

13

DEVELOPING CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way that we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others. (Anthony Robbins)

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

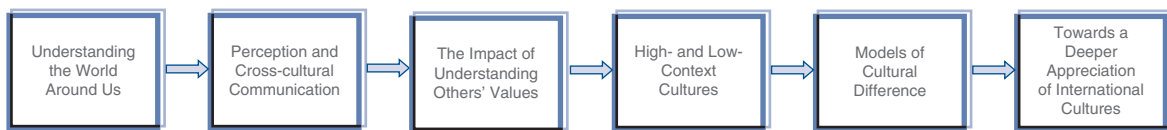


Figure 13.1

When you see the  this means go to the companion website <https://study.sagepub.com/morgan2e> to do a quiz, complete a task, read further or download a template. 

AIMS OF THE CHAPTER

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Analyse your own and others' world views.
- Overcome perceptual and other cultural barriers in order to develop a good understanding of others' communication.
- Develop your insight into other cultures.
- Become more of a global citizen, able to operate with understanding in other cultures.

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WHEN SHOULD YOU READ THIS CHAPTER?

You will almost certainly need to work with individuals who are different from yourself and who might come from overseas, and so it is best to read this chapter during your first year at university.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a global world which is changing fast – technologically, legally, politically, economically and environmentally. We can travel pretty much anywhere nowadays, we can see strange and amazing things, we can interact with people who are vastly different from ourselves and we can enjoy some of the most wonderful places that nature can provide. We can travel to countries with little more than our phone and passport, with our tickets and money accessible through smartphones and no need of paper documentation. Yet there are places where power cuts

are a daily occurrence and where the price of accessing the internet by phone is so expensive that many cannot afford it. And, of course, there are places in the world where people need food and shelter much more than they need to access Facebook, WeChat or Skype. Very often, our interaction with this international world in which we live does not help us to understand the people who live in it or the impact that they might have on us in our home country. Whether we like it or not, international economics and global trade affect the value of a house and the amount of tax we pay, as well as the exchange rate when we go on holiday. Those same pressures affect some of the social issues we experience and which we see played out on the international news – immigration, battles and wars, education, and so on – and yet the issues affecting us in our home country – an aging population, unemployment, international diplomacy – are likely to be exactly the same as those affecting millions of others in countries we can now travel to.

Even if we do not live in another country during our lifetime, we will almost certainly interact with individuals who look and speak differently from us, who eat different food and who have different world views, values, attitudes and behaviours. Societies are becoming much more diverse as global movement and travel becomes easier, yet typically we make little effort to learn another language, to learn about others' values and to understanding how others think, behave and communicate – and that level of effort will not help us in the longer term. In reality, as human beings (or even as animals), we tend to protect ourselves from and fight against that which we do not understand; this is natural, but there is a great deal more value in developing that understanding than in being defensive.

If we are open to learning about others' values, then we can start to change perceptions. Of course, sharing a common language makes life easier, but sharing a common language does not mean that we share the same values, in the same way that looking similar does not mean that we share the same outlook on life. The globalised world that we now live in requires culturally literate managers and leaders who understand what it means to recognise that others might be thinking in very different ways from them. Being able to communicate effectively and understand how others from diverse backgrounds might react will enable us to operate far more cross-culturally than those competing for the same jobs, something that is very much needed in this international world.

BOX 13.1

If you are an international student (and even if you are not), you should read this

If you are an international student and have come to study in a country which is not your own – or perhaps a student in your own country but studying in a language which is not your own – then you are probably already one or two steps ahead of many of the students in your classroom. You will likely have come to the university through a foundation programme or have achieved IELTS results of 6.0 or 6.5 or above. To become so good in a second language that you can study for a degree in that language is a great

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achievement, so well done! You may not understand everything that is being said and may struggle sometimes with different accents, different kinds of food, or the weather, and so on, but you are doing something that the home students might not understand, but should appreciate. They might not have left their family, their familiar surroundings and their community to spend a considerable time in a city and culture which may or may not appear welcoming.

Being an international student is not easy but can be a great adventure, and if you can learn more about the culture, people and language in which you are studying, then the experience can be a fantastic one. Learn how the transport system works, get to visit some of the key places, make friends with local students and improve your language skills.

Above all, try to break out of your own community. Try to spend some time with home students, because it is one of the best ways to learn about the culture. What is the value of an education in another country if all you do is spend time with those from your own culture, visit some tourist spots and struggle with your English? You may not feel confident in your own English language abilities (even though you have every right to be confident if the university has accepted you onto the degree programme), but you will never develop that confidence or learn about others' cultures if you never break out of your own cultural group.

Finally, do try the local food! While international food is widely available, if you are in the UK, potatoes feature in many meals, fish and chips can seem pretty tasteless without salt and vinegar, each person will probably order their own meal, and there are distinct 'stages' in a meal (starter or appetiser, main course and then dessert with coffee) rather than all the dishes coming at the same time.

This chapter will examine the ways in which perceptual processes can impact helpfully and unhelpfully on building cross-cultural awareness. We will also spend time looking at how individual cultures might differ, how communication works differently in different cultures and what individuals can do to give themselves a competitive advantage in developing an international career.

We will begin with a skills assessment, looking at our awareness of other cultures, our attitudes and values, and our engagement with the international environment.

There may well be very different responses to the questions posed. While the world has become more global in terms of trade, and while we have a much better understanding of the world than we might have done some years ago thanks to the internet, much of the world does not seem to want to understand how to operate with what some call 'global literacy' – and that is what the remainder of this chapter is about.

SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Complete the brief questionnaire below to see how well you could do when it comes to developing a global career. Read carefully each of the following descriptions and say how typical you think each statement is of your behaviour or attitude by giving it a score between 1 and 5, where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 5 is 'strongly agree'.

Item	Statement	Score
1.	As a human being, humility is an important quality for me to possess	
2.	I enjoy travelling to other countries	
3.	I love trying international and unusual food	
4.	I find it easier to talk to someone who looks like me than someone who does not	
5.	I think most other cultures are friendly	

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Item	Statement	Score
6.	From what I hear on the news and read online, I do not think I really want to live in another country	
7.	Learning another language is something that I will never need or want to do	
8.	I believe that if people speak the same language - grammar, vocabulary - then they can easily understand each other	
9.	I am likely to find living in another country really stressful	
10.	The national and online media have a significant influence on my attitudes towards those from other countries	
11.	I do not really believe this chapter is an important one for me; I am never going to interact with those from other cultures	
12.	I know what a passport is, and I know (in very broad terms) what I need to do, practically, to get a visa	
13.	I have a good number of friends who come from a culture which is not the same as mine	
14.	I only really see the value in communicating with others who come from the same culture as me	
15.	My values and attitudes are more important and useful than those of people from other cultures	
16.	If you do not agree with me, then I am likely to think you are a bit weird or strange	
17.	I have a passport [Answer should be either 0 or 5 for 'yes' or 'no' respectively.]	
18.	I use my passport regularly to travel to countries which are quite different from my own	
19.	I have never spoken to someone who disagrees with my view of how the world operates	
20.	If I lived in another country, I know what I would find difficult	
21.	Going on holiday is one of the best ways to find out about others' cultures	
22.	Being at university has exposed me to many people who come from cultures which are different to mine	
23.	I interact regularly with individuals who do not speak my language	
24.	I am more likely to meet up with people who are from my culture than from other cultures	
25.	I know something about the history and culture of other countries	

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD AROUND US

Viewing the world around us can be done on so many levels at any one time. At one end of the scale, perhaps you have been on holiday or perhaps you have actually lived in another country. Maybe you are an overseas student who is trying desperately to make sense of both living in another country and simultaneously trying to adapt to a university system which can seem somewhat strange. Whatever your level of engagement, developing an understanding of how the world operates is something that we build up over our lifetime, most of the time wholly unconsciously. We call it our 'world view'.

The view we have of how the world operates comprises a range of thinking on a number of levels (see Figure 13.2). Usually, we do not think about what our world view is. We simply carry around with us a series of assumptions about how the world operates. That view will be based on our beliefs.

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The best way of explaining how this works is to illustrate it with a couple of contrasting examples. This might be according to religious or philosophical belief. For example, an eastern viewpoint will indicate that life carries us along and it is for us to make the best of it that we can. This differs considerably from a typical western viewpoint which ‘empowers’ the individual to ‘go out and change the world to make it a better place’ in some way.

 WORLD VIEW

Our world view is our view of how the world operates.

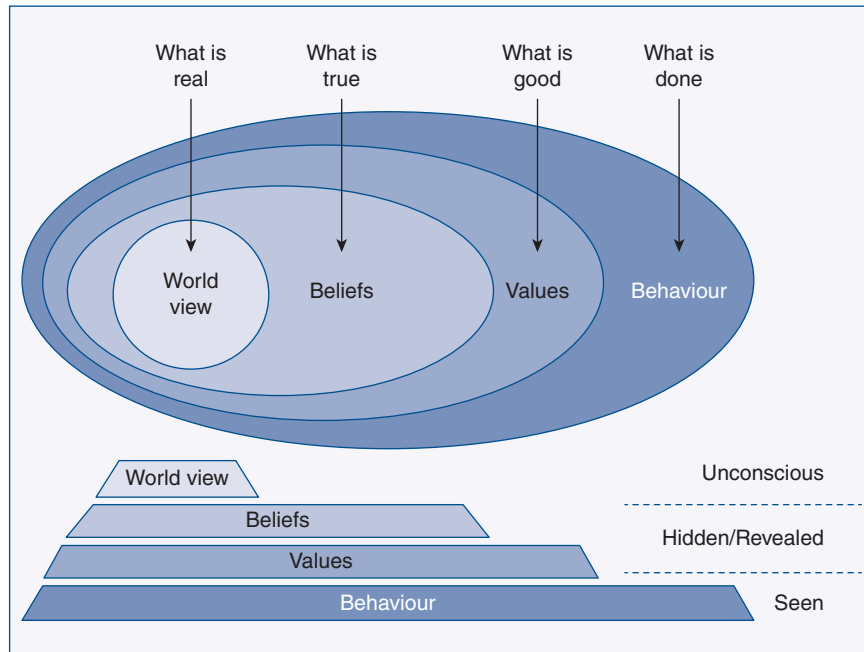


Figure 13.2 Components of a world view

Those beliefs often influence our view of what is good and what is bad – our values. Some cultures might suggest that modesty, respect for elders, filial piety and hard work are espoused. In a western culture, it would be very unusual to see a statement of values, since there is tolerance for a wide range of views about what is good and what is bad – often referred to as ‘post-modernist’ philosophy. The statement in the photograph in Image 13.1 – outside a department store in China – encourages adherence to a particular set of views. Cultural values play a significant role in creating a cohesive society, but are not always straightforward to understand or apply, as shown in Box 13.2.

CULTURE 

Culture is the overarching system of rules and guidelines which determine what is and what is not acceptable.

REFLECTION POINT 

Take some time to think about the following questions and write down some answers.

Thinking about your own country, what changes have been happening - socially, economically, politically, in terms of technology?

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How easy is it to identify your own country's culture?

How could any changes your country is facing impact on your own national culture?



Image 13.1 Basic standards of citizenry: values of one city in northeast China

While your own view of what is real, true and good is generally hidden, your own behaviour – what is done – is seen and is visible. Similarly, you will see the behaviour of those from other cultures. Our behaviour is the outworking of our reaction to what we see and experience, and that reaction is based on our perception.

As we have indicated, others' behaviour is a result of their reaction to events based on their own world view, just as our behaviour is a reflection of our world view. Because we do not usually talk about our 'world views' (even in conversations with those who are different!), we can arrive at an incomplete understanding of why people behave as they do, and this can cause us problems in accepting others.



KEY LEARNING POINT

Understanding another person's 'world view' is crucial for understanding how that person is behaving and what they are thinking - and why. This implies that we need to have increased conversations with those who are different from ourselves, to find out what they really think.

PERCEPTION AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The impression(s) that others have of you will determine how they communicate with you. For example, if they have the impression that you are lazy, then they might be somewhat more aggressive towards you than if that were not the case. Alternatively, if they think you are a hard worker and that

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you put more effort into your activities than others, then they will probably be more likely to believe you if you say you are overworked and too busy. This does not mean that we should do all we can 'to get people to like us' – going into a managerial career because we want people to 'like us' is a recipe for disaster, simply because we will always face conflicting priorities – but it does mean that we should communicate well enough for people to understand why we do what we do. Doing so in a world of uncertain perceptions is not easy, but if we understand how perception works, then we can probably minimise the impact of poor perception by controlling how and what we communicate.

The process of 'attending to' information refers in the definition to the fact that we do not pay attention to all that happens around us at any one time, but only to that which is within our perceptual 'field of vision', because it is going to have a strong and/or immediate impact on our situation, because it relates to something we are interested in, or because it will have a clear impact on others around us. We 'interpret' information according to our previous experiences and ideas about likely meanings. If we cannot easily interpret what we see, then we will likely investigate further, but if we think we have interpreted something correctly, that is much less likely – even if we are not correct in our interpretation. This becomes a particularly challenging issue when we are communicating across cultures. The final unconscious element involves 'organising' information and categorising it so as to ensure our brain can find the information next time we need it. Any mistakes in any of these three unconscious processes can lead to difficulties on our part and on the part of the recipients in the way our communication is delivered or interpreted.

There are several reasons for what we call 'perceptual errors':

1. **We form impressions and make judgements and decisions about people on very little information:** Our brain likes to take as little time as possible to reach judgements on others and, as a result, fills in any gaps in information itself from what it thinks is likely to be true.
2. **Underlying this is a need for meaning:** We try to categorise experiences/situations/people so as to achieve stability. This stability helps us to believe that our view of the world is the correct one, but, in doing so, we unconsciously introduce bias and distortion.
3. **We may attribute behaviour incorrectly:** If we believe that someone is highly capable and intelligent, we may believe that their poor behaviour on a particular occasion was due to factors outside of their control. This supports our stable world view and concurs with the 'information gaps' that our brain has already 'filled in' for us.
4. **Such processes are unconscious:** Rarely do we challenge or think about our judgements, preferring to believe that our original understanding is correct. As a result, we become reluctant to change our views. We are likely to do so only if we are challenged to support our original judgement with hard evidence, or if something significant happens that forces us to re-evaluate our original assessments.
5. **What seems similar in some aspects, is probably similar in all aspects:** Relating this to point 1 above, if there are two things that seem similar, then they probably are similar. When we are perceiving people, we can believe that two people who act in a similar way are probably demonstrating not only the same behaviours, but also the same attitudes and values. This leads to stereotyping and to incorrect approaches to communicating with two people who may display the same behaviour but for very different reasons.
6. **We feel personally more secure with those who are like us, and have a preference for those who seem similar to, not different from, us:** This is not dissimilar to point 5: we believe that those who look like us will probably act like us, think like us and enjoy the same things that we enjoy. Of course, the reality is not usually so simple, but believing this means that

PERCEPTION



Perception is the unconscious process of attending to, interpreting and organising information so as to develop an understanding of the world around us.

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the brain has to do a lot less work. In practice, what all of this means is that what we understand of the world around us and how it works is not necessarily the reality, and that means that we can get things badly wrong when we are planning how to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds.



FOR YOU TO DO

Have a look at the picture below. It is a very simple picture featuring three people and has been used regularly in management training.



When you look at the picture, try to answer the following questions and give a summary of what you see - first on your own, then with a friend, and then perhaps with someone from a different cultural background.

1. Where are these people?
2. What do you think their jobs might be?
3. Do you think they know each other? If so, how?
4. Why do you think they are together?
5. Is there anything else you can interpret from what you see?

Be as creative as you can - that will make this exercise more interesting - but also try to analyse carefully what you see to develop an accurate interpretation.

BOX 13.2

Interpretation of cultural norms

Some time ago, I had a friend who was working in another country. After he had been there for some time, I asked him how it was going. His answer surprised me: 'I am finding it OK, but I am not sure if the locals like me very much.' On hearing this, I asked why he had said that. He replied, 'Because they are often spitting at me.'

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We react to what we interpret of others' behaviour. People in his own country did not spit in public. In his culture, spitting was something that was seen as rude and impolite. That was his perception and he was reacting to it. In other cultures, particularly some tribal cultures in Africa where water is scarce, spitting is seen as a sign of respect.

Some months later, I met him again and asked how things were going and whether people were still spitting at him. His response this time was much more accepting of others' behaviour: 'Oh yes, but I've learnt that the spitting was nothing to do with me - they were simply clearing their throats of phlegm.'

His perception had changed based on a lot more experience of that culture - and on many conversations he had with local individuals much more familiar with this culture.

We interpret others' behaviour in the light of our own experiences, but when we move to another culture, *those experiences and interpretations become less relevant.*

One of the best ways to prevent inaccurate perceptions from affecting how we engage and communicate with others is to challenge ourselves and ask ourselves questions about our earlier assessments of others. This typically involves deciding to try to collect information which actually contradicts our original assessment. If we cannot find any having made an honest and definite attempt to do so, then we can be reasonably sure that our assessment is probably correct, but, of course, once we have *gathered* the information, we need to be very careful to ensure that we *interpret* the evidence accurately as well.

Of course, it is not just us that are affected by those perceptual processes - those receiving our communication are just as subject to these processes as we are, though they may not be aware of it. Some people like to discuss this with others that they communicate with on an ongoing basis, so that any misperceptions can be addressed easily. Some organisations will engage in what is known as '360° feedback', where information from others is used as part of a performance review process. This may not necessarily change *what* is done, but may change *how* it is done and *how* the individual communicates with others.

The final note here is that all the forms and components of communication covered below will generate perceptions in others. Our non-verbal behaviour, our para-language, our movements and gestures, and our appearance will all have an impact. Some of these we will be able to control, and others we might struggle to control, but it is important to recognise that the perceptions that others have of our communications will be affected by the way they interpret the ways we have communicated previously.

FOR YOU TO DO



This is a perceptual activity and a private one for you to do on your own. Think of one individual that you are struggling to work with or get on with, and then ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is it that they did which originally generated your impression of them?
2. Why do you believe they did what they did?
3. What evidence do you have for that assumption (in question 2)?
4. Is there any other possible interpretation of that evidence? Could there have been anything externally which influenced them to do what they did?
5. Have they done the same thing, before or since?
6. If not, what set of factors might have led them to do what they have done? Will you change your perception? If so, what can you do to prevent it from happening again to you? To others?

Whether your original perception was correct or incorrect, it may still not be possible to work with them. We do not all have the same values or attitudes and sometimes this can cause conflicts, but *if we have perceived someone incorrectly*, then at least we can start exploring those other issues with a little more objectivity.

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KEY LEARNING POINT

Other people's perceptions of us will have a significant impact on how the messages we communicate are received and acted on.

THE IMPACT OF UNDERSTANDING OTHERS' VALUES

Chapter 9 showed us that accurate communication processes require that messages encoded in one way should be interpreted or decoded in the same way, enabling both parties to understand the meaning. It also indicated that there should be a feedback loop to ensure that all parties were clear on whether or not the message had been understood well.

Communication across cultures causes problems in both these processes. Firstly, the encoding and decoding processes might work completely differently in different cultures (depending on how different the cultures are in terms of their world view). Secondly, the feedback loop might not yield the information expected for a variety of reasons, including that some cultures might even find the need for such a feedback loop quite offensive.

Resolving these challenges sometimes requires a good degree of knowledge of how different cultures might use and interpret the communication processes. In cultures where individuals say exactly what they mean and this is clearly understood, there may not be a big challenge. However, other cultures might require a reasonable understanding of cultural values in order to interpret others' communication accurately and, in doing so, we start to talk about high-context and low-context cultures.

HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

Since we try to derive meaning from our communications with others, one of the key challenges with communicating cross-culturally is that we assume that items and behaviours we see as familiar may have very different meanings from our understanding. This becomes problematic when we are operating in what we call 'high-context cultures', where we may not accurately understand others' communications with us.



HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

High-context cultures are those where, to communicate well, a deep understanding of the culture is needed.

Low-context cultures are those where little understanding of the culture is needed.

Understanding the culture is sometimes vital to understanding the underlying meaning of what someone is trying to communicate. In a low-context culture, individuals will be clear and direct about what they mean, and communicating in low-context cultures is relatively straightforward.



FOR YOU TO DO

Look at the statements below. Assume that they are given with a pleasant facial expression and little in the way of para-linguistic or non-verbal cues. Without knowing anything about the culture of the speaker, which of the three ideas below each expression do you think is being communicated by the speaker?

1. 'Thank you for your presentation. Very informative. Let me discuss your findings with my colleagues. We've no questions at this stage. Thank you again.'

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- a. 'It was a really great presentation which answered everything I think we need to know.'
 - b. 'I think your presentation told us some things, but it didn't really inspire us. It wasn't really what we are looking for.'
 - c. 'We're confident that you have given us what we are looking for, but if we agreed to everything you said right now, then we would look a bit foolish. No one ever agrees to everything right away without checking their information.'
2. 'We are concerned about the delays in this project. We were hoping that we can work with you more effectively than this, so if there is anything we can do to help you, please let us know.'
 - a. 'We want to continue to work with you to resolve these delays.'
 - b. 'We are not really satisfied with how this project is progressing. You shouldn't really ask us for any help, but we are offering it in order to maintain the relationship.'
 - c. 'We want to stop the contract and offer it to someone else who we think can do a better job.'
 3. 'The analysis of our own data tells us beyond any doubt that customers do not approve of the technology we are using for this product. We cannot go on like this!'
 - a. 'In order to avoid a problem, we will have to work as a team to change what we do.'
 - b. 'The person who thought this up must have been stupid. I hope he's no longer part of the organisation.'
 - c. 'I believe that the organisation's Chief Technical Engineer has the answer.'

In reality, there are no right or wrong answers to any of the above statements, but an understanding of an individual's values and attitudes might have a significant impact on how you interpret their statements. If we take two countries – the Netherlands (which is a low-context culture) and Japan (which is a high-context culture) – we can see these differences very clearly. The messages given in high-context cultures can be very difficult to understand accurately. Box 13.3 provides some examples.

BOX 13.3

Expressing Messages in Different Cultures

Below are a number of statements indicating how individuals in high- and low-context cultures may express similar kinds of messages.

Expressing dislike about someone

Direct, low-context culture: 'I don't like them.'

Indirect, high-context culture: 'I am sure they have some significant strengths.'

Refusing hospitality

Direct, low-context culture: 'Thank you, but I really don't want any more.'

Indirect, high-context culture: 'It is very kind, but my partner needs me to be back at home.'

Offering hospitality

Direct, low-context culture: 'Can you come to the restaurant tonight?'

Indirect, high-context culture: 'My colleagues and I would be honoured if you could join us.'

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Giving negative feedback

Direct, low-context culture: 'This was not done well.'

Indirect, high-context culture: 'The effort you made was very welcome. We have asked someone else to continue your wonderful beginning.'

Asking for more time to complete your work

Direct, low-context culture: 'I need some more time. Is that possible?'

Indirect, high-context culture: 'We are becoming more and more confident that we will be finished around the deadline that you gave us.'

The messages given in a high-context culture may seem contradictory to the message that is intended, but that is because there is little understanding of the values underlying the communication. If we take the examples above and assume they are given by a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) where traditional Confucian values have been important, such as China, Korea or Japan, then we might recognise that:

1. Preservation of the other party's dignity is extremely important.
2. It is vital that the other person's confidence in us is not damaged.
3. The collective 'we' guides a lot of what is done: 'if you wish to work with us, then you will need to become part of the collective team'.
4. Hierarchy is really important, so that offers made by senior individuals should be received with a significant amount of respect.

These attitudes will govern the phrasing of the above messages. Other cultures will have their own attitudes, often around such issues as time, the speed at which good relationships can be built up, the extent to which hierarchy is important, how hard-headed (or, alternatively, empathetic) someone is allowed to be, how much risk is acceptable when undertaking new activities (or engaging in new relationships), and how strongly they are expected to sacrifice personal activities and goals for the good of society.



'BUT I HAVE A QUESTION ...'

... If this is the case, how can I be sure that I understand what anyone from another culture is really saying? And how do I know if someone comes from a high-context or a low-context culture?

These are good questions. There are various ways of getting to know a culture, though some are less beneficial than others. Visiting a place as a tourist is perhaps the most superficial action anyone can take. Apart from visiting or living in a second country, the best way to get to know another culture is by making friends and asking lots of honest questions. Learn from those friends and find out what their attitudes and values might be, and the extent to which these values affect styles of communication.

Doing those things - along with some background reading - will help you understand more about the cultures with which you are interacting.

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In all of these things, the most effective approach is often a cautious one, which means not expressing yourself directly. It is not difficult to become direct subsequently, but to be direct and then to become more cautious is much more difficult.

KEY LEARNING POINT



Communication with individuals from cultures other than our own means that messages may well be misunderstood. We need to recognise that this is the case and ensure that we gather feedback on our own communication and check the meanings of others' messages wherever possible.

MODELS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Stating that any country has one culture is likely to ignore subtle variations. Firstly, countries change: cultures and values evolve over time. Secondly, assuming that everyone in a particular culture shares the same values or behaves in the same way is likely to be inaccurate. Individuals from the same countries do differ. Research published in 2014 indicates that the United States and Canada have distinct regional cultures (Dheer, Lenatowicz and Peterson, 2014). However, while there is a variety of models accessible to researchers, two frameworks for identifying and explaining differences in behaviour have become accepted knowledge, and it would be inappropriate to ignore them completely.

Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

The best-known framework was developed by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch researcher, in the 1970s. Hofstede undertook research for IBM across its national subsidiaries in various countries and then produced his findings in a book called *Culture's Consequences*. Hofstede's model is one of the easiest to remember and the website that bears his name is well regarded by practitioners in the field.

The most recent version of Hofstede's model contains six dimensions:

- **Masculinity vs femininity:** How hard-headed and 'tough' is the national culture? Does it show much mercy, or is it intolerant of failure? How much pride is shown in the country by individuals living in that culture? Does the national culture seek harmony or show readiness to enter a conflict if pushed a little? As with many labels given to dimensions, some might disagree with these characterisations, but the dimension has nothing to do with whether a culture's population is male or female.
- **Power-distance (high \leftrightarrow low):** How accessible to the general public are organisational and national leaders of the country? Are leaders and managers expected to be aloof and deeply respected, or is the general attitude one of friendliness? Are organisations likely to be very hierarchical, or relatively flat in terms of structure?
- **Uncertainty avoidance (high \leftrightarrow low):** How readily do individuals in the country accept (or even embrace) risk? Is there an entrepreneurial spirit, or do individuals prefer a cautious approach? How quickly would decisions be made if things were uncertain?
- **Individualism vs collectivism:** How readily do individuals put the national interest above their own? Is there a noticeable desire to serve others, or are people generally competitive and/or selfish? How is wealth regarded in the country – as a personal asset or as something to be shared?
- **Long-term outlook vs short-term outlook:** To what extent are individuals interested in closing the single deal or in a much longer-term relationship? How will parties react if one party

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breaks the agreement in a minor way? Will countries be interested in talking to solve a problem, or will they resort to more 'para-legal' means?

- **Indulgence vs self-restraint:** To what extent does society allow individuals to freely express emotions of excitement and joy? Is there societal pressure not to express such feelings? How freely can individuals enjoy having 'fun'? Societies which are free to have more fun tend to believe that they are in control of their own destiny.

The questions given here are not exhaustive, but should give you enough information to understand the dimensions of the model.

Hofstede's original research has been criticised by some on the grounds that it committed a fatal flaw in undertaking the research in the way that it did. When we are examining what we see and trying to make deductions based on what we see, we are in serious danger of interpreting behaviour based on our own understanding, and that may well be inaccurate. Some have criticised Hofstede for carrying out research in just this way: that interpretations of culture were originally based not on reality but on perceptions and interpretations of reality by individuals who did not necessarily understand whether those interpretations were accurate, or did not take time to check. As time has moved on, the model has received a great deal of acceptance internationally and research methods for Hofstede's recent work have become somewhat more refined.



'BUT I HAVE A QUESTION ...'

... You mentioned earlier that it is dangerous to generalise, so presumably it is really dangerous to stereotype and generalise at a national level? If so, what can we do about it?

Yes, you are correct on both issues. It is dangerous and unlikely to be wholly accurate to generalise or to say that everyone from a certain culture will be high on 'power-distance', low on 'masculinity', and so on. In some ways, this addresses a fundamental issue about the application of research. Research can only model what it sees, and what research sees is always measured in terms of probabilities. It hardly ever produces absolute certainty, and the same is true for cross-cultural research: it produces a model or a series of hypotheses which need to be tested every time we meet others.

So, to answer your second question, on what we can do about uncertainty, we need to test those hypotheses - it is as simple as that. So, we use as many opportunities as we can to find out about people, to learn what is important to them, how they deal with certain issues and how they determine what is important and what is not important. As we will see later on in the chapter, learning about others' attitudes and cultures from individuals themselves - often called 'ethnography' - is one of the most important steps to understanding another's culture.

Having said that, the models given above do give us a set of thoughts from which we might start asking questions, and in some business settings, groups of individuals in some countries are more inclined to follow a national culture than to follow their own individual values. This is going to be particularly true in more collectivist/communitarian societies, of course.



FOR YOU TO DO

Think about your own national culture. Your own culture (world view, beliefs and values) will have an impact on how you see other cultures and how you behave towards them. Try to answer the following questions:

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1. Looking at the dimensions listed above, how high or low on the dimensions given would you place your own culture?
2. How easy was it to answer question 1? How clearly defined is your own national culture?
3. Can you readily think of individuals from your country who do not fit your own national culture?
4. What would be the dangers of ignoring the cultural differences between you and someone else in (a) a group coursework situation and (b) a business meeting?
5. What could you do to get to know international students studying at your university?

KEY LEARNING POINT



Describing individual, group and national cultures is not easy, and unless we are dealing with individuals there will always be a degree of generalisation taking place. We can, however, begin with our own analyses of individuals we know by using the models as a framework - to be tested and proved or disproved as appropriate.

TOWARDS A DEEPER APPRECIATION OF INTERNATIONAL CULTURES

As a student, you are likely to be exposed to a large number of students from international backgrounds. In the early 1990s, there were very few international students in the UK, but as political systems around the world changed and as countries began realising the cultural and other benefits of inviting international students into their classrooms, those numbers have grown considerably.

This brings certain challenges – to nations, groups, institutions and individuals – but also opportunities to learn about the world around us, which have never before been so easy to find out. As mentioned in the introduction, the world has become global and to ignore others' cultures is something we do at our peril.

The questions therefore are: 'What skills and qualities do we need to develop in order to become culturally aware?' and 'What can we do practically to develop such awareness?'

There are a number of answers to these questions. For the former question, Box 13.4 outlines some of the qualities leading to 'intercultural competence' identified in research, and the content below (based on Figure 13.3) identifies some relevant actions, some of which give us a fairly superficial view and some of which help us understand other cultures in considerably more depth.

BOX 13.4

What Is 'Intercultural Competence'?

Sheridan (2005) identified a number of characteristics - the 7Cs - of what was called 'intercultural competence', relating to the extent to which an individual:

- possesses knowledge about being 'cross-cultural' (Capability).
- considers all stakeholders - including international customers and employers - in making decisions (Care).
- is used to engaging with diverse and international communities (Connection).

(Continued)

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- is humble enough to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to cross-cultural operations (Context).
- understands situations without making any judgements (Contrasts).
- develops followers according to their cultural backgrounds (Consciousness).
- has experience of living abroad (Cultural immersion).

Questions

1. When you look at these 7Cs, to what extent do you possess these qualities?
2. How could you develop those qualities you do not possess?

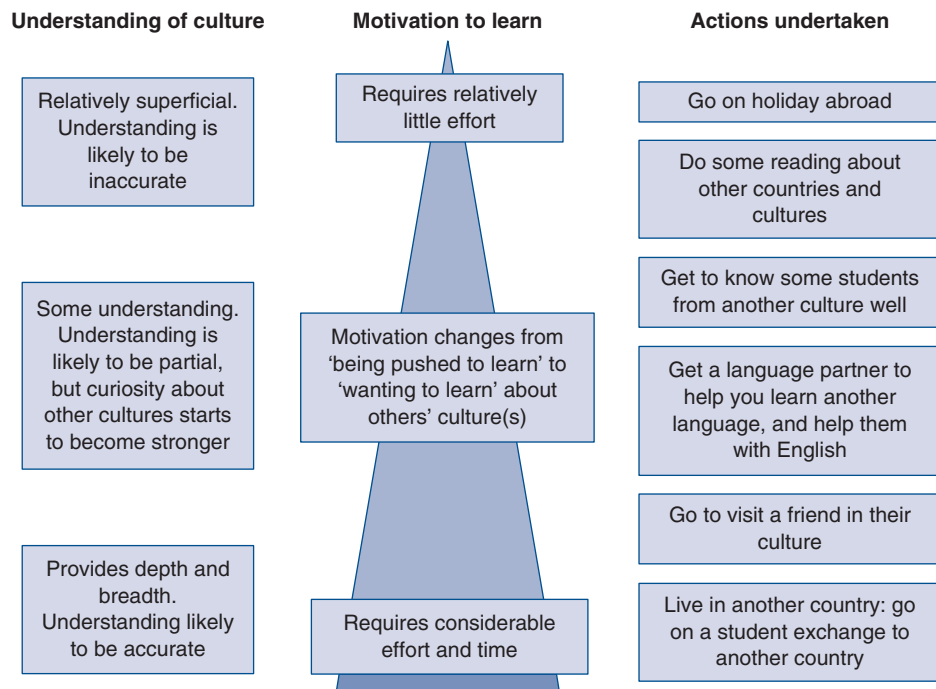


Figure 13.3 Developing an awareness of others' cultures

Figure 13.3 shows some ideas for how to develop cultural awareness. Let us look at how each of these actions can give you some benefit when it comes to developing intercultural competence.

- **Visiting new places:** This can help us to understand the more obvious differences between cultures, for example the language or the history of a particular place, but we are unlikely to develop any kind of detailed understanding of the culture simply by seeing things which are different. In fact, the more things we see that are different without trying to understand them, the more we will be in danger of developing stereotypes based on very limited knowledge of the culture. Perceptual theory tells us that we are then more likely to find evidence to support that inaccurate understanding, rather than evidence which contradicts it. However, it is better to realise that cultures are different than stay at home and wonder why other 'strange' cultures do not understand you.
- **Doing some reading about other cultures:** This still has a sense of superficiality about it in some ways since you are relying on what you read (and reading comments on Facebook is not

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going to be helpful), but you will learn things. Reading develops your knowledge about a country and, without knowledge, your understanding will be very limited.

- **Getting to know some students from another culture well:** While we do need to be very aware that not everyone from one particular culture is the same, the better we can get to know other individuals and their cultures – their behaviours, their values and beliefs, and their world view – the better we can engage in constructive relationships with others from that culture. A great deal of learning can be developed through discussion. The easiest way of doing this is to work with international students on group coursework.



'BUT I HAVE A QUESTION ...'

... We are a group of students from a variety of different cultures working together on coursework, which can sometimes present certain challenges. Are there ways to make this easier?

Working with those who have different values and cultures from our own can sometimes present challenges, and in some cases can even produce conflicts within the group. Of course, the solution is to identify exactly where the problem might lie. Some students:

- may not seem to speak as much in the group. This does *not* mean that they do not wish to contribute to the group, only that they may not understand as much as native speakers, or that they need more time to process the information. The solution is to find out informally what the issue is, to reassure those students that their contribution is valuable, and then to give time and space to ensure that their contributions are heard.
- may do their work in a different way or on a different timescale from others. This may be related to their values and experience in their own culture. The solution is often to ensure that the group develops some standardised rules and values (including procedures for communicating effectively) and then to ensure that everyone understands the values and norms of the group before getting too far into the work (see section on storming in Chapter 11).
- may want to stick together with other students from their own culture. If you were living in another country, you would probably want to do the same. It is a lot easier to understand and communicate with those who naturally eat the same kind of food, share your cultural values and speak your language.
- may not want to do the same social activities as other members of the group. Certain social events might be very common in some cultures, but may be disapproved of by certain cultural values or contradict religious values. The group needs to ensure that social events can be accessible to all students; it would not take too much imagination to organise such activities.

There may be other challenges that you face. As in working with anyone with a slightly different lifestyle or background to your own, solutions usually relate to addressing concerns from *all* individuals in the group, rather than just the leader, or the loudest.

- **Getting a language partner to help you learn another language, and help them learn to speak your language:** Being willing to learn a language is a great way of showing how committed you are to developing an international mindset. In the UK, we (in general) are very lazy about learning languages, partially because we think: 'So many people around the world speak English, so why bother?'
 - The answer is very simple: It shows commitment and engagement with that culture, and more often than not, it will be a significant advantage to being able to do business in that culture.

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- Doing so with a language partner rather than in a class will enable you to ask questions which occur to you about that culture as you progress, and will also help the international student to develop their English skills in an informal situation.
- **Visiting a friend in their culture:** Spending time with people you know in their own culture is probably one of the best ways to learn about that culture. Because they are a friend, you can ask them nearly anything you wish about their culture, you can see what they do, how they act and how they relate to others and the world around them. You can never buy that kind of experience from a book (even this one!).
- Some cultures would be very happy for you to ask whether you can do this, while others would not react well to such a request and would expect you to wait to be invited. So you need to take time to develop the friendship first so that you can understand which is most acceptable. You also need to be very clear on who will pay for what. Assume at the outset that you will need to pay for everything, including a gift for your host. Misunderstandings can damage friendships and it would be a big shame if you got this wrong.
- **Living in another country or going on a student exchange:** Long-term exposure to another country cannot fail to enhance your understanding of other cultures, and so a semester



CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the emotional reaction to recognising that your experience, knowledge and understanding of a different culture are incomplete or inaccurate, but knowing that you cannot isolate yourself from that culture.

abroad – either on an exchange programme or, if not, as part of a study abroad programme – would be a great place to start. Your university will usually have a number of ‘partner universities’ where students can go and study for a semester or a year, and where their students will come to your own university. If you do go abroad, make sure you ask questions about health insurance, bank accounts (including getting access to your own money while abroad) and visa requirements; these can take some time to set up.

- Student exchange programmes are usually free in terms of course fees, will contribute to your degree in the same way as if you were studying in your own university, and will usually give you a good ‘study experience’ in the other culture. Study abroad programmes will vary in these areas, but will usually require you to pay extra. You must also check whether such programmes will contribute to your degree, or whether they are going to mean that you just add a year onto your degree.
- You also need to be prepared to experience culture shock as you immerse yourself in that second country (see section below on overcoming culture shock). The best way of reducing culture shock is to get to know as many people as you can from that country and talk to them about what you might expect to experience, or go to that country on holiday, where things may still seem strange, but where you will be able to escape ‘the strangeness’ relatively quickly and insulate yourself against it temporarily by staying with other foreigners. (This latter strategy will *not* work if you are genuinely trying to become culturally competent, but it can serve as a short-term coping strategy.)

Overcoming Culture Shock

The graph in Figure 13.4 – based on the Kubler-Ross Transition Curve – was developed to explain individuals’ reactions to situations where they were being subjected to changes in their environment over which they have no control, and thus it could apply to any student coming to university for the

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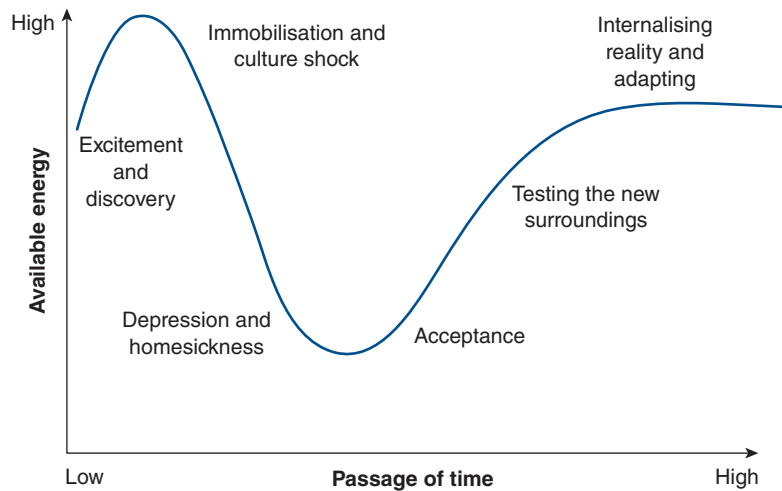


Figure 13.4 Emotional reactions to culture shock: 'Kubler-Ross Transition Curve'

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first time (see Chapter 1) as much as to someone going to live abroad.

At its heart, the model works like this. An individual going abroad might be expected to have an initial sense of excitement regarding their new situation. Everything seems different and those differences make life interesting and exciting. Just as we might enjoy becoming like children again and learning (see the relevant content in Chapter 14 on physical and practical 'play'), so too we now enjoy learning from our new situation by trying to make sense of it. After a time, however, we recognise that the sense of fun starts to decrease as we struggle to get basic things done.

We might struggle and feel some confusion with some or all of the following:

- **Understanding jokes and the other culture's sense of humour:** Smiling and laughter help us to build relationships, but if we find that we don't understand what makes people laugh, then building and keeping relationships with others from what we might term a 'host culture' can seem challenging.
- **Knowing how to address people and avoid cultural 'faux pas':** Many high context cultures do not readily show their small 'rights and wrongs' when it comes to ways of offending others, so we might feel nervous about making such mistakes, especially when meeting important individuals (e.g. at a business meeting).
- **Understanding how to engage in general day-to-day conversation:** There are cultural taboos – topics we should not discuss – in every culture, but unless we have discussed those with local individuals, we may not know what they are. We also need to learn how (or if) to approach strangers, and what ways might be considered offensive.
- **Understanding day-to-day habits:** There are a number of other areas of behaviour we may not understand well. The ways that people drive, the typical daily schedule (when people wake and sleep), the kinds of food people enjoy, attitudes towards a range of social issues such as marriage, poverty and wealth, the purposes and behaviours around physical contact: these can all be very different from our own situation. When put together, these small differences can make us feel uncomfortable.
- **Understanding how and when to develop trust with others:** Just as our behaviour is affected by our own culture, the way that we approach others can affect their desire to trust

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us. Trust is not always easy to develop across cultures, but the more we engage with others and learn to adapt our behaviour, the less difficulty we will have in doing so.

As a result of any or all of the above, we can feel lost. We can feel that we are struggling to unpick the attitudes and behaviours that we have come to regard as useful and second nature when living in our own culture in order to re-learn them for a new situation. Homesickness and distress can be a natural result of these issues, and we might need some emotional support at times.



FOR YOU TO DO

Watch a movie

The number of times one of your lecturers is going to ask you to watch a movie may not be large, but there are a large number of movies which discuss individuals' experiences of cultures other than their own, or which are set in an unfamiliar culture. Maybe one of the best known movies to do this of recent times is *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) featuring the stories of a number of individuals who travel to India and have various experiences as they do so - good and bad. Similarly, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) gives us a glimpse into one viewpoint of Indian culture - but it is one viewpoint, and there will be many others. The 2008 film *Gran Torino* shows Clint Eastwood's character empathising with some local Chinese immigrants who are having a tough time dealing with a local gang and, of course, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy shows the hobbits dealing with a range of different types of creatures and cultures.

1. **Find a movie** which shows something of others' experiences dealing with being in a cross-cultural situation. It does not need to be about different countries - often several cultures will exist within the same country - but it is about interacting with individuals who are different from yourself.
2. **Look at the issues:** What problems do the characters face when interacting with each other? Sometimes if we can see those in a well-acted movie, we can imagine how we might feel.
3. **Identify solutions:** How do the characters deal with these situations? Do those solutions work? Would you deal with those situations any differently?

Recognising that we need help with our language skills and cannot do what we would find second nature in our own country raises some serious issues for us. We may for a while try to deny that we find certain things hard, but eventually come to accept that we need help. Having found sources of help, we learn to experiment within our new environment and test out ways of doing what we need to do. Eventually, we find ways to cope and adapt and we get used to living in the new culture. This does not mean that we never have any more issues in getting used to the culture: there may still be surprises - some exciting and some depressing - that we experience, but it does mean that we can relax and be more content.

Questions

1. If you have always lived in one country, how would you feel about living abroad? What would be the main challenges you would face - cooking, travelling, finding friends?
2. How would you cope with these issues?

Overcoming these emotional reactions is important and can take more or less time according to a number of issues related to personal attitude - are we used to learning about others and others' cultures? - and experience - have we travelled much in our lives? The longer we spend in one culture and the more emotionally attached we are to that culture, the more challenges we might find in overcoming culture shock.

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But there are some things which will help us overcome these challenges:

- **Ask questions:** Any relationship is usually based on mutual understanding, so find someone and ask them questions. Usually people will be very happy to talk about their own background and culture, so ask someone if they would be happy to help you understand the environment in which you live.
- **Be patient:** Adopting a patient attitude will help us enormously. We will be able to relax and see the situations we face from different perspectives. The challenge is, of course, that this is easier said than done, but the more we try to do this and the more we remind ourselves of the need to be patient, then the more we are likely to accept what we see – even if we don't understand it.
- **Make compromises:** When we go to another culture, the natural instinct is to criticise what is not familiar to us, or that which seems to contradict our values. The second instinct is then to fight against what seems wrong. In reality, we are very unlikely to change the culture we are experiencing, and so the only option is to adapt to it. That usually involves compromising somehow; not doing so is likely to make our cross-cultural experience more painful.
- **Practise empathy:** When we go into another culture, we bring our own experiences, values and history, some of them good and some of them less good perhaps. Those things help to make us who we are. When we go into that other culture, we enter a world that has its own history, challenges and influences. But we also need to learn to deal with individuals who have their own histories and challenges and influences, some good and some painful perhaps. It is no different from how we might deal with anyone even in our own culture, but it becomes particularly important when we are in another culture, where emotions are going to be heightened and there are more challenges to deal with. Learning to understand and show empathy for another's situation can help to focus our attention on others.
- **Build hypotheses, not facts:** Throughout your time in another culture, you will be making very quick judgements about what you see. These judgements will be based on interpretations you have learned to make throughout the previous years of your life, and you will have refined those interpretations so that your brain can very quickly understand what is going on without collecting additional information. However, when you move to a different culture, you will find that many of those interpretations are no longer correct, and as a result, the best that you can do is to treat the interpretation of what you see as a hypothesis, not as a statement of truth. The more different the culture is from your own, the less accurate your interpretation of what you see and experience.
- **Make friends:** There is nothing more helpful in a strange place (where maybe you cannot speak the language) than making friends – especially if they can help you with the practical things you need to do, with the language and with understanding others' behaviour. A great thing to do *before you go* to another culture is to find individuals from that culture who might be living close to you (in your own country) and start to learn more about their culture from them (assuming that they moved relatively recently: speaking to someone about the country that they left 20 years ago is probably only going to give you a very partial picture of the culture there now).

KEY LEARNING POINT



Overcoming culture shock is a process and can take some time. Different people will struggle with different things in different ways, and some will take more time than others, but with time, overcoming culture shock is not difficult.

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REFLECTION POINT

Take some time to think about the following questions and write down some answers.

How important do you think it is to develop your own sense of awareness of the world around you?

Do you study with (attend lectures, do group work, live in the same accommodation, etc.) people from a different cultural background? What have you done to find out about their culture?

Do you think you can use any of the ideas in this section to develop more cross-cultural awareness?

INTEGRATION AND APPLICATION

Living in a global world requires that we engage with the world around us. To do so, we need a number of personal qualities:

1. Humility – to admit that there may be other and better ways of doing things.
2. Open-mindedness – to accept that others can have a different way of doing things.
3. Acceptance – to allow others to continue doing things their way if they actually work well for them and have no impact on the organisation.
4. Understanding – of the idea that others have a point of view which may be different from yours.

In developing our cross-cultural skills and our readiness for a world that is unquestionably global, we need to possess knowledge about other cultures, but knowledge is not going to be sufficient – the ability to apply our skills to use that knowledge is crucial.

In all that we do, we need to have motive, means and opportunity. In seeking to develop cultural literacy, we can consider the following:

- **The motive for being global:** We look at the world around us and see changes happening on a scale that limits the effectiveness of unilateral action, and we wish to position ourselves strategically (see issues related to personal branding for job applications in Chapter 16) to ensure we can take advantage of such opportunities.
- **The means:** We can look at the ways in which our skills (or lack of them sometimes) can be enhanced so as to demonstrate to employers that we can work in a global world, and take action to do so. This can sometimes take us on journeys – including real physical journeys – during our studies which can appear scary, or alternatively as adventures.
- **The opportunities:** There are now numerous ways in which we can take advantage of opportunities to interact with other cultures. From examining the diverse communities in which we live (including student accommodation) to spending time with individuals we know in an environment which is unfamiliar, we would be foolish not to seek to understand those with whom we interact – and will interact – on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

You should now have a good idea of how to:

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- Analyse your own and others' world views.
- Overcome perceptual and other cultural barriers in order to develop a good understanding of others' communication.
- Develop your insight into other cultures.
- Become more of a global citizen, able to operate with understanding in other cultures.

This chapter has sought to establish an awareness of what it means to interact in a global world. We have covered what we mean by a world view and discussed issues relating to our beliefs, values and behaviours. We have discussed what it means to have a global mindset. We have discussed how perceptual processes can present challenges in understanding others and how communication processes can become difficult, particularly in high-context cultures. The chapter has also presented a brief discussion regarding theoretical models of culture – useful for comparing cultures with each other – and provided some practical steps that individuals can take to develop an increasingly important ability, namely cross-cultural literacy.

CHAPTER TASK



Find an international student (or if you are an international student, find someone from the country that you are studying in). Without judging their country or their values, chat to them for an hour about:

- Important points in their country's history.
- What they value in life.
- What is the greatest pressure and greatest joy they have experienced in life.
- What it is like to live in their country.

Asking questions is the best way to find out about others' lives and cultures. You might like to extend this exercise and do this with a group of other students from different countries to find out more about their cultures.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



In nearly all cases, the questions in previous chapters have only been about determining your skills and abilities in certain areas. However, being a global citizen involves knowledge as well as skill, and so some of the questions which might be asked in this area could try to find out how much you know as well as what you are able to do.

Think about the following questions. What might your answers be?

1. What do you think are the biggest issues currently facing international organisations?
2. What difficulties would you expect to face if you were offered a role in another country?
3. Imagine a situation where you – as a departmental manager – needed quickly to resolve a conflict between two individuals of different cultural backgrounds about an issue where both held very strong and opposing views. How would you handle such a situation?

Chapter 17 gives a lot more information on selection interviews and the online content gives some guidance on these questions.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Want to learn more? Visit <https://study.sagepub.com/morgan2e> to gain access to a wide range of online resources, including interactive tests, tasks, further reading and downloads.

Website Resources

The following websites offer useful advice on cross-cultural awareness.

Oregon State University student blog: <http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/dorrespblog/cssa-competencies/4-multicultural-awareness-knowledge-skills-and-ability/>

INSEAD Knowledge: <http://knowledge.insead.edu/career/the-rise-of-multicultural-managers-2552>

MindTools – cross-cultural communication: www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/Cross-Cultural-communication.htm

MindTools – working with diverse groups: www.mindtools.com/pages/article/cultural-intelligence.htm

Study.com: study.com/academy/lesson/cross-cultural-communication-definition-strategies-examples.html#lesson

Textbook Resources

Barrett, D. J. (2011) *Leadership Communication* (3rd edition). New York: McGraw-Hill (particularly Chapter 8).

Christopher, E. (2012) *Communication Across Cultures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Connerly, M. L. and Pederson, P. B. (2005) *Leadership in a Diverse and Multicultural Environment*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harvard Business Review (2011) *Building Better Teams*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review (particularly pages 103–24).

Hind, D. and Moss, S. (2011) *Employability Skills*. Houghton-le-Spring: Business Education Publishers (particularly Chapter 15).

Schneider, S. C., Barsoux, J.-L. and Stahl, G. (2014) *Managing Across Cultures* (3rd edition). Harlow: Pearson (particularly Chapters 7 and 8).

Varner, I. and Beamer, L. (2011) *Intercultural Communication in the Workplace* (5th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill.

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