgments? Why? What would you need to know about each person to feel comfortable in making a prediction? How could you get that information?

Web Resources

www.yforum.com Visitors to the National Forum on People's Differences can ask questions about religion, culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, or other topics that might be too personal or embarrassing to ask someone in person.

Understanding Culture: Dimensions of Our Mental Software (pages 88–92)

Key Terms

Culture *88*
Subculture *88*
Enculturation *88*
Acculturation *88*
Cultural values *89*
Masculine cultural values *89*

Feminine cultural values *90*
Cultural context *91*
High-context cultures *91*
Low-context cultures *91*

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Name the subcultures to which you belong. Would you describe your subcultures as low- or high-context, masculine or feminine? Explain. What beliefs and norms characterize these co-cultures? What does your culture or co-culture value?

2. Is it ethical or appropriate for someone from one culture to attempt to change the cultural values of someone from a different culture? For example, Culture A practises polygamy, which means that one husband can be married to several wives. Culture B practises monogamy, which means that one husband can be married to only one wife. Should a person from Culture B attempt to make someone from Culture A change his or her ways? Why or why not?

Activities

Bring to class a fable, folktale, or children's story from a culture other than your own. As a group, analyze the cultural values implied by the story or characters in the story.

Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication and Improving Intercultural Communication Competence (pages 92–108)

Key Terms

Intercultural communication *92*
Culture shock *93*
Ethnocentrism *94*
Stereotype *96*
Prejudice *96*
Intercultural communication competence *99*
Motivation *99*
Skill *99*
World view *100*

Third culture *100*
Relational empathy *101*
Mindful *102*
Social decentring *104*
Empathy *105*
Sympathy *105*
Adaptation *105*
Communication accommodation theory *105*
Adapt predictively *106*
Adapt reactively *106*

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What is the problem in assuming that other people are like us? How does this create a barrier to effective intercultural communication?

2. Christine, a Canadian, has just been accepted as a foreign exchange student in Germany. What potential cultural barriers might she face? How should she manage these potential barriers?

3. What are appropriate ways to deal with someone who consistently utters racial slurs and demonstrates prejudice toward racial or ethnic groups? Using MySearchLab, find

an article that suggests some ways to deal with this type of behaviour. Share your article and findings with your class or small group.

Activities

In small groups, identify examples from your own experiences of each barrier to effective intercultural communication discussed in the text. Use one of the examples as the basis for a skit to perform for the rest of the class. See whether the class can identify which intercultural barrier your group is depicting. Also, suggest how the skills and principles discussed in the chapter might have improved the communication in the situation you role-play.

Web Resources

http://chocd.umsl.edu The Connecting Human Origin and Cultural Diversity Program provides suggestions for the development of social justice and cultural awareness curricula.

MyCommunicationLab™

Are you ready for the test? You can find review questions and additional resources to deepen your understanding and test your recall of the material in this chapter by going to MyCommunicationLab. This valuable resource offers interactive multimedia assets and diagnostic tests with customized study plans and remediation, along with an enhanced eText. To access MyCommunicationLab, see the access card shrinkwrapped with this textbook.