AMONG CULTURES

The Challenge of Communication

Second Edition

Bradford 'J' Hall
University of New Mexico

WADSWORTH
CENGAGE Learning

What Is the Relationship between Communication and Culture?

Overview

Linda was in a good mood as she approached her interpersonal communication class. She had started a new job the previous week and it had been going really well. The fact that she was making almost double what she had made in her last job didn't hurt any either. Up ahead she saw Wanida coming from the other direction.

*Linda instantly brightened. She loved visiting with Wanida. Wanida al-
ways made her smile with the way she used English and the surprised
expression she often got when she found out something new about
Americans.*

*Wanida smiled when Linda caught her eye. Wanida liked Linda;
she was so friendly. They had started having lunch together every
Tuesday after class. Linda always had lots to talk about, and she was
the first American who had really taken an interest in Wanida.
Wanida's first few months in the United States had been a struggle.
Linda had helped make the transition from Thailand to the United
States a lot easier. In fact, Wanida was starting to enjoy her new life in
the United States. She also seemed to be doing quite well in her classes,
though she had a big test in History the next morning.*

Visiting cheerfully, Wanida and Linda walked into class together.

*Near the end of class their professor started talking about a re-
search project she was working on. She explained that early the next
morning she would need two people to help her code some role plays
she had videotaped. Professor Fresquez also indicated that because
of the late notice, she was willing to give each of those who helped out
20 extra-credit points.*

*As soon as the extra-credit points were mentioned, Linda knew
she'd better volunteer. She had let her new job get in the way of doing
a few assignments and she could really use the extra points. Linda
quickly raised her hand and offered to help out. She then glanced
quickly at Wanida and suggested to the professor that Wanida might
also be able to help out.*

*Wanida felt the embarrassment of the situation and responded hes-
itantly, "Well, ah, I would like to, but my English may not be good
and . . ." Wanida paused, hoping that it was clear that she wanted to
be helpful but that she could not do this project.*

*Linda was sure Wanida's English would be good enough. Besides,
she would be there to help if any questions came up. The project would
be a lot more fun if Wanida were there, and Linda suspected that
Wanida was just being typically "Asian" and being overly modest. So,
as Wanida paused, Linda jumped in and reassured the teacher that
Wanida's English was really very good and that she was quite capable
of doing the job.*

*The professor turned inquisitively to Wanida and asked her, "Are
you willing to help out then, Wanida?"*

*Wanida glanced away from the professor, but she could feel the
eyes of the entire class upon her. "Yes, I will try," she responded softly,
at the same time thinking of her exam the next morning.*

*After the professor had turned her attention elsewhere, Linda
nudged Wanida and said cheerfully, "Don't worry. We'll have a good
time. And we can both use the twenty points." She laughed lightly.*

Miguel Gandert

*As class ended Linda quickly gathered her things and told Wanida
that she had to finish some paperwork for her new job so she couldn't
do lunch today, but they should plan on lunch next Tuesday. "Besides,"
she said as she hurried out the door, "we'll see each other tomorrow."*

*The next day Linda sat staring at the video. She was tired and a bit
frustrated. The room reminded her a little of a jail cell, no windows
and four blank walls. The project was taking twice as long as she had
expected. She was also a bit worried about Wanida. She had never
showed up.*

*When she finally finished the project, she was close to being late
for work. She rushed across campus to her car, hardly noticing anyone
in her hurry. All of a sudden her eyes focused on Wanida sitting on a
bench, talking with another Asian student. Concerned and just a bit
exasperated, she made a quick beeline to Wanida.*

*"Wanida, are you all right? I was worried when you didn't show
up to help code. In fact, I just barely got done coding right now. What
happened?"*

*Wanida said apologetically, "I'm sorry, I had an exam I had to
go to."*

*Linda just stood there, somehow expecting a little more explana-
tion and feeling the frustration grow inside her. Finally she said a bit
crossly, "So, if you had an exam, why didn't you just say you couldn't
help yesterday?"*

Wanida just looked down and didn't say anything.

Now Linda really was upset, "Oh, just forget it." Linda forced a smile, but did not feel a bit of the smile inside. "I've got work to go to, and they're not too happy if I don't show up."

As she rushed off, Linda told herself that she didn't really mean to be hard on Wanida, but a little common courtesy on Wanida's part would have been nice. She had ended up doing twice the work for the same amount of points and hadn't gotten any of her other studying done.[1]

Why do you think Wanida and Linda are frustrated with each other? Some Americans may feel the problem was due to Wanida's lack of honesty, whereas some Thais may feel the problem is rooted in Linda's lack of maturity. Social scientists who study human interaction for a living may give other explanations. For example, a psychologist may point to personality traits, a political scientist may suggest that power differences may be partially to blame, and a sociolinguist may find that tone of voice or word choice based on social class confounded the situation. There are many possible answers, but based on our discussion in Chapter 1, we can say with some confidence that no one person was entirely to blame. Both of them contributed to the frustrating situation in which they found themselves. We may also suspect that because of cultural differences, neither Linda nor Wanida really appreciated what seemed like common sense to the other.

Regardless of the explanations that people working in the different social sciences may give for the encounter described, there is a common concern for understanding the behavior or communication of the humans involved. Trying to describe accurately what happened, explain why it happened, and predict when such things will happen in the future so that we can better control what goes on in our lives are basic goals throughout the social sciences. One of the variables used to accomplish these goals is culture. Much of the research in intercultural communication focuses on how culture influences human interaction or communication.

MANIFESTATIONS OF CULTURE

Researchers who adopt the concept of culture in an effort to explain or predict our social interactions often equate culture with one of its specific manifestations. Three common manifestations used for this purpose are worldviews, values, and norms. These three manifestations of culture are related to each other in many ways, but one important way in which they differ from each other is in terms of their level of abstraction. Hayakawa explains that more abstract terms are less tied to the physical world and allow for many different things to be encompassed by a term.[2] The relationship between worldviews, values, and

norms is similar to the one that exists between wealth, livestock, and cows. Wealth is a very abstract term and many different things could be considered wealth, of which livestock is just one example. Worldviews are similar to wealth in that any given worldview allows for many values and norms. Just because two people share the same worldview does not mean they necessarily share the same values or norms. Values are less abstract than worldviews, but there is still room for great variety in the way that, for example, honesty or love is expressed or the norms surrounding their expression, just as livestock is more specific than wealth but may include pigs, chickens, cows, and so forth. Finally, norms for behavior are much more concrete than worldviews or values, just as cow is more specific than livestock. Certainly, there is room for individual differences just as there are differences between Mabel the cow and Bessie the cow. Like all analogies, if pushed too far, this analogy may not hold up well, but it gives you a sense of how worldviews, values, and norms are related.

The work that has been done on these three different levels of cultural expression has over the years provided many useful insights into the relationship between culture and communication. I will review each of these levels with a particular concern for how each one as a manifestation of culture influences communication.

WORLDVIEWS

Worldviews are *abstract notions about the way the world is.* By and large, worldviews are not open for challenge or debate. In fact, they are usually the premises upon which challenges and debates are conducted. Often, worldviews operate at an unconscious level, so that we are not even aware that other ways of seeing the world are either possible or legitimate. Like the air we breathe, worldviews are a vital part of who we are, but not a part we usually think much about.

Worldviews may be best thought of as answers to basic human questions; thus, each of the eight worldviews discussed in this section are identified with a question and answer. The answer in each case will take the form of a continuum. A continuum implies that the answer is a matter of degree, rather than all one thing or another. For example, if I ask, "Is that water hot or cold?" it implies that it is either one or the other. However, if I view the answer as if it were on a continuum, then the answer may fall somewhere in between hot and cold and merely be warm or cool or kind of cold, all of which recognize that even such a seemingly simple question has many possible answers and that reducing the answer to two options may cause the answer to be misleading. The opportunity for misunderstanding is even more likely when we are dealing with humans and their cultural understanding than when we deal with something like water temperature. So please keep in mind that even though the answer will identify only the two ends of the continuum, there are many possible answers along the continuum.

The eight questions and the worldviews that relate to them that I review here do not constitute an exhaustive list of all possible worldview topics. In addition, each one of these eight issues comprises only a part of a person or group's entire worldview. However, these eight areas cover a wide range of issues and deal with many of the most frequent points of difference across cultures.

Who Am I? Individualism/Collectivism

My own experience in reading about intercultural differences is that the individualism/collectivism distinction is used more often than any other concept to explain intercultural misunderstandings.[3] In answering the question of who we are, many people focus on how they are different from all those around them. They highlight unique and idiosyncratic aspects that distinguish them from others. Thus, I may see myself as "Brad" and note the many ways I feel I am different from other people I know. Such a perspective is typical of those on the individualistic end of the continuum. Those on the collectivist end focus on their relationships with others and explain the answer in terms of shared membership in family (I am a Hall), occupation (I am a professor and work at the University of New Mexico), or other group memberships (I am American).

In the United States the individualistic approach to life can often be found in the workplace. For instance, employees turning down job transfers because they like where they currently live, employee-of-the-month programs, or expecting a person to talk themselves up in a job interview are all examples of individualistic actions. Fewer individual offices or cubicles and a high priority on achieving consensus before a group meeting so as to avoid open debate and disagreement display a sense of collectivism in the Japanese workplace.

Although our worldviews tend to operate at an unconscious level, people can come to recognize differences and take these into account in intercultural settings. Take, for example, the following incident:

> John was driving down the streets of Milwaukee with an international student from Saudi Arabia and started to pull into a gas station to fill up his car. The international student, Khalid, cried in a very animated way, "No, no, not here! Let's go to a different one." Surprised by his emotion, John started to pull out. At the same time John noticed that Khalid had slid down in the seat in an apparent desire not to be seen, but was watching those at the gas station very closely. Looking a bit more carefully at those already at the station, John noticed another Middle-Eastern-looking man and asked if it was because he was there. Khalid nodded yes and seemed to relax as he and John merged back into the regular flow of traffic.
> "What is up with that guy?" John asked.
> Khalid brushed his question aside and changed the subject by asking if they were doing okay with time for the meeting John needed to

To get a feel for where you fit on the individualism/collectivism continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of six paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: When I think of myself, I primarily do so in terms of my family name or a social role.

   B: When I think of myself, I primarily do so in terms of my first name.

2. A: It is wrong for me to put my own desires above those of other people in a group I value and to which I belong.

   B: It is wrong for me to simply go along with what a group of people want to do when I personally feel strongly that I do not want to do what they are doing.

3. A: Who I am changes depending on who I am with.

   B: I am always just "myself" regardless of who I am with.

4. A: You can learn a lot about me by watching what members of an important group to which I belong do.

   B: You can learn hardly anything about who I am simply by watching what other people in my group (family, etc.) do.

5. A: If I do what is best for the group, then in the long run each individual will be protected.

   B: If I stand up for the right for each individual to do what he or she wants, then in the long run the group will stay strong.

6. A: When buying a gift, I should first and foremost buy something that is appropriate for the person's role in society.

   B: When buying a gift, I should buy something that best fits that person's individual personality or desires.

Most Americans will score a 19 or higher.

make. John decided just to drop the matter and responded that they should make it just in time.

However, a few days later John was walking with Khalid over to some shops near the university when he saw what appeared to be the same fellow that Khalid had avoided at the gas station. John noted his presence to Khalid at the same time that the fellow looked over at them. The man smiled, calling out Khalid's name. They walked toward each other, kissed one another on both cheeks, and proceeded to have

*a friendly and lively conversation for what seemed like about twenty
minutes.*

*After the man went on his way, John couldn't resist asking Khalid
again about the other day at the gas station. Khalid smiled and ex-
plained that things are different here in the United States. If you see an
American friend, you can just say, "Hi, how are you?" and keep on
walking without even slowing down, but with his friends from the
Middle East he needs to stop and talk for awhile, no matter where he
is and what he is doing. He explained further that he knew John had
been in a hurry the other day and Khalid did not want to cause him to
be late, so he thought it best to avoid any interaction rather than either
be rude to his friend or cause John problems. John laughed as they con-
tinued down the street, remembering how he had thought Khalid had
some sort of feud going with this other guy.*[4]

Coming from an individualistic perspective, the idea of just briefly greeting
a friend from a group I belong to and continuing on with my own plans seems
like no big deal. However, these connections are much more vital to who we
are from a collectivist perspective, and it is important to maintain these con-
nections even if we are personally inconvenienced. In the example, Khalid rec-
ognized the predicament that he would face if he met his friend when he was
with John, who was in a hurry to get to a meeting, and wisely avoided it. We
cannot always avoid such predicaments, but if we understand what is involved
in them, we can better manage them when they happen.

This difference does not mean that those who have a collectivist mind-set
do not have personal goals or that those who are more individualistic do not
value their families or have no team spirit. It does mean that there is a subtle
difference in the way we view ourselves and others and in what aspects get em-
phasized when group and individual needs are in conflict. The tension between
looking out for oneself and fitting in with group needs is found in every com-
munity (see Table 2-1), but an understanding of how this tension should be
resolved varies across communities and can lead to a sense of frustration with
others.

How Do People Establish Their Position in Society?
Ascription/Achievement

Ascription is based on the notion that something is given to a person and does
not require the person to have done something for it.[5] Perhaps the most classic
example of ascription as it relates to a person's position in society is found in
the traditional caste system in India. In this system, each person is born into a
certain role or status within society and there is no expectation that a person
can or should change that position. Instead, it is important to fulfill that posi-
tion as best one can. Although the caste system does not have the power or le-
gal status that it once had, there is still an awareness of it and it has a particu-

TABLE 2-1   Scores by Country on the Individualism Scale

*The higher the score the more the country tends toward individualism and the lower
the score the more the country tends toward collectivism.*

COUNTRY	SCORE	COUNTRY	SCORE
United States	91	India	48
Australia	90	Argentina	46
Great Britain	89	Japan	46
Canada	80	Iran	41
Netherlands	80	Brazil	38
New Zealand	79	Greece	35
Italy	76	Philippines	32
Denmark	74	Mexico	30
Sweden	71	Portugal	27
France	71	Hong Kong	25
Switzerland	68	Chile	23
Germany	67	Thailand	20
South Africa	65	Taiwan	17
Finland	63	Peru	16
Austria	55	Pakistan	14
Israel	54	Colombia	13
Spain	51	Venezuela	12

Adapted from Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-
Related Values,* abridged ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984).

larly large influence on interaction in India's rural communities. Other forms of
ascription may be found in family businesses where it is expected that family
members will take over certain positions regardless of demonstrated ability, or
where being a member of a family or graduate of a particular school provides
a certain status regardless of what one has accomplished. Ascription recognizes
that some rights and privileges are rightfully based on things that you person-
ally had no control over.

Achievement is centered on the idea that one's position in society is deter-
mined by one's efforts. Achievement implies that bettering one's social position
in life is not only possible but is promoted. Many "power of positive thinking"
speakers and writers rely on their audiences holding the achievement world-
view. The classic example of achievement is the old American story of Abraham
Lincoln, who went from a log cabin to the White House. Because of a strong
bias for achievement, it is hard for some Americans to see or accept the differ-
ent social classes that exist in the United States and the limitations these class
distinctions carry with them.

To get a feel for where you fit on the ascription/achievement continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of six paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: Promotions in a company should be based primarily on performance.

   B: Promotions in a company should be based primarily on seniority.

2. A: I should date anyone I want to regardless of their social, economic, or organizational background.

   B: I should only date individuals who have a social background that matches or complements my own.

3. A: I should be hired for a job because of my ability and record of past performance.

   B: I should be hired for a job because I am related to or share a group membership with those who are in a position of authority.

4. A: Leadership is a skill that can be developed.

   B: Leadership is something a person either has or doesn't have.

5. A: The idea of royalty and heirs to the throne and the privileges that go with it makes *no* sense to me.

   B: The idea of royalty and heirs to the throne and the privileges that go with it seems very logical and natural to me.

6. A: I can improve my social standing by working harder.

   B: I should be content with whatever social position I am born to.

Americans tend to score 17 or lower.

The achievement worldview also conveys a lack of respect for unearned status. In fact, people who inherit their money and social status are often presented in a negative light in the American media. In a classic American film, *It's a Wonderful Life,* the hero is a person who, despite a lack of material wealth, has been kind and thoughtful to others. Due in part to financial troubles, the hero ends up despairing that he has done any good in his life and wishes he had never been born. At the end of the film he returns from almost committing suicide to find that virtually the whole community has rallied around him, and it is obvious that he is a very valued member of the community. The high regard in which he is held in his community and the audience's emotional support of

this person are based on the hero's actions over the course of the film. If the hero were someone born to money and a high position within the community but had acted in unkind and self-centered ways (which is true of the movie's villain), he would not have had the support of the community nor would audiences feel the same kind of affection for him.

Another movie in which the difference between ascription and achievement can be seen is *The Prisoner of Zenda.* In this show, the hero arrives in a small country that is having trouble with its king. The king is irresponsible and, although not a bad person, he is not portrayed as a particularly good person. His own vices allow the main villains to capture him and come close to taking over the kingdom. The hero, as it turns out, looks exactly like the king. He is recruited to help foil the plot to take over the kingdom. In the process of doing so, the hero shows himself to be a nicer and more responsible person than the real king. He is much more kind to all he meets, especially the woman who, due to an arranged marriage, is engaged to the king. At the end of the show the hero and heroine must decide whether to marry each other or to return to their roles ascribed at birth. They decide to part and live up to the roles they were ascribed to in society. When I have watched this movie with others, I have often heard complaints about this decision. People who have more of an achievement perspective tend to feel that the hero and heroine should have married because they love each other and that the hero, through his actions, deserved to be the king or at least to "get the girl." In contrast, I have never heard a complaint about how the hero gets all the community support and recognition in *It's a Wonderful Life,* even though his ascribed status would not indicate that he was anything special.

How Should Society Be Organized? Egalitarian/Hierarchical

In egalitarian societies it is assumed that each person is of the same worth and value as any other, whereas in hierarchical societies the assumption is that there is natural and proper differentiation across people.[6] The egalitarian perspective assumes that every person is just as important as every other person. The hierarchical perspective sees every person as important to the extent that they complement each other's roles, and a person's position of authority determines the person's relative worth. A bumper sticker I once saw, "Question Authority," goes against the very basis of a hierarchical community. Communities that view the world from a hierarchical perspective immediately assume that if there is a problem between a person of authority (such as a police officer) and an ordinary citizen, the person in authority is in the right. Decisions in an organizational setting should naturally be made by those in a position of authority, and respect is due someone purely because of her or his position in society.

In the United States people like to think of everyone as being equal. One of the ways in which the assumption of equality is manifested is in the way Americans speak. For example, most of my students call me Brad, and I am

To get a feel for where you fit on the egalitarian/hierarchical continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of six paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: I should respect my supervisor because she or he is in a position of authority.

   B: I should respect my supervisor because of what she or he does, not because of her or his position.

2. A: Decisions made by those in upper management should not be questioned.

   B: Decisions made by those in upper management may be questioned just as much as anyone else's.

3. A: Some people should receive better schooling than others because of their position in life.

   B: Everyone should get the same educational opportunities, regardless of position or ability to pay for it.

4. A: If I play a game, I am happy if it ends in a tie or if we don't even keep score.

   B: If I play a game, I want a winner, even if that means I might lose.

5. A: I like group projects in which everyone in the group automatically gets the same score.

   B: I like for everyone to be evaluated and rewarded differently based on their own personal performances.

6. A: It is important to know the other person's status in order to interact with him or her appropriately.

   B: Everyone should be treated the same.

Americans tend to score 19 or higher.

comfortable with that. It is not that people do not use formal titles, such as Professor, Doctor, and so forth, but in the United States it is very common and acceptable to call people simply by their given name rather than by a particular title. Indeed, I have seen advertisements that boast that a company will always call the customer by his or her first name. This sort of informality and lack of concern for official titles reflects and reinforces an egalitarian perspective.

This sort of naming and informality in language contrasts sharply with many other cultures, in which a person's relative position and status are impor-

tant elements in all interactions. I have Japanese students who feel extremely uncomfortable in addressing me by my first name and, even though they know that the class norm is to do so, they still refer to me as Hall Sensei. In addition, if people are speaking Thai and refer to their brother or sister, they naturally indicate whether the person is older or younger than the person speaking. This differentiation is built into the language just as gender is built into the English terms *brother* and *sister*.

These sorts of differences may cause a variety of misunderstandings in social settings. Americans often get the feeling that Thais are not sincere because they can change from an attitude of extreme informality to one that seems marked by excessive respect when a superior enters a room. Americans may mistakenly view this as brownnosing, a slang term that refers to people pretending to be nice to get unfair advantages. Americans prefer to think of themselves as treating everyone the same. Perhaps this can best be seen in the jokes, derogatory comments, and general lack of respect that is often expressed by Americans toward the president of their country, whereas in Thailand to speak ill of the king is looked upon with extreme displeasure and would be a major social mistake.

There are other countries, however, where egalitarianism is even more pervasive than is found in the United States—for example, Denmark. This may surprise some because Denmark, like Thailand and other countries, has a king. However, the king is not assumed to be better than the common Dane, and there are many stories that reflect this understanding. One such example follows.

A newspaperman called the Royal Lodge just before Christmas to ask the resident gamekeeper about preparation for the royal family's visit. The newspaperman found the number (which is listed in the directory) and the man who answered gave him the desired information.

"Do you have enough material?" the man finally said. "I must help my wife unpack."

Hoping to find out more information from the man he presumed was the gamekeeper, the reporter asked, "Have you been traveling?"

"Well, you are not speaking with the gamekeeper," the answer came. "This is the King. I wish you a very merry Christmas and a good article."[7]

This attitude that all should be treated the same is also reflected in many of the Danish social systems, such as health care. Everyone is guaranteed health care, and there is no question of insurance or whether one has the money to pay. This equality is also reflected in economic status. One finds much greater differences between wealth and poverty in the United States than in Denmark, where the laws and popular opinion discourage such differences. In Denmark there is a concept of *Janteloven*, which refers to the idea that one should not excel over others.[8]
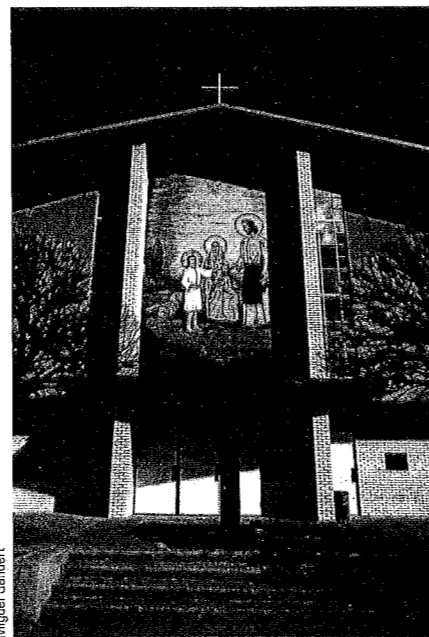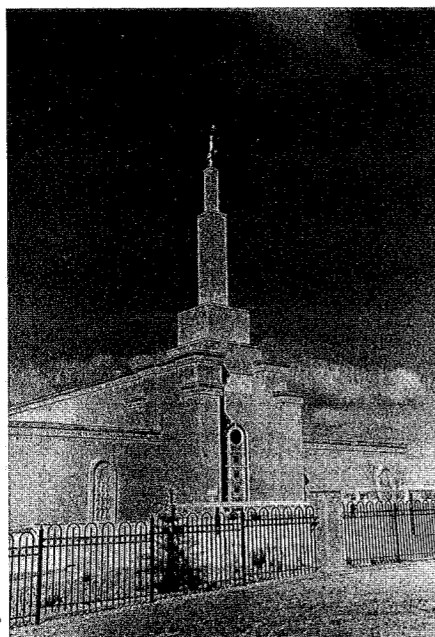
Many deep-seated cultural differences are grounded in religious beliefs.

Americans like equality, but only in reference to some imagined starting point. This, of course, ignores the fact that everyone is born into a historical context that affords varying degrees of advantage. Americans at times cheer for the underdog, but in the end what they truly love is a winner, and they are quick to assign star status to those who succeed. In the United States the idea of a tie in athletic events is extremely unsatisfying, but this is not the case in Denmark. In many ways, Americans relish a hierarchy as long as it is grounded in individual achievement. Danes, therefore, may be more egalitarian in terms of end results rather than initial starting points.

What Is the Basic Nature of Humans? Good/Evil

Some communities feel that humans are inherently good and that, if given the choice, they will choose that which is good.[9] Thus, humans are inherently trustworthy. Other communities feel that humans cannot be trusted and that they will take advantage of you given any possibility. From that viewpoint humans are naturally evil and must be kept in check with laws, precautionary measures, and diligent policing. When you go into your bank next time, look at the table they have for you to write on. Are the pens chained down or are they just sitting there? What does this suggest about the bank staff's expectations? Although differences in religious belief exist at the heart of many cultural differ-

To get a feel for where you fit on the good/evil continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of six paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: Children are born into sin and must be saved from this state through some cleansing process.
   B: Children are inherently innocent and good.
2. A: Without their guns police would not be respected or obeyed.
   B: Police will be respected because of their recognized authority.
3. A: One should be very careful about whom to trust and always be prepared for the worst.
   B: One is wise to be open to other people and to give them the benefit of the doubt.
4. A: Put into a position with no obvious social consequences, people tend to be selfish.
   B: Put into a position with no obvious social consequences, people tend to be thoughtful of other people.
5. A: Children are naturally selfish.
   B: Children are naturally loving.
6. A: Everyone has their price.
   B: People naturally want to do what is right.

Americans tend to score 17 or lower.

ences, they are perhaps most clearly revealed within this worldview continuum. In many Christian religions, though not all, humans are seen as inherently bad and in need of redemption. We see this in the notion of original sin and the practice of infant baptism. This orientation also appears in other religions, such as Islam, which has requirements in regard to gender and dress that reflect a belief that humanity's naturally evil self will exert itself if not guarded against. On the other hand, Hinduism is built on the idea that humans are naturally good and that suffering comes only through ignorance of our real selves.[10]

This particular worldview continuum is complicated by the question of change. Can humans change their basic nature, or are they always simply good or bad? Those who assume that humans cannot change tend to also believe that humans are inherently good or evil and that it is best to accept this state rather than try to change it. An example of this can be found in certain forms of

Taoism. Many religions, however, are built on the idea of changing from bad to good. Most of these function from a belief that humans are inherently bad but can be saved through a conversion process. There are exceptions. Hinduism, as already noted, assumes the inherent goodness of the person but that, due to ignorance, this goodness is often not revealed. Change, from this perspective, is a change in awareness rather than a change in nature. In addition, one of the fastest-growing Christian sects, Mormonism, assumes that people are inherently good but that, faced with the challenges of this world, they may choose evil.[11] Within this perspective, change is a return to or an improvement on the goodness that was originally there.

What Is Our Relationship with Nature? Mastery/Adaptive

The mastery view of nature refers to the idea that we can and sensibly should control the world around us, or in other words, conquer the wilderness.[12] One way this worldview is manifest is an emphasis on ownership, such as owning land, water, and animals. This sense of mastery is often conveyed in subtle ways. The other day I was at the zoo and a bird trainer who was doing a show talked about the intelligence of the various birds. He provided as evidence of his statements the fact that some birds did what he wanted them to and some just never seemed to learn. It left me wondering if the so-called stupid birds simply did not

To get a feel for where you fit on the mastery/adaptive continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of four paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: Owning land is a wise investment.

   B: Land cannot be owned, merely lived upon.

2. A: Crossbreeding different plants to create new and more productive crops is a good idea.

   B: One should nourish plants around you just as they nourish you.

3. A: Pioneers should be respected for conquering the wilderness.

   B: Pioneers were often reckless in the way they treated the land.

4. A: Technology makes the world a better place to live.

   B: Technology is dangerous because it separates humans from their natural environment.

Americans tend to score 11 or lower.

want to do what the trainer wanted even if there was a treat awaiting them. Certainly from the mastery perspective, it made sense to assume a bird was less intelligent because it did not learn its "master's" tricks.

Another way the mastery view is demonstrated is by human efforts in actively trying to change the environment through developing technology to make things easier for us (air conditioning, cars, crossbreeding of grains, and so forth). Often these sorts of things add to our physical comfort and have a natural, physical attraction.

That said, some cultures take an adaptive or harmonious attitude toward the world around them. A Native American tribe, the Chippewa, have a term, *Bimisdwin,* that refers to a type of balance in life that encourages an adaptive worldview. People with this perspective see humans less as owners and more as cohabitants of this world. Everything should be respected as having a spirit of its own, and humans should strive to adapt and blend into their environment. Although not the sole cause of problems, this different feeling about the world has helped to complicate some of the treaty rights conflicts that have occurred in the United States.[13]

What Is the Primary Purpose of Language? Social Lubricant/Information

Those who view communication as primarily a social lubricant focus on the impact that even indirect messages can have on relationships and on one's self-image and public image.[14] The accuracy of the information is of less importance than the immediate social implications. Gochenour reports that when Filipinos are invited out to some event, both the inviters and invitees prefer an answer that indicates a desire and an effort to go even if the invitees know they will not attend.[15] From the social lubricant perspective communication is very powerful and potentially dangerous, and therefore it must be treated carefully and with respect. Often people within communities with such a perspective distrust those who speak too much or appear too free in their communication, because it is taken as a sign of immaturity. Those communities that focus on the information function of communication tend to see it as a neutral container that a person uses as a tool to convey her or his thoughts. Accuracy, directness, and clarity in speech are valued because of informational demands. This type of community tends to love a good speaker; indeed, public speaking as a topic of study receives more emphasis in such communities.

The story of Linda and Wanida that began this chapter is a good example of these different attitudes. Linda was expecting and emphasizing the informational aspect of communication when she wanted Wanida to state clearly whether she could help with the coding. On the other hand, Wanida was focused on the social lubricant aspect when she avoided telling the professor straight out that she would not be helping. Of course, no culture fails to see that communication has informational and social aspects to it, but the emphasis

To get a feel for where you fit on the social lubricant/information continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of four paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: You should not clearly state what you believe in case there are others around who disagree.

   B: It is generally important to clearly state what you believe.

2. A: It is generally best to be indirect when stating your opinion.

   B: One should be direct in one's communication in order to avoid misunderstanding.

3. A: I can understand why people do not tell me the complete truth and would rather them not do so than cause unpleasant feelings.

   B: I hate it when people do not tell me the complete truth.

4. A: It is important to keep the morale of your entire crew high, even if the job takes longer to complete.

   B: It is important to get the job done, even if you bother a few people along the way.

Americans tend to score 13 or higher.

and recognition of the primary purpose of communication may be quite different across cultures.

Where Does Meaning Primarily Lie? High Context/Low Context

Edward Hall, who coined the terms *high* and *low context*, explains that "a high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is [already] in the person," whereas "a low context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of information is vested in the explicit code." [16] This implies that a given person may engage in both high and low context communication depending on the situation. For example, you are likely to engage in more high context communication with a very good friend than with a business associate whom you know only casually. This is certainly true, but groups of people also share unspoken expectations about the proper and preferred style of communication in general. Those who fall on the high context end of the continuum rely more on contextual cues such as background information, the social setting, relative status of those interacting, and previous experiences. Those who have more of a low context outlook tend to emphasize the words used. In rural communities in which there is a lot of shared information, there

To get a feel for where you fit on the high context/low context continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of six paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: If I noticed a group of empty shoes at the entrance of a new friend's house, as I entered the home I would take mine off without being asked to.

   B: If I noticed a group of empty shoes at the entrance to a new friend's house, I would either ask if I should take my shoes off or wait until I was asked to do so before removing my shoes.

2. A: I prefer to have time on a new job to watch and listen and thoroughly learn what is expected rather than have someone tell me first thing.

   B: When I have a new job, I prefer to have my boss tell me directly and clearly what is expected of me.

3. A: I prefer to live and work in a place where everybody knows everybody.

   B: I prefer to live in a place where I am always meeting new people and where I am allowed to live my own life without nosy neighbors.

4. A: I expect people to look beyond the words I speak and consider their deeper meaning.

   B: I expect people to accept me for what I am and to take my words at face value.

5. A: I feel insulted when people insist on explaining what I can figure out for myself.

   B: I appreciate it when people explain clearly what they mean.

6. A: I prefer business deals to be based on a handshake and our mutually expressed agreement to follow through on the deal.

   B: In any business deal I am more comfortable when everything is spelled out clearly.

Americans tend to score 19 or higher.

tends to be a more high context type of communication. It may only take a handshake to confirm business and a word and a look to convey many meanings rather than a contract and much explanation. The idea behind low context communication is that the relationship or setting does not matter. What matters is that one's verbal communication is clear and informative.

Hall pointed out that one of the problems U.S. bankers had in Saudi Arabia was grounded in the difference between high and low context communication.[17] U.S. banks tend to be very low context. If you have ever gone to a U.S. bank for a loan, you can appreciate that everything related to that loan is carefully spelled out in print. It may not always make sense to you, but it is obvious that the bankers have carefully thought through and put into words everything related to that loan and its repayment. Your approval for that loan depends on careful credit and background checks. The Saudi banks, however, are more high context. Getting everything checked and put into words is not nearly as important as the relationship with the banker. A loan can be arranged on a handshake, without having to cover for every possible way you may default on the loan. This made the Saudi banks much faster and better able to attract the best clients. The U.S. banks were slower and could only attract those who had a reputation of a bad risk, for in a high context system, failure to fulfill an agreement has much more lasting consequences. Using their background knowledge, the Saudi banks would know immediately if you were worth the risk, whereas a U.S. bank would rely on the written contract to ensure payment, and even if a client had found a loophole in the past, the bank would just try to strengthen the contract.

High context cultures rely on a lot of contextual and background information, so the communication is often quick and confusing to outsiders, whereas a low context culture's communication is more explicit. However, low context cultures appear to allow for greater individual change and growth than high context cultures in which a person is quickly identified and understood in a set position in society. Change and the development of new relationships or contacts is much easier in a low context culture.

How Does Time Function? Polychronic/Monochronic

Polychronic refers to doing many things at once; monochronic is doing one thing at a time.[18] Time is viewed in a linear fashion from a monochronic perspective. Appointment times and schedules are very important. Monochronic people are likely to interrupt whatever they are doing in order to avoid being late for the next appointment. The polychronic view sees time, but not the clock, as important. Thus, things such as conversations, jobs, and so forth have a time of their own, and if that means that someone is late according to the clock, it is not that big of a deal. While I was visiting with a woman from the Navajo reservation in New Mexico, she joked about how Anglos are always amazed at how late many of the Navajo meetings get started. She thought so much concern over the clock was a waste of energy. From her perspective, the scheduled time was not meant to be a rigid deadline but a general guide for gathering. Because time is not seen as something that you only have one of, the ideas of spending time, wasting time, or killing time don't matter or even make much sense. It is relationships that matter, and if there are two things going on,

To get a feel for where you fit on the monochronic/polychronic continuum, give yourself a score from 1 to 5 on the following set of five paired comments, with 1 equaling a greater agreement with A, 5 equaling a greater agreement with B, and 3 indicating an equal amount of agreement between the two comments.

1. A: It would be rude to keep another person waiting if you have an appointment.
   B: I don't mind waiting for someone even if we had an appointment for a certain time.
2. A: I like to use a planner to make sure I keep on schedule and get everything done I need to.
   B: I don't like to have to worry about a schedule; I prefer to let things happen as they will.
3. A: I am comfortable just greeting a friend with a quick greeting and going on with what I am doing.
   B: I expect to visit with a friend and catch up with what has been going on when I see one, even if I have something else to do then.
4. A: I can only really concentrate well on one thing at a time.
   B: I am at my best when I am doing many things at once.
5. A: I don't want someone I am visiting with to be distracted by other people or things while I am visiting with that person.
   B: I don't mind if the person I am visiting with has other things going on while I am talking with them.

Americans tend to score 17 or lower.

that is just fine. A businessperson does not have to have calls held because she or he is in a meeting. Time has more of a circular rather than a linear feel to it from a polychronic perspective.

Think about these worldviews and how they may be reflected in the choices made by the participants in the following story, which was shared with me a couple of years ago, as well as how they are reflected in your own reactions to the participants' experiences.

Shaheed lives in the United States now but grew up in Indonesia. There, when he was in his twenties, he met a young woman and fell in love with her. Fortunately, the woman returned his love. They discussed marriage, but they wanted to act appropriately and have their families' support. Obtaining this family support was not as easy as

they hoped because, even though there was no legal recognition of the caste system, there was still an informal recognition of the system, and Shaheed was from a caste lower than that of the woman he loved. Acting within the culturally appropriate way, Shaheed had his mother contact the woman's mother and request a visit to discuss the potential marriage. The young woman's mother invited Shaheed's mother to tea. Before talking about the marriage at all, the woman's mother served bananas with the tea. This is something that is simply not done, and Shaheed's mother understood without asking or talking about it directly that this marriage was just something that could not be done. She ended her visit, and Shaheed and the woman broke off their relationship and he moved to the United States.

Shaheed was disappointed, but he understood the problem and accepted the situation. However, in part because of different worldviews, this story really bothers many Americans.

How many differences in worldviews did you recognize in this experience? I count at least five. For example, an American would have felt that the hierarchical nature of the situation that helped to establish the concern in the first place was inherently wrong. Shaheed and the woman would be seen as equals. In addition, if there were to be any differences between the two, they should have been determined by achievement, not ascribed to the individuals by birth. Third, the decision to go with what is wanted by the families or groups involved is in line with a collectivistic approach rather than an individualistic approach, which would have encouraged each person to do what was best for him- or herself. Fourth, Shaheed's mother's understanding of the meaning of being served bananas at tea depended entirely on the context rather than the verbal message. Many Americans who hear this story worry about whether Shaheed's mother got the right message. Finally, Americans would tend to want to discuss the issue more, asking, "Why won't this work?" and trying to convince the young woman's mother that it is okay. This orientation is grounded in using communication primarily as an information source rather than as a social lubricant, which Shaheed's mother did by not threatening the face of the other person or the status quo of the current relationship.

Final Thoughts on Worldviews

It is crucial to keep in mind with all of these worldviews that they are on continuums and that there are individual differences within communities (see Figure 2-1). My family as a whole may be more collectivist in nature when compared with other Americans, yet Americans as a whole may be more individualistic than Mexicans. Two communities may even overlap in terms of how they fall on this continuum. Thus, a particular American may be more collectivist than a particular Mexican. Remember that these worldviews are general trends

FIGURE 2-1   Individualism-Collectivism Continuum
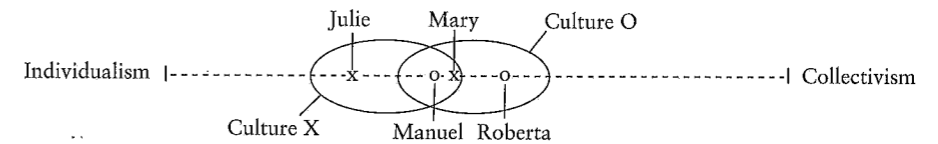
that help us to understand some confusing behaviors in another culture. They are not hard-and-fast rules that every member of a community follows.

In addition, because we belong to many different cultures, two people who happen to be of the same nationality may not be as culturally similar as two who share a certain occupation or economic status. Different settings may also affect where we fall on the collectivism/individualism continuum. How I think of myself when I am alone or when I am with friends, people from work, or family members may all have an influence on where I fall on the continuum. There are also different types of collectivism and individualism. Some forms of collectivism focus on membership in terms of time and who has gone before me and after me (family), and others focus on current group memberships, such as organizations in which I work or where I go to school. I may be individualistic, but do I believe that the self is something that is discovered or something that is created or achieved? Is the true self something that is revealed when I can do whatever I want to with no expectations placed on me, or when I am put on the spot and forced to react to a difficult situation?

Finally, cultures have different patterns of worldviews. For example, in the United States most people fall on the individualism and achievement end of those two worldviews, whereas in India people tend to fall closer to the collectivism and ascription ends of those worldview continuums. However, there is no necessary connection between individualism and achievement. Japan, for example, tends to be a highly collectivist culture, yet it is also more toward the achievement end of the continuum. Some people are surprised by the competitiveness they find in Japan, expecting collective harmony to always hold sway. The achievement, though, is more centered on the group and relative group positioning than you would find in the United States.

VALUES

The worldviews discussed are also sometimes referred to as *value orientations;* however, I find it easier to keep the difference between worldviews and values in mind if we do not overlap the labels. This is especially true because the difference between values and worldviews is a subtle one. *Values are grounded in beliefs about the way the world should be rather than assumptions about the*

way the world is. I may believe that people should be honest, hardworking, friendly, and ambitious, but I don't necessarily assume that they are. Regardless of whether or not they have the above characteristics, I may assume that all people are primarily unique and free to achieve what they will in the world. The distinction between worldviews and values gets complicated when some values and worldviews seem to overlap or deal with the same thing. For example, take the egalitarian worldview and the value of equality. I may work in an organization with a clear hierarchy and even value clear subordinate and superior roles for the purpose of accomplishing certain work-related tasks; yet, I may believe deep down that this hierarchy is a superficial and temporary creation of the workplace and that really we are all equal regardless of our particular title or position in life. On the other hand, I could value equality in certain settings, while at the same time believing that there really are differences in level of ability and worth across people based on birth and social position. Typically, though, values coincide with worldviews in more direct ways. It is important to remember, however, that people on the opposite ends of worldview continuums may still have certain values in common, and just because someone has the same worldview as someone else does not guarantee that they will share the same values.

This tension between sharing some values with members of other cultural communities while still operating from disparate valuing systems is reflected in an old debate in the social sciences known as the "culture of poverty debate."[19] One side of this debate said that those who were poor had a different culture than those who were rich and, therefore, they obviously valued things differently. Certain groups of people were claimed to value items related to material success less (hospitality as a primary value and efficiency and technology as tertiary ones) and, therefore, they were poor or had fewer material goods. From this standpoint it was assumed that they were not less successful nor lazy; they just valued different things than those groups who may be considered rich. Advocates of this perspective considered themselves nonjudgmental and culturally sensitive.

The other side argued that this was just a cop-out. These people claimed that some values were universal in nature. They claimed that those who were poor valued material goods just as much as those who were rich. They maintained that there was no "culture of poverty," just a lack of resources and opportunities among certain groups to gain the material goods that we all value. From this perspective, the concept of culture simply served as aspirin for the headache of injustice. These people saw themselves as true humanitarians, treating everyone just the same.

Do all people value technology and material goods the same? Is saying they don't just an excuse to avoid feeling guilty about us having the goods and them not? Of course, I have presented only a simple and reduced version of the argument, but the key here is that both sides have merit. People across the world want good things, and we have to be careful not to assume that people who

may seem very different from us do not value what we value. At the same time, we have to remember that there is not a single universal value system. Therefore, our frustrations with others may be due to what is valued.

One student traveling abroad recorded the following in her diary:

> *They treat me like an honored guest. Ira, my "sister," even gave up her bedroom for me and slept on the couch. We always do things together, often playing cards. It seems like Ira never does anything without me. I am always included in her plans. The other evening, overwhelmed by the constant presence of other people, I retired early and left the light on so I could read for awhile. After a few pages, Ira poked her head in and asked if I was okay or if I was angry, and after receiving reassurances on both accounts, if I wanted to go play cards with her and her family. Worried that I had offended her, I agreed. My American friends have all complained that the Turkish students refuse to let them alone as well.*[20]

This student's desire for privacy and personal space became obvious in a setting that denied her the ability to achieve either one. Things we value, such as privacy, honesty, ambition, kindness, and so forth, are things we hold as important and desirable. Therefore, it is when we are unable to experience them that we most clearly understand what we value.

Jack Bilmes engaged in some interesting work in a Thai village that concerned the relationship between values and human action.[21] The members of the village were building a community temple, but not everything was going smoothly. Each village member had been requested to contribute a certain amount of money to the building, but only some had contributed. There was a need for more money, and the village headman was asking for more contributions from those who had already contributed. In a series of village meetings the headman was challenged by his brother regarding this decision to ask for more money from those who had already made a contribution. The brother wanted everyone to have contributed before anyone was asked to contribute more. He based his challenge on the community-held value of equity. The headman defended his decision based on the value of freedom. He argued that he could not force everyone to contribute, because each had different circumstances and the decision had to be each person's own. Others questioned the way the earlier money had been spent, asking for a complete accounting from the person overseeing the funds. Still others came to this person's defense by noting the need for trust. In short, the values of equity, freedom, accountability, and trust were all being used in opposition to each other. All of the values were important in the village. People believed that things should be equitable and that there needed to be freedom of choice. They also felt that trust should be shown toward those in authority, and yet they still felt people should be accountable. To assume that the values caused a certain action would be to miss the point that at certain times equity was seen as more important and at other

times freedom was considered more important. The values were not serving to cause behavior but rather served as resources for making sense of past actions and providing reasons for future actions.

Politicians are often looked down on in the United States because they seem to be able to make any course of action seem like it fits the values of the community. In part, this is because values are abstract concepts. The more abstract a concept, the harder it is to say with certainty that it is linked in a causal way with concrete items such as human behavior. Therefore, values are difficult to use in a predictive sense. For example, the student visiting Turkey valued privacy, yet she still chose to forego her desire for privacy to avoid offending her host family. To deal with these sorts of challenges, many researchers posit values as existing in a hierarchy. Certain values are argued to be more important for a group of people than other values.

Sitaram and Cogdell maintain that there are three levels of values: primary, secondary, and tertiary.[22] These levels highlight the fact that not all values are equal. Research has indicated that Americans, for example, have efficiency as a primary value and hospitality as a tertiary one. I am confident that you can think of examples when Americans have put efficiency over hospitality. Americans are well known in Latin America for their eagerness to get down to business rather than spending time with what the Americans perceive to be unnecessary efforts by Latin Americans to get to know the other person and develop a personal relationship. However, I suspect you have also seen situations when, for the sake of hospitality, efficiency was put aside for a time. These values are difficult to neatly categorize into levels that are consistently followed in all situations. If I read about Americans valuing efficiency over hospitality and accept that as true in all circumstances for all Americans, I may find myself misunderstanding many situations. Even with a recognition of the different levels of values, using values without understanding the particular situation and flexible ways values may be used in reference to behavior can lead to as much frustration as not being aware of value differences at all.

NORMS

Part of the challenge with using values to predict behavior is that the same value may be expressed in many different ways. The expression of a given value may be reflected in a variety of different *should* and *should not* types of statements known as norms. Norms are *social rules for what certain types of people should and should not do*. As such, they are less abstract than values. You may find many different cultural groups who value politeness, yet the norms for being polite may differ widely. Should I or should I not call acquaintances by their first names when I greet them? Should I or should I not use my hands to eat? Should I or should I not ask about someone's health or general well-being? Depending on the community in which I find myself, any answer I give to these questions could be either right or wrong.

In his book on U.S. American and Mexican relationships, Jack Condon points out that both cultures value honesty, but the norms governing honesty are very different.[23] Americans may allow for less than complete honesty when thanking a host or hostess for a dinner they did not enjoy or when they meet a friend who has just performed poorly in an amateur theatrical production. Mexicans however, have a much wider range of situations when not telling the whole truth or even telling made-up stories is seen as appropriate. Often when it is claimed that people do not value the same thing, the difference is actually a reflection of different norms surrounding that value. Conflicting norms often result in negative images of the other person or group.

Jay came back from his two-month business trip in Saudi Arabia thoroughly frustrated. "I can't believe those people over there," he moaned to anyone who would listen. "You think we have problems with corruption here; you should try doing business over there. I worked my tail off trying to make contacts and it didn't do a bit of good. It turns out that the only way to make the contacts you need to get started over there is to grease the wheel with a little money to so-called middlemen, extortionists if you ask me, and to keep greasing it. And some of their habits are just downright silly. A lot of times when they eat, they all eat off of one large plate in the middle and they eat with their hands. Or hand I should say. Don't try eating with your left hand. It's considered unsanitary! If they are worried about being sanitary, why are they eating with their hand off of a group plate in the first place? And, you know, they are so backward. The women and the men don't even eat together in the same room!"

Jay was frustrated in large part because many of the norms he was used to didn't apply in Saudi Arabia, and many Saudi norms did not make sense to him. Much of the business done in Saudi Arabia depends on *baksheesh,* a type of kickback to a middleman (and it is a man), who facilitates contacts between potential business partners.[24] The middleman is doing a service and expects to get paid for it. The more *baksheesh* the person gives, the more likely it is that the person will succeed, because the middleman will be sure to treat him very well. Giving *baksheesh* is a norm in the Saudi business community. In addition, Saudis believe that God gave us multifunctional hands and that the hand is our best tool for eating. However, they are also concerned with hygiene. They reserve the left hand for cleaning themselves and use the right hand for eating. Saudis have a number of norms related to restricting male and female interaction that, within the context of their religious beliefs, make perfect sense but would be very inappropriate to most Westerners.

The point here is not to debate the relative worth of each of these norms but to recognize that different norms lead to very different judgments about behavior. I have had more than one Saudi raise the use of the handkerchief as repulsive to them. "Why would you blow your nose into a piece of cloth and then

What and how we eat provides a good example of different cultural norms.

stick it back into your pocket to save? It seems so dirty." Often when we encounter different or new norms, the reaction is that something is wrong. After all, we use our community norms every day to evaluate those around us. For example:

You promised you'd call, what happened?

I can't believe he's cheating on her!

Johnny, is that how we ask? What's the magic word?

I don't think a president should act that way.

Pick up a newspaper or just listen to the talk among your friends and you will soon see or hear examples of people being questioned about their behavior based on a norm. When individuals from communities with different norms interact, it is only natural to find many frustrated people.

The question for our purposes now, though, is what is the relationship between norms and actions? Do community-specific norms cause action? Norms are often attributed great power in governing behavior. Of course, all norms are not created equal. The importance of a given norm within a community is often based on two factors: consensus and intensity. For a norm to be said to govern behavior and have an important impact in the community, it must be agreed upon in the community (consensus) and felt strongly enough about (intensity) that negative sanctions are expected and appropriate for violations of the norm. These negative sanctions may be as mild as disapproving looks or as extreme as physical punishment.

In the educational community to which I belong there is a norm against looking on someone else's paper during a test. It is called cheating, and there

appears to be a high degree of consensus that cheating is wrong. The classic question is, "Would you want your doctor to have cheated on her or his exams?" In addition, to be caught cheating consistently results in negative sanctions. Based on this information, a person studying this educational system from the outside may assume that cheating is virtually nonexistent. However, in informal conversations it is hard to find someone in this system who has not either observed someone else cheating or done it to some extent themselves. Does that mean that there really is no consensus or intensity surrounding the norm of cheating? Are students and faculty just lying when they say cheating should not be done? No. I suspect it depends more on understanding the situations in which it occurs. People are masters at finding exceptions to the rule and rationalizing why in this case it is not so bad and why they are unlikely to be caught.

Swartz distinguishes between two different types of norms: guides and tokens.[25] Guides are argued to direct or govern behavior. Thus, if there is a norm in a classroom that students should raise their hands before speaking, we would expect that all students will raise their hands before speaking. In those few cases where a student does not, there will be a negative consequence for violating the norm. However, if the norm is of a token type, there is no expectation that certain behaviors will follow given a particular norm. Token norms serve a guiding function in only a loose sense. Instead, these norms merely serve to represent unity and provide a sense of community in the face of contradictory actions. Although Swartz's research with the Swahili in Africa was directed toward finding guides, he only found tokens.

I have heard people say it is the norm in the United States to shake hands when greeting someone. Does this mean that in the United States people shake hands every time they meet someone? No, it does not. Shaking hands upon greeting is a token norm, and it depends on many different factors, including the social identity of the people involved, their previous relationship, the purpose of the meeting, the physical setting, and more. Listen to the talk around you, in the media and among friends, coworkers, and family, and take note of how many times norm violations of some sort are referred to. Norms obviously do not dictate behavior in a strict sense. They do provide a common ground for understanding what is going on. However, when different cultures are involved the common ground dissolves, and all too often it is replaced by various types of informal courtrooms.

Reflection Question

When and to what extent are we aware of our worldviews? Values? Norms? Which do you think has more influence on our choices and actions?

Two Perspectives on the Culture-Communication Connection

Although there are many variations on these perspectives, two common perspectives on the connection between culture and communication may be termed the monolithic force and reflexive force perspectives.[26]

MONOLITHIC FORCE

The monolithic force perspective is essentially borrowed from the physical sciences and has two key assumptions:

1. We can explain human behavior based on a causal model. Humans are socialized such that, given the right stimulus (situation, psychological trait, etc.), humans will interact in consistent, predictable ways.

2. What we find to be true based on these causal relationships is true for entire cultural communities and has the potential to be universally true.

Culture is viewed from this perspective as the independent variable or causal force that dictates how we will interact or communicate. The three ways in which culture is given form—worldviews, values, and norms—should provide consistent resources by which a person can predict particular behaviors and actions once somebody's culture is known. However, as I have reviewed these three ways of understanding culture, it is clear that the assumptions underlying the monolithic force perspective—clear causal connection between culture and communication and a consistent application of that connection across the community—are open to question.

REFLEXIVE FORCE

The reflexive force perspective is based on two very different assumptions.

Sense Making

First, it is not assumed that the relationship between culture and communication is causal; rather, this relationship is one of sense making. Worldviews, values, and norms all facilitate meaning. They help us make sense of the world around us. We use them to account for what has happened in the past, to develop a shared understanding of the present, and to plan and coordinate actions for the future. Of course, the differences across cultures in terms of norms, values, and worldviews complicate this communication process, but even when we disagree we can see that values and so forth are helping us achieve our sense of the world. Our behaviors and thoughts may not always match our norms, values, and worldviews, but they are always accountable to these cultural forms.

If a community values kindness, you cannot guarantee that everyone will always be kind, but you can guarantee that people will use kindness as a standard by which to interpret their own and others' behavior.

Situational

Second, it is assumed in the reflexive force perspective that the relationship between cultural forms, such as worldviews and norms, and communication is situational rather than the same for the entire community. Just because a behavioral norm is held dear by a group, it does not mean that there is no situation in which it may be acceptably violated. A norm associated with promptness may in some, but not all, cases be superseded by a norm associated with personal hygiene. Without understanding the importance of the situation and how that can change what is appropriate or effective, we are doomed to disappointment in our intercultural interactions. If we ignore the situational nuances, then community-based norms, ways of speaking, values, and worldviews become reified into stereotypes that can distort and complicate intercultural interactions as often as enlighten and facilitate them. The best reminder of the importance of this assumption is to see how many stereotypes of groups we belong to do not hold true for us all the time, even if they do hold true for many people, including ourselves, at times.

Does this mean that concepts of worldviews, values, and norms are of no value in the study of intercultural communication? Just the opposite, all three are important aspects of each situation. Just as a community's specific values and so forth help that community to make sense of their world, the general concepts of values, norms, and worldviews help us to make sense of intercultural interaction. The only problem is when we try to use these concepts to make people into cultural robots that act without free will and sophisticated reasoning. I saw a television show in which it was claimed that even the most sophisticated computers we now have are less sophisticated in terms of reasoning than an earthworm. We must be careful not to ignore the sophisticated reasoning of humans, even if it is often done unconsciously.

Culture and communication, therefore, have a reflexive relationship, each working back and influencing the other but neither completely determining the other. Cultures have discernible patterns, but they also have an open texture to them that allows for dynamic and situational adjustments based on human needs and communication. Culture facilitates shared meaning and coordinated action much the same way that any resource facilitates the accomplishment of some task. The meanings and actions involved with a particular interaction may become frustrating, such as in the story of Wanida and Linda, but cultural patterns can be deciphered and troubles managed in positive ways.

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SUMMARY

In this chapter we have explored three major ways in which culture is given form for understanding the relationship between culture and communication: worldviews, values, and norms. Worldviews were shown to be very abstract assumptions about the way the world *is;* values were taken to be abstract concepts that reflect what is important to or desired by a person or group. Values reflect not so much the way the world is, but the way it *should be,* the ideal. Norms were discussed as social rules that give more concrete standards for how types of people should or should not act. These three manifestations of culture provide us with resources for making sense of intercultural interactions.

In addition, the relationship between culture and communication or human behavior has been examined. The monolithic force perspective holds that human behavior is caused by independent variables, such as culture, and that these causal relationships are consistent across communities, allowing for prediction and control. However, the causal relationship between culture and communication was shown to have problems in specific applications. Although this perspective has definite worth for initially understanding tendencies and the reasons for cultural misunderstandings, it may lead to a distortion of the relationship.

A second perspective, reflexive force, which better fit our examples and our definitions of both culture and communication, was also discussed. This perspective views culture as a resource for communication and recognizes the importance of context and particular situations in understanding any given behavior. This perspective allows for the connection between culture and communication to be both patterned and open to change. This perspective views humans not as cultural robots, but as decision makers whose actions are accountable to social and cultural consequences.

Reflection Questions

1. How strong do you feel that the connection between culture and our actions is? What is the relationship between personality and culture? Which has the greater impact on us? How much can we change either one?

2. I argue that norms and values are resources for communication. They help us evaluate the past, interpret the present, and plan for the future. Can you think of examples of evaluating the past, interpreting the worth of the present, or planning for the future that do not involve implicit values and norms?

3. Can you think of your own example of how our communication has a reflexive relationship with our culture, each one influencing and changing the other?

ACTIVITIES

1. Visit with three to five people about how they are like and unlike others of their culture (however they define it). Compare the answers and write up your findings. Consider how much impact culture has on a person's actions. Do some cultures appear to have more impact on behavior than others? Why?

2. Select a list of values, such as honesty, independence, success, beauty, friendship, and humor. Discuss these with a person or persons from a different culture. Ask for examples of what is meant by these values. When are they most important? How are they achieved? Are they understood differently depending on who is involved or the situation?

3. In a multicultural group, brainstorm different incidents that would seem to test or violate particular norms and values. Role-play how you would handle these situations. What are the differences? What types of cultures of the many cultures people share seem to be most important in influencing how they would interpret or act in a difficult situation?

4. Get together with people from different cultures and discuss time, using some of the following questions as discussion starters:

    A. If you were invited to another family's house for dinner, how much later than the scheduled time would you arrive?

    B. How long does a party at which dinner is served usually last?

    C. If you were having a party for the students in your class, how many days in advance would you invite them?

    D. How would a host indicate to a guest that it was time to leave? Would a host do this?

    E. At a party or social occasion, how would you indicate that it was time for you to leave?

    F. When first speaking with the parents of a date or a friend, what would be an appropriate amount of time to speak to them?

    G. If you had an appointment with a professor at 1:00 P.M. and arrived at 1:45 P.M., how would you expect the professor to react?

5. Individually or in a group, create your own culture, along with worldviews, values, and norms that all fit together. Compare them with a

friend's, or another group's. Try to role-play how each group would handle certain situations, such as a classroom, business meeting, or a date.

NOTES

1. Story adapted from an incident related in K. Cushner and R. Brislin, *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide,* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996). The original story involved a Japanese young woman; however, I have had many Japanese students tell me that not mentioning the test would be atypical for a person from Japan (although the rest of the story would seem typical). In further discussions with those from Thailand, I have found this type of an "I'll try" response to be quite typical. This is also similar to what Gochenour describes about Filipinos, who traditionally will respond "I'll try" even when they know they cannot accept a particular invitation.
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26. A version of this distinction was first suggested to me by Gerry Philipsen.