

Culture and Communication in the Global Workplace

The Jack Welch of the future cannot be me. I spent my entire career in the United States. The next head of General Electric will be somebody who spent time in Bombay, in Hong Kong, in Buenos Aires. We have to send our best and brightest overseas and make sure they have the training that will allow them to be global leaders who will make GE flourish in the future.

—Jack Welch, CEO of U.S.-based General Electric in a speech to GE employees¹

To succeed in managing a workforce that is increasingly diverse and multinational, managers need knowledge about cultural differences and similarities among nations. They also need to be sensitive to these differences, which can contribute to their effectiveness in cross-cultural communication. Human behavior and interpersonal interactions are reflective of the values and norms of specific societies. These cultural values and behavioral norms differ between societies, but until recently, they have been considered quite stable within societies. In recent decades, however, this perception started to change as scholars became more aware of the impact of the global trends of immigration and worker migration on national cultures (see Chapters 4 and 5). In today's global business world, a manager has to understand cultural differences among societies and their meaning in business relations. In addition, she or he needs to be sensitive to cultural nuances within societies that are associated with the diversity of that society.

In this chapter, we examine the cultural context in the global workplace and analyze communication patterns that facilitate or block effective cross-cultural communication.

The Cultural Context for the Global Workplace

What is *culture*? The Latin origin of the word refers to the tilling of the soil, although its common, everyday use pertains to refinement, particularly through education, literature, and the arts. In this book, we refer to the broader meaning of the word *culture* as used by social scientists. There are many definitions of culture in the social psychological and anthropological literature,² but the most widely accepted is that proposed in the mid-20th century by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) after analyzing 160 definitions of the concept of *culture* and synthesizing the following definition:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit or implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 181)

Culture is defined as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” (*Cambridge dictionary*, 2015). Using the analogy of computer programming, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) call culture “software of the mind,” noting that the patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting embedded in a culture are like “mental programs.” They define culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 6). Although culture does not determine the exact behavior for human beings the way programs dictate how computers function, it does delineate the expectations, actual or anticipated, and behaviors within a specific social context. Others define *culture* as a “set of beliefs and values about what is desirable and undesirable in a community of people, and a set of formal or informal practices to support the values” (Javidan & House, 2001, p. 292). Understanding societal culture can be complex because it includes two sets of elements at once: The first are the ongoing cultural practices that inform us about the current perceptions of specific cultures, and the second are the strongly held values that inform us about aspirations and direction that cultures wish to develop (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012; House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & DeLuque, 2014; Javidan, Stahl, Brodbeck, & Wilderom, 2005).

If culture is the sum of the learned and shared patterns of thought and behaviors that are characteristic of a given people, how are national cultures around the world different from one another? To answer this question, Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social scientist, embarked on a multinational study examining national cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 1997, 2001, 2015; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004; Hofstede et al., 2010). In his initial book, *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede (1980) presented a statistical analysis of about 117,000 questionnaires collected in 1967 and 1973 from employees working in IBM subsidiaries in 40 different countries.

Studying individuals who worked for the same organization was assumed to provide the researchers with a good environment for studying national cultures because all the employees were thought to share the same organizational culture and environment. This allowed the researchers to focus on the differences in the participants' responses as indicative of national cultural differences. In other words, the researchers assumed that being employed by the same organization (IBM) has created a common organizational culture; therefore, whatever differences in values and norms that would be evident among employees who worked in different countries would be the result of national cultural differences. The most important result of this analysis was a theoretical formulation of four value dimensions for representing differences among national cultures: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity/femininity. A fifth dimension—long- versus short-term orientation—was added a decade later (Hofstede, 1997).

It is important to note from the outset that Hofstede's research (e.g., 1980, 1997, 2001) was widely lauded for its breakthrough contribution to the study of culture (e.g., Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006; Søndergaard, 1994), yet it was criticized for its lack of scientific rigor and even outright cultural bias (e.g., Ailon, 2008; McSweeney, 2002). Because of its enduring and widespread influence, we devote the following sections to discussing the strengths of the work as well as its limitations.

Cultural Value Dimensions

Social anthropologists have long agreed that all societies face the same basic problems—they differ only in the way they try to solve these problems.³ Hofstede (1980), based on an earlier framework developed by Inkeles and Levinson (1969), examined culture in the different countries along four axes: (a) *power distance*—the relationship with authority and social inequality; (b) *individualism versus collectivism*—the relationship between the individual and the group; (c) *masculinity versus femininity*—the tendency toward assertiveness in contrast to modesty; and (d) *avoidance of uncertainty*—the control of aggression and expressions of emotions. Interestingly, Hofstede (1980) found that national culture, as measured along these axes, explained more of the differences in work-related values and attitudes than did position within the organization, profession, age, or gender. Following the discovery and writeup of the four original cultural dimensions that were previously stated, Hofstede (2001) decided to add a fifth dimension to his model. This dimension was based on the answers in student samples from 23 countries to the Chinese Value Survey (CVS). The study's instrument was developed by Michael Harris Bond in Hong Kong based on values suggested by Chinese scholars, and seemed to reflect Confucian teachings in both of its poles. The fifth dimension was *long- versus short-term orientation*—the tendency for thrift and perseverance and respect for tradition and fulfilling social obligations. Table 8.1 provides definitions for each dimension, with some country-specific examples.

These five dimensions have clear implications for individual and group expectations related to acceptable behaviors in the workplace. Whether employees expect their supervisor, for example, to be authoritative and give clear instructions that they will closely follow or whether they expect to operate independently and have egalitarian relationships with their supervisors depends to a large extent on the cultural perception of power distance in their society. Next is a description of the cultural differences in expected and acceptable behaviors in the workplace, according to Hofstede's five axes.

TABLE 8.1 • Dimensions of Cultural Difference

Dimension	Definition ¹	Country-Specific Examples ²
Power distance	<i>Power distance</i> refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	Large power distance: Malaysia, Guatemala, Panama, Philippines, Mexico Small power distance: Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland
Individualism versus collectivism	<i>Individualism</i> pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose. <i>Collectivism</i> pertains to societies in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout a lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.	High individualism: United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands High collectivism: Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia
Masculinity versus femininity	<i>Masculinity</i> pertains to societies in which gender roles are clearly distinct. <i>Femininity</i> pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap (both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life).	High masculinity: Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland High femininity: Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Costa Rica
Avoidance of uncertainty	<i>Avoidance of uncertainty</i> refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations—the extent to which they need predictability in the form of written and unwritten rules.	Weak uncertainty avoidance: Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, Belgium Strong uncertainty avoidance: Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong
Long-term versus short-term orientation	Long-term orientation refers to the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards—in particular, perseverance and thrift. Short-term orientation refers to the fostering of virtues related to the past and present—in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of “face,” and fulfilling social obligations.	Long-term orientation: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea Short-term orientation: Zimbabwe, Canada, Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan

Source: Adapted from Hofstede (1980, 1997, 2001).

Notes:

1. Definitions for the four cultural dimensions are drawn from Hofstede (1997, pp. 28, 51, 113), and the fifth cultural dimension is drawn from Hofstede (2001, pp. 356, 359). These definitions are also cited in Hofstede's more recent work with his colleagues (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010).
2. Country-specific identifications in this table and throughout the chapter are based on Hofstede's study among IBM employees worldwide and Michael Bond's CVS study among students. Scores and rankings for the more than 60 countries included in the original study on each of the four cultural dimensions can be found in Hofstede (1980, 1997; Hofstede et al., 2010), and those for 23 countries included in the CVS study on the fifth dimension can be found in Hofstede (2001; Hofstede et al., 2010).

Power Distance

In large power distance societies, such as Latin countries (Latin American and Latin European, like France and Spain), as well as Asian and African countries, the hierarchical system in

society is considered existential. Applying this principle to the workplace, supervisors and subordinates consider themselves as existentially unequal. There are many supervisors and many layers of management with large salary differentials between people at the top and at the bottom, as well as in between. Subordinates expect to be told what to do, and superiors are entitled to special privileges. Hofstede and his colleagues (2010) note that, in high power distance societies, “The ideal boss, in the subordinates’ eyes, is one they feel most comfortable with and who they respect most, is a benevolent autocrat or ‘good father’” (p. 73). In contrast, in small power distance societies, such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Denmark, subordinates and supervisors consider themselves as existentially equal. The hierarchical strata in the organizations are considered permeable, providing the possibility for both subordinates and supervisors to move up or down the ladder, and supervisors are expected to be accessible to subordinates. The ideal boss is “a resourceful (and therefore respected) democrat” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 74). There is evidence that congruence between managers’ societal values of power distance and the culture of the organization in which the manager works can reduce job-related stress. For example, Joiner (2001) found that managers in Greece, a country characterized by a large power distance, were comfortable with the so-called Eiffel Tower organizational culture, characterized by centralization and formalizations, and that the congruence between this type of organizational culture and the Greek culture contributed to reduced levels of stress among the managers.

Individualism Versus Collectivism

The individualism/collectivism dimension refers to the extent to which people see themselves as an integral part of a social group with primary alliance to the group or as separate individuals with primary responsibility for themselves and their very immediate family only. In collectivist societies, such as many Latin American countries as well as Arab-speaking countries, people are born into extended families or other in-groups, which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty. This reality is evident in the workplace, where the relationship between the employer and the employees in the organization is seen as a family relationship. There are mutual obligations with strong loyalty on the part of the employee connected to an employer’s commitment for protection and security in return. In a strong collectivist-oriented context, there is a clear preference for group-oriented human resource (HR) management practices (Aycan, Al-Hamadi, Davis, & Budhwar, 2007). Employee loyalty in this context refers to an unwritten contract that requires employees to be faithful to their duties, to their managers and coworkers, and to their organization. Loyalty often serves as a mediator between the perception of a familiar (collectivistic) organizational climate and job performance and often means that employees are more likely to follow orders, behave according to expectations, and do the best job they know how to do (Jen, Chou, Lin, & Tsai, 2012; Umiker, 1995). Hiring preference is given to relatives, first to relatives of high-ranking members of the organization and then to others. The assumption underlying this practice is that hiring relatives of employees reduces the company’s business risk (due to familiarity with the new hires) and increases employee loyalty. Even when employees do not perform to expectation, they can still expect to hold onto their jobs because of the family loyalty value. A strong collectivist orientation, such as in many countries in the Middle East, often translates into commitment to the work organization (Fischer & Mansell, 2009; Robertson,

Al-Khatib, & Al-Habib, 2002). A study of 365 employees from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman provides support for the proposition that a collectivist orientation is associated with a strong group commitment and belief in participatory work ethics (Robertson et al., 2002), and two sets of meta-analyses of employee commitment across cultures indicate that greater collectivism was associated with higher organizational commitment and lower intention to leave (Fischer & Mansell, 2009).

In individualist societies, such as the United States, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada, people are expected to act in their best interests. For example, employees in these individualist societies would most likely view their supervisor as rewarding individual efforts, unlike employees in collectivistic societies, who are more likely to perceive supervisory actions as rewarding team or work group collaboration. The relationship between employees and employers is based, therefore, not on group loyalty but on complementing self-interests. Employers' decisions related to hiring and promotions are expected to be based on skills, achievements, and merit; favoritism and nepotism are strongly discouraged. In approaching work assignments, employees in a collectivist society would emphasize working together and will view the relationships as more important than the task, whereas the reverse will be true in the individualist society, where the task will prevail over the relationship. A study comparing social support of employees in a U.S.-based company with that of employees in its former subsidiary in Israel found significant differences that are rooted in the collectivist-individualist leanings, respectively, of these two societies (Mor Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003). Using the statistical method of factor analysis, which allowed the researchers to identify clusters of relationships between variables, the researchers examined the sources of social support for employees in the two societies. They found that employees in the United States clearly delineated between three types of support providers: (a) their supervisor; (b) their coworkers; and (c) support providers from outside the work environment—their spouses/partners, family members, and friends. The Israeli employees did not make such distinctions. For the Israeli employees, living in a collectivist society, the lines between supervisors, coworkers, and family/friends networks were blurred because a coworker—or a supervisor, for that matter—could also have been a friend or a family member.

Masculinity Versus Femininity

The masculinity/femininity dimension refers to the extent to which dominant values in the society emphasize assertiveness, competition, and material achievements, attributes associated with masculine qualities, as compared with feminine qualities such as relationships among people, care for others, and care for quality of life in general. Hofstede (1980, 1997, 2005) justifies anchoring these qualities in the gender-related terminology of the ancient, universal, gender-role differences between men as hunters, fighters, and providers and women as caretakers and nurturers of the family. In masculine societies, such as Japan, Italy, Mexico, and the United States, assertiveness, ambition, and competitiveness are expected and rewarded in the work context. In contrast, employees who show modesty, solidarity, and care for others are valued more in feminine societies such as Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Denmark. In feminine societies, there is a preference for solving work-related conflicts by compromise and negotiation, whereas in masculine societies, power struggles and direct confrontation may be more common in conflict resolution. Managers in feminine societies take into consideration their employees' needs and strive for consensus, whereas managers

in masculine societies are expected to be assertive and decisive. The balance between work and family is also very different in both types of societies. In the Scandinavian countries (identified as feminine societies), fathers often take time out from work to take care of a young or sick child. In a review of paternity leave statistics in the European Union (EU), almost all fathers in Sweden and the majority of fathers in Norway and in Finland take paternity leave (Dermott, 2001; O'Brien, 2009). In contrast, in masculine societies, the mother typically takes care of the children, and the father is expected to continue with his work as usual. In some countries, such as Japan and South Korea, the traditional cultural expectation was that women retire completely from the workforce once they had their first child and devote full time to raising their children. When British prime minister Tony Blair limited his schedule but continued to work when his fourth child, Leo, was born in May 2000, a public debate ensued about the justification for such an action, with some criticizing his action as irresponsible and others hailing it as an example of paternal responsibility. Great Britain is, of course, near the masculine end of the scale.

Avoidance of Uncertainty

Avoidance of uncertainty is a dimension that refers to the extent to which people in a society feel anxious about ambiguous situations and the steps that they are willing to take to create stability through formalization of rules and regulations. In high uncertainty avoidance societies, such as Belgium, Japan, and France, there are many rules that govern the behavior of employees as well as the work process. In contrast, in low uncertainty avoidance societies such as Great Britain, Jamaica, and South Africa, there are fewer regulations and a general belief that there should not be more rules than are strictly necessary. High job mobility is prevalent and expected in societies with low uncertainty avoidance, and job stability and lifetime employment are more common and cherished in societies with high uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede and his colleagues (2010) note the importance of the anxiety component of uncertainty avoidance and its impact on time orientation in the work context:

In strong uncertainty avoidance societies people like to work hard, or at least to be always busy. Life is hurried, and time is money. In weak uncertainty avoidance societies people are quite able to work hard if there is a need for it, but they are not driven by an inner urge towards constant activity. They like to relax. Time is a framework to orient oneself in, but not something one is constantly watching. (p. 210)

Long- Versus Short-Term Orientation

The long- versus short-term orientation is the fifth dimension that was added after the introduction of the original four dimensions to address differences in East-West cultural orientations. Designed by Chinese scholars and reflecting Confucian principles, the CVS provided the initial evidence for this dimension among students in 23 different countries (Hofstede, 2007; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Long-term orientation refers to the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards: in particular, perseverance and thrift. Short-term orientation refers to the fostering of virtues related to the past and present: in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face," and fulfilling social obligations.

In long-term-oriented cultures, a person's responsibilities for family and for work are not separate and not viewed as in competition. In fact, the two seem to support each other, and therefore family enterprises are very common. The long-term pole on the continuum is associated with persistence, perseverance, and tenacity in pursuit of goals, and this value orientation is seen as supporting entrepreneurial initiatives. These values are paired with the values of thrift and a sense of comfort with hierarchy, all leading to the availability of capital and to a stable work relationship within a family or close-knit work enterprise. At the other end of the continuum, the short-term orientation places great emphasis on personal steadiness and stability, which could suppress risk-seeking behaviors that are required to support entrepreneurial activities.

On the continuum of long- versus short-term orientation, Asian countries scored toward the long-term pole while the rest of the countries scored at the medium- or short-term pole. The top long-term scorers were China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea (Hofstede, 2007). No Western countries scored more than medium term; the United States, Britain, and Canada scored in the short-term orientation range, as did countries of Africa. High scores on the long-term dimension were strongly correlated with the countries' economic success in the last quarter of the 20th century (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004, p. 223). The authors noted that long-term orientation is identified as a major explanation for the explosive growth of the East Asian economies during that period.

Summary and Critique of Hofstede's Framework

Hofstede's original work received wide acclaim for its pioneer nature and has since been cited and used in a vast number of research projects around the world, but it was also criticized for its less than rigorous theoretical framework and less than perfect research methods (e.g., Ailon, 2008; McSweeney, 2002). The strengths of the work included an ambitious effort to measure and quantify the values that distinguish one culture from another along five unified dimensions and a demonstration of the significance of national cultures to management theory and practice. As a result, the books promoted sensitivity to cultural diversity in the workplace at the very time that global businesses were expanding. It also undermined the assumption that management knowledge that originated in the United States could be universally applied and emphasized the need to learn different cultures and adapt management practices to local values and norms. The typology that Hofstede put forth in his work has been widely applied and has become exceptionally influential (e.g., Baskerville, 2003; Bhagat, 2002; Bing, 2004; Chandy & Williams, 1994; Cronje, 2011; Hart, 1999; Kirkman et al., 2006; Søndergaard, 1994; Triandis, 2004; Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz, 2011).

In a retrospective piece, Michale Minkov and Geert Hofstede (2011) summarize what they call "the Hofstede doctrine," noting that Hofstede's body of work has a distinct identity with five major contributions to cross-cultural research: (a) generating a paradigm shift in the study of culture, from treating it as a single (though, admittedly, complex) variable to unpackaging it into independent, measurable dimensions; (b) creating cultural dimensions that are meaningful on a national level, underpinned by variables that correlate across nations, not across individuals or organizations; (c) addressing basic universal problems that all societies have to deal with; (d) reflecting stable national differences that, though evolving, remain quite the same, or move in a similar direction as to render them quite consistent

over time; (e) having been based on a very large data set, demonstrating the importance and relevance of national culture to organizational behavior, management practices, and to society at large.

Hofstede's work has been criticized on several levels, including its limited conceptualization of culture, its less than rigorous methodology, and its inherent Western cultural bias (e.g., Ailon, 2008; Baskerville-Morley, 2003, 2005; Eckhardt, 2002; Engle & Nash, 2015; Eringa, Caudron, Rieck, Xie, & Gerhardt, 2015; Harrison & McKinnon, 1999; Kitayama, 2002; McSweeney, 2002; Robinson, 1983; Singh, 1990).

The work was criticized because it seemed to identify culture with nations and because it has operated under the assumption that within each nation there was a uniformed and relatively static culture. This notion of a unified national culture is particularly problematic in light of the increased diversity within nations. One glaring example from Hofstede's (1980) initial study was the use of an all-White sample (because of the apartheid regime of the time) to represent the totality of the South African national culture. Another stream of criticism related to the validity and reliability of the study's measures as well as the limited research methodology. For example, even though the total number of questionnaires was very large—117,000—this number includes both waves of the questionnaire that were administered in 1968 and 1969 and again from 1971 to 1973. The large number in and of itself does not ensure representativeness. In fact, in some of the countries the samples were very small (e.g., 58 in Singapore and 37 in Pakistan). Hofstede's (2001) claim that the sample sizes were sufficient because of the homogeneity of values within national samples is highly questionable because the basic premise of homogeneous national cultures cannot be substantiated (McSweeney, 2002). Finally, an interesting analysis by Ailon (2008) uses a mirroring technique to deconstruct Hofstede's book *Culture's Consequences* (1980), using the book's own assumptions and logic. The author demonstrates that, despite his explicit efforts to remain "culturally neutral," the book's specific Western cultural lens is evident throughout the chapters. For example, with respect to the uncertainty avoidance dimension, Ailon (2008) notes, "Hofstede strongly disagrees with the claim that company rules should not be broken, thus expressing low uncertainty avoidance value" (p. 423), yet the book itself manifests what appears to be a very high intolerance for the unpredictable, ambiguous, or uncertain. In other words, it manifests very high uncertainty avoidance (p. 893). Ailon found several inconsistencies in both theory and methodology and cautioned against an uncritical reading of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

A central concern among all of Hofstede's critics is the author's central premise that *national cultures are uniform* and therefore could be represented by relatively small samples (1980, p. 65) and could be measured, quantified, compared, and graphed quite precisely on the continuum of each of the five dimensions. McSweeney (2002) notes that "if the aim is understanding then we need to know more about the richness and diversity of national practices and institutions—rather than merely assuming their 'uniformity' and that they have an already known national cultural cause" (p. 112). Ailon (2008) sums up her criticism with a positive note, highlighting Hofstede's pioneering work on the backdrop of the period of his initial research: "Hofstede, it should be remembered, worked within the discursive limits of the 1970's, and he did so impressively, at least in so far as the popularity of *Culture's Consequences* indicated" (p. 901).

It is important to remember that the cultural dimensions offered by Hofstede's work were in many respects the first attempt to scientifically characterize the very broad concept of culture in a multinational context. Judging by the numerous researchers who found this conceptual framework useful, the author's contribution has been enormous. Yet, as national cultures become more diverse with an influx of immigrants, migrant workers, and the migration of businesses (painstakingly demonstrated in the first part of this book), it is important to pay attention to diversity within national cultures and to the change in the culture of those nations as a result of infusion of other cultures over time. Any manager who attempts to shortcut her or his learning process by looking for broad-brush characterizations of "uniform" and "constant" national cultures may be doing a disservice to herself or himself. It has been the premise of this book all along that in today's increasingly diverse workforce, a more nuanced understanding of, sensitivity to, and proficiency in the cultural differences not only *between* but *within* national cultures is essential.

The GLOBE Study

A different attempt to identify cultural dimensions in an international context is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program. GLOBE is a multiyear program of cross-cultural research designed to examine the relationship between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership effectiveness (Dorfman et al., 2012; House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2013; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004, 2013; Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2006). The project was conceived in 1991 by Robert J. House from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, who assembled a team of approximately 170 social scientists and management scholars from 61 countries representing major geographic regions throughout the world to collaborate on the study. The researchers collected data from over 17,000 middle managers in three industries: financial services, food processing, and telecommunications, as well as archival measures of country economic prosperity and the physical and psychological well-being of the cultures studied.

GLOBE has several distinguishing features. First, it is truly a cross-cultural research program. The constructs were defined, conceptualized, and operationalized by the multicultural team of researchers. Second, the industries were selected through a polling of the country investigators, and the instruments were designed with the full participation of the researchers representing the different cultures. Finally, the data in each country were collected by investigators who were either natives of the cultures studied or had extensive knowledge of and experience in those cultures.

The authors derived nine cultural dimensions from the literature and measured them both as practices (the way things are) and values (the way things ought to be) (Dorfman et al., 2012; House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2013; Javidan, Dorfman, Sully de Luque, & House, 2006). The nine cultural attributes that were described in the study were:

- *Performance orientation*: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence
- *Assertiveness*: The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others

- *Future orientation*: The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future
- *Human orientation*: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others
- *Institutional collectivism*: The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action
- *In-group collectivism*: The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families
- *Gender egalitarianism*: The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality
- *Power distance*: The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally
- *Uncertainty avoidance*: The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.

The study authors focused on leadership, which they defined through a process of cross-cultural discussions as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (House et al., 2004, p. 15). The principal outcome of the study was the development of six universally shared dimensions of leadership: charismatic/value based, team oriented, self-protective, participative, humane oriented, and autonomous.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Effective interactions in today’s global business world depend to a great extent on the ability to convey a clear message that people in different cultures can comprehend in the way the communicator intended them to understand it. Business communication can be interpreted very differently, depending on the cultural orientation of a particular country. For example, in masculine societies, an effective manager is one who communicates directly, assertively, and even aggressively. Those from feminine-leaning societies may interpret such behavior as unfriendly, arrogant, and even rude. A Swedish manager reading a help-wanted advertisement for a salesperson in the United States might be taken aback by the requirement that the qualified candidate be “aggressive.” On the other hand, British managers may interpret a Chinese manager’s modesty and humility in stating his qualifications as a weakness. Although the cross-fertilization of ideas generated from a diverse workforce can be beneficial to organizations, some research indicates that congruence between organizational culture and the culture of the wider society could produce beneficial outcomes. For example, a study of Mexican workers indicates that such congruence, along the axes noted by Hofstede and his colleagues, contributes to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Madlock, 2012).

An incident in the city of Najaf during the 2003 war in Iraq (see Box 8.1) demonstrates one leader’s bold and effective use of nonverbal, cross-cultural communication that probably saved many lives that day. Unable to speak Arabic and with no interpreter on site, the commander of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division was unable to use language to

communicate his nonaggressive intentions to the Arabic-speaking crowd. In a spur-of-the-moment decision, he instructed his soldiers to kneel on one knee, smile, and point their weapons to the ground. This vulnerable yet friendly posture was clearly understood by the crowd that responded likewise by smiling and sitting on the ground. Luckily, in the Najaf incident, the nonverbal body language was sufficiently universal to convey the peaceful intentions of the soldiers and to prevent what could have been a deadly incident.

Box 8.1

LEADERSHIP THROUGH EFFECTIVE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SAVES THE DAY IN NAJAF

Early in June 2003 during the U.S. war in Iraq, the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division on a mission to secure the area entered the city of Najaf. It was an uneventful patrol. The search turned up nothing. The Shia Muslim population, which traditionally had not supported Saddam's rule, seemed curious and friendly, but didn't get too close. The local population had cautiously welcomed the U.S. troops. Word came from the Grand Ayatollah Sistani that he was willing to meet with the American commander, but he asked first that the U.S. soldiers secure his compound.

As the troops started down the road toward the Ayatollah's compound, the crowd that assembled there to watch the American soldiers mistook their intentions to mean that they were progressing toward the Imam Ali shrine located in Najaf. The Imam Ali shrine is the burial site of the prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and considered one of the holiest sites in the world for Shia Muslims.

The once-friendly crowd became alarmed and chaos ensued. Earlier warm greetings were replaced with angry shouts and gestures as hundreds of people attempted to block the soldiers' way. Clerics appeared with a message from the Grand Ayatollah that the soldiers were progressing at his invitation, but their message was drowned out.

Realizing the explosive situation at hand and unable to verbally convey his peaceful intentions, the colonel told his men to stay calm. He instructed the soldiers to smile, get down on one knee, and point their weapons to the ground. The puzzled soldiers reluctantly complied. A hush fell on the crowd. Then slowly the crowd responded in kind—relaxing, smiling, and sitting on the ground. The tension was diffused, but the colonel realized that the situation was still potentially volatile. "Turn around," he ordered his men, "just turn around and go." The soldiers complied, and as they were leaving, the colonel turned around and bowed apologetically to the crowd as if saying, "Sorry for the misunderstanding." A potentially deadly confrontation was prevented.

Source: Chilcote (2003).

Although in the business world the stakes do not often involve human lives, they do involve people's livelihood. Cross-cultural miscommunication can result in lost opportunities—such as losing a job or a business deal—that could be detrimental to the financial and economic well-being of individuals and organizations. Conversely, effective cross-cultural communication can open up employment and business opportunities that may not otherwise be available to the participants.

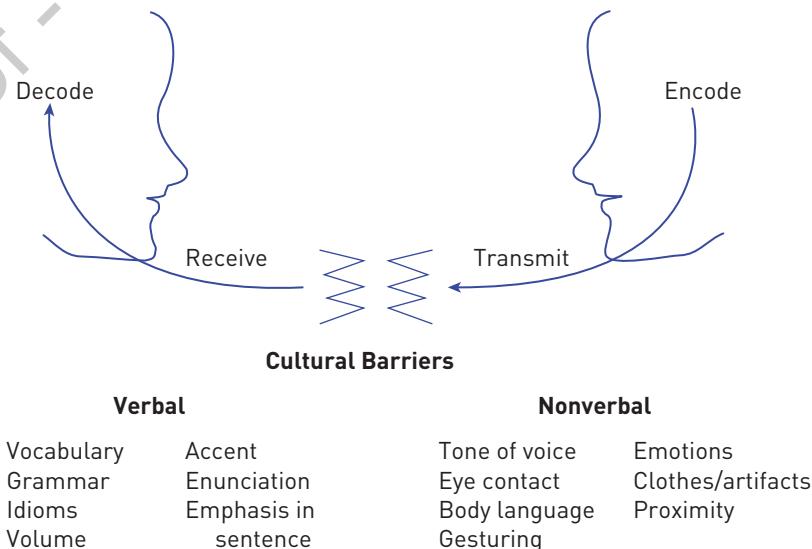
Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Communication, in its most basic form, is the use of symbols to convey meaning. Symbols can include words, tones of voice, gestures, or use of objects (artifacts). It refers to “the process through which people, acting together, create, sustain, and manage meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols from a particular context” (Conrad & Poole, 2012, p. 5). Even more so, communication is the practice of collective exchange and is fundamentally societal (Greenaway, Wright, Willingham, Reynolds, & Haslam, 2015). Broadly defined, communication is multidimensional (Neuliep, 2008) and relates to three types of goals: (a) instrumental goals (e.g., performing tasks), (b) relational goals (e.g., negotiating conflicts), and (c) identity management (e.g., conveying a desired self-image) (Bernstein, 1975; Clark & Delia, 1979; Halliday, 1978).

Cross-culture is a particularly challenging form of communication. It involves several potential barriers to communication that are related to the use of verbal and nonverbal methods to convey meanings that may or may not be the same in the cultures of origin of the participants (see Figure 8.1 for an illustration).

When people use symbols that elicit meaning in another person, whatever the original intent was, or even without conscious intent, they are still communicating. Often, the message that is received may be different from the one that was intended because of cultural barriers on the part of receivers and transmitters. Take, for example, gender differences in perceptions of sexual meanings. A man may perceive a woman’s behavior as flirtatious when her original intent was simply courteous and entirely nonsexual, leading to severe misunderstandings. Add to that the cultural layer when, for example, it is entirely acceptable and even chivalrous for a French businessman to compliment a woman colleague on her dress in the

FIGURE 8.1 • Barriers to Effective Cross-Cultural Communication



French cultural context. An American businesswoman might perceive the exact same behavior as inappropriate and may even interpret it as sexual harassment. Miscommunication occurs when the original intent of the person transmitting the message is different from the meaning that is received by the other person, and it is more likely to occur between participants who belong to different cultures.

Verbal Communication

The use of different languages often creates a barrier to communication because one or both sides are not as articulate as they could be in their native tongues. For example, a person from Holland who speaks Dutch but is also fluent in French may not be as familiar with the vocabulary, grammar, and idioms of the language as would be a native French speaker. Articulating her thoughts (encoding) would be more difficult for her, and the end message may not be exactly what she intended to convey. In addition, her accent, enunciation, and emphasis in sentence intonation (the “music” of the language) may make it difficult for the listener to clearly comprehend what she was saying and to be distracted from the message.

When conducting international business, the choice of which language to use (e.g., one’s own or the host country’s language) is more than a practical matter. It is a choice of whether to signify national pride on the one hand or to demonstrate respect for the host country’s culture on the other. Foreign leaders often speak their own language and communicate through an interpreter, even when they are fluent in the host country’s language, to show a sense of national pride. For example, when the supersonic plane the *Concorde* was designed, there was a bitter argument between the French and the British who collaborated on the project, perhaps reflecting the age-old rivalry and animosity between the two countries.⁴ At one point, work was halted after the French insisted that the plane should have a Gallic final letter *e* in its name, whereas the British stolidly referred to it as “Concord.” Eventually, the French spelling was adopted (Arnold, 2003). On the other hand, saying a few words, such as “hello” or “good evening,” in the host country’s language can go a long way. When John F. Kennedy gave his famous speech in front of the Berlin town hall and said, “All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words, ‘*Ich bin ein Berliner*’” (I am a Berliner), more than a million West Berliners responded with a roar of approval.⁵ Similarly, when Bill Clinton spoke at the funeral of Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister of Israel who was assassinated because of his work toward peace in the Middle East, he began his English speech by saying two words in Hebrew, “*Shalom, chaver*” (goodbye [also doubles as peace], my friend). The people of Israel were so touched by this gesture that these words later appeared in poems, in everyday phrases, and on bumper stickers. Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor, once commented, “If I’m selling to you, I speak your language. If I am buying, *dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen*” (then you must speak German) (Nurden, 1997, p. 39). After the January 7, 2015, killings of 11 staff members of the *Charlie Hebdo* French satirical weekly newspaper by two brothers from Al Qaeda’s branch in Yemen, about 2 million people met in Paris in a rally of national and international unity against the killings. The phrase “*Je suis Charlie*” (I am Charlie) became a slogan of support and freedom of speech.

Linguistic diversity is an important aspect of global diversity. Managing a workforce that does not share a common language can present a major challenge to both employees and

management. Although most of the discussion related to the use of foreign languages in business refers to international organizations with business partners or subsidiaries in different countries, verbal communication may also present a challenge within countries. In Guinea, for example, a large segment of the population barely speaks French, the official language of Guinea (Auclair, 1992); India has two main languages (Hindi and English), 14 official languages, and thousands more languages and dialects (The World Factbook, 2015); and in South Africa's metropolitan area of Alexandra, nine major Bantu languages are claimed as the home language, and many residents also speak some English, Afrikaans, or Portuguese (Heine, 2000; McCall, Ngeva, & Mbebe, 1997). Linguistic diversity is strongly related to people's and nations' history, heritage, and sense of identity, and can influence economic and political development both positively and negatively. As Ginsburgh and Weber (2011) point out, on the one hand suppression and elimination of linguistic diversity was part of the ugly heritage of colonialism and should be condemned. On the other hand, a plethora of languages within a nation (e.g., 527 languages in Nigeria, 217 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, thousands in India) could cause difficulties such as miscommunication, institutional wastefulness, inefficiencies, and, when tied to strong ethnic, national, or religious identity, even war (Ginsburgh & Weber, 2011).

Often, misunderstandings occur when one person is not familiar with all aspects of the other's language. A classic example of such mistaken translation resulted in a horned Moses holding the Ten Commandments in the famous Michelangelo statue (circa 1513). The original biblical Hebrew text describes Moses coming down Mount Sinai after meeting God "with his face radiating," or literally with rays of light coming out of his face (Exodus 34:29). However, the Hebrew word for *ray* is the same as the word for *horn—keren*. Michelangelo, relying on Jerome's vulgate translation of the Old Testament, which apparently confused the two meanings, sculpted the famous statue of Moses with two horns protruding from his head. On the other hand, sometimes the use of a foreign language can add a different dimension to the discussion because people who are not native speakers can pick up errors that native speakers will not see. Adler and Gundersen (2008, p. 74) describe an example of a business using this perceptual characteristic to its advantage: For proofreading, the Canadian National Railway gives reports written in English to bilingual francophone employees and reports written in French to bilingual anglophone employees.

Language Fluency and Cultural Fluency

When dealing with foreign languages and different cultures, language fluency and cultural fluency are not the same—although they are related. Language fluency refers to the possession of linguistic skills that allow one to function much like a native speaker of the language. Cultural fluency refers to the ability to identify, understand, and apply the communicative behaviors of members of the other group; it is the ability to go back and forth between two or more cultures, to send and receive messages in a way that ensures that the meanings of the messages of both the sender and receiver regularly match (Glazier, 2003; Molinsky, 2005; Oyserman, 2011; Staub, 2009). Children of immigrants who grow up speaking the language of their parents at home, but without connection to their broader cultural heritage, face great difficulties when returning to their homeland, even though they may speak the language fluently. For example, according to U.S. laws, legal aliens who commit a crime may

be deported to their home country. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001, the United States began enforcing its immigration laws more vigorously, and more immigrants who committed crimes were deported. Among the deportees was a large group of Cambodian nationals who grew up in the United States and were highly acculturated to the American way of life. Although their parents spoke Khmer at home, they did not teach them about their cultural heritage because they wanted to forget the horrors of the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot regimes. As a result, although they were fluent in Khmer, these deportees experienced great difficulties adjusting to the Cambodian way of life and culture.⁶

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal barriers to cross-cultural communication include body language—movements, gestures, and postures—as well as use of artifacts such as personal adornments and the physical setting. Trust and respect are often conveyed through nonverbal rather than verbal communication. A case in point is the controversy in the U.S. media ignited by U.S. president Barack Obama's bow to the Japanese emperor during his Asian tour in November 2009. Some interpreted the bow as a culturally sensitive sign of respect, but others complained it was an indication of subservience unbecoming a U.S. president (MSNBC News, 2009; National Public Radio, 2009). Obama's defenders attributed the bow to his multicultural background and worldly awareness, while his critics, citing a tradition that the U.S. president bows to no one, claimed it was a sign of his naïveté. The supporters also noted that the bow, a typical Asian form of greeting, was also accompanied by a very Western firm handshake, while the critics noted that the very low bow, practically a 90-degree angle, was a gesture of extreme deference and subordination. Either way, it is clear that this one nonverbal gesture spoke volumes. Indeed, it was discussed more than any of the speeches the president and his hosts gave during the tour.

One person who is using nonverbal communication to combat prejudice and discrimination against refugees from predominantly Muslim countries in Europe is comedian filmmaker Firas Alshater. A Syrian refugee himself, Alshater engaged in a street social experiment to test how ordinary Germans react to refugees and if they would give a hug to him as he stood, blindfolded, in the middle of a large public square in Berlin (see Box 8.2). In addition to body gestures, artifacts can be used to transfer important information, and those, too, need to be understood and interpreted in their specific cultural and national contexts (see Box 8.3 for an example of the use of the physical setting to convey respect in different cultures).

Clothing has long been used to communicate rank (e.g., the cardinal robes and the queen's crown), mood (e.g., mourning clothes), occasion (e.g., wedding outfits in different cultures), and even seasons (e.g., the geisha's seasonal kimono colors, or light and dark business attire in the West, depending on the time of year). Clothes are an extension of the body and closely relate to the person's gender, age, socioeconomic status, and national origin. When doing business in a foreign country, one often faces the question of whether to wear the business attire that is common in one's own culture or in the host country. Although in modern times the Western business suit goes a long way for men, it is not the same for women. Western clothes may be perceived as inappropriately revealing by many cultures, and wearing them might be interpreted as disrespectful to the host culture and perceived

Box 8.2**HUGS FOR INCLUSION: USING A UNIVERSAL NONVERBAL GESTURE TO COMMUNICATE ACCEPTANCE**

In a YouTube video that went viral, Firas Alshater, a comedian and filmmaker, conducted a social experiment to find out how ordinary Germans react to refugees. Alshater stood blindfolded in the middle of the Alexanderplatz square in Berlin next to a sign in German that read, "I am a Syrian refugee. I trust you. Do you trust me? Hug me!" He waited a long time for someone to hug him but after the first person did, many passersby came over and gave Alshater hugs. In the hour and a half that he stood there, about 40 people hugged him. The video, posted on YouTube on January 27, 2016, received more than 700,000 hits. Alshater, who immigrated to Berlin as an asylum seeker in 2013, spent 9 months in jail for documenting the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime. He concludes his video by stating, "I learned that the Germans need a bit of time but then they can't be stopped. That's why I believe the integration will be a success . . . Eventually."

Sources: "Zukar 01—Who Are Those Germans?" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZozLHZFEbIY>); Ma (2016); Shuster (2016).

Box 8.3**HOW CAN THE IMPORTANT GUEST SIT AT THE HEAD OF A ROUND TABLE? THE USE OF THE PHYSICAL SETTING TO CONVEY RESPECT IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

To convey respect to a high-ranking visitor, Europeans and North Americans have the person sit at the head of a rectangular table. A round table is typically reserved for occasions when the participants are presumed to be equals. A prime example is the famous legend of King Arthur of Camelot and his Knights of the Round Table. King Arthur conveyed the equality among his chosen knights through the use of a round table. Similarly, in modern times, the representatives to the UN Security Council all sit at a round table. The assumption of these Western cultures is that there is no way to identify a more- or less-respected seat at a round table, and therefore no way to indicate the relative ranking of the participants.

In the Chinese culture, on the other hand, the ranking of the participants can be clearly identified by the way they sit at a round table: The highest-ranking participant in a meeting will be seated directly facing the main entrance to the room, and the rest of the participants, in descending order of rank, will be seated to his or her left and right sides until the lowest-ranking person will have his or her back to the entrance. This follows a similar logic of circular-ranked importance expressed in the Chinese perception of geography. The Chinese tradition indicates that the imperial palace is the most important place in the world, and from there, in circles of decreased importance, are the other areas of Beijing, the rest of China, and the rest of the world.

as offensive. On the other hand, wearing a traditional outfit, such as the Muslim attire of *abaya*, *burqah*, or *hijab*,⁷ may be seen as confining or even degrading by Western women. The U.S. Army's policy of "strongly encouraging" army servicewomen to conform to Saudi rules and wear *abayas* while serving in Saudi Arabia has long been controversial.⁸ When Madeleine Albright, the U.S. secretary of state during Bill Clinton's presidency, visited Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1999, she found a middle-ground solution. Although she did not wear the traditional Muslim attire that is expected from women in that country, she wore dresses and skirts that were longer than the ones she wore in Washington. She also donned a wide-brimmed hat, thus walking the fine line between conveying respect for her hosts' culture and her own. In contrast, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India and the leader of its liberation movement from Great Britain, wore just a loincloth during his visit to England in 1931, shocking the conservative British society (Brown & Fee, 2008). The British media interpreted his attire as primitive and disrespectful, but Gandhi was sending a clear message of independence and defiance as well as respect for Indian culture and traditions: "It was a rejection not only of the material products of Europe, but also of the European value system with its criteria of decency" (Tarlo, 1996, p. 75).

Over the years, more work organizations and international bodies relaxed strict clothing requirements to accommodate the traditional or religious attire. For example, Disney allowed a Muslim employee at its Orange County park to wear a specially designed headscarf after initially objecting to her religious head covering. Initially, Noor Abdallah, who worked at a ticket booth in the Disneyland park, was told that she could not wear the hijab and was offered another job away from the public. After she refused, the park worked with her to design a covering—a blue scarf topped with a beret—to match her costume and meet her religious demands ("Disney, Muslim Worker," 2010). In preparation for the 2012 Olympic Games in London, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) overturned its ban on women playing football with their heads covered, opening the doors to women athletes from traditional Muslim countries to compete in the Olympics. Other international sports bodies have also relaxed clothing rules in ways that allowed more Muslim women to compete in the games such as Saudi Arabian judo player Wodjan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim, Saudi Arabian runner Sarah Attar, and U.S. fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad (Khaleeli, 2012).

Cross-Cultural Communication Styles

A question that is very relevant for any business transaction is whether and to what extent members of a particular cultural group will alter their preferred communication style when interacting with members from another cultural group. Utilizing the theoretical perspective presented earlier, will members of collectivist cultures become more direct and task oriented in their communication with members of individualist cultures? Will members of individualist cultures become more concerned with the needs of others and in preserving harmony in the transaction? Or will one or both groups become more entrenched in their own communication style?

It is plausible to assume that adapting to the other's communication style will generate a perception of similarity and familiarity that will contribute to creating a positive atmosphere in cross-cultural encounters (e.g., Byrne's 1971 similarity attraction paradigm; Foley,

Linnehan, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2006; Lee & Gudykunst, 2001). Intergroup contact theory and research, originally proposed as a “contact hypothesis” by Allport (1954), suggests that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Harrington & Miller, 1992; MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011).

Allport’s original conditions for optimal contact, such as equal status and common goals, facilitate the effect but are not necessary conditions, and there are other positive outcomes for intergroup contact such as greater trust. Research findings apply to many types of groups including different ages, genders, nations, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, and abilities, and the major mediators between intergroup contact and such positive outcomes are affective—reduced anxiety and empathy (Pettigrew et al., 2011). On the other hand, because cross-cultural encounters create uncertainty and provoke anxiety, participants may resort to the familiarity of their own cultural norms and even more strongly exhibit their normative communication styles, especially when the contact is nonvoluntary or threatening (Lau, Lam, & Deutsch Salamon, 2008; Laurent, 1984; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Tse, Francis, & Walls, 1994). A study conducted in New Zealand supports the latter (see Box 8.4).

Box 8.4

ARE MEMBERS OF A CULTURAL GROUP INTERACTING WITH A MEMBER OF ANOTHER GROUP MORE LIKELY TO CHANGE THEIR ORIGINAL COMMUNICATION STYLE OR REINFORCE IT?

Pekerti and Thomas (2003) examined intercultural and intracultural communication styles between two groups in New Zealand: Anglo-Europeans, representing a low-context individualist culture, and East Asians, representing a high-context collectivist culture. Participants in the experiment were 96 students at a large New Zealand university, one half of whom were Anglo-European New Zealanders (Pakeha) and one half of whom were students from Asia (primarily from China) who were first generation, with less than 10 years in New Zealand (to control for acculturation). Students were randomly assigned to one of two conditions—interaction with members of their own cultural group or interaction with members of the other cultural group.⁹ The assignment was ranking of 15 crimes by their severity, and participants were given no more than 15 minutes to rank the crimes by consensus. The interactions were videotaped and coded by independent observers for the occurrence and intensity of each cultural communication behavior. The results showed that interacting with members of a different culture increased the tendency to use the cultural communication style of their own culture. Specifically, in interactions with Anglo-Europeans, the Asian students were more likely than they were with members of their own culture to accommodate and change their opinions in order to preserve harmony. A similar trend was apparent with the Anglo-European students, who were more likely than they were with members of their own cultural group to be direct and task oriented in their interaction with Asian students. The authors attribute this behavior to the uncertainty involved in cross-cultural interactions, which increases people’s tendency to rely on their own cultural norms. The authors conclude that in cross-cultural communication, the dominant tendency is exaggeration of one’s own cultural behaviors rather than adaptation.

The tendency to resort to the familiarity of one's own cultural norms may be even stronger when facing a conflict. Sometimes due to misunderstanding, cultural ignorance, or fear of losing face, this behavior can have a toll both in human relationships and in financial outcomes. Mangaliso (2001) describes an incident in a South African mining company that mushroomed into a labor dispute and a prolonged strike that cost the company greatly—all because management was unable to appropriately communicate with its workers. In the beginning of the labor dispute, the workers invited top management to address them on the issue in a public forum. Management denied their request, however, and responded instead by sending messages through envoys and written statements posted on bulletin boards. In the high-context collectivist culture of the South African workers, management's impersonal and task-oriented communication was entirely inappropriate. It failed to take into consideration the South African concept of *ubuntu*, meaning humaneness, consideration for compassion and community—similar to the Chinese concept of *quanxi*, the Korean *chae-boel*, and the Spanish *simpatia* (mentioned in Chapter 9), all indicating a cultural emphasis on relationships (Hurwich-Reiss et al., 2014; Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2007; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). Frustrated and humiliated, the workers began a strike that lasted more than 2 weeks and resulted in several hundreds of employees being fired and several million dollars of company losses. One of the employee representatives was reported to have said, "The only thing that employees wanted was for top management to come and address us. Just to speak to us" (Mangaliso, 2001, p. 23). In retrospect, the strike and its costly consequences could have been avoided if management understood the cultural context of its workers and was able to communicate with them in an appropriate manner.

Summary and Conclusion

To succeed in managing a workforce that is increasingly diverse and multinational, managers need to understand cultural differences and to become competent in cross-cultural communication. This chapter examines the cultural context of the global workplace and analyzes communication patterns that facilitate or block effective cross-cultural communication.

Research on cultural dimensions and the wealth of studies inspired by Geert Hofstede's pioneering work provide an important context for understanding cross-cultural interactions in the workplace. His four axes of *power distance* (authority and social inequality), *individualism versus collectivism* (cohesion and loyalty to the group), *masculinity versus femininity* (competition in contrast to care for others), *avoidance of uncertainty* (tolerance for ambiguity), and long- versus short-term orientation (fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards in contrast to virtues related to the past such as respect for tradition) have clear implications for individual and group expectations related to acceptable behaviors in the workplace. Whether employees expect to be rewarded, for example, for individual excellence or for a team effort depends to a large extent on the cultural perception of individualism versus collectivism in their society. The GLOBE project, led by Robert J. House, examined nine cultural dimensions of leadership worldwide through a longitudinal study in 62 world cultures. The principal outcome of the study was the development of six universally shared dimensions of leadership: (a) charismatic/value based, (b) team oriented, (c) self-protective, (d) participative, (e) humane oriented, and (f) autonomous.

Defined as *the use of symbols to convey meaning*, communication in today's global environment has become largely cross-cultural. Cross-cultural communication involves several potential barriers that are related to the use of verbal and nonverbal methods to convey meanings that may or may not be the same in the cultures of origin of the participants. Miscommunication occurs when the original intent of the person transmitting the message is different from the meaning that is received by the other person, and it is more likely to occur between participants who belong to different cultures. Often, misunderstandings occur when one person is not familiar with all aspects of the other's language, is not fluent or articulate in the language used for the business transaction, or miscommunicates or misreads nonverbal communication such as movement or gestures.

Effective communication with employees, customers, shareholders, regulators, and other business partners presents a serious challenge, even when conducted within the same cultural framework. The challenge is compounded when communication involves two or more diverse cultural contexts. When one partner to a business communication misreads the cultural clues encoded in the other person's message, the transaction can result in a misunderstanding, hurt emotions, conflicts, and lost business opportunities. On the other hand, making the effort to understand other cultures and to communicate effectively within them can go a long way in fostering trust, conveying respect, and eventually securing mutually beneficial business deals.

Notes

1. See Javidan and House (2001, p. 289).
2. For a summary table of key definitions of culture, see Erez and Earley (1993).
3. See, for example, Margaret Mead (1935/2001) and Ruth Benedict (1934/1989).
4. The interesting historical/political context to the inception of the *Concorde* project was that the project was designed in response to the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960s. Its goal was to demonstrate the technological abilities of Western Europe as a center of world power, independent from the United States and the Soviet Union.
5. This was the impetus for France and England to put aside their historical animosity and work collaboratively on this project ("History of the Supersonic Airliner," 2001; "The World," 2003).
6. See "Text: Kennedy's Berlin Speech" (2003).
7. See "The World" (2003).
8. *Abaya* is a head-to-toe, traditional Muslim dress made from black, lightweight fabric that has two layers; *burqah* similarly provides cover from head to toe and covers the face so that only the eyes are exposed, sometimes behind a netlike fabric;

and *hijab* is a traditional Muslim headscarf.

8. Lieutenant Colonel Martha McSally has led a long struggle to end this policy by the Pentagon. McSally, who was the first woman U.S. service member to fly in combat, was stationed in Saudi Arabia, where she was forced to wear the *abaya* and travel in the rear seats of vehicles in accordance with local custom. Congressman Jim Langevin of Rhode Island joined McSally's fight and

called the army's requirement "gender discrimination," saying that "women make first-class soldiers and should not be treated like second-class citizens" ("Langevin Seeks," 2002).

9. The study used a 2×2 (culture \times condition) design, and in assignment to the two experimental conditions, the researchers used blocks by gender, age, and culture to control for possible effects of these variables on the outcome variable of communication style.