

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL METAPHORS

After the fall of the Berlin Wall a common political and economic consensus emerged, not only in the West but to a considerable extent around the world. Markets and democracy, working hand in hand, would transform the world into a community of modernized, peace-loving nations. In the process, ethnic hatred, extremist fundamentalism, and other “backward” aspects of underdevelopment would be swept away. The consensus could not have been more mistaken. Since 1989, the world has seen the proliferation of ethnic conflict, the rise of militant Islam, the intensification of group hatred and nationalism, expulsions, massacres, confiscations, calls for renationalization, and two genocides unprecedented since the Nazi Holocaust.

—Chua, 2003, p. 123

There are many good and obvious reasons for studying cross-cultural differences, including a conservative estimate that somewhere between 25% and 50% of our basic values stem from culture (for such estimates, see Haire, Ghiselli, & Porter, 1966; Hofstede, 2001). Other aspects of workforce diversity, such as age and socioeconomic status, also account for the variances in our values and attitudes, but clearly culture is critical. For example, failures in cross-cultural communication and negotiation have very tangible bottom-line results, including several well-publicized disasters such as Enron’s \$3 billion investment in India and Disney’s initial problems with EuroDisney in France. It is little wonder that corporations tend to plan 6 to 10 years before undertaking a major investment abroad.

An even more fundamental reason for studying culture is that our globalized world demands cross-cultural expertise if we are to survive. The quote from Amy

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Chua's (2003) influential new book is clear support for this point of view (see also Huntington, 1996). As argued elsewhere, there are as many reasons, and perhaps more reasons, supporting the view that global disintegration may be our fate rather than global integration (see Carroll & Gannon, 1997). We are just as likely to become a global battlefield as we are to become a global village or a global community.

Still, it is much more difficult to understand culture, an admittedly "soft" phenomenon, than such areas as accounting and finance, which are numbers driven, as the following case study illustrates. By way of background, let me say that I was privileged to attend a 10-day cross-cultural training program in 1990 led by Professor Richard Brislin at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa. All 35 attendees were professionals involved in cultural studies in some way, and they included professors from a diverse range of disciplines and immigration officials from several nations. During the course of the program, a well-known cross-cultural training exercise, *The Albatross* (Gotchenour, 1977), was conducted, which produced a number of insights. Perhaps because of my background as a professor of management, I immediately wrote a case study about the experience and have used it more than 200 times in a variety of settings involving students and managers. Readers are invited to read this case study and answer the questions after it before we provide any additional details:

I recently participated in a cross-cultural training session at the East-West Center, Hawaii. There were six male volunteers (including me) and six female volunteers. We walked into a room where a man was dressed in Eastern or Asian garb but in a somewhat indistinguishable manner; he could have been a king or a Buddhist monk. A woman sat beside him, and she was also dressed in a similar indistinguishable fashion.

There was no talking whatsoever in this training session, which lasted for about 10 minutes. The "king" beckoned the males to sit on chairs, after which he indicated that the females should sit at their feet. He then greeted each male silently and in standing position; he clasped each male by the arms and then gently rubbed his hands on the male's sides. The males did as the king instructed, but there was some nervousness and laughter, although no talking. The king then bowed to each female.

Next, the king presented a large vase of water to each male and he drank of it. He then did the same thing with each female.

The king and queen then walked before the volunteers, peering intently at the females. After a minute or two, the king put on a satisfied look and made a noise as if satisfied. He then looked at the queen, who nodded in agreement. The queen then took the hand of one female in order to lead her to a sitting position on the ground between the king and queen. Next, the king and queen tried to push the female's head toward the ground as she sat on the ground between them (they were on chairs), but she resisted. They tried once again, but she still resisted. The training session then ended.

INSTRUCTIONS. Each small group should appoint a recorder/secretary to report back to the larger group. Time limit is 10 minutes. Please answer the following questions:

What kind of a culture is this? Please describe.

How would you interpret the differential treatment of males and females in this culture?

Since there were about six subgroups per session over approximately 200 sessions, there have been approximately 1,200 interpretations. In 9 of 10 instances, the subgroup describes the culture in the following manner: A male-dominated traditional culture; probably Asian or African or Mideastern; ritualistic; and conservative. Sometimes the subgroup tries to identify the religion involved, and frequently Buddhism or Islam is cited. And, although almost all subgroups feel that females are in a subordinate role, a few believe that females have high status, clearly separate from that of the dominant males.

In fact, this is an earth-worshipping culture in which males are clearly subordinate to females, and the only way to integrate all of the information provided is to use this framework. For example, the male leader was not being friendly when he patted the males; rather, he was checking for weapons, as males tend to have too much testosterone and too strong a tendency to engage in immature fighting. Similarly the females were seated in the place of honor (nearest to the ground), and the males were relegated to the bleachers. The males drank first to test for poison, thus ensuring the safety of the females. Even the “king,” whose ambiguous position is highlighted by the quotation marks, must ask permission of the female leader before selecting a favored female, who was placed nearest the ground for the ritual in an honored position between the two leaders. Frequently I ask why a particular female was chosen, and rarely does anyone guess the reason: A visual inspection indicated that she had the largest feet, an obvious sign of importance in an earth-worshipping culture. In many cultures the number three is used, and it was being used in this ritual until the favored female resisted.

This exercise is usually sufficient to make the point that having a framework is very useful in understanding any culture. If the trainees had been told that the culture was earth-worshipping, they could have integrated the various stimuli that were overwhelming them. Furthermore, the feedback session after the original training proved to be insightful, as the young woman selected for the ritual was asked why she resisted. When I recount this case study, I usually profile this young woman, a very accomplished cultural anthropologist who has devoted her career to the study of village life around the world. She was in her mid-thirties, well published, and tenured at a good university, attractive, and divorced but without children. Her response focused on the maltreatment that she had experienced at the hands of various men in her life and on her resolve never to allow such maltreatment to occur again. Thus she had interpreted the ritual as a form of subservience to men, as the “king” was pushing her head toward the ground; so was the “queen,” but she did not mention this fact. My pedagogical point is that this young woman, given her educational training and work experiences in different villages, was as knowledgeable as or more knowledgeable than any professional in the room, but her perspective—warped by unpleasant experiences with men—had led her to react emotionally, even to the extent that she was not able to think about an alternative framework such as an earth-worshipping culture. I also point out that I felt overwhelmed and had no idea what was going on.

But the case study also highlights other critical aspects of culture, which operate subtly, often on the unconscious or semiconscious level. Culture has been aptly

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compared to a computer program that, once activated by a few commands or stimuli, begins to operate automatically and seemingly in an independent manner (Fisher, 1988; Hall, 1966; Hofstede, 1991). Clearly such automaticity occurred, but unfortunately the stimuli were not properly matched to the cultural framework because of the negative relationships with males that this young woman had experienced.

Frequently, when foreigners violate a key cultural value, they are not even aware of the violation, and no one brings the matter to their attention. The foreigners are then isolated and begin to experience negative feelings. As one American businessman in Asia aptly pointed out, one of the central problems doing business cross-culturally is that, once a visitor makes a major cultural mistake, it is frequently impossible to rectify it, and it may well take several months to realize that polite rejections really signify isolation and banishment. Sometimes foreigners make such a mistake and eventually leave the country without even realizing or identifying what they have done.

Even genuinely small cultural mistakes can have enormous consequences. Many older and even some younger Germans, for instance, do not like to converse too much during meals. They will ordinarily begin the meal by taking a sip of beer or soda, then pick up the knife and fork and hold them throughout the meal, putting them down only when they have finished eating. For many Germans eating is a serious business, not to be disturbed by trivial comments and animated conversation. Many Italians, on the other hand, tend to talk constantly during meals and wave their hands repeatedly. As a result, a German and an Italian dining with one another may feel aggrieved by each other's behavior, and much time is wasted negotiating acceptable rules of behavior that could otherwise be spent on substantive issues, including the development of trust.

Furthermore, while technological and societal changes have been rapid in recent decades, many key aspects of culture tend to change only slowly, frequently at a snail's pace, and the influence of culture persists for centuries even after mass immigrations take place. The American Irish have the "gift of the gab," befitting a cultural heritage that has a strong oral tradition, and they are disproportionately represented in fields such as trial law and politics, where this gift is an asset (see Chapter 12). English and French residents of Canada think and feel differently in large part because of their respective cultural heritages, and these differences have threatened the very existence of that country.

Individuals from English-speaking countries are at a particular disadvantage culturally because the people of many non-English-speaking countries use both English and their own native languages. It is common for English-speaking visitors to a non-English-speaking country to assume cultural similarity when dissimilarity is really the norm. Today, about 800 million people speak English, which has become the international business language, thus creating both opportunities and pitfalls for natives of English-speaking countries.

However, it should be noted that knowing a country's language, while clearly helpful, is no guarantee of understanding its cultural mindset, and some of the most difficult problems have been created by individuals who have a high level of fluency but a low level of cultural understanding. Glen Fisher (1988), a former foreign service officer, describes a situation in Latin America in which an American team's efforts were seriously hampered because of the condescending attitude of one member whose fluency in Spanish was excellent. Fortunately another member

of the team helped to save the day because she showed a genuine interest in the culture and its people, even though she was just beginning to learn how to speak Spanish. Moreover, members of a culture tend to assume that highly fluent visitors know the customs and rules of behavior, and they judge those visitors severely when violations occur.

Americans are at a particular disadvantage in trying to understand the mindsets of other cultures. American businesspeople and travelers tend to follow frantic schedules, sometimes visiting Hong Kong, Thailand, Japan, and Taiwan within the space of 2 weeks. To expect these American travelers to understand these cultures in such a short period of time is unrealistic. Even fewer Americans spend any time residing in foreign countries and, when doing so, tend to isolate themselves from the natives in their “golden ghettos.” By contrast, Europeans speak two or more languages, including English, and they experience great cultural diversity simply by traveling a few hundred miles from one country to another. Many Asians, because of their knowledge of the English language and education in Europe and the United States, are similar to these Europeans in terms of cultural sophistication.

This book describes an innovative method, the *cultural metaphor*, for understanding easily and quickly the cultural mindset of a nation and comparing it to those of other nations. In essence, the method involves identifying some phenomenon, activity, or institution of a nation’s culture that all or most of its members consider to be very important and with which they identify cognitively and/or emotionally. The characteristics of the metaphor then become the basis for describing and understanding the essential features of the society.

For example, the Italians invented the opera and love it passionately. Five key characteristics of the opera are the overture, spectacle and pageantry, voice, externalization, and the interaction between the lead singers and the chorus (see Chapter 21). We use these features to describe Italy and its cultural mindset. Thus, the metaphor is a guide, map, or beacon that helps foreigners understand quickly what members of a society consider to be very important. This knowledge should help them to be comfortable in the society and to avoid making cultural mistakes. The cultural metaphor is, however, only a starting point and subject to change as the individual’s first-hand knowledge increases.

Cultural metaphors can be used to profile ethnic groups, nations, clusters of nations, and even continents. We have taken this approach in this book for nations, the base culture and its evolution across national borders, and even for two continents.

Constructing Cultural Metaphors

Countless social scientists, particularly cross-cultural psychologists and cultural anthropologists, have devoted their lives to the study of culture. Our cultural metaphors are based partially on the work of cross-cultural psychologists and cultural anthropologists, who emphasize a small number of factors or dimensions such as time and space when comparing one society to another.

The first of these dimensional approaches was described by two anthropologists, Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck (1961), although Kluckhohn is generally given credit for developing the original ideas. They compare cultures across six

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dimensions. However, they emphasize that philosophers, social scientists, and commentators interested in understanding cultural differences have focused attention on these dimensions for hundreds of years. These six dimensions are:

- What do members of a society assume about the nature of people, that is, are people good, bad, or a mixture?
- What do members of a society assume about the relationship between a person and nature, that is, should we live in harmony with it or subjugate it?
- What do members of a society assume about the relationship between people, that is, should a person act in an individual manner or consider the group before taking action (individualism to groupism or collectivism in terms of such issues as making decisions, conformity, and so forth)?
- What is the primary mode of activity in a given society, that is, *being* or accepting the status quo, enjoying the current situation, and going with the flow of things; or *doing*, that is, changing things to make them better, setting specific goals and accomplishing them within specific schedules, and so forth?
- What is the conception of space in a given society, that is, is it considered *private* in that meetings are held in private, people do not get too close to one another physically, and so on; or *public*, that is, having everyone participate in meetings and decision making, allowing emotions to be expressed publicly, and having people stand in close proximity to one another?
- What is the society's dominant temporal orientation: past, present, or future?

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck note that each society has a dominant cultural orientation that can be described in terms of these six dimensions but that other, weaker orientations may also exist simultaneously in its different geographical regions and racial and ethnic groups.

Another well-known anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, has spent more than 40 years developing and writing about a similar dimensional classification system (for a good summary of it, see Hall & Hall, 1990). He basically focuses on the communication patterns found within cultures, and he emphasizes four dimensions along which societies can be compared:

1. Context, or the amount of information that must be explicitly stated if a message or communication is to be successful
2. Space, or the ways of communicating through specific handling of personal space, for example, North Americans tend to keep more space between them while communicating than do South Americans
3. Time, which is either *monochronic* (scheduling and completing one activity at a time) or *polychronic* (not distinguishing between activities and completing them simultaneously)
4. Information flow, which is the structure and speed of messages between individuals and/or organizations.

Hall then arrays societies along an overarching high-context/low-context dimension. In a high-context society, time tends to be polychronic, and there is a heavy investment in socializing members so that information does not need to be

explicitly stated for it to be understood. Members of such a culture have known one another for long periods of time, and there is strong agreement as to what is expected and not expected. In the high-context Japanese society, there is even an aphorism that expressly addresses this issue: He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know (see Chapter 3). Hence, verbal communication is frequently not necessary and may well impede the transmission of the message. Also, members of high-context societies tend to have less physical space between them when communicating than those in low-context societies.

As Edward Hall notes, high-context societies tend to require a strong leader to whom everyone else expresses submission or at least great respect. In the Arabic countries, such a leader will sit in his office surrounded by people seeking his help and advice. He will not address the issues and people sequentially, as would tend to happen in monochronic countries such as the United States and Germany. Rather, he will deal with several issues and people as conditions seem to warrant, going from one group to the other in a seemingly haphazard fashion that takes into consideration their sensitivities and need to save face or avoid embarrassment.

Hall tends to array societies he has studied in the following way, going from high-context to low-context: Japan, the Arab countries, France (approximately in the middle of the continuum), the United States, and Germany. Clearly Hall has a bias against low-context societies, even though he recognizes that it is much easier to interface with a low-context society because information about rules and permissible behaviors is explicitly stated. To him, such societies tend to be too mechanical and lack sensitivity to the needs of individuals. However, he does not critically analyze some of the problems found in high-context societies, particularly the overwhelming power of the leader, which can be used indiscriminately, or the in-group bias that hinders relations with anyone outside of the culture. Hall's system begins to break down when he talks about the low-context way that the Japanese interact with foreigners but the high-context way in which they interact among themselves. Thus he seems to be describing the classic in-group/out-group phenomenon rather than an overarching dimension along which societies can be arrayed. Triandis, Brislin, and Hui (1988) have argued that the major dimension separating societies is individualism-collectivism, in which the in-group and out-group distinction is critical, and this seems to be the dimension that Hall is describing. Furthermore, as described in the various chapters of this book, there are many specific kinds of individualism and collectivism.

Still, Hall's work has been significant and insightful, particularly his treatment of time and space. Throughout this book we will use some of his basic concepts, especially the monochronic-polychronic distinction and that between high-context and low-context communication.

The third major dimensional approach was developed by Geert Hofstede (1991, 2001). While there are other similar frameworks, Hofstede's has proved to be the most robust and useful, and it has served as the base from which other dimensional approaches evolved (for examples of such frameworks, see Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998. We briefly summarize these dimensional approaches as they relate to clusters of nations in the Introduction to Part VIII). Hofstede is a prominent organizational psychologist whose research is based on a large questionnaire survey of IBM employees and managers working in 53 different countries. Hofstede's work is especially significant because the type of organization is held constant; his is the only large-scale cross-cultural study in which the respondents

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all worked for a multinational corporation that had uniform personnel policies. He develops empirical profiles of these 53 countries across five dimensions of basic cultural values:

1. Power distance or the degree to which members of a society automatically accept a hierarchical or unequal distribution of power in organizations and the society
2. Uncertainty avoidance or the degree to which members of a given society deal with the uncertainty and risk of everyday life and prefer to work with long-term acquaintances and friends rather than with strangers
3. Individualism or the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be separate from a group and to be free from group pressure to conform
4. Masculinity or the degree to which a society looks favorably on aggressive and materialistic behavior
5. Time horizon (short-term to long-term) or the degree to which members of a culture are willing to defer present gratification to achieve long-term goals

The three dimensional approaches developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hall, and Hofstede, along with the similar works of others, have become enormously influential and, at the same time, controversial. While they rely upon a small number of dimensions so that profiles of various societies can be constructed, they by necessity leave out many features of the cultural mindsets that are activated in daily cultural activities, and they neglect the institutions molding these mindsets. These dimensional approaches are an excellent starting point for understanding cultures and providing an overall perspective on cultural differences, but an individual will experience great difficulty in applying these approaches to daily interactions. In effect, these dimensions are instructive but somewhat lifeless and narrow in that they leave out many facets of behavior.

The metaphoric method highlighted in this book supplements and enriches the three major dimensional approaches so that a visitor can understand and, most importantly, begin to deal effectively with the flesh and blood of a culture. While the metaphor itself cannot encompass all of the reality that is found within each society, it is a good starting point for understanding and interacting effectively with it. At the same time the various chapters of the book are linked together through the use of the three dimensional approaches.

Throughout this book we have attempted to identify metaphors that members of given societies view as very important if not critical. However, we needed to identify metaphors that would be relatively complex so that we could make several direct comparisons between the metaphor and the nation being represented by it. Also, we wanted to have a metaphor for each society that would have several suitable features that we could then use to describe it. In addition, we sought to include numerous factors or variables such as religion and small-group behavior when using the metaphor to describe the society, recognizing that some of these factors are important in some societies but not others. For each society we used all of the dimensions of the three dimensional approaches described above. In addition, we focused on all of the following:

- religion
- early socialization and family structure
- small-group behavior
- public behavior
- leisure pursuits and interests
- total lifestyle: work/leisure/home and time allocations to each
- aural space or the degree to which members of a society react negatively to high noise levels
- roles and status of different members of a society
- holidays and ceremonies
- greeting behavior
- humor
- language: oral and written communication
- non-oral communication such as body language
- sports as a reflection of cultural values
- political structure of a society
- the educational system of a society
- traditions and the degree to which the established order is emphasized
- history of a society, but only as it reflects cultural mindsets or the manner in which its members think, feel, and act; not a detailed history
- food and eating behavior
- social class structure
- rate of technological and cultural change
- organization of and perspective on work such as a society's commitment to the work ethic, superior-subordinate relationships, and so on
- any other categories that were appropriate

Using all of these categories initially, we studied each society in depth and interviewed several of its natives. After an initial draft of a chapter was written, it was presented at seminars and reviewed by natives and long-term residents of the society being described. The chapter was then rewritten in light of the suggestions that were offered, and additional comments were solicited. This iterative process typically led to rewriting a chapter five or six times, and sometimes nine or ten times.

A Four-Stage Model of Cross-Cultural Understanding

For this book we have developed a four-stage model of cross-cultural understanding that we employed to frame the analysis of each nation more precisely. The first stage centers on a four-cell typology of process/goal orientation and degree of emotional expressiveness. The two major dimensions of the typology are defined as:

- The degree to which process, such as effective communication and getting to know one another in depth, should precede discussion of specific goals
- The degree to which a culture fosters and encourages open emotional expression

In many cultures process must be emphasized before any meaningful collaboration around specific goals can occur. Other cultures, such as the American and

FIGURE 1.1
Process, Goals, and Expression of Emotions

Open Expression of Emotions and Feelings

		Lower	Higher
Degree to Which Process Must Be Emphasized Before Goals Can Be Discussed	Lower	England, Ireland, and Scotland	United States and Germany
	Higher	China, Japan, and India	Mexico, Spain, and Italy

German, tend to emphasize goals over process. As some American managers express the point, it is not necessary to like one another in order to do business, presumably because a written contract will keep everyone honest. Furthermore, in some cultures emotional expression is not only acceptable but also important, whereas in other cultures such expression is discouraged. As Figure 1.1 indicates, visitors to a nation can obtain a general orientation to it by using this typology and its key dimensions.

In the second stage visitors need more specificity, particularly in the relationship between culture and economics or business practices. For the past several years Harry Triandis (2002) and Alan Fiske (1991b) have independently developed frameworks linking culture and economics more closely. There are minor differences between the two frameworks, and sometimes Fiske does not clearly demarcate the cultural level from the individual level. For our purposes, however, the two frameworks can be treated as identical.

Both authors seek to identify generic types of cultures. They begin their analyses with the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism, which has been the dimension of most interest to researchers because of its obvious importance. Also, they emphasize the extent to which there is a large degree of inequality or power distance in the culture. Thus there is a four-cell typology of cultures emphasizing individualism-collectivism and power distance (Figure 1.2). There are two generic types of collectivism (horizontal and vertical) and two generic types of individualism (horizontal and vertical). Horizontal collectivism reflects community sharing in which members of the in-group share all of their goods, as in a small village, even to the extent that there is no such phenomenon as theft. There is not much differentiation between individuals, and ethics are based on group membership: in-group or out-group. In essence, members of out-groups are viewed as nonpersons.

Vertical collectivism or authority ranking, found in large parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, involves a psychological relationship between the leader or leaders and all others in the culture. Frequently such a culture is symbolized not by the handshake, which reflects equality, but by different forms of bowing. Only a few Americans and Europeans have even experienced such a culture in depth because the relationship between superior and subordinate in most American firms is instrumental and focuses only on work-related goals. In contrast, there is a

FIGURE 1.2
Four Generic Types of Cultures

		INDIVIDUALISM	COLLECTIVISM
POWER DISTANCE	Low (horizontal)	Equality Matching	Community Sharing
	High (vertical)	Market Pricing	Authority Ranking

dynamic two-way relationship between subordinates and leaders in authority ranking cultures: While the leaders receive more rewards, they are responsible for safeguarding the livelihoods of subordinates, even to the extent of finding them new positions when bankruptcy occurs. In turn, the subordinates are expected to be committed to the leader and the organization. Letting people go to save money is anathema. Ethics is still determined in large part by group membership (in-group and out-group), but status as signified by family background, position at work, and so on is also critical.

Horizontal individualism or equality matching is dominant in Scandinavian nations such as Sweden and Norway. All individuals are considered equal, even when some are taxed heavily, and it is expected that those who cannot make individual contributions to the common good will do so at a later time if possible. Finally, vertical individualism or market pricing is found in the United States and other market-dominated nations. Although individualism is emphasized, so too is the free market, and inequality resulting from its operation is deemed acceptable. There is equality of opportunity and a level playing field, but not equality of outcomes. Ethics revolves around the operation of such a market.

Fiske, in particular, relates these concepts to the four types of statistical scales: Nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. His argument is that individuals have difficulty making decisions and use these scales as rough approximations for determining how to interact with others. Thus community sharing represents nominal scaling, as names are given only to entities (in-group versus out-group). In an authority ranking culture, individual A may be more important than individual B, and individual C may be more important than individual B, but there is no common unit of measurement. The scale is ordinal in nature. Hence we cannot say C is twice as important as A. In equality matching, the culture has a common unit of measurement, but it does not make value judgments about individual worth, as there are too many dimensions along which individuals can be measured. In this sense the scaling is interval. Finally, in market pricing, there is a common unit of measurement and a true zero point (zero money), which allows members of the culture to transform every other dimension and compare them monetarily. In this case the scaling is ratio.

Fiske provides an insightful example of these four types of culture in his discussion of a small town's decision about the purchase of an expensive fire truck. The issue becomes: Who should receive the new fire protection? The reader may want

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to stop at this point to consider the matter. The answers are: (a) community sharing, only members of the in-group; (b) authority ranking, all members of the in-group, but the leaders receive more attention and monitoring of their homes; (c) equality matching, everyone is protected; and (d) market pricing, only those who can pay the taxes. This example is not far-fetched. In the United States there have been several recorded instances when fire trucks did not respond, sometimes because a home was just outside of the fire department's district and sometimes because the owners of the homes did not contribute monetarily to the fire department's upkeep.

In Hofstede's (1980b) original analysis of 40 nations, he divided them at the median score both on individualism-collectivism and power distance. No nation is in the community-sharing quadrant, probably because this form of collectivism is not appropriate for such large entities as nations. Interested readers can view the dispersion of the 40 nations into the other three quadrants by consulting the original work.

The model's third stage revolves around the other etic or culture-general dimensions along which specific cultures have been shown to vary. Osland and Bird (2000) provide an excellent summary of most of these dimensions, such as achievement motivation, and the remaining three dimensions developed by Hofstede (uncertainty avoidance, time horizon, and femininity or assertiveness). Triandis has recently highlighted another key dimension: the tightness-looseness of rules (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In this way it is possible to compare cultures in a novel manner. Thus, while Japan is collectivistic and Germany individualistic, both are characterized by a large number of rules governing behavior (high degree of tightness).

In the fourth stage cultural metaphors are employed for understanding a culture. They build upon the etic understanding provided by the approaches used in the first three stages. During this stage, the specific types of individualism and collectivism are related to each cultural metaphor, for example, competitive individualism in the United States and proud and self-sufficient individualism in Spain.

It is possible to sensitize individuals to cultural differences and similarities through the use of the four-stage model. For example, several applications such as marketing and advertising exercises help trainees to apply this model to actual problems (Gannon, 2001). Also, this model integrates the etic (culture-general) and emic (culture-specific) approaches in a dynamic manner rather than treating them as separate.

When Culture Does, and Does Not, Matter

The last important issue that we address in this chapter is: When does culture matter? There are times when culture is not important and other times when it is critically important. In this book we emphasize culture, but we do caution the reader to consider other factors.

Frequently occupational similarities neutralize culture. For instance, when two medical doctors are jointly working on a problem, their medical backgrounds can help them to work together smoothly regardless of cultural backgrounds. Also,

similarity of social class can diminish the importance of culture. For example, throughout the world middle-class families tend to use positive reinforcement in raising their children and provide them with opportunities to develop skills and a strong sense of self-esteem. These families may provide their children with music lessons and ask them to perform in front of guests, who respond enthusiastically. Conversely, blue-collar families throughout the world tend to emphasize negative reinforcement and punishment, which negatively influence skill development, opportunities to function in a public or leadership role, and feelings of self-esteem (see Kagitcibasi, 1990).

However, sometimes powerful groups will exclude others from opportunities and then stereotype them negatively, thus consigning them to permanent inferior status. This clearly happened in Ireland when the English ruled that nation for centuries. Apartheid, now outlawed in South Africa, began as a reaction to scarcity of jobs and led to the stigmatization of native Africans for nearly a century (see Olson, 1982). If the playing field is level, as is more probable when markets are genuinely competitive, this outcome is mitigated.

At times social class or occupational similarity and culture become confused in the minds of visitors. Some Americans, for example, complain about the rudeness of Parisian shopkeepers, whereas other Americans describe wonderful relationships with their occupational peers in France. Presumably what is occurring reflects social class or occupational similarity as much as if not more than culture.

Sometimes the nature of the problem minimizes the importance of cultural differences. For example, when companies from two or more nations are working together on a joint project that their top managements strongly support, organizational members are more likely to forget cultural differences, especially when ample rewards for goal attainment are available, along with punishments for failure.

When trust is present, culture decreases in importance. Jarvenpaa, Knoll, and Leidner (1998) studied 75 virtual work teams throughout the world who were integrated via the Internet. The major finding was that, if “quick trust” can be established, culture is not a major issue. However, developing trust is frequently neither easy nor quick.

One of the most controversial issues is the degree to which technological changes such as the Internet influence culture. As Wallace (1999) points out, the Internet has not resulted in a global village, as the case is so often stated. Rather, individuals with similar interests—including crime, in the case of the ever-expanding crime syndicates—seek one another out on the Internet. As such, the Internet has led to as much differentiation as integration and possibly more differentiation, as Amy Chua’s (2003) book, *World on Fire*, persuasively demonstrates.

But any indirect form of communication such as e-mail presents special difficulties. For example, a high-context and high-level manager in Indonesia became angry when he received a terse message from his American counterpart, not because of the content, but because of the manner in which the message was phrased. Furthermore, it seems that any major technological change has a greater influence on culture in the later stages of maturation than in the earlier stages, and the Internet is in the early stage of maturation (Hughes, 1994). As a general rule, technological and economic changes do matter, especially when disruptive of cultural patterns. Still, problems are minimized when changes are introduced gradually and are not directly injurious to deep-seated values. And, as the comparison of northern and southern Italy indicates, the cultural patterns found in the

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11th century have persisted into the present, leading to concrete economic differences between these two major regions (Chapter 21).

As suggested in the Preface, perhaps the most interesting feature of culture is that it triggers unconscious values leading to action. Thus it is not surprising that culture is important when individuals must communicate directly. If individuals expect that outsiders will follow their cultural rules and are unwilling to facilitate the relationship by developing new rules acceptable to all, communication is likely to break down. Rebecca Mark, former senior vice president of international operations at Enron, openly downgraded the importance of culture when she was responsible for a \$3 billion joint venture in India. However, she changed her behavior after the conservative Indian government stopped her firm's activity. At that point she followed the advice of an Indian friend, who gently suggested that she begin to show appreciation for Indian culture by wearing saris rather than her favored miniskirts and by showing an interest in Indian cuisine. These actions signaled that Rebecca wanted to facilitate communication and recognized the importance of Indian culture (see Karp & Kranhold, 1999). Similarly, a Texan businesswoman was having difficulty in China until she started wearing red dresses, a favorite color among the Chinese. Such small changes tend to trigger positive reactions, even at the unconscious level.

As shown in numerous research studies, culture is particularly important in cross-cultural negotiations. Understanding both the similarities and differences of the cultures represented by the negotiators is a good way to facilitate interaction and goal attainment. Americans, for example, have a reputation for being direct and low-context when communicating information, and this becomes a problem when the communication is phrased in terms of "take it or leave it." Billion-dollar deals have died on the table because of such behavior.

Culture is also important when individuals move to another nation or culture for an extended period of time. The well-known phenomenon of culture shock does occur and, if not handled properly, can lead to major problems. In this regard, it is not surprising that many managers from a company's headquarters who are sent to work in a subsidiary for an extended period cling to the values and ways of behaving found in their base culture, even to the extent of isolating themselves in "golden ghettos."

Culture is also relevant if distorted stereotypes are present. There is some confusion surrounding the definition of a stereotype, but at a minimum it represents a distorted view or mental picture of groups and their supposed characteristics, on the basis of which we tend to evaluate individuals from each group. Stereotypes can be erroneous and can lead to unwarranted conclusions, particularly if no exceptions are allowed; for example, if we assume that all Italians are emotional and talk constantly while moving their hands and arms. In this sense a stereotype is a universal syllogism. In the case of Italians the stereotype is clearly erroneous in many instances, as anyone who has transacted business in northern Italy will confirm. Ironically, in-group members frequently use universal stereotyping as a form of humor but react negatively if out-group members employ it.

However, all human beings use stereotypes, as they are a shorthand and easy way of classifying the multitude of stimuli to which we are exposed. The issue is not stereotyping itself but whether the stereotypes are accurate.

Most of us take an extremely negative position on stereotyping. It can be very embarrassing to be accused of stereotyping, especially since it is frequently so

difficult to refute the charge. In today's world the accusation is frequently raised, and as a result, it has become difficult to discuss genuine differences. However, many social psychologists now take the position that there are real differences between groups and societies and that the negative connotations associated with stereotyping have led us to deemphasize these legitimate differences. From this perspective a stereotype represents only a starting point that is to be rigorously evaluated and changed as experience with groups warrants. Nancy Adler (1997) argues persuasively that it is legitimate and helpful to use stereotypes if they are descriptive rather than evaluative, the first best guess, based on data and observation, and subject to change when new information merits it.

Metaphors are not stereotypes. Rather, they rely on the features of one critical phenomenon in a society to describe the entire society. There is, however, a danger that metaphors will include some inaccurate stereotyping, and we have attempted to guard against this possibility by having the various chapters of this book reviewed by natives or long-term residents of the societies being described. In some instances we were unable to construct a metaphor that satisfied natives, residents, or ourselves. Hence this book includes only metaphors about which there is a consensus.

Admittedly, it is very difficult to test the validity of these metaphors empirically, at least at this point in time. Our tests are two in number: whether there is consensus and whether a metaphor other than the one we have selected increases our understanding of a particular society. Also, we have noted in many instances that not all members of a society adhere to the behavioral patterns suggested by the metaphor by using such phrases as "Some Germans," "Many Italians," and "The Irish tend to." In effect, we are highlighting patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that a society manifests and that are clearly and concisely portrayed by means of a simple and easily remembered metaphor. In this way visitors can use the metaphor as a guide, map, or beacon to avoid cultural mistakes and to enrich cross-cultural communications and interactions.

In sum, culture frequently does not matter, but at other times, it is very influential. We have described only some of the instances when culture does and does not matter. Culture probably counts the most when there are feelings of inequity (perceived or real) and a scarcity of resources and opportunities. It is comforting to cluster with others similar to ourselves, especially when we are rejected by dominant groups. As Huntington (1996) persuasively argues, the major threat to world security is the increase in ethnic wars that has accompanied globalization and privatization. Cultural differences are especially exacerbated when accompanied by extreme religious and ideological viewpoints. Many cultural problems are solved in the long run through intermarriages and increased social and business contacts, all of which are hindered by religious and ideological differences.

All of the factors described above, and some others not described because of space limitations, are important for evaluating when culture does or does not matter. The position taken in this book is that culture is important and is of critical significance in many situations but not in all of them. Culture also interacts with political, social, and economic forces and is, in that sense, a fuzzy concept. But clearly it is possible to understand cultures and use this understanding to enhance relationships between individuals and groups. Throughout the remainder of the book, we will be employing the methodology described in this chapter, including the four-stage model of cross-cultural understanding, to demonstrate how cultural

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metaphors can strengthen understanding and to show how those metaphors are related to the core values, attitudes, and behaviors of various nations.

Reading and Using This Book

Cultural metaphors can be employed to profile an ethnic group, a specific nation, a base nation from which a cluster of nations sharing similar values and attitudes emerges, the cluster of nations itself, and even a continent. In this book, we have used cultural metaphors in the cluster of nations itself this way but have incorporated discussion of ethnic groups into national cultures and/or the base culture.

To understand the book thoroughly and use it most effectively, readers should review the Preface and Chapter 1. Also, readers should understand the rationale behind each of the nine major parts of the book. Many nations can fit into more than one part of the book. I have placed chapters in various parts because they fit comfortably there and are representative of the themes for the parts themselves. For a brief description of each part or theme of the book, see “Plan of the Book” in the Preface.

As this discussion suggests, readers can use this book flexibly, reading chapters in whatever order they desire. Understanding each chapter is enhanced when readers can relate it to the theme of the part of the book in which the chapter resides.

Finally, more than 100 exercises, applications, and teaching concepts can be used to enrich the learning experiences associated with this book. Most of these were published in *Working Across Cultures: Applications and Exercises* (Gannon, 2001). These exercises and additional ones are now available on my Web site: <http://www.csusm.edu/mgannon>