An Introduction to Intercultural Communication

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"The times, they are a changin'," proclaimed Bob Dylan in his popular folk song of the 1960s. Dylan was right; the times were changing. And, as we move into the final half decade of the twentieth century, the times still "are a changin'..

Numerous events have caused major changes to occur, both worldwide and locally. These changes have transformed the world into the global village forecast by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. From an intercultural communication perspective, four of the events leading to the development of the global village are crucial: (1) improvements in transportation technology, (2) developments in communication technology, (3) globalization of the economy, and (4) changes in immigration patterns. These events have produced major transformations in both worldwide and local patterns of communication and interaction and are of primary concern to the study of intercultural communication.

Improvements in transportation technology have helped to shrink the earth to a figurative global village by creating the means for people to travel almost anywhere in the world within less than a day's time. Aircraft now in the design stage will increase travel speeds so that the travel time between China and the United States, for instance, will come to be measured in durations of minutes. Also in development are single-stage-to-orbit (SSTO) rocket vehicles that will provide near-earth-orbit capabilities to an increased number of nations and cultures.

Developments in communication technology paralleled those in travel technology and prompted further movement toward the global village. It is now possible for people to have instantaneous vocal, graphic, and textual communication with most parts of the world. Indeed, with a few hundred dollars' worth of battery-powered equipment in the form of a facsimile machine and a cellular telephone, it is possible to be in instant oral and print communication with others in almost any place in the world while driving interstate highways in the United States. In addition, the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web have provided a means for people everywhere to interact with one another and to transmit, store, and retrieve information about nearly any topic virtually anywhere in the world.

Although these improvements in communication technology have produced many effects, three are significant to intercultural communication. First, new communication technology has created an almost free flow of news and information throughout the world and has become so important in the everyday conduct of commerce and government that it cannot be set aside. These changes have made it virtually impossible to keep communication capabilities out of the hands of common citizens. Government attempts to censor the free flow of ideas, opinions, and information have been frustrated. In China, for instance, during the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of mid-1989, the Chinese government attempted to ban foreign correspondents from reporting observed incidents, cutting their access to telephone and television broadcast facilities. American television viewers, however, were informed of many incidents by reporters using their cellular telephones to call the United States via a communications satellite. By the time the Chinese government reacted to this technology, the story and all information had long...
since been disseminated to the world. In other parts of the world, similar incidents have occurred; for example, the widespread and multiple changes that took place in the former Soviet Union are due in part to the availability of news and information. And, because of today’s communication technology, events in Bosnia, as well as in Somalia and Haiti, cannot escape world scrutiny.

Second, communication technology also has dissolved our isolation. Not more than a half century ago it was virtually impossible for the average citizen to have an informed awareness of what was happening outside her or his city, let alone be informed about the world. People had to wait for reports to arrive by mail or appear in newspapers, where the news could be up to several months old. Although transcontinental and transoceanic telegraph and telephone services and the development of radio permitted essentially instantaneous contact, those channels of communication were quite easy to control in terms of who might use them and what information they might contain. The situation today is quite different. With existing communication technology we can sit in our living rooms and watch events anywhere on earth, or, indeed, in space, as these events are actually happening. Only a scant few years ago we had to wait hours, days, and even weeks to learn who won gold medals in the Olympic Games. Today we can witness these events in our living rooms as they occur.

Third, the immediacy of this new communication technology has impacted us in another manner. In the past when news and information reception was delayed and we learned of events days, perhaps weeks, after they occurred, it was difficult to develop strong feelings about what might have happened thousands of miles away. But, consider how different is the impact of reading in a newspaper that the police have beaten someone while making an arrest from that of actually watching the videotape of the Rodney King beating. Similarly, television coverage of the Reginald Denny beating as it occurred at the outset of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles could not help but move us. The ability to deny the cruelty of these acts is virtually reduced to zero. And it hardly seems necessary to mention the worldwide impact of the televised O.J. Simpson trial.

Globalization of the economy has further brought people together. At the end of World War II, the United States was the only military and economic superpower. Most of the rest of the world’s economy was in disarray. Most industries had been destroyed, and few banks were functioning. Because the United States escaped World War II with its industry and its banking system intact, it was the dominant economic force in the world. Only 5 percent of American businesses faced international competition. In the 1990s, however, 75 percent of American industries face international competition. This leads to interdependence among national economies and to intercultural contact in arenas of both politics and business.

As the economy has internationalized, the U.S. presence overseas has increased dramatically. Today, over 8,000 U.S. companies have international operations in foreign countries. American holdings total over $209 billion, with some $3.5 billion committed to more than 600 joint ventures with China. American companies also are engaging in joint ventures with other Asian countries. IBM, for instance, has worked with Japan to build a plant there to produce advanced versions of computer memory chips. The Allied Signal Corporation of Morristown, New Jersey, “expects to complete plans for at least 10 joint ventures or wholly owned operations in China in the next two years.” A $92 million venture involving Hoe Binh Limited of Vietnam and such American companies as General Instrument, ITT, and Standard Communications is being planned to broadcast local and international television programs in the cities of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, and Can Tho. Additionally, young Americans are finding jobs abroad. Fourteen percent of the Stanford University business school class of 1994 elected to seek jobs abroad, compared with 6 percent in 1989. At New York University’s Stern School of Business, the number of American students taking overseas jobs jumped 20 percent in 1994 compared to 1993. Student applications for the University of Michigan’s overseas-study programs in 20 countries have increased 70 percent.
since 1992. In addition, 1 million Americans apply for business passports each year, with more than 2.5 million Americans now working abroad.

Simultaneously, foreign presence in the United States has increased: over 8,000 foreign firms operate in the United States. Foreigners have invested more than $300 billion and own nearly $1.5 trillion in U.S. assets, a 200 percent increase since 1980. In 1990, overseas concerns controlled over 13 percent of American industrial assets, causing companies such as AT&T to prepare thousands of its annual stockholder reports in foreign languages. Foreign investors own more than 1 million acres of U.S. farmland and 64 percent of the commercial property in downtown Los Angeles.

The interconnectedness of the global economy seems to become more apparent on a daily basis. This was evidenced recently when key stock markets in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, New York, and London fell due in part to the collapse of Barings Investment Bank in London.\(^6\) It is obvious that the strength of our economy depends on communication with and among other cultures such as those of Japan, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Korea, Italy, France, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and many smaller nations.

Changes in immigration patterns have also contributed to the development of the global village. Although transportation improvements, communication technology, and globalization of the economy have figuratively shrunk the world, the world’s population has continued to increase and shift. In 1974, the world numbered approximately 3.9 billion people and was growing by nearly 80 million a year. Since 1974, the world’s population has expanded by nearly 1.7 billion and now increases by nearly 90 million annually. This has a severe impact on ecosystems, and fresh-water supplies continue to shrink. Experts ask whether the world can adequately feed and shelter the 5 billion mouths that will be added during the next 50 years. Refugees produced by population pressures in Africa and Asia already threaten to destabilize nations.\(^5\)

Recent immigration patterns have physically shifted segments of the world population. Legal migration to North America – the United States, and Canada – is nearly double what it was in the decade of the 1960s. In the 1980s, 872,704 legal immigrants entered North America from many parts of the world including sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and western Asia, South Asia, eastern and southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.\(^5\)

As a result of population growth and immigration, contacts with new cultures or with cultures that previously appeared unfamiliar, alien, and at times mysterious, are becoming a normal part of our day-to-day routine. People from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba, Haiti, Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Ecuador, among others, have entered the United States to become our neighbors and add to the cultural diversity of our society. As these people adjust to this culture, we will have increasing intercultural contacts in our daily lives. Adaptation to this new cultural diversity by American businesses was demonstrated recently when some telephone companies advertised in the Chinese language to remind the Chinese community to call home during the Chinese New Year holiday.

While this global phenomenon involving transportation, communication, an international economy, and migration was taking place, change was also taking place within our own boundaries. Domestic events made us focus our attention on often-demanding co-cultures. African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, women, homosexuals, the poor, the disabled, the homeless, and countless other groups became visible and vocal as they cried out for recognition and their rightful place in our community.

This attention on co-cultures made us realize that although intercultural contact is inevitable, it is not always successful. The communicative behavior of the co-cultures frequently disturbed many of us. Their behavior seemed strange and, at times, perhaps bizarre; frequently it failed to meet our normal expectations. We discovered, indeed, that intercultural communication is difficult. Even when the natural barrier of a foreign language is dissolved, we can still fail to understand and to be understood.
These communication difficulties, both in the international arena and in the domestic scene, give rise to a major premise: The difficulty with being thrust into a global village is that we do not yet know how to live with the global villagers; there are too many of us who do not want to live with them. Our is a culture in which racism and ethnocentrism run deep. Although there has been a lessening of overt racial violence since the 1960s, the enduring racist-ethnocentric belief system has not been appreciably affected.

For centuries, not only Americans, but most other groups of people as well have classified themselves and their neighbors by the color of their skin. Belief in the reality of race is at the heart of how people traditionally perceive differences in those around them; it is how they define themselves. And, until recently, it was a basis used by many scientists to describe the evolution of humanity. Today, an ever-growing number of anthropologists and geneticists are convinced that the biological concept of race has become an antiquated approach to self and group description and identity. Recent genetic research has indicated that “people can be divided just as usefully into different groups based on the size of their ears, or their ability to digest milk or resist malaria.” These characteristics are easily identified as hereditary characteristics shared by large numbers of people, and they are no more useful nor less significant than use of skin colors to delineate race. Scientists do not claim that all humans are the same, but race does not lend assistance in understanding how people are different.

In many respects, racism and ethnocentrism have become institutionalized and are practiced unconsciously. The result is a structured domination of people of color by the white European American power structure. Perhaps it would be better for us to adopt the concept of race advanced by Viktor Frankl, who asserts that there are but two races of humankind: the decent and the indecent. Both are found everywhere, and they penetrate into all groups—transcending ethnicity, rational origin, religion, gender, and sexual preference. With such an approach we may be able to eliminate, or at least lessen significantly, this deep-seated antagonism and be able to assume our proper place in a global village community.

Our incapacity to yet behave as good citizens in the global village is due for major concern because we have not learned to respect and accept one another. We must come to recognize, as Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres has so clearly stated: All people have the right to be equal and the equal right to be different. If we can recognize and operate from this assumption, we can learn to communicate with one another effectively, to learn to understand one another, even if our cultures are different. Then, when we have a strong desire to communicate, we can face and attempt to conquer the difficulties imposed upon us by cultural diversity and its impact on the communication process.

Concern with the difficulties cultural diversity poses for effective communication has given rise to the marriage of culture and communication and to the recognition of intercultural communication as a field of study. Inherent in this fusion is the idea that intercultural communication entails the investigation of those elements of culture that most influence interaction when members of two different cultures come together in an interpersonal setting.

To help us understand what is involved in intercultural communication we will begin with a fundamental definition: Intercultural communication occurs whenever a message produced in one culture must be processed in another culture. The rest of this essay will deal with intercultural communication and point out the relationships between communication, culture, intercultural communication, and cultural context.

**Communication**

To understand intercultural interaction, we must first understand human communication. Understanding human communication means knowing something about what happens when people interact, why it happens, the effects of what happens, and finally what we can do to influence and maximize the results of a particular communication event.
Understanding and Defining Communication

We begin with the basic assumption that communication is a form of human behavior derived from a need to connect and interact with other human beings. Almost everyone desires social contact with other people, and this need is met through the act of communication, which unites otherwise isolated individuals. Our behaviors become messages to which other people may respond. When we talk, we are obviously behaving; but when we wave, smile, frown, walk, shake our heads, or gesture, we also are behaving. These behaviors frequently become messages; they communicate something to someone else.

Before behaviors can become messages, however, they must meet two requirements: (1) they must be observed by someone, and (2) they must elicit a response. In other words, any behavior that elicits a response is a message. If we examine this last statement, we can see several implications.

First, the word *any* tells us that both verbal and nonverbal behaviors may function as messages. Verbal messages consist of spoken or written words (speaking and writing are word-producing behaviors), while nonverbal messages consist of the entire remaining behavior repertoire.

Second, behavior may be either conscious or unconscious. We frequently do things without being aware of them. This is especially true when nonverbal behavior involves such habits as finger-nail biting, toe tapping, leg jiggling, head shaking, staring, and smiling. Even such things as slouching in a chair, chewing gum, or adjusting glasses may be unconscious behaviors. Since a message consists of behaviors to which people may respond, we must thus acknowledge the possibility of producing messages unknowingly.

Third, we frequently behave unintentionally, in some cases uncontrollably. For instance, if we are embarrassed, we may blush or speak with vocal disfluencies; we do not intend to blush or stammer, but we do so anyway. Again, these unintentional behaviors can become messages if someone perceives them and responds to them.

This concept of conscious-unconscious, intentional-unintentional behavioral relationships gives us a basis to formulate a clearer definition of communication. Communication may be defined as that which happens whenever someone responds to the behavior or the residue of the behavior of another person. When someone perceives our behavior or its residue and attributes meaning to it, communication has taken place regardless of whether our behavior was conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. If we think about this for a moment, we must realize that it is impossible for us not to behave. Being necessitates behavior. If behavior has communication potential, then it is also impossible for us not to communicate. In other words, we cannot *not* communicate.

Behavioral residue (just mentioned in our definition) refers to those things that remain as a record of our actions. For instance, this essay that you are reading is a behavioral residue—it resulted from certain behaviors. As the authors, we had to engage in a number of behaviors; we had to research, think, and use our word processors. Another example of behavioral residue might be the odor of cigar smoke lingering in an elevator after the cigar smoker has departed. Smoking the cigar in the elevator was the behavior, the odor is the residue. The response you have to that odor is a reflection of your past experiences and attitudes toward cigars, smoking, smoking in public places, and, perhaps, people who smoke cigars.

Our approach to communication has focused on the behavior of one individual causing or provoking a response from another by the attribution of meaning to behavior. Attribution means that we draw upon our past experiences and give meaning to the behavior that we observe. We might imagine that somewhere in each of our brains is a meaning reservoir in which are stored all of the experience-derived meanings we possess. These various meanings have developed throughout our lifetime as a result of our culture acting upon us as well as the result of our individual experiences within that culture. Meaning is relative to each of us because each of us is a unique human being with a unique background and a unique set of experiences. When we
encounter a behavior in our environment, each of us dips into our individual, unique meaning reservoirs and selects the meaning we believe is most likely to be appropriate for the behavior encountered and the social context in which it occurred.

If someone walks up to us and says, "If you've got a few minutes, let's get a cup of coffee," we observe this behavior and respond to it by giving it meaning. The meaning we give it is drawn from our experience with language and word meaning and also from our experience with this person and the social context. Our response could vary significantly depending upon prior experiences and the circumstances. If the person is a friend, we may interpret the behavior as an invitation to sit and chat for a few minutes. On the other hand, if the behavior comes from someone with whom we have had differences, we might respond by attributing conciliatory goodwill to the message and seeing an invitation to try to settle past differences. Yet another example could be a situation in which the person is someone you have seen in a class but do not know. Then your ability to respond is diminished because you may not be able to infer fully the other person's intention. Perhaps this is someone who wants to talk about the class, perhaps it is someone who only wants companionship until the next class, or if gender differences are involved, it is perhaps someone attempting to "hit" on you. Your response to the observed behavior is dependent upon knowledge, experience, and social context.

Usually this works quite well, but at other times it fails and we misinterpret a message; we attribute the wrong meaning to the behavior we have observed. This may be brought about by inappropriate behavior when someone does or says something not intended. Or it could occur when the experiential backgrounds of people are sufficiently different that behavior is misinterpreted.

**The Ingredients of Communication**

Next, we examine the ingredients of communication, the various components that fit together to form what we call communication. Since our purpose in studying intercultural communication is to develop communication skills to apply with conscious intent, our working definition of communication will specify intentional communication. We further define communication as a dynamic transactional behavior-affecting process in which people behave intentionally to induce or elicit a particular response from another person. Communication is complete only when the intended behavior is perceived by the intended receiver and that person responds to and is affected by the behavior.

These transactions must include all conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, verbal, nonverbal, and contextual stimuli that act as cues about the quality and credibility of the message. The cues must be clear to both the behavioral source of the transaction and the processor of that behavior.

This definition allows us to identify eight specific ingredients of communication within the framework of intentional communication. First is a behavioral source. This is a person with both a need and a desire to communicate. The need may be a social desire to be recognized as an individual, to share information with others, or to influence the attitudes and behaviors of one or more others. The source's wish to communicate indicates a desire to share his or her internal state of being with another human being. Communication, then, is really concerned with the connecting of individuals and the sharing of internal states with varying degrees of intention to influence the information, attitudes, and behaviors of others.

Internal states of being cannot be shared directly; we must rely on symbolic representations of our internal states. This brings us to the second ingredient, encoding. Encoding is an internal activity in which verbal and nonverbal behaviors are selected and arranged to create a message in accordance with the contextual rules that govern the interaction and the rules of grammar and syntax applicable to the language being used.

The result of encoding is expressive behavior that serves as a message, the third ingredient, to represent the internal state that is to be shared. A message is a set of verbal and/or nonverbal symbols that represent a person's particular state of being at a particular moment in time and space. Although encoding is an internal act that produces a message, a message is external to the source; it is the behavior or
behavioral residue that must connect a source and a responder across time and space.

Messages must have a means by which they move from source to responder, so the fourth communication ingredient is the channel, which provides a connection between a source and a responder. A channel is the physical means by which a message moves between people.

The fifth ingredient is the responder. Responders observe a source's behavior or its residue and, as a consequence, become linked to the message source. Responders may be those intended by the source to receive the message, or they may be others who, by whatever circumstance, intercept and perceive the behavior once it has entered a channel. Responders have problems with messages, not unlike the problems sources have with internal states of being. Messages usually impinge on people in the form of light or sound energy, although they may be in forms that stimulate any of the senses. Whatever the form of sensory stimulation, people must convert these energies into meaningful experiences.

Converting external energies into a meaningful experience is called decoding, the sixth ingredient of communication. Decoding is akin to a source's act of encoding, because it also is an internal activity. Through this internal processing of a message, meaning is attributed to those behaviors that represent a source's internal state of being.

Response—what a person decides to do about a message—is the seventh ingredient. Responses may vary from an unconscious decision to do nothing to a conscious, immediate overt physical act of violence. If communication has been somewhat successful, the response of the message recipient will resemble to some degree that desired by the source who created the response-eliciting behavior.

The final ingredient of communication is feedback, information available to a source that permits her or him to make qualitative judgments about communication effectiveness. Through the interpretation of feedback, one may adjust and adapt behavior to an ongoing situation. Although feedback and response are not the same thing, they are clearly related. Response is what a person decides to do about a message, and feedback is information about the effectiveness of communication. They are related because a message recipient's behavior is the normal source of feedback.

These eight ingredients of communication make up only a partial list of the factors that function during a communication event. In addition to these elements, when we conceive of communication as a process, several characteristics help us understand how communication actually works.

First, communication is dynamic. It is an ongoing, ever changing activity. As participants in communication, we constantly are affected by each other's messages and, as a consequence, we undergo continual change. Each of us in our daily lives meets and interacts with people who exert some influence over us. Each time we are influenced, we are changed in some way, which means that as we go through life we do so as continually changing, or dynamic, individuals.

A second characteristic of communication is that it is interactive. Communication must take place between people. This implies two or more people who bring to a communication event their own unique backgrounds and experiences that serve as a backdrop for communicative interaction. Interaction also implies a reciprocal situation in which each party attempts to influence the other—that is, each party simultaneously creates messages designed to elicit specific responses from the other.

Third, communication is irreversible. Once we have said something and someone has received and decoded the message, we cannot retrieve it. This circumstance sometimes results in what is called "putting your foot in your mouth." The source may send other messages in attempts to modify the effect, but it cannot be eliminated. This is frequently a problem when we unconsciously or unintentionally send a message to someone. We may affect them adversely and not even know it, then during future interactions we may wonder why that person is reacting to us in what we perceive to be an unusual manner.

Fourth, communication takes place in a physical and a social context; both establish the rules that govern the interaction. When we interact with someone, it is not in isolation but within specific
physical surroundings and under a set of specific social dynamics. Physical surroundings include specific physical objects such as furniture, window coverings, floor coverings, lighting, vegetation, or the presence or absence of physical clutter; noise levels; and acoustics—as well as competing messages. Many aspects of the physical environment can and do affect communication: The comfort or discomfort of a chair, the color of the walls, or the total atmosphere of a room are but a few.

The symbolic meaning behind physical surroundings, a kind of nonverbal communication, also governs communication. Social context defines the social relationships that exist between people as well as the rules that govern the interaction. In our culture in the United States, we tend to be somewhat cavalier toward social hierarchies and to pay much less attention to them than do people in other cultures. Nevertheless, relationships such as teacher-student, employer-employee, parent-child, admiral-seaman, senator-citizen, physician-patient, and judge-attorney establish rules that specify expected behavior and thus affect the communication process.

Quite frequently, physical surroundings actually define the social context. An employer may sit behind a desk while an employee stands before the desk to receive an admonition. In a courtroom, the judge sits elevated facing the courtroom, jurors, and attorneys, indicating the social superiority of the judge to the other officers of the court. Attorneys sit side by side, indicating a social equality between accuser and accused until such time as the jury of peers renders a verdict. No matter what the social context, it will have some effect on communication. The form of language used, the respect or lack of respect shown one another, the time of day, personal moods, who speaks to whom and in what order, and the degree of nervousness or confidence people express are but a few of the ways in which the social context can affect communication.

At this point, we should see clearly that human communication does not take place in a social vacuum. Rather, communication is an intricate matrix of social acts taking place in a complex social environment that reflects the way people live and how they come to interact with and get along in their world. This social environment is culture, and if we truly are to understand communication, we must also understand culture.

Culture

The Basic Function of Culture

Culture is a complex, abstract, and pervasive matrix of social elements that functions as an all-encompassing form or pattern for living by laying out a predictable world in which an individual is firmly oriented. Culture enables us to make sense of our surroundings, aiding the transition from the womb to this new life.

From the instant of birth, a child is formally and informally taught how to behave. Children, regardless of their culture, quickly learn how to behave in a manner that is acceptable to adults. Within each culture, therefore, there is no need to expend energy deciding what an event means or how to respond to it. The assumption is that people who share a common culture can usually be counseled on to behave "correctly" and predictably. Hence, culture reduces the chances of surprise by shielding people from the unknown. Try to imagine a single day in your life without access to the guidelines your culture provides. Without the rules that govern your actions, you would soon feel helpless. From how to greet strangers to how to spend our time, culture provides us with structure. To lack culture is to lack structure. We might even go so far as to say that "our primary mode of biological adaptation is culture, not anatomy." 11

Definition of Culture

We have already indicated that culture is a complex matrix of interacting elements. Culture is ubiquitous, multidimensional, complex, and all-pervasive. Because it is so broad, there is not a single definition or central theory of what it is. Definitions of culture run the gamut from "an all-encompassing phenomenon" to descriptions listing nearly all human activity. For our purposes, we define culture as the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of
the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

The Ingredients of Culture

Although scholars may lack a definitive ingredient list for culture, most agree that any description should include the three categories submitted by Almaney and Alwin. They contend that cultures may be classified by three large categories of elements: artifacts (which include items ranging from arrowheads to hydrogen bombs, magic charms to antibiotics, torches to electric lights, and chariots to jet planes); concepts (which include such beliefs or value systems as right or wrong, God and man, ethics, and the general meaning of life); and behaviors (which refer to the actual practice of concepts or beliefs).

These authors provide an excellent example of how these three aspects might be reflected within a culture. "Whereas money is considered an artifact, the value placed upon it is a concept, but the actual spending and saving of money is behavior." Other inventories provide additional listings of the content of culture. Some of these additional ingredients of particular interest to intercultural communication include cultural history, cultural personality, material culture, role relationships, art, language, cultural stability, cultural beliefs, ethnocentrism, nonverbal behavior, spatial relations, time, recognition and reward, and thought patterns.

The Characteristics of Culture

Six characteristics of culture are of special importance to intercultural communication: (1) culture is learned, (2) culture is transmissible, (3) culture is dynamic, (4) culture is selective, (5) the facets of culture are interrelated, and (6) culture is ethnocentric.

Culture Is Not Innate; It Is Learned. From infancy on, members of a culture learn their patterns of behavior and ways of thinking until they have become internalized. The power and influence of these behaviors and perceptions can be seen in the ways in which we acquire culture. Our culture learning proceeds through interaction, observation, and imitation. A little boy in North America whose father tells him to shake hands when he is introduced to a friend of the family is learning culture. The Arab baby who is read the Koran when he or she is one day old is learning culture. The Hindu child who lives in a home where the women eat after the men is learning culture. The Jewish child who helps conduct the Passover celebration is learning culture.

All of this learning occurs as conscious or unconscious conditioning that leads one toward competence in a particular culture. This activity is frequently called enculturation, denoting the total activity of learning one's culture.

Culture Is Transmissible. The symbols of a culture enable us to pass on the content and patterns of a culture. We can spread our culture through the spoken word as when the recorded voice of radio actor Bruce Beemer brings us the voice of the Lone Ranger from the 1940s or when the recorded voice of President Franklin Roosevelt tells us that the date December 7, 1941, will live on in infamy. We can use the written word as a symbol and let others learn our history by reading about the War of Independence, learn about Abraham Lincoln through reading the Gettysburg Address, or even learn cultural strategies of persuasion by reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

We also can use nonverbal actions as symbols—for example, showing others that we usually shake hands to greet one another. National flags symbolize our claim to territory or demonstrate our loyalty. Rolls Royce automobiles and Rolex watches are evidence of our success and status. A cross speaks of our love for God. The use of symbols is at the core of culture.

The portability of symbols allows us to package and store them as well as transmit them. The mind, books, pictures, films, videos, and the like enable a culture to preserve what it deems to be important and worthy of transmission. Each individual, regardless of his or her generation, is heir to a massive "library" of information that has been collected in anticipation of his or her entry into the culture.
Culture is Dynamic. As with communication, culture is ongoing and subject to fluctuation; cultures seldom remain constant. As ideas and products evolve within a culture, they can produce change through the mechanisms of invention and diffusion.

Invention is usually defined as the discovery of new practices, tools, or concepts that most members of the culture eventually accept. In North America, the civil rights movement and the invention of television are two good examples of how ideas and products reshaped a culture.

Change also occurs through diffusion, or borrowing from another culture. The assimilation of what is borrowed accelerates as cultures come into direct contact with each other. For example, as Japan and North America share more commerce, we see Americans assimilating Japanese business management practices and the Japanese incorporating American marketing tactics.

In addition to invention and diffusion, other factors foster cultural change. The concept of cultural contiguity illustrates how cultures change. Consider for a moment the effects of war or revolution. The contiguity of Vietnam brought changes to both Vietnam and the United States. Not only did it create a new population of refugees, but it also forced us to reevaluate some cultural assumptions concerning global influence and military power. Currently, many cultural changes are taking place in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The elimination of the Berlin Wall, the unification of East and West Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet Union into numerous smaller states, and the problems of adjustment to new economies and governments are producing enormous changes in the affected cultures.

Although cultures do change, most change affects only the surface structure of the culture. The deep structure resists major alteration. Visible changes in dress, food, transportation, housing, and the like are simply attached to the existing cultural value system. Elements associated with the deep structure of a culture—such as values, ethics and morals, work and leisure, definitions of freedom, the importance of the past, religious practices, the pace of life, and attitudes toward gender and age—are so very deep in the structure of a culture that they tend to persist generation after generation. Even the demands for more liberal governments in China and Russia have their roots in the histories of those countries. In the United States, studies conducted on American values show that most of the central values of the 1990s are similar to the values of the past 200 years. When analyzing cultural change we cannot let ourselves be fooled just because downtown Tokyo looks much like Paris, London, or New York. Most of what is important in a culture is below the surface. It is like the moon—we observe the face, which appears flat and one-dimensional, but there is another side and dimensions that we cannot see.

Culture is Selective. Every culture represents a limited choice of behavior patterns from the infinite patterns of human experience. This selection, whether it be what shoes to wear or how to reach God, is made according to the basic assumptions and values that are meaningful to each culture. Because each individual has only these limited cultural experiences, what we know is but an abstraction of what there is to know. In other words, culture also defines the boundaries of different groups.

This characteristic is important to all students of intercultural communication for two reasons. First, it reminds us that what a culture selects to tell each succeeding generation is a reflection of what that culture deems important. In the United States, for example, being healthy is highly valued, and therefore messages related to that idea are selected. Second, the notion of selectivity also suggests that cultures tend to separate one group from another. If one culture selects work as an end (Japan), while another emphasizes work as a means to an end (Mexico), we have a cultural separation.

Facets of Culture Are Interrelated. This characteristic serves to inform us that culture is like a complex system. As Hall clearly states, “you touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected.” The women’s movement in the United States may serve as an example of this. Women’s
movement" may be but two simple words, but the phenomenon has been like a large stone cast into a pond. The movement has brought about changes in gender roles, sexual practices, educational opportunities, the legal system, career opportunities, and even female-male interaction.

Culture Is Ethnocentric. The characteristic of ethnocentrism, being centered on one's own group, might well relate most directly to intercultural communication. The important tie between ethnocentrism and communication can be seen in the definition of the word itself. Keating notes that ethnocentrism is a "universal tendency for any people to put its own culture and society in a central position of priority and worth." Ethnocentrism, therefore, becomes the perceptual window through which a culture interprets and judges all other cultures. Ethnocentrism leads to a subjective evaluation of how another culture conducts its daily business. That this evaluation can only be negative is clear if you realize that a logical extension of ethnocentrism is the position that "our way is the right way." Most discussions of ethnocentrism even enlarge the concept to include feelings of superiority. Keating notes, "Nearly always the folklore of a people includes myths of origin which give priority to themselves, and place the stamp of supernatural approval on their particular customs."

As we have seen, culture is extremely complex and influences every aspect of our lives. There are, however, specific aspects of culture that are of particular interest in the study of intercultural communication. For the sake of simplicity and to put some limitation on our discussion, we will examine three major elements: perceptual processes, verbal processes, and nonverbal processes.

These three interacting cultural elements are the constituent elements of intercultural communication. When we combine them, as we do when we communicate, they are like the components of a quadraphonic stereo system—each one relates to and needs the other to function properly. In our discussion, we separate these elements to identify and discuss them, but in actuality they do not exist in isolation nor do they function alone.

Perception
In its simplest sense, perception is the internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize stimuli from the external environment. In other words, perception is the conversion of the physical energies of our environment into meaningful experience. A number of corollary issues arising out of this definition help explain the relationship between perception and culture. A basic belief is that people behave as they do because of the ways in which they perceive the world and that these behaviors are learned as part of their cultural experience. Whether in judging beauty or describing snow, we respond to stimuli as we do primarily because our culture has taught us to do so. We tend to notice, reflect on, and respond to those elements in our environment that are important to us. We in the United States might respond principally to a thing's size and cost, while in Japan color might be the important criterion.

Social Perception. Social perception is the process by which we construct our unique social realities by attributing meaning to the social objects and events we encounter in our environments. It is an extremely important aspect of communication. Culture conditions and structures our perceptual processes so that we develop culturally inspired perceptual sets. These sets not only help determine which external stimuli reach our awareness but are more important, they also significantly influence the social aspect of perception—the social construction of reality—by the attribution of meaning to these stimuli. The difficulties in communication caused by this perceptual variability can best be overcome or minimized by knowing about and understanding the cultural elements that are subject to diversity, coupled with an honest and sincere desire to communicate successfully across cultural boundaries.

There are three major sociocultural elements that have a direct and major influence on the meanings we develop for our perceptions. These elements are our belief/value/attitude systems, world view, and social organization. When these three elements influence our perceptions and the meanings we develop for them, they affect our individual,
subjective aspects of meanings. We all may see the same social entity and agree upon what it is in objective terms, but what the object or event means to us individually may differ considerably. Both an American and a Chinese might agree in an objective sense that a particular object is a young dog, but they might disagree completely in their interpretation of the dog. The American might see it as a cute, fluffy, loving, protective pet. The Chinese, on the other hand, might see the dog as something especially fit for a Sunday barbecue. You see, it is an American's cultural background that interprets the dog as a pet, and it is the Chinese cultural background that regards dog meat as a delicacy.

Belief/Value/Attitude Systems In a general sense, beliefs can be viewed as individually held subjective probabilities that some object or event possesses certain characteristics. A belief involves a link between the belief object and the characteristics that distinguish it. The degree to which we believe that an event or an object possesses certain characteristics reflects the level of our subjective probability and, consequently, the depth or intensity of our belief. That is, the more certain we are in a belief, the greater is the intensity of that belief.

Culture plays an important role in belief formation. Whether we accept the New York Times, the Bible, the entrails of a goat, tea leaves, the visions induced by peyote, or the changes specified in the Taoist Ching as sources of knowledge and belief depends on our cultural backgrounds and experiences. In matters of intercultural communication, there are no rights or wrongs as far as beliefs are concerned. If someone believes that voices in the wind can guide one's behavior along the proper path, we cannot throw up our hands and declare the belief wrong (even if we believe it to be wrong); we must be able to recognize and to deal with that belief if we wish to obtain satisfactory and successful communication.

Values are the valuative aspect of our belief/value/attitude systems. Valuative dimensions include qualities such as usefulness, goodness, aesthetics, need satisfaction, and pleasure. Although each of us has a unique set of personal values, other cultural values also tend to permeate a culture. Cultural values are a set of organized rules for making choices, reducing uncertainty, and reducing conflicts within a given society. They are usually derived from the larger philosophical issues inherent in a culture. These values are generally normative in that they inform a member of a culture what is good and bad, right and wrong, true and false, positive and negative, and so on. Cultural values define what is worth dying for, what is worth protecting, what frightens people, what are considered to be proper subjects for study or ridicule, and what types of events lead individuals to group solidarity. Cultural values also specify which behaviors are important and which should be avoided within a culture.

Values express themselves within a culture as rules that prescribe the behaviors that members of the culture are expected to perform. These are called normative values. Thus, Catholics are supposed to attend Mass, motorists are supposed to stop at stop signs, and workers in our culture are supposed to arrive at work at the designated time. Most people follow normative behaviors; a few do not. Failure to do so may be met with either informal or codified sanctions. The Catholic who avoids Mass may receive a visit from a priest; the driver who runs a stop sign may pay a fine; and the employee who is tardy too frequently may be discharged.

Normative values also extend into everyday communicative behavior by specifying how people are to behave in specific communication contexts. This extension acts as a guide to individual and group behavior that minimizes or prevents harm to individual sensitivities within cultures.

Beliefs and values contribute to the development and content of attitudes. An attitude may be defined formally as a learned tendency to respond in a consistent manner to a given object of orientation. This means that we tend to avoid those things we dislike and to embrace those we like. Attitudes are learned within a cultural context. Whatever cultural environment surrounds us helps shape and form our attitudes — our readiness to respond — and ultimately our behavior.
World View

This cultural element, though somewhat abstract, is one of the most important elements found in the perceptual aspects of intercultural communication. World view deals with a culture's orientation toward such philosophical issues as God, humanity, nature, the universe, and others that are concerned with the concept of being. In short, our world view helps us locate our place and rank in the universe. Because world view is so complex, it is often difficult to isolate during an intercultural interaction. In this examination, we seek to understand its substance and its usefulness.

World view issues are timeless and represent the most fundamental bases of a culture. A Catholic's world view differs from that of a Muslim, Hindu, Jew, Taoist, or atheist. The way in which Native Americans view the individual's place in nature differs sharply from the Euro-American's view. Native Americans see themselves as one with nature; they perceive a balanced relationship between humanity and the environment, a partnership of equality and respect. Euro-Americans, on the other hand, see a human-centered world in which humans are supreme and are apart from nature. They may treat the universe as theirs—a place to carry out their desires and wishes through the power of science and technology.

World view influences a culture at very profound levels. Its effects are often quite subtle and not revealed in such obvious and often superficial ways as dress, gestures, and vocabulary. We can think of a world view as analogous to a pebble tossed into a pond. Just as the pebble causes ripples that spread and reverberate over the entire surface of the pond, world view likewise spreads itself over a culture and permeates every facet of it. World view influences beliefs, values, attitudes, use of time, and many other aspects of culture. In its subtle way, it is a powerful influence in intercultural communication because, as a member of a culture, each communicator's world view is so deeply imbedded in the psyche that it is taken for granted; and each communicator tends to assume automatically that everyone else views the world as he or she does.

Social Organization

The manner in which a culture organizes itself and its institutions also affects how members of the culture perceive the world and how they communicate. It might be helpful to look directly at two of the dominant social units found in a culture.

The family, although it is the smallest social organization in a culture, is one of the most influential. The family sets the stage for a child's development during the formative periods of life. It presents the child with a wide range of cultural influences that affect almost everything from his or her first attitudes to the selection of toys, and guides the child's acquisition of language and the amount of emphasis placed on it. Skills from vocabulary building to developing dialects are the purview of the family. The family also offers and withholds approval, support, rewards, and punishments, having a marked effect on the values children develop and the goals they pursue. If, for example, children learn by observation and communication that silence is paramount in their culture, as Japanese children do, they will reflect that aspect of culture in their behavior and bring it to intercultural settings.

The school is another social organization that is important. By definition and history, schools are endowed with major portion of the responsibility for passing on and maintaining a culture. They are a community's basic link with its past as well as its taskmaster for the future. Schools maintain culture by relating to new members what has happened, what is important, and what one as a member of the culture must know. Schools may teach geography or wood carving, mathematics or nature lore; they may stress revolution based on peace or pacificated on violence, or they may relate a particular culturally accepted version of history. But whatever is taught in a school is determined by the culture in which that school exists.

Verbal Processes

Verbal processes include not only how we talk to each other but also the internal activities of thinking and developing meaning for the words we use. These processes, verbal language and patterns of
thought, are vitally related to perception and the attachment and expression of meaning.

**Verbal Language.** Any discussion of language in intercultural settings must include an investigation of language issues in general before dealing with specific problems of foreign language, language translation, and the argot and vernacular of co-cultures. Here, in our introduction to the various dimensions of culture, we will look at verbal language as it relates to our understanding of culture.

In the most basic sense, language is an organized, generally agreed upon, learned symbol system used to represent human experiences within a geographic or cultural community. Each culture places its own individual imprint on word symbols. Objects, events, experiences, and feelings have a particular label or name solely because a community of people has arbitrarily decided to so name them. Thus, because language is an inexact system of symbolically representing reality, the meanings for words are subject to a wide variety of interpretations.

Language is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values, norms, and world view. Language gives people a means of connecting and interacting with other members of their culture and a means of thinking. Language thus serves as a mechanism for communication and as a guide to social reality. Language influences perceptions, transmits meaning, and helps mold patterns of thought.

**Patterns of Thought.** The mental processes, forms of reasoning, and approaches to problem solving prevalent in a community make up another major component of culture. Unless they have had experiences with people from other cultures who follow different patterns of thought, most people assume everyone thinks and solves problems in much the same way. We must be aware, however, that there are cultural differences in aspects of thinking and knowing. This diversity can be clarified and related to intercultural communication by making a general comparison between European and Asian patterns of thought. In most European thought there is an assumption of a direct relationship between mental concepts and the concrete world of reality. This orientation places great stock in logical considerations and rationality. There is a belief that truth is out there somewhere and that it can be discovered by following correct logical sequences. One need only turn over the right rocks in the right order and truth will be there. The Asian view, best illustrated by Taoist thought, holds that problems are solved quite differently. To begin with, people are not granted instant rationality; truth is not found by active searching and the application of Aristotelian modes of reasoning. On the contrary, individuals must prepare themselves to receive truth and then wait. If truth is to be known, it will make itself apparent. The major difference in these two views is in the area of activity. To the Western mind, human activity is paramount and ultimately will lead to the discovery of truth; in the Taoist tradition, truth is the active agent, and if it is to be known, it will make itself apparent.

A culture's thought patterns affect the way individuals in that culture communicate, which in turn affects the way each person responds to individuals from another culture. We cannot expect everyone to employ the same patterns of thinking, but understanding that many patterns exist and learning to accommodate them will facilitate our intercultural communication.

**Nonverbal Processes.**

Verbal processes are the primary means for the exchange of thoughts and ideas, but closely related nonverbal processes often overshadow them. Most authorities agree that the realm of nonverbal processes comprises the following topics: gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and gaze, posture and movement, touching, dress, objects and artifacts, silence, space, time, and paralanguage. As we turn to the cultural nonverbal processes relevant to intercultural communication, we will consider three aspects: nonverbal behavior that functions as a silent form of language, the concept of time, and the use and organization of space.

Nonverbal Behavior. It would be foolish for us to try to examine all of the elements that constitute nonverbal behavior because of the tremendous
range of activity included in this form of human activity. An example or two will enable us to visualize how nonverbal issues fit into the overall scheme of intercultural understanding. For example, touch can demonstrate how nonverbal communication is a product of culture. Germans as well as men shake hands at the outset of every social encounter, in the United States, women are less likely to shake hands. Vietnamese men do not shake hands with women or elders unless the woman or the elder offers the hand first. In Thailand, people do not touch in public, and to touch someone on the head is a major social transgression. You can imagine the problems that would arise if one did not understand some of these differences.

Another example of nonverbal communication is eye contact. In the United States we are encouraged to maintain good eye contact when we communicate. In Japan and other Asian countries, however, eye contact often is not important, and among Native Americans, children are taught that eye contact with an adult is a sign of disrespect.

The eyes can also be used to express feelings. For instance, widening the eyes may be a surprise for an Anglo, but the feelings denoted by eye widening are culturally diverse. Widenning eyes may also indicate anger by a Chinese, a request for help or assistance by a Latin or the issuance of a challenge by a French person, and a rhetorical or persuasive effect by an African American.

As a component of culture, nonverbal expression has much in common with language. Both are coding systems that we learn and pass on as part of the cultural experience. Just as we learn that the word stop can mean "to halt or cease," we also learn that an arm held up in the air with the palm facing another person frequently means the same thing. Because most nonverbal communication is culturally based, what it symbolizes often is a case of what a culture has transmitted to its members. The nonverbal symbol for suicide, for example, varies among cultures. In the United States it is usually a finger pointed at the temple or drawn across the throat. In Japan, it is a hand thrust onto the stomach, and in New Guinea it is a hand placed on the neck. Both nonverbal symbols and the responses they generate are part of cultural experience, what is passed from generation to generation. Every symbol takes on significance because of one's past experience with it. Even such simple acts as waving the hand can produce culturally diverse responses. In the United States, we tend to wave goodbye by placing the hand out with the palm down and moving the hand up and down. In India and in parts of Africa and South America, this is a beckoning gesture. We should also be aware that what may be a polite or friendly gesture in one culture may be an impolite and obscene gesture in another. Culture influences and directs those experiences and is, therefore, a major contributor to how we send, receive, and respond to nonverbal symbols.

The Concept of Time: A culture's concept of time is its philosophy toward the past, present, and future and the importance or lack of importance it places on time. Most Western cultures think of time in linear-spatial terms; we are time-bound and well aware of the past, present, and future. In contrast, the Hopi Indians pay very little attention to time. They believe that each object—whether a person, plant, or animal—has its own time system. Even within the dominant mainstream of American culture, we find groups that perceive time in ways that appear strange to many outsiders. Latinos frequently refer to Mexican or Latino time when their timing differs from the predominant Anglo concept, and African Americans often use what is referred to as "hang loose" time—a concept of time that gives priority to what is happening at that instant.

Use of Space: The way in which people use space as a part of interpersonal communication is called proxemics. It involves not only the distance between people engaged in conversation but also their physical orientation. Arabs and Latinos, for example, tend to be physically closer when they interact than are North American Angles. It is important to realize that people of different cultures have different ways in which they relate to one another spatially. When talking to someone from another culture, therefore, we must realize that what would be a violation of our personal space in our culture is not so intended by the other person. We may experience feelings that are difficult to handle; we
may believe that the other person is overbearing, boorish, or even making inappropriate, unacceptable sexual advances when indeed the other person’s movements are only manifestations of his or her cultural learning about how to use space.

Physical orientation is also culturally influenced, and it helps to define social relationships. North Americans prefer to sit where they are face to face or at right angles to each other. We seldom seek side-by-side arrangements. Chinese, on the other hand, often prefer a side-by-side arrangement and may feel uncomfortable when placed in a face-to-face situation.

We also tend to define social hierarchies through our nonverbal use of space. Sitting behind a desk while speaking with someone is standing is usually a sign of a superior-subordinate relationship, with the socially superior person seated. Misunderstandings can easily occur in intercultural settings when two people, each acting according to the dictates of his or her culture, violate each other’s expectations. If we were to remain seated when expected to rise, for example, we could easily violate a cultural norm and unknowingly insult our host or guest.

Room furnishings and size can also be an indication of social status. In corporate America, status within the corporation is often measured by desk size, office size, and the presence of carpet on the office floor (and whether the carpet is wall-to-wall or a mere rug).

How we organize space also is a function of our culture. Our homes, for instance, preserve nonverbally our cultural beliefs and values. In South America, house designs preserve privacy with only one door opening onto the street and everything else behind walls. North Americans are used to large uncluttered front yards with windows looking into the house, allowing passers-by to see what goes on inside. In South America, a North American is liable to feel excluded and wonder what goes on behind all those closed doors.

**Intercultural Communication**

The link between culture and communication is crucial to understanding intercultural communication because it is through the influence of culture that people learn to communicate. A Korean, an Egyptian, or an American learns to communicate like other Koreans, Egyptians, or Americans. Their behavior conveys meaning because it is learned and shared; it is cultural. People view their world through categories, concepts, and labels that are products of their culture.

Cultural similarity in perception makes the sharing of meaning possible. The ways in which we communicate, the circumstances of our communication, the language and language style we use, and our nonverbal behaviors are primarily all a response to and a function of our culture. And, as cultures differ from one another, the communication practices and behaviors of individuals reared in those cultures will also be different.

Our contention is that intercultural communication can best be understood as cultural diversity in the perception of social objects and events. A central tenet of this position is that minor communication problems are often exaggerated by perceptual diversity. To understand others’ worlds and actions, we must try to understand their perceptual frames of reference; we must learn to understand how they perceive the world. In the ideal intercultural encounter, we would hope for many overlapping experiences and a commonality of perceptions.

Cultural diversity, however, tends to introduce us to dissimilar experiences and, hence, to varied and frequently strange and unfamiliar perceptions of the external world.

In all respects, everything so far said about communication and culture applies to intercultural communication. The functions and relationships between the components of communication obviously apply, but what especially characterizes intercultural communication is that sources and responders come from different cultures. This alone is sufficient to identify a unique form of communicative interaction that must take into account the role and function of culture in the communication process.

In this section, intercultural communication will first be defined and then discussed through the perspective of a model. Finally, its various forms will be shown.
Intercultural Communication Model

Intercultural communication occurs whenever a message that must be understood is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture. This circumstance can be problematic because, as we have already seen, culture forges and shapes the individual communicator. Culture is largely responsible for the construction of our individual social realities and for our individual repertoires of communicative behaviors and meanings. The communication repertoires people possess can vary significantly from culture to culture, leading to all sorts of difficulties. Through the study and understanding of intercultural communication, however, these difficulties can at least be reduced and at best nearly eliminated.

Cultural influence on individuals and the problems inherent in the production and interpretation of messages between cultures are illustrated in Figure 1. Here, three cultures are represented by three distinct geometric shapes. Cultures A and B are purposefully similar to each other and are represented by a square and an irregular octagon that resembles a square. Culture C is intended to be quite different from Cultures A and B. It is represented both by its circular shape and its physical distance from Cultures A and B. Within each represented culture is another form similar to the shape of the influencing parent culture. This form represents a person who has been molded by his or her culture. The shape representing the person, however, is somewhat different from that of the parent culture. This difference suggests two things: First, there are other influences besides culture that effect and help mold the individual; and, second, although culture is the dominant shaping force on an individual, people vary to some extent from one another within any culture.

Message production, transmission, and interpretation across cultures is illustrated by the series of triangles connecting them. When a message leaves the culture in which it was encoded, it carries the content intended by its producer. This is represented by the triangles leaving a culture having the same pattern as that within the message producer. When a message reaches the culture where it is to be interpreted, it undergoes a transformation because the culture in which the message is decoded influences the message interpretation and hence its meaning. The content of the original message changes during interpretation phase of intercultural communication because the culturally different repertoires of social reality, communicative behaviors, and meanings possessed by the interpreter do not coincide with those possessed by the message producer.

The degree of influence culture has on intercultural communication is a function of the dissimilarity between the cultures. This also is indicated in the
model by the degree of pattern change that occurs in the message triangles. The change that occurs between Cultures A and B is much less than the change between Cultures A and C and between Cultures B and C. This is because there is greater similarity between Cultures A and B. Hence, the repertoires of social reality, communicative behaviors, and meanings are similar, and the interpretation effort produces results more nearly like the content intended in the original message. Since Culture C is represented as being quite different from Cultures A and B, the interpreted message is considerably different and more nearly represents the pattern of Culture C.

The model suggests that there can be wide variability in cultural differences during intercultural communication, due in part to circumstances or forms. Intercultural communication occurs in a wide variety of situations that range from interactions between people for whom cultural differences are extreme to interactions between people who are members of the same dominant culture and whose differences are reflected in the values and perceptions of co-cultures existing within the dominant culture. If we imagine differences varying along a minimum-maximum dimension (see Figure 2), the degree of difference between two cultural groups depends on their relative social uniqueness. Although this scale is unrefined, it allows us to examine intercultural communication acts and gain insight into the effect cultural differences have on communication. To see how this dimensional scale helps us understand intercultural communication, we can look at some examples of cultural differences positioned along the scale.

The first example represents a case of maximum differences — those found between Asian and Western cultures. This may be typified as an interaction between two farmers, one who works on a communal farm on the outskirts of Beijing in China and the other who operates a large mechanized and automated soybean, corn, and dairy farm in Michigan. In this situation, we would expect to find the greatest number of diverse cultural factors. Physical appearance, religion, philosophy, economic systems, social attitudes, language, heritage, basic conceptualizations of self and the universe, and degree of technological development are cultural factors that differ sharply. We must recognize, however, that these two farmers also share the commonality of farming, with its rural lifestyle and love of land. In some respects, they may be more closely related than they are to members of their own cultures who live in large urban settings. In other words, across some cultural dimensions, the Michigan farmer may have more in common with the Chinese farmer than with a Wall Street securities broker.

Another example nearer the center of the scale is the difference between American culture and
German culture. Less variation is found; physical characteristics are similar, and the English language is derived in part from German and its ancestor languages. The roots of both German and American philosophy are found in ancient Greece, and most Americans and Germans share some form of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet there are some significant differences. Germans have political and economic systems that are different from those found in the United States. German society tends toward formality while in the United States we tend toward informality. Germans have memories of local warfare and the destruction of their cities and economy, of having been a defeated nation on more than one occasion. The United States has never lost a war on its own territory.

Examples near the minimal end of the dimension can be characterized in two ways. First are variations found between members of separate but similar cultures—for instance, between U.S. Americans and English-Canadians. The differences are less than those found between American and German cultures, between American and Greek cultures, between American and British cultures, or even between American and French-Canadian cultures, but greater than generally found within a single culture. Second, minimal differences also may be seen in the variation between co-cultures within the same dominant culture. Sociocultural differences may be found between members of the Catholic church and the Baptist church; environmentalists and those who advocate further development of Alaskan oil resources; middle-class Americans and the urban poor; mainstream Americans and the gay and lesbian community; the able and the disabled; or male-dominance advocates and female-equality advocates.

In both of these categorizations, members of each cultural group have much more in common than do the examples found in the middle or at the maximum end of the scale. They probably speak the same language, share the same general religion, attend the same schools, and live in the same neighborhoods. Yet, these groups to some extent are culturally different; they do not fully share their experiences, nor do they share their perceptions. They see their worlds differently.

Communication Context

Any communicative interaction takes place within some social and physical context. When people are communicating within their culture, they are usually aware of the context and it does little to hinder the communication. When people are engaged in intercultural communication, however, the context in which that communication takes place can have a strong impact. Unless both parties to intercultural communication are aware of how their culture affects the contextual element of communication, they can be in for some surprising communication difficulty.

Context and Communication

We begin with the assumption that communicative behavior is governed by rules; principles or regulations that govern conduct and procedure. Communication rules act as a system of expected behavior patterns that organize interaction between individuals. Communication rules are both culturally and contextually bound. Although the social setting and situation may determine the type of rule that is appropriate, the culture determines the rules. In Iraq, for instance, a contextual rule prohibits females from having unfamiliar males visit them at home; in the United States, however, it is not considered socially inappropriate for unknown males to visit females at home. Rules dictate behavior by establishing appropriate responses to stimuli for a particular communication context.

Communication rules include both verbal and nonverbal components; the rules determine not only what should be said but also how it should be said. Nonverbal rules apply to proper gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, prosodies, vocal tone, and body movements. Unless we are prepared to function in the contextual environment of another culture, we may be in for a disappointing experience. The intercultural situation can be one of high stress, both physically and mentally. The effects of this stress are called culture shock. In order to avoid culture shock, we need to have a full understanding of communication context and how it differs culturally. We must remember that cultural
contexts are neither right nor wrong, better nor worse; they are just different.

Having determined that cultures develop rules that govern human interaction in specific contexts, we now need to gain some insight into a general concept of context. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall has written extensively about context. Although he categorizes cultures as being either high-context or low-context, context really is a cultural dimension that ranges from high to low. Figure 3 places various cultures along that dimension.\(^2\)

In high-context cultures most of the information is in the physical context or is internalized in the people who are a part of the interaction. Very little information is actually coded in the verbal message. In low-context cultures, however, most of the information is contained in the verbal message, and very little is embedded in the context or within the participants. In high-context cultures such as those of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, people tend to be more aware of their surroundings and their environment and do not rely on verbal communication as their main information source. The Korean language contains the word minchi, which literally means “being able to communicate through your eyes.” In high context cultures, so much information is available in the environment that it is unnecessary to state verbally what is obvious. Oral statements of affection, for instance, are very rare; when the context says “I love you,” it is not necessary to state it orally.

There are four major differences in how high- and low-context cultures affect the setting. First, verbal messages are extremely important in low-context cultures. In high-context cultures, it is in the verbal message that information to be shared is coded; it is not readily available from the environment because people in low-context cultures tend not to learn how to perceive information from the environment. Second, low-context people who rely primarily on verbal messages for information are perceived as less attractive and less credible by people in high-context cultures. Third, people in high-context cultures are more adept at reading nonverbal behavior and the environment. Fourth, people in high-context cultures have an expectation that others are also able to understand the unarticulated communication; hence, they do not speak as much as people from low-context cultures.

**Summary**

In many respects the relationship between culture and communication is reciprocal; each affects the other. What we talk about, how we talk about it, what we see, attend to, or ignore, if we think, and what we think about are influenced by our culture. In turn, what we talk about, how we talk about it, and what we see help shape, define, and perpetuate our culture. Culture cannot exist without communication; one cannot change without causing change in the other.

We suggested that the chief problem associated with intercultural communication is error in perception brought about by the cultural diversities that affect the perceptual process. The attribution of meaning to messages is in many respects influenced by the culture of the person responding to
the message behavior. When the message being inter-
preted is encoded in another culture, the cul-
tural influences and experiences that produced the
message may have been entirely different from the
cultural influences and experiences that are being
drawn on to interpret and respond to the message.
Consequently, unintended errors in meaning attri-
bution may arise because people with entirely dif-
ferent backgrounds are unable to understand one
another accurately.

We discussed several sociocultural variables that
are major sources of communication difficulty. Al-
though they were discussed in isolation, we cannot
permit ourselves to conclude that they are unre-
lated; they are all related in a matrix of cultural
interdependencies. For successful intercultural com-
munication, we must be aware of these cultural factors
and their implications both for our own culture
and the culture of the other party. We need to un-
derstand not only cultural differences, which will
determine sources of potential problems, but also cultural similarities, which will help us be-
come closer to one another.
The approach we have taken is also based on a
fundamental assumption: The parties to intercultural
communication must have an honest and sincere desire
to communicate and to seek mutual understanding.
This assumption requires favorable attitudes about
intercultural communication and an elimination of
superior-inferior relationships based on member-
pship in particular cultures, races, religions, or eth-
groups. Unless this basic assumption has been
satisfied, our theory of cultural diversity in social
interaction will not produce improvement in inter-
cultural communication.

At the beginning of this article, we mentioned
the changes in transportation and communication
technology that have brought us to the brink of the
global village. We also suggested that we, as a peo-
pel, do not yet know how to live as global villagers.
Want to return to this point as we finish and
sure you with some thoughts about it.
The prevailing direction in the United States to-
seems to be toward a pluralistic, multicultural
society. An underlying assumption of this position,
that is seldom expressed or perhaps seldom real-
ed, is that this requires that we as a society be
accepting of the views, values, and behaviors of
other cultures. This means that we must be willing
to "live and let live." We do not seem able or will-
ing to do this, however, nor are we sure that it is
proper to do so in all circumstances. But if we are
to get along with one another, we must develop tol-
eration for others' culturally diverse customs and
behaviors—a task that will be difficult.

Even within the dominant mainstream culture,
we are unable to accept diversity. For example, we
find ourselves deeply divided over such issues as
right to life versus freedom of choice. When we
must cope with the diversity of customs, views,
values, and behaviors inherent in a multicultural so-
ciety, we find ourselves in much greater states of
frustration and peril. Three closely timed events
covered extensively in the news media serve as ex-
amples of our difficulty. Cable News Network
(CNN) carried a story on March 2, 1990, about
fundamentalist Christians in a southern commu-
nity who were demanding the removal of a statue
of Buddha from the front of an Asian restaurant
because "it is the idol of a false god, it's in the New
Testament." Also, news media carried a story about
a judge who dismissed wife-beating charges against
an Asian man because this behavior was appropri-
ate and acceptable in the man's culture. The action
by the judge was immediately assailed by the fem-
nist movement, even though the judge had admon-
ished the man that he could not persist in this
behavior in the future because it is not acceptable
in this society and further charges would not be
dropped. The final event was a series of news re-
ports in the Los Angeles print media relating to the
disappearance of young dogs and puppies in por-
tions of the Los Angeles area where there had been
an influx of Southeast Asian immigrants. The spec-
ulation was that these animals were ending up on
barbecues, spits, since dog meat is considered a deli-
cacy by these immigrants.

These events have led us to conclude that there
are some major obstacles we must overcome if we
are to become proper members of the global vil-
lage. Perhaps the greatest challenge is in determin-
ing what rules will govern the global village and,
perhaps more importantly, who will generate those,
Definitions

Before you start the course, take a look at the following definitions. PLEASE refer and review these definitions often to help you gain a more better understanding of the terms. Note: all of the definitions here are taken from Bennett, Janet, in Readings for Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, Forest Grove, OR:SIIC, 1996. with the appropriate citations included below.

- INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
- INTERETHNIC AND INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION
- CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION
- INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION
- MULTICULTURALISM
- CULTURE
- RACE
- ETHNIC GROUP
- PREJUDICE
- RACISM

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which the degree of difference between people is large and important enough to create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about what are regarded as competent behaviors that should be used to create shared meanings.

—Bennett, Janet, in Readings for Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, Forest Grove, OR:SIIC, 1996.

INTERETHNIC AND INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Just as race and ethnic group are terms commonly used to refer to cultures, interethnic and interracial communication are two labels commonly used as substitutes for intercultural communication. Usually these terms are used to explain differences in communication between members of racial and ethnic groups who are all members of the same nation-state...Although it may be useful in some circumstances to use the terms interethnic and interracial, we believe these types of communication are most usefully categorized as subsets of intercultural communication.

—Bennett, Janet, in Readings for Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, Forest Grove, OR:SIIC, 1996.
Learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of interacting people

CULTURE


CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION
RACE

"...a subgroup of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the subgroup from other subgroups of mankind." (W.M. Krogman "The Concept of Race" in The Science of Man in World Crisis)

"Physical differences involving skin pigmentation, head form, facial features, stature, and the color distribution and texture of body hair, are among the most commonly recognized factors distinguishing races of people. [However]...race in the biological sense has no biological consequences, but what people believe about race has very profound social consequences. Through subtle yet effective socializing influences, group members are taught and come to accept as 'social fact' a myriad of myths and stereotypes regarding skin color, stature, facial features and so forth." (D.R. Atkinson, et al., in Counseling American Minorities)

"Race refers to a group that is socially defined on the basis of physical criteria." (J. Jones in Prejudice and Racism)

ETHNIC GROUP

"A segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients." (J.M. Yinger "Ethnicity in Complex Societies" in The Uses of Controversy in Sociology)

"Ethnic group is [also] defined, but on the basis of cultural criteria." (J. Jones in Prejudice and Racism)

PREJUDICE

"...prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group.

The net effect of prejudice, thus defined, is to place the object of prejudice at some disadvantage not merited by his own misconduct." (G. Allport in The Nature of Prejudice)
RACISM

"Racism results from the transformation of race prejudice and/or ethnocentrism through the exercise of power against a racial group defined as inferior, by individuals and institutions with the intentional or unintentional support of the entire culture.

Stated simply, preferences for (or belief in the superiority of) one's own racial group might be called racism, while preference for (or belief in the superiority of) one's own ethnic group might be called ethnocentrism." (J. Jones in Prejudice and Racism)

POWER + PREJUDICE = RACISM

Updated 10/15/97
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