

Chapter 18

Intercultural and International Business Communication

We should never denigrate any other culture but rather help people to understand the relationship between their own culture and the dominant culture. When you understand another culture or language, it does not mean that you have to lose your own culture.

- Edward T. Hall

I've been traveling all over the world for 25 years, performing, talking to people, studying their cultures and musical instruments, and I always come away with more questions in my head than can be answered.

- Yo-Yo Ma

Getting Started

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Find a film where one person overcomes all obstacles. Make notes of your observations on how he or she approaches the world, solves problems, and rises triumphant
2. Find a film where a group of people overcomes obstacles through joint effort. Make notes of your observations on how they approach the world, solve problems, and rise triumphant.
3. Consider a culture with which you have had little interaction. Write down at least five terms to describe that culture.

As a professional in the modern business community, you need to be aware that the very concept of community is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Throughout the world's history—until recently—a community was defined by its geographic boundaries. A merchant supplied salt and sugar, and people made what they needed. The products the merchant sold were often produced locally because the cost of transportation was significant. A transcontinental railroad brought telegraph lines, shipping routes, and brought ports together from coast to coast. Shipping that once took months and years was now measured in days. A modern highway system and cheap oil products allowed for that measurement unit to be reduced to days and minutes. Just in time product delivery reduced storage costs, from renting a warehouse at the port to spoilage in transit. As products sold, bar code and RDIF (radio frequency identification) tagged items instantly updated inventories and initiated orders at factories all over the world.

Communication, both oral and written, linked communities in ways that we failed to recognize until economic turmoil in one place led to job loss, in a matter of days or minutes, thousands of miles away. A system of trade and the circulation of capital and goods that once flowed relatively seamlessly have been challenged by change, misunderstanding, and conflict. People learn of political, economic, and military turmoil

that is instantly translated into multiple market impacts. Integrated markets and global networks bind us together in ways we are just now learning to appreciate, anticipate, and understand. Intercultural and international communication are critical areas of study with readily apparent, real-world consequences.

Agrarian, industrial, and information ages gave way to global business and brought the importance of communication across cultures to the forefront. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Thomas Friedman calls this new world “flat,” Friedman, T. (2005). *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. noting how the integration of markets and community had penetrated the daily lives of nearly everyone on the planet, regardless of language or culture. While the increasing ease of telecommunications and travel have transformed the nature of doing business, Friedman argues that “the dawning ‘flat world’ is a jungle pitting ‘lions’ and ‘gazelles,’ where ‘economic stability is not going to be a feature’ and ‘the weak will fall farther behind.” Publishers Weekly. (2009). The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century [Starred review]. Retrieved from <http://www.thomasfriedman.com/bookshelf/the-world-is-flat> Half of the world’s population that earn less than \$2 (USD) a day felt the impact of a reduction in trade and fluctuations in commodity prices even though they may not have known any of the details. Rice, for example, became an even more valuable commodity than ever; to the individuals who could not find it, grow it, or earn enough to buy it, the hunger felt was personal and global. International trade took on a new level of importance.

Intercultural and international business communication has taken on a new role for students as well as career professionals. Knowing when the European and Asian markets open has become mandatory; so has awareness of multiple time zones and their importance in relation to trade, shipping, and the production cycle. Managing production in China from an office in Chicago has become common. Receiving technical assistance for your computer often means connecting with a well-educated English speaker in New Delhi. We compete with each other via Elance.com or oDesk.com for contracts and projects, selecting the currency of choice for each bid as we can be located anywhere on the planet. Communities are no longer linked as simply “brother” and “sister” cities in symbolic partnerships. They are linked in the daily trade of goods and services.

In this chapter, we explore this dynamic aspect of communication. If the foundation of communication is important, its application in this context is critical. Just as Europe once formed intercontinental alliances for the trade of metals—leading to the development of a common currency, trade zone, and new concept of nation-state—now North and South America are following with increased integration. Major corporations are no longer affiliated with only one country or one country’s interests but instead perceive the integrated market as team members across global trade. “Made in X” is more of a relative statement as products, from cars to appliances to garments, now come with a list of where components were made and assembled and what percentage corresponds to each nation.

Global business is more than trade between companies located in distinct countries; indeed, that concept is already outdated. Intercultural and international business focuses less on the borders that separate people and more on the communication that brings them together. Business communication values clear, concise interaction that promotes efficiency and effectiveness. You may perceive your role as a business communicator within a specific city, business, or organization, but you need to be aware that your role crosses cultures, languages, value and legal systems, and borders.

18.1 Intercultural Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define and discuss how to facilitate intercultural communication.
2. Define and discuss the effects of ethnocentrism.

Communication is the sharing of understanding and meaning, Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: Understanding and sharing*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill. but what is intercultural communication? If you answered, “The sharing of understanding and meaning across cultures,” you’d be close, but the definition requires more attention. What is a culture? Where does one culture stop and another start? How are cultures created, maintained, and dissolved? Donald Klopf described culture as “that part of the environment made by humans.” Klopf, D. (1991). *Intercultural encounters: The fundamentals of intercultural communication* (2nd ed.). Inglewood, CA: Morton Publishing Company. From the building we erect that represents design values to the fences we install that delineate borders, our environment is a representation of culture, but it is not all that is culture.

Culture involves beliefs, attitudes, values, and traditions that are shared by a group of people. Thus, we must consider more than the clothes we wear, the movies we watch, or the video games we play, all representations of environment, as culture. Culture also involves the psychological aspects of our expectations of the communication context. For example, if we are raised in a culture where males speak while females are expected to remain silent, the context of the communication interaction governs behavior, which in itself is a representation of culture. From the choice of words (message), to how we communicate (in person, or by e-mail), to how we acknowledge understanding with a nod or a glance (nonverbal feedback), to the internal and external interference, all aspects of communication are influenced by culture.

In defining intercultural communication, we only have eight components of communication to work with and yet we must bridge divergent cultures with distinct values across languages and time zones to exchange value, a representation of meaning. It may be tempting to consider only the source and receiver within a transaction as a representation of intercultural communication, but if we do that, we miss the other six components—the message, channel, feedback, context, environment, and interference—in every communicative act. Each component influences and is influenced by culture. Is culture context? Environment? Message? Culture is represented in all eight components every time we communicate. All communication is intercultural.

We may be tempted to think of intercultural communication as interaction between two people from different countries. While two distinct national passports may be **artifacts**, or nonverbal representations of communication, what happens when two people from two different parts of the same country communicate? From high and low Germanic dialects, to the perspective of a Southerner versus a Northerner in the United States, to the rural versus urban dynamic, our geographic, linguistic, educational, sociological, and psychological traits influence our communication.

It is not enough to say that someone from rural Southern Chile and the capital, Santiago, both speak *Castellano* (the Chilean word for the Spanish language), so that communication between them must be **intracultural communication**, or

communication within the same culture. What is life like for the rural Southerner? For the city dweller? Were their educational experiences the same? Do they share the same vocabulary? Do they value the same things? To a city dweller, all the sheep look the same. To the rural Southerner, the sheep are distinct, with unique markings; they have value as a food source, a source of wool with which to create sweaters and socks that keep the cold winters at bay, and in their numbers they represent wealth. Even if both Chileans speak the same language, their socialization will influence how they communicate and what they value, and their vocabulary will reflect these differences.

Let's take this intranational comparison a step further. Within the same family, can there be intercultural communication? If all communication is intercultural, then the answer would be yes, but we still have to prove our case. Imagine a three-generation family living in one house. The grandparents may represent another time and different values from the grandchildren. The parents may have a different level of education and pursue different careers from the grandparents; the schooling the children are receiving may prepare them for yet another career. From music, to food preferences, to how work is done may vary across time; Elvis Presley may seem like ancient history to the children. The communication across generations represents intercultural communication, even if only to a limited degree.

But suppose we have a group of students who are all similar in age and educational level. Do gender and the societal expectations of roles influence interaction? Of course. And so we see that among these students not only do the boys and girls communicate in distinct ways but also not all boys and girls are the same. With a group of sisters, there may be common characteristics, but they will still have differences, and these differences contribute to intercultural communication. We are each shaped by our upbringing and it influences our worldview, what we value, and how we interact with each other. We create culture, and it creates us.

Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt define intercultural communication as the exchange of information between individuals who are "unlike culturally." Rogers, E., & Steinfatt, T. (1999). *Intercultural communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. If you follow our discussion and its implications, you may arrive at the idea that ultimately we are each a "culture of one"—we are simultaneously a part of a community and its culture(s) and separate from it in the unique combination that represents us as an individual. All of us are separated by a matter of degrees from each other even if we were raised on the same street or by parents of similar educational background and profession, and yet, we have many other things in common.

Communication with yourself is called **intrapersonal communication**, which may also be intracultural, as you may only represent one culture. But most people belong to many groups, each with their own culture. Within our imaginary intergenerational home, how many cultures do you think we might find? If we only consider the parents and consider work one culture, and family another, we now have two. If we were to examine the options more closely, we would find many more groups, and the complexity would grow exponentially. Does a conversation with yourself ever involve competing goals, objectives, needs, wants, or values? How did you learn of those goals, or values? Through communication within and between individuals, they themselves representatives of many cultures. We struggle with the demands of each group and their expectations and could consider this internal struggle intercultural conflict or simply intercultural communication.

Culture is part of the very fabric of our thought, and we cannot separate ourselves from it, even as we leave home, defining ourselves anew in work and achievements. Every business or organization has a culture, and within what may be considered a global culture, there are many subcultures or co-cultures. For example, consider the difference between the sales and accounting departments in a corporation. We can quickly see two distinct groups with their own symbols, vocabulary, and values. Within each group, there may also be smaller groups, and each member of each department comes from a distinct background that in itself influences behavior and interaction.

Intercultural communication is a fascinating area of study within business communication, and it is essential to your success. One idea to keep in mind as we examine this topic is the importance of considering multiple points of view. If you tend to dismiss ideas or views that are “unlike culturally,” you will find it challenging to learn about diverse cultures. If you cannot learn, how can you grow and be successful?

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view other cultures as inferior to one’s own. Having pride in your culture can be healthy, but history has taught us that having a predisposition to discount other cultures simply because they are different can be hurtful, damaging, and dangerous. Ethnocentrism makes us far less likely to be able to bridge the gap with others and often increases intolerance of difference. Business and industry are no longer regional, and in your career, you will necessarily cross borders, languages, and cultures. You will need tolerance, understanding, patience, and openness to difference. A skilled business communicator knows that the process of learning is never complete, and being open to new ideas is a key strategy for success.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Intercultural communication is an aspect of all communicative interactions, and attention to your perspective is key to your effectiveness. Ethnocentrism is a major obstacle to intercultural communication.

EXERCISES

1. Please list five words to describe your dominant culture. Please list five words to describe a culture with which you are not a member, have little or no contact, or have limited knowledge. Now, compare and contrast the terms noting their inherent value statements.
2. Identify a country you would like to visit. Research the country and find one interesting business fact and share it with the class.
3. Write a brief summary about a city, region, state, or country you have visited that is not like where you live. Share and compare with classmates.

18.2 How to Understand Intercultural Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe strategies to understand intercultural communication, prejudice, and ethnocentrism.

The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall is often cited as a pioneer in the field of intercultural communication. Chen, G., & Starosta, W. (2000). *Foundations of intercultural communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Born in 1914, Hall spent much of his early adulthood in the multicultural setting of the American Southwest, where Native Americans, Spanish-speakers, and descendents of pioneers came together from diverse cultural perspectives. He then traveled the globe during World War II and later served as a U.S. State Department official. Where culture had once been viewed by anthropologists as a single, distinct way of living, Hall saw how the perspective of the individual influences interaction. By focusing on interactions rather than cultures as separate from individuals, he asked us to evaluate the many cultures we ourselves belong to or are influenced by as well as those with whom we interact. While his view makes the study of intercultural communication far more complex, it also brings a healthy dose of reality to the discussion. Hall is generally credited with eight contributions to our study of intercultural communication: Chen, G., & Starosta, W. (2000). *Foundations of intercultural communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon., Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (1990). Notes in the history of intercultural communication: The foreign service institute and the mandate for intercultural training. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76, 268-281., McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

1. *Compare cultures*. Focus on the interactions versus general observations of culture.
2. *Shift to local perspective*. Local level versus global perspective.
3. *You don't have to know everything to know something*. Time, space, gestures, and gender roles can be studied, even if we lack a larger understanding of the entire culture.
4. *There are rules we can learn*. People create rules for themselves in each community that we can learn from, compare, and contrast.
5. *Experience counts*. Personal experience has value in addition to more comprehensive studies of interaction and culture.
6. *Perspectives can differ*. Descriptive linguistics serves as a model to understand cultures, and the U.S. Foreign Service adopted it as a base for training.
7. *Intercultural communication can be applied to international business*. U.S. Foreign Service training yielded applications for trade and commerce and became a point of study for business majors.
8. *It integrates the disciplines*. Culture and communication are intertwined and bring together many academic disciplines.

Hall, E. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York, NY: Doubleday. shows us that emphasis on a culture as a whole, and how it operates, may lead us to neglect individual differences. Individuals may hold beliefs or practice customs that do not follow their own cultural norm. When we resort to the mental shortcut of a stereotype, we lose these unique differences. Stereotypes can be defined as a generalization about a group of people that oversimplifies their culture. Rogers, E., & Steinfatt, T. (1999). *Intercultural communication*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

The American psychologist Gordon Allport Allport, G. (1958). *The nature of prejudice*. New York, NY: Doubleday. explored how, when, and why we formulate or use stereotypes to characterize distinct groups. His results may not surprise you. Look back at the third of the [Note 18.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter and examine the terms you used to describe a culture with which you are unfamiliar. Were the terms flattering or pejorative? Did they reflect respect for the culture or did they make unfavorable value judgments? Regardless of how you answered, you proved Allport's main point. When we

do not have enough contact with people or their cultures to understand them well, we tend to resort to stereotypes. Allport, G. (1958). *The nature of prejudice*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

As Hall, E. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York, NY: Doubleday. notes, experience has value. If you do not know a culture, you should consider learning more about it firsthand if possible. The people you interact with may not be representative of the culture as a whole, but that is not to say that what you learn lacks validity. Quite the contrary; Hall asserts that you can, in fact, learn something without understanding everything, and given the dynamic nature of communication and culture, who is to say that your lessons will not serve you well? Consider a study abroad experience if that is an option for you, or learn from a classmate who comes from a foreign country or an unfamiliar culture. Be open to new ideas and experiences, and start investigating. Many have gone before you, and today, unlike in generations past, much of the information is accessible. Your experiences will allow you to learn about another culture and yourself, and help you to avoid prejudice.

Prejudice involves a negative preconceived judgment or opinion that guides conduct or social behavior. McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. As an example, imagine two people walking into a room for a job interview. You are tasked to interview both, and having read the previous section, you know that Allport rings true when he says we rely on stereotypes when encountering people or cultures with which we have had little contact. Will the candidates' dress, age, or gender influence your opinion of them? Will their race or ethnicity be a conscious or subconscious factor in your thinking process? Allport's work would indicate that those factors and more will make you likely to use stereotypes to guide your expectations of them and your subsequent interactions with them.

People who treat others with prejudice often make assumptions, or take preconceived ideas for granted without question, about the group or communities. As Allport illustrated for us, we often assume characteristics about groups with which we have little contact. Sometimes we also **assume similarity**, thinking that people are all basically similar. This denies cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and many other valuable, insightful differences.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Ethnocentric tendencies, stereotyping, and assumptions of similarity can make it difficult to learn about cultural differences.

EXERCISES

1. People sometimes assume that learning about other cultures is unnecessary if we simply treat others as we would like to be treated. To test this assumption, try answering the following questions.
 - a. When receiving a gift from a friend, should you open it immediately, or wait to open it in private?
 - b. When grocery shopping, should you touch fruits and vegetables to evaluate their freshness?
 - c. In a conversation with your instructor or your supervisor at work,

should you maintain direct eye contact?

Write down your answers before reading further. Now let's explore how these questions might be answered in various cultures.

- a. In Chile, it is good manners to open a gift immediately and express delight and thanks. But in Japan it is a traditional custom to not open a gift in the giver's presence.
- b. In the United States, shoppers typically touch, hold, and even smell fruits and vegetables before buying them. But in northern Europe this is strongly frowned upon.
- c. In mainstream North American culture, people are expected to look directly at each other when having a conversation. But a cultural norm for many Native Americans involves keeping one's eyes lowered as a sign of respect when speaking to an instructor or supervisor.

No one can be expected to learn all the "dos and don'ts" of the world's myriad cultures; instead, the key is to keep an open mind, be sensitive to other cultures, and remember that the way you'd like to be treated is not necessarily the way others would appreciate.

2. Please write a short paragraph where your perception of someone was changed once you got to know them. Share and compare with your classmates

18.3 Common Cultural Characteristics

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand the concept of common cultural characteristics and list several examples of such characteristics in your life.

While we may be members of many different cultures, we tend to adhere to some more than others. Perhaps you have become friendly with several of your fellow students as you've pursued your studies in college. As you take many of the same classes and share many experiences on campus, you begin to have more and more in common, in effect forming a small group culture of your own. A similar cultural formation process may happen in the workplace, where coworkers spend many hours each week sharing work experiences and getting to know each other socially in the process.

Groups come together, form cultures, and grow apart across time. How does one become a member of a community, and how do you know when you are full member? What aspects of culture do we have in common and how do they relate to business communication? Researchers who have studied cultures around the world have identified certain characteristics that define a culture. These characteristics are expressed in different ways, but they tend to be present in nearly all cultures. Let's examine them.

Rites of Initiation

Cultures tend to have a ritual for becoming a new member. A newcomer starts out as a nonentity, a stranger, an unaffiliated person with no connection or even possibly awareness of the community. Newcomers who stay around and learn about the culture

become members. Most cultures have a rite of initiation that marks the passage of the individual within the community; some of these rituals may be so informal as to be hardly noticed (e.g., the first time a coworker asks you to join the group to eat lunch together), while others may be highly formalized (e.g., the ordination of clergy in a religion). The nonmember becomes a member, the new member becomes a full member, and individuals rise in terms of responsibility and influence.

Business communities are communities first, because without communication interaction, no business will occur. Even if sales and stock are processed by servers that link database platforms to flow, individuals are still involved in the maintenance, repair, and development of the system. Where there is communication, there is culture, and every business has several cultures.

Across the course of your life, you have no doubt passed several rites of initiation but may not have taken notice of them. Did you earn a driver's license, register to vote, or acquire the permission to purchase alcohol? In North American culture, these three common markers indicate the passing from a previous stage of life to a new one, with new rights and responsibilities. As a child, you were not allowed to have a driver's license. At age fourteen to eighteen, depending on your state and location (rural versus urban), you were allowed to drive a tractor, use farm equipment, operate a motor vehicle during daylight hours, or have full access to public roads. With the privilege of driving comes responsibility. It is your responsibility to learn what the signs and signals mean and to obey traffic laws for the common safety. In order for stop signs to work, we all have to agree on the behavior associated with them and observe that behavior.

Sometimes people choose to ignore a stop sign, or accidentally miss one, and it places the public in danger. Law enforcement officials reinforce that common safety as representatives of the culture, empowered by the people themselves based on a common agreement of what a stop sign means and what a driver is supposed to do when approaching one. Some people may argue that law enforcement serves some while it prosecutes others. This point of debate may deserve some consideration, but across cultures, there are rules, signs, and symbols that we share.

Rites of initiation mark the transition of the role or status of the individual within the group. Your first day on the job may have been a challenge as you learned your way around the physical space, but the true challenge was to learn how the group members communicate with each other. If you graduate from college with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, you will already have passed a series of tests, learned terms and theories, and possess a symbol of accomplishment in your diploma, but that only grants you the opportunity to look for a job—to seek access to a new culture.

In every business, there are groups, power struggles, and unspoken ways that members earn their way from the role of a “newbie” to that of a full member. The newbie may get the tough account, the office without a window, or the cubicle next to the bathroom, denoting low status. As the new member learns to navigate through the community—establishing a track record and being promoted—he passes the rite of initiation and acquires new rights and responsibilities.

Over time, the person comes to be an important part of the business, a “keeper of the flame.” The “flame” may not exist in physical space or time, but it does exist in the minds of those members in the community who have invested time and effort in the business. It is not a flame to be trusted to a new person, as it can only be earned with time. Along the

way, there may be personality conflicts and power struggles over resources and perceived scarcity (e.g., there is only one promotion and everyone wants it). All these challenges are to be expected in any culture.

Common History and Traditions

Think for a moment about the history of a business like Ford Motor Company—what are your associations with Henry Ford, the assembly line manufacturing system, or the Model T? Or the early days of McDonald's? Do you have an emotional response to mental images of the "golden arches" logo, Ronald McDonald, or the Big Mac sandwich? Traditions form as the organization grows and expands, and stories are told and retold to educate new members on how business should be conducted. The history of every culture, of every corporation, influences the present. There are times when the phrase "we've tried that before" can become stumbling block for members of the organization as it grows and adapts to new market forces. There may be struggles between members who have weathered many storms and new members, who come armed with new educational perspectives, technological tools, or experiences that may contribute to growth.

Common Values and Principles

Cultures all hold values and principles that are commonly shared and communicated from older members to younger (or newer) ones. Time and length of commitment are associated with an awareness of these values and principles, so that new members, whether they are socialized at home, in school, or at work, may not have a thorough understanding of their importance. For example, time (fast customer service) and cleanliness are two cornerstone values of the McDonald's corporation. A new employee may take these for granted, while a seasoned professional who inspects restaurants may see the continued need to reinforce these core values. Without reinforcement, norms may gradually change, and if this were the case it could fundamentally change the customer experience associated with McDonald's.

Common Purpose and Sense of Mission

Cultures share a common sense of purpose and mission. Why are we here and whom do we serve? These are fundamental questions of the human condition that philosophers and theologians all over the world have pondered for centuries. In business, the answers to these questions often address purpose and mission, and they can be found in mission and vision statements of almost every organization. Individual members will be expected to acknowledge and share the mission and vision, actualize them, or make them real through action. Without action, the mission and vision statements are simply an arrangement of words. As a guide to individual and group behavioral norms, they can serve as a powerful motivator and a call to action.

Common Symbols, Boundaries, Status, Language, and Rituals

Most of us learn early in life what a stop sign represents, but do we know what military stripes represent on a sleeve, or a ten-year service pin on a lapel, or a corner office with two windows? Cultures have common symbols that mark them as a group; the knowledge of what a symbol stands for helps to reinforce who is a group member and who is not. You may have a brand on your arm from your fraternity, or wear a college ring—symbols

that represent groups you affiliate with temporarily, while you are a student. They may or may not continue to hold meaning to you when your college experience is over. Cultural symbols include dress, such as the Western business suit and tie, the Scottish kilt, or the Islamic headscarf. Symbols also include slogans or sayings, such as “you’re in good hands” or “you deserve a break today.” The slogan may serve a marketing purpose but may also embrace a mission or purpose within the culture. Family crests and clan tartan patterns serve as symbols of affiliation. Symbols can also be used to communicate rank and status within the group.

Space is another common cultural characteristic; it may be a nonverbal symbol that represents status and power. In most of the world’s cultures, a person occupying superior status is entitled to a physically elevated position—a throne, a dais, a podium from which to address subordinates. Subordinates may be expected to bow, curtsy, or lower their eyes as a sign of respect. In business, the corner office may offer the best view with the most space. Movement from a cubicle to a private office may also be a symbol of transition within an organization, involving increased responsibility as well as power. Parking spaces, the kind of vehicle you drive, and the transportation allowance you have may also serve to communicate symbolic meaning within an organization.

The office serves our discussion on the second point concerning boundaries. Would you sit on your boss’s desk or sit in his chair with your feet up on the desk in his presence? Most people indicate they would not, because doing so would communicate a lack of respect, violate normative space expectations, and invite retaliation. Still, subtle challenges to authority may arise in the workplace. A less than flattering photograph of the boss at the office party posted to the recreational room bulletin board communicates more than a lack of respect for authority. By placing the image anonymously in a public place, the prankster clearly communicates a challenge, even if it is a juvenile one. Movement from the cubicle to the broom closet may be the result for someone who is found responsible for the prank. Again, there are no words used to communicate meaning, only symbols, but those symbols represent significant issues.

Communities have their own vocabulary and way in which they communicate. Consider the person who uses a sewing machine to create a dress and the accountant behind the desk; both are professionals and both have specialized jargon used in their field. If they were to change places, the lack of skills would present an obstacle, but the lack of understanding of terms, how they are used, and what they mean would also severely limit their effectiveness. Those terms and how they are used are learned over time and through interaction. While a textbook can help, it cannot demonstrate use in live interactions. Cultures are dynamic systems that reflect the communication process itself.

Cultures celebrate heroes, denigrate villains, and have specific ways of completing jobs and tasks. In business and industry, the emphasis may be on effectiveness and efficiency, but the practice can often be “because that is the way we have always done it.” Rituals serve to guide our performance and behavior and may be limited to small groups or celebrated across the entire company. A pink Cadillac has a special meaning for a Mary Kay cosmetics representative. How that car is received is ritualistic, recognizing current success while honoring past performances across the company.

Rituals can serve to bind a group together, or to constrain it. Institutions tend to formalize processes and then have a hard time adapting to new circumstances. While the core values or mission statement may hold true, the method of doing things that worked in the past may not be as successful as it once was. Adaptation and change can be

difficult for individuals and companies, and yet all communities, cultures, and communication contexts are dynamic, or always changing. As much as we might like things to stay the same, they will always change—and we will change with (and be changed by) them.

KEY TAKEAWAY

All cultures have characteristics such as initiations, traditions, history, values and principles, purpose, symbols, and boundaries.

EXERCISES

1. Compile a list or group of pictures of symbols that characterize some of the cultural groups you belong to. Share and discuss your list with your classmates.
2. Compile a list of pictures or symbols that your group or community finds offensive. Share and compare with classmates.

18.4 Divergent Cultural Characteristics

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Discuss divergent cultural characteristics and list several examples of such characteristics in the culture(s) you identify with.

We are not created equal. We are born light- or dark-skinned, to parents of education or parents without access to education, and we grow up short or tall, slender or stocky. Our life chances or options are in many ways determined by our birth. The Victorian “rags to riches” novels that Horatio Alger wrote promoted the ideal that individuals can overcome all obstacles, raising themselves up by their bootstraps. Some people do have amazing stories, but even if you are quick to point out that Microsoft founder Bill Gates became fabulously successful despite his lack of a college education, know that his example is exception, not the rule. We all may use the advantages of our circumstances to improve our lives, but the type and extent of those advantages vary greatly across the planet.

Cultures reflect this inequality, this diversity, and the divergent range of values, symbols, and meanings across communities. Can you tie a knot? Perhaps you can tie your shoes, but can you tie a knot to secure a line to a boat, to secure a heavy load on a cart or truck, or to bundle a bale of hay? You may not be able to, but if you were raised in a culture that place a high value on knot-tying for specific purposes, you would learn that which your community values. We all have viewpoints, but they are shaped by our interactions with our communities. Let’s examine several points of divergence across cultures.

Individualistic versus Collectivist Cultures

People in individualistic cultures value individual freedom and personal independence, and cultures always have stories to reflect their values. You may recall the story of Superman, or John McLean in the Diehard series, and note how one person overcomes all obstacles. Through personal ingenuity, in spite of challenges, one person rises successfully to conquer or vanquish those obstacles. Sometimes there is an assist, as in

basketball or football, where another person lends a hand, but still the story repeats itself again and again, reflecting the cultural viewpoint.

The Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede explored the concepts of individualism and collectivism across diverse cultures. Hofstede, G. (1982). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage., Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage., Hofstede, G. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. He found that in individualistic cultures like the United States, people perceived their world primarily from their own viewpoint. They perceived themselves as empowered individuals, capable of making their own decisions, and able to make an impact on their own lives.

Cultural viewpoint is not an either/or dichotomy, but rather a continuum or range. You may belong to some communities that express individualistic cultural values, while others place the focus on a collective viewpoint. Collectivist cultures, Hofstede, G. (1982). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. including many in Asia and South America, focus on the needs of the nation, community, family, or group of workers. Ownership and private property is one way to examine this difference. In some cultures, property is almost exclusively private, while others tend toward community ownership. The collectively owned resource returns benefits to the community. Water, for example, has long been viewed as a community resource, much like air, but that has been changing as business and organizations have purchased water rights and gained control over resources. Public lands, such as parks, are often considered public, and individual exploitation of them is restricted. Copper, a metal with a variety of industrial applications, is collectively owned in Chile, with profits deposited in the general government fund. While public and private initiatives exist, the cultural viewpoint is our topic. How does someone raised in a culture that emphasizes the community interact with someone raised in a primarily individualistic culture? How could tensions be expressed and how might interactions be influenced by this point of divergence?

Explicit-Rule Cultures versus Implicit-Rule Cultures

Do you know the rules of your business or organization? Did you learn them from an employee manual or by observing the conduct of others? Your response may include both options, but not all cultures communicate rules in the same way. Carley Dodd, C. (1998). *Dynamics of intercultural communication* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. discusses this difference and has found quite a range of difference. In an **explicit-rule culture**, where rules are clearly communicated so that everyone is aware of them, the guidelines and agenda for a meeting are announced prior to the gathering. In an **implicit-rule culture**, where rules are often understood and communicated nonverbally, there may be no agenda. Everyone knows why they are gathered and what role each member plays, even though the expectations may not be clearly stated. Power, status, and behavioral expectations may all be understood, and to the person from outside this culture, it may prove a challenge to understand the rules of the context.

Outsiders often communicate their "otherness" by not knowing where to stand, when to sit, or how to initiate a conversation if the rules are not clearly stated. While it may help to know that implicit-rule cultures are often more tolerant of deviation from the understood rules, the newcomer will be wise to learn by observing quietly—and to do as much research ahead of the event as possible.

Uncertainty-Accepting Cultures versus Uncertainty-Rejecting Cultures

When we meet each other for the first time, we often use what we have previously learned to understand our current context. We also do this to reduce our uncertainty. Some cultures, such as the United States and Britain, are highly tolerant of uncertainty, while others go to great lengths to reduce the element of surprise. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, are high in uncertainty avoidance; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, the Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese Berger, C., & Calabrese, R. (1975). Some explorations in initial interactions and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human communication Research, 1*, 99-112. developed uncertainty reduction theory to examine this dynamic aspect of communication. Here are seven axioms of uncertainty:

1. There is a high level of uncertainty at first. As we get to know one another, our verbal communication increases and our uncertainty begins to decrease.
2. Following verbal communication, nonverbal communication increases, uncertainty continues to decrease, and more nonverbal displays of affiliation, like nodding one's head to indicate agreement, will start to be expressed.
3. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, we tend to increase our information-seeking behavior, perhaps asking questions to gain more insight. As our understanding increases, uncertainty decreases, as does the information-seeking behavior.
4. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, the communication interaction is not as personal or intimate. As uncertainty is reduced, intimacy increases.
5. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, communication will feature more reciprocity, or displays of respect. As uncertainty decreases, reciprocity may diminish.
6. Differences between people increase uncertainty, while similarities decrease it.
7. Higher levels of uncertainty are associated with a decrease in the indication of liking the other person, while reductions in uncertainty are associated with liking the other person more.

Time Orientation

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall Hall, M. R., & Hall, E. T. (1987). *Hidden differences: Doing business with the Japanese*. New York, NY: Doubleday. state that monochronic time-oriented cultures consider one thing at a time, whereas polychronic time-oriented cultures schedule many things at one time, and time is considered in a more fluid sense. In **monochromatic time**, interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time. Even the multitasker from a monochromatic culture will, for example, recognize the value of work first before play or personal time. The United States, Germany, and Switzerland are often noted as countries that value a monochromatic time orientation.

Polychromatic time looks a little more complicated, with business and family mixing with dinner and dancing. Greece, Italy, Chile, and Saudi Arabia are countries where one can observe this perception of time; business meetings may be scheduled at a fixed time, but when they actually begin may be another story. Also note that the dinner invitation

for 8 p.m. may in reality be more like 9 p.m. If you were to show up on time, you might be the first person to arrive and find that the hosts are not quite ready to receive you.

When in doubt, always ask before the event; many people from polychromatic cultures will be used to a foreigner's tendency to be punctual, even compulsive, about respecting established times for events. The skilled business communicator is aware of this difference and takes steps to anticipate it. The value of time in different cultures is expressed in many ways, and your understanding can help you communicate more effectively.

Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation

Do you want your reward right now or can you dedicate yourself to a long-term goal? You may work in a culture whose people value immediate results and grow impatient when those results do not materialize. Geert Hofstede (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Hofstede, G. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (Revised and expanded 2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. discusses this relationship of time orientation to a culture as a "time horizon," and it underscores the perspective of the individual within a cultural context. Many countries in Asia, influenced by the teachings of Confucius, value a long-term orientation, whereas other countries, including the United States, have a more short-term approach to life and results. Native American cultures are known for holding a long-term orientation, as illustrated by the proverb attributed to the Iroquois that decisions require contemplation of their impact seven generations removed.

If you work within a culture that has a short-term orientation, you may need to place greater emphasis on reciprocation of greetings, gifts, and rewards. For example, if you send a thank-you note the morning after being treated to a business dinner, your host will appreciate your promptness. While there may be a respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity.

Long-term orientation is often marked by persistence, thrift and frugality, and an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame for the family and community is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

Masculine versus Feminine Orientation

There was a time when many cultures and religions valued a female figurehead, and with the rise of Western cultures we have observed a shift toward a masculine ideal. Each carries with it a set of cultural expectations and norms for gender behavior and gender roles across life, including business.

Hofstede describes the masculine-feminine dichotomy not in terms of whether men or women hold the power in a given culture, but rather the extent to which that culture values certain traits that may be considered masculine or feminine. Thus, "the assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine.' The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so

that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values." Hofstede, G. (2009). Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions. *Itim International*. Retrieved from <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>

We can observe this difference in where people gather, how they interact, and how they dress. We can see it during business negotiations, where it may make an important difference in the success of the organizations involved. Cultural expectations precede the interaction, so someone who doesn't match those expectations may experience tension. Business in the United States has a masculine orientation—assertiveness and competition are highly valued. In other cultures, such as Sweden, business values are more attuned to modesty (lack of self-promotion) and taking care of society's weaker members. This range of difference is one aspect of intercultural communication that requires significant attention when the business communicator enters a new environment.

Direct versus Indirect

In the United States, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. "What can I do for you?" is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state his or her business. In some cultures it is quite appropriate to make direct personal observation, such as "You've changed your hairstyle," while for others it may be observed, but never spoken of in polite company. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised. Again, the skilled business communicator researches the new environment before entering it, as a social faux pas, or error, can have a significant impact.

Materialism versus Relationships

Does the car someone drives say something about them? You may consider that many people across the planet do not own a vehicle and that a car or truck is a statement of wealth. But beyond that, do the make and model reflect their personality? If you are from a materialistic culture, you may be inclined to say yes. If you are from a culture that values relationships rather than material objects, you may say no or focus on how the vehicle serves the family. From rocks that display beauty and wealth—what we call jewelry—to what you eat—will it be lobster ravioli or prime rib?—we express our values and cultural differences with our purchase decisions.

Members of a materialistic culture place emphasis on external goods and services as a representation of self, power, and social rank. If you consider the plate of food before you, and consider the labor required to harvest the grain, butcher the animal, and cook the meal, you are focusing more on the relationships involved with its production than the foods themselves. Caviar may be a luxury, and it may communicate your ability to acquire and offer a delicacy, but it also represents an effort. Cultures differ in how they view material objects and their relationship to them, and some value people and relationships more than the objects themselves. The United States and Japan are often noted as materialistic cultures, while many Scandinavian nations feature cultures that place more emphasis on relationships.

Low-Power versus High-Power Distance

How comfortable are you with critiquing your boss's decisions? If you are from a low-

power distance culture, your answer might be “no problem.” In low-power distance cultures, according to Hofstede, Hofstede, G. (2009). Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions. *Itim International*. Retrieved from <http://www.geert-hofstede.com> people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant or subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles as employee and manager, for example.

In a high-power distance culture, you would probably be much less likely to challenge the decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with people from a high-power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. Unless you are sensitive to cultural orientation and power distance, you may lose valuable information.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Cultures have distinct orientations when it comes to rules, uncertainty, time and time horizon, masculinity, directness, materialism, and power distance.

EXERCISES

1. Take a business letter or a page of a business report from a U.S. organization and try rewriting it as someone from a highly indirect, relational culture might have written it. Share and discuss your result with your classmates.
2. Conduct an online search for translated movie titles. Share and compare your results with your classmates.
3. Consider the movie you noted in the first of the [Note 18.1 "Introductory Exercises"](#) for this chapter. In what ways does it exemplify this individualistic viewpoint? Share your observations with your classmates.
4. Think of a movie where one or more characters exemplify individualism. Write a brief statement and share with classmates.
5. Think of a movie where one or more characters exemplify community-oriented values. Write a brief statement and share with classmates.

18.5 International Communication and the Global Marketplace

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe international communication and the global marketplace, including political, legal, economic, and ethical systems.

People create systems that reflect cultural values. These systems reduce uncertainty for the culture, creating and perpetuating the rules and customs, but may prove a significant challenge to the entrepreneur entering a new market. Political, legal, economic, and ethical systems vary from culture to culture, and may or may not reflect formal boundaries. For example, disputes over who controls what part of their shoreline are common and are still a matter of debate, interpretation, and negotiation in many

countries.

To a large extent, a country's culture is composed of formal systems. Formal systems often direct, guide, constrain, or promote some behaviors over others. A legal system, like taxation, may favor the first-time homebuyer in the United States, and as a consequence, home ownership may be pursued instead of other investment strategies. That same legal system, via tariffs, may levy import taxes on specific goods and services, and reduce their demand as the cost increases. Each of these systems reinforces or discourages actions based on cultural norms, creating regulations that reflect ways that each culture, through its constituents, views the world.

In this section, we'll examine intercultural communication from the standpoint of international communication. International communication can be defined as communication between nations, but we recognize that nations do not exist independent of people. International communication is typically government to government or, more accurately, governmental representatives to governmental representatives. It often involves topics and issues that relate to the nations as entities, broad issues of trade, and conflict resolution. People use political, legal, and economic systems to guide and regulate behavior, and diverse cultural viewpoints necessarily give rise to many variations. Ethical systems also guide behavior, but often in less formal, institutional ways. Together these areas form much of the basis of international communication, and warrant closer examination.

Political Systems

You may be familiar with democracy, or rule by the people; and theocracy, or rule of God by his or her designates; but the world presents a diverse range of how people are governed. It is also important to note, as we examine political systems, that they are created, maintained, and changed by people. Just as people change over time, so do all systems that humans create. A political climate that was once closed to market forces, including direct and indirect investment, may change over time.

Centuries ago, China built a physical wall to keep out invaders. In the twentieth century, it erected another kind of wall: a political wall that separated the country from the Western world and limited entrepreneurship due to its adherence to its interpretation of communism. In 2009, that closed market is now open for business. To what extent it is open may be a point of debate, but simple observation provides ample evidence of a country, and a culture, open to investment and trade. The opening and closing ceremonies for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing symbolized this openness, with symbolic representations of culture combined with notable emphasis on welcoming the world. As the nature of global trade and change transforms business, so it also transforms political systems.

Political systems are often framed in terms of how people are governed, and the extent to which they may participate. **Democracy** is one form of government that promotes the involvement of the individual, but even here we can observe stark differences. In the United States, people are encouraged to vote, but it is not mandatory, and voter turnout is often so low that voting minorities have great influence on the larger political systems. In Chile, voting is mandatory, so that all individuals are expected to participate, with adverse consequences if they do not. This doesn't mean there are not still voting minorities or groups with disproportionate levels of influence and power, but it does underscore cultural values and their many representations.

Centralized rule of the people also comes in many forms. In a dictatorship, the dictator establishes and enforces the rules with few checks and balances, if any. In a totalitarian system, one party makes the rules. The Communist states of the twentieth century (although egalitarian in theory) were ruled in practice by a small central committee. In a theocracy, one religion makes the rules based on their primary documents or interpretation of them, and religious leaders hold positions of political power. In each case, political power is centralized to a small group over the many.

A third type of political system is **anarchy**, in which there is no government. A few places in the world, notably Somalia, may be said to exist in a state of anarchy. But even in a state of anarchy, the lack of a central government means that local warlords, elders, and others exercise a certain amount of political, military, and economic power. The lack of an established governing system itself creates the need for informal power structures that regulate behavior and conduct, set and promote ideals, and engage in commerce and trade, even if that engagement involves nonstandard strategies such as the appropriation of ships via piracy. In the absence of appointed or elected leaders, emergent leaders will rise as people attempt to meet their basic needs.

Legal Systems

Legal systems also vary across the planet and come in many forms. Some legal systems promote the rule of law while others promote the rule of culture, including customs, traditions, and religions. The two most common systems are civil and common law. Civil law draws from a Roman history and common law from an English tradition. In **civil law** the rules are spelled out in detail, and judges are responsible for applying the law to the given case. In **common law**, the judge interprets the law and considers the concept of precedent, or previous decisions. Common law naturally adapts to changes in technology and modern contexts as precedents accumulate, while civil law requires new rules to be written out to reflect the new context even as the context transforms and changes. Civil law is more predictable and is practiced in the majority of countries, while common law involves more interpretation that can produce conflict with multiple views on the application of the law in question. The third type of law draws its rules from a theological base rooted in religion. This system presents unique challenges to the outsider, and warrants thorough research.

Economic Systems

Economic systems vary in similar ways across cultures, and again reflect the norms and customs of people. Economies are often described on the relationship between people and their government. An economy with a high degree of government intervention may prove challenging for both internal and external businesses. An economy with relatively little government oversight may be said to reflect more of the market(s) and to be less restricted. Along these same lines, government may perceive its role as a representative of the common good, to protect individual consumers, and to prevent fraud and exploitation.

This continuum or range, from high to low degrees of government involvement, reflects the concept of government itself. A government may be designed to give everyone access to the market, with little supervision, in the hope that people will regulate transactions based on their own needs, wants, and desires; in essence, their own self-interest. If everyone operates in one's self-interest and word gets out that one business produces a product that fails to work as advertised, it is often believed that the market will naturally

gravitate away from this faulty product to a competing product that works properly. Individual consumers, however, may have a hard time knowing which product to have faith in and may look to government to provide that measure of safety.

Government certification of food, for example, attempts to reduce disease. Meat from unknown sources would lack the seal of certification, alerting the consumer to evaluate the product closely or choose another product. In terms of supervision, we can see an example of this when Japan restricts the sale of U.S. beef for fear of mad cow disease. The concern may be warranted from the consumer's viewpoint, or it may be protectionist from a business standpoint, protecting the local producer over the importer.

From meat to financial products, we can see both the dangers and positive attributes of intervention and can also acknowledge that its application may be less than consistent. Some cultures that value the community may naturally look to their government for leadership in economic areas, while those that represent an individualistic tendency may take a more "hands off" approach.

Ethical Systems

Ethical systems, unlike political, legal, and economic systems, are generally not formally institutionalized. This does not imply, however, that they are less influential in interactions, trade, and commerce. Ethics refers to a set of norms and principles that relate to individual and group behavior, including businesses and organizations. They may be explicit, in the form of an organization's code of conduct; may be represented in religion, as in the Ten Commandments; or may reflect cultural values in law. What is legal and what is ethical are at times quite distinct.

For example, the question of executive bonuses was hotly debated when several U.S. financial services companies accepted taxpayer money under the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) in 2008. It was legal for TARP recipient firms to pay bonuses—indeed, some lawyers argued that failing to pay promised bonuses would violate contract law—but many taxpayers believed it was unethical.

Some cultures have systems of respect and honor that require tribute and compensation for service, while others may view payment as a form of bribe. It may be legal in one country to make a donation or support a public official in order to gain influence over a decision, but it may be unethical. In some countries, it may be both illegal and unethical. Given the complexity of human values and their expression across behaviors, it is wise to research the legal and ethical norms of the place or community where you want to do business.

Global Village

International trade has advantages and disadvantages, again based on your viewpoint and cultural reference. If you come from a traditional culture, with strong gender norms and codes of conduct, you may not appreciate the importation of some Western television programs that promote what you consider to be content that contradicts your cultural values. You may also take the viewpoint from a basic perspective and assert that basic goods and services that can only be obtained through trade pose a security risk. If you cannot obtain the product or service, it may put you, your business, or your community at risk.

Furthermore, “just in time” delivery methods may produce shortages when the systems break down due to weather, transportation delays, or conflict. People come to know each other through interactions (and transactions are fundamental to global trade), but cultural viewpoints may come into conflict. Some cultures may want a traditional framework to continue and will promote their traditional cultural values and norms at the expense of innovation and trade. Other cultures may come to embrace diverse cultures and trade, only to find that they have welcomed some who wish to do harm. In a modern world, transactions have a cultural dynamic that cannot be ignored.

Intercultural communication and business have been related since the first exchange of value. People, even from the same community, had to arrive at a common understanding of value. Symbols, gestures, and even language reflect these values. Attention to this central concept will enable the skilled business communicator to look beyond his or her own viewpoint.

It was once the privilege of the wealthy to travel, and the merchant or explorer knew firsthand what many could only read about. Now we can take virtual tours of locations we may never travel to, and as the cost of travel decreases, we can increasingly see the world for ourselves. As global trade has developed, and time to market has decreased, the world has effectively grown smaller. While the size has not changed, our ability to navigate has been dramatically decreased. Time and distance are no longer the obstacles they once were. The Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan, a pioneer in the field of communication, predicted what we now know as the “global village.” The **global village** is characterized by information and transportation technologies that reduce the time and space required to interact. McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

KEY TAKEAWAY

People create political, legal, economic, and ethical systems to guide them in transacting business domestically and internationally.

EXERCISES

1. Choose one country you would like to visit and explore its political system. How is it different from the system in your country? What are the similarities? Share your findings with classmates.
2. Think of an ethical aspect of the economic crisis of 2008 that involved you or your family. For example, did you or a relative get laid off at work, have difficulty making mortgage or rent payments, change your spending habits, or make donations to help those less fortunate? Is there more than one interpretation of the ethics of the situation? Write a short essay about it and discuss it with your classmates.
3. Choose one country you would like to visit and explore its economic system, including type of currency and its current value in relation to the U.S. dollar. Share and compare your results with classmates.

18.6 Styles of Management

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Understand and discuss how various styles of management, including Theory X, Y, and Z, influence workplace culture.

People and their relationships to dominant and subordinate roles are a reflection of culture and cultural viewpoint. They are communicated through experience and create expectations for how and when managers interact with employees. The three most commonly discussed management theories are often called X, Y, and Z. In this section we'll briefly discuss them and their relationship to intercultural communication.

Theory X

In an influential book titled *The Human Side of Enterprise*, M. I. T. management professor Douglas McGregor (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. described two contrasting perceptions on how and why people work, formulating Theory X and Theory Y; they are both based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harper & Row. Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row. According to this model, people are concerned first with physical needs (e.g., food, shelter) and second with safety. At the third level, people seek love, acceptance, and intimacy. Self-esteem, achievement, and respect are the fourth level. Finally, the fifth level embodies self-actualization.

McGregor's **Theory X** asserts that workers are motivated by their basic (low-level) needs and have a general disposition against labor. In this viewpoint, workers are considered lazy and predicted to avoid work if they can, giving rise to the perceived need for constant, direct supervision. A Theory X manager may be described as authoritarian or autocratic, and does not seek input or feedback from employees. The view further holds that workers are motivated by personal interest, avoid discomfort, and seek pleasure. The Theory X manager uses control and incentive programs to provide punishment and rewards. Responsibility is the domain of the manager, and the view is that employees will avoid it if at all possible to the extent that blame is always deflected or attributed to something other than personal responsibility. Lack of training, inferior machines, or failure to provide the necessary tools are all reasons to stop working, and it is up to the manager to fix these issues.

Theory Y

In contrast to Theory X, **Theory Y** views employees as ambitious, self-directed, and capable of self-motivation. Employees have a choice, and they prefer to do a good job as a representation of self-actualization. The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain are part of being human, but work is also a reward in itself and employees take pride in their efforts. Employees want to reach their fullest potential and define themselves by their profession. A job well done is reward in and of itself, and the employee may be a valuable source of feedback. Collaboration is viewed as normal, and the worker may need little supervision.

Theory Z

Theory X and Y may seem like two extremes across the range of management styles, but in fact they are often combined in actual work settings. William Ouchi's **Theory Z** combines elements of both, and draws from American and Japanese management style. It

promotes worker participation and emphasizes job rotation, skills development, and loyalty to the company. Luthans, F. (1989). *Organisational behaviour*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. Workers are seen as having a high need for reinforcement, and belonging is emphasized. Theory Z workers are trusted to do their jobs with excellence and management is trusted to support them, looking out for their well-being. Massie, J., & Douglas, J. (1992). *Managing: A contemporary introduction*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Each of these theories of management features a viewpoint with assumptions about people and why they do what they do. While each has been the subject of debate, and variations on each have been introduced across organizational communication and business, they serve as a foundation for understanding management in an intercultural context.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Management Theories X, Y, and Z are examples of distinct and divergent views on worker motivation, need for supervision, and the possibility of collaboration.

EXERCISES

1. Imagine that you are a manager in charge of approximately a dozen workers. Would you prefer to rely primarily on Theory X, Y, or Z as your management style? Why? Write a short essay defending your preference, giving some concrete examples of management decisions you would make. Discuss your essay with your classmates.
2. Describe your best boss and write a short analysis on what type of management style you perceive they used. Share and compare with classmates.
3. Describe your worst boss and write a short analysis on what type of management style you perceive they used. Share and compare with classmates.

18.7 The International Assignment

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how to prepare for an international assignment.
2. Discuss the acculturation process as an expatriate.
3. Describe effective strategies for living and working abroad.

Suppose you have the opportunity to work or study in a foreign country. You may find the prospect of an international assignment intriguing, challenging, or even frightening; indeed, most professionals employed abroad will tell you they pass through all three stages at some point during the assignment. They may also share their sense of adjustment, even embrace of their host culture, and the challenges of reintegration into their native country.

An international assignment, whether as a student or a career professional, requires work and preparation, and should be given the time and consideration of any major life change. When you lose a loved one, it takes time to come to terms with the loss. When

someone you love is diagnosed with a serious illness, the news may take some time to sink in. When a new baby enters your family, a period of adjustment is predictable and prolonged. All these major life changes can stress an individual beyond their capacity to adjust. Similarly, in order to be a successful “expat,” or expatriate, one needs to prepare mentally and physically for the change.

International business assignments are a reflection of increased global trade, and as trade decreases, they may become an expensive luxury. As technology allows for instant face-to-face communication, and group collaboration on documents via cloud computing and storage, the need for physical travel may be reduced. But regardless of whether your assignment involves relocation abroad, supervision of managers in another country at a distance, or supervision by a foreign manager, you will need to learn more about the language, culture, and customs that are not your own. You will need to compare and contrast, and seek experiences that lend insight, in order to communicate more effectively.

An efficient, effective manager in any country is desirable, but one with international experience even more so. You will represent your company and they will represent you, including a considerable financial investment, either by your employer (in the case of a professional assignment) or by whoever is financing your education (in the case of studying abroad). That investment should not be taken lightly. As many as 40 percent of foreign-assigned employees terminate their assignments early, Tu, H., & Sullivan, S. (1994). *Business horizons*. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1038/is_nl_v37/ai_14922926 at a considerable cost to their employers. Of those that remain, almost 50 percent are less than effective. Tu, H., & Sullivan, S. (1994). *Business horizons*. Retrieved from FindArticles.com: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1038/is_nl_v37/ai_14922926

Preparation

With this perspective in mind, let’s discuss how to prepare for the international assignment and strategies to make you a more effective professional as a stranger in a strange land. First we’ll dispel a couple of myths associated with an idealized or romantic view of living abroad. Next we’ll examine traits and skills of the successful expatriate. Finally, we’ll examine culture shock and the acculturation process.

Your experience with other cultures may have come firsthand, but for most, a foreign location like Paris is an idea formed from exposure to images via the mass media. Paris may be known for its art, as a place for lovers, or as a great place to buy bread. But if you have only ever known about a place through the lens of a camera, you have only seen the portraits designed and portrayed by others. You will lack the multidimensional view of one who lives and works in Paris, and even if you are aware of its history, its economic development, or its recent changes, these are all academic observations until the moment of experience.

That is not to say that research does not form a solid foundation in preparation for an international assignment, but it does reinforce the distinction between a media-fabricated ideal and real life. Awareness of this difference is an important step as you prepare yourself for life in a foreign culture.

If the decision is yours to make, take your time. If others are involved, and family is a consideration, you should take even more care with this important decision. Residence

abroad requires some knowledge of the language, an ability to adapt, and an interest in learning about different cultures. If family members are not a part of the decision, or lack the language skills or interest, the assignment may prove overwhelming and lead to failure. Sixty-four percent of expatriate respondents who terminated their assignment early indicated that family concerns were the primary reason. Contreras, C. D. (2009). Should you accept the international assignment? *BNET*. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5350/is_200308/ai_n21334696

Points to consider include the following:

- How flexible are you?
- Do you need everything spelled out or can you go with the flow?
- Can you adapt to new ways of doing business?
- Are you interested in the host culture and willing to dedicate the time and put forth the effort to learn more about it?
- What has been your experience to date working with people from distinct cultures?
- What are your language skills at present, and are you interested in learning a new language?
- Is your family supportive of the assignment?
- How will it affect your children's education? Your spouse's career? Your career?
- Will this assignment benefit your family?
- How long are you willing to commit to the assignment?
- What resources are available to help you prepare, move, and adjust?
- Can you stand being out of the loop, even if you are in daily written and oral communication with the home office?
- What is your relationship with your employer, and can it withstand the anticipated stress and tension that will result as not everything goes according to plan?
- Is the cultural framework of your assignment similar to—or unlike—your own, and how ready are you to adapt to differences in such areas as time horizon, masculinity versus femininity, or direct versus indirect styles of communication?

This list of questions could continue, and feel free to add your own as you explore the idea of an international assignment. An international assignment is not like a domestic move or reassignment. Within the same country, even if there are significantly different local customs in place, similar rules, laws, and ways of doing business are present. In a foreign country, you will lose those familiar traditions and institutions and have to learn many new ways of accomplishing your given tasks. What once took a five-minute phone call may now take a dozen meetings and a month to achieve, and that may cause you some frustration. It may also cause your employer frustration as you try to communicate how things are done locally, and why results are not immediate, as they lack even your limited understanding of your current context. Your relationship with your employer will experience stress, and your ability to communicate your situation will require tact and finesse.

Successful expatriates are adaptable, open to learning new languages, cultures, and skilled at finding common ground for communication. Rather than responding with frustration, they learn the new customs and find the advantage to get the job done. They form relationships and are not afraid to ask for help when it is warranted or required. They feel secure in their place as explorer, and understand that mistakes are a given, even as they are unpredictable. Being a stranger is no easy task, but they welcome the challenge with energy and enthusiasm.

Acculturation Process

Acculturation, or the transition to living abroad, is often described as an emotional rollercoaster. Steven Rhinesmith (1984). *Returning home*. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Bureau for International Education. provides ten steps that show the process of acculturation, including culture shock, that you may experience:

1. Initial anxiety
2. Initial elation
3. Initial culture shock
4. Superficial adjustment
5. Depression-frustration
6. Acceptance of host culture
7. Return anxiety
8. Return elation
9. Reentry shock
10. Reintegration

Humans fear the unknown, and even if your tolerance for uncertainty is high, you may experience a degree of anxiety in anticipation of your arrival. At first the “honeymoon” period is observed, with a sense of elation at all the newfound wonders. You may adjust superficially at first, learning where to get familiar foods or new ways to meet your basic needs. As you live in the new culture, divergence will become a trend and you’ll notice many things that frustrate you. You won’t anticipate the need for two hours at a bank for a transaction that once took five minutes, or could be handled over the Internet, and find that businesses close during midday, preventing you from accomplishing your goals. At this stage, you will feel that living in this new culture is simply exhausting. Many expats advise that this is the time to tough it out—if you give in to the temptation to make a visit back home, you will only prolong your difficult adjustment.

Over time, if you persevere, you will come to accept and adjust to your host culture, and learn how to accomplish your goals with less frustration and ease. You may come to appreciate several cultural values or traits and come to embrace some aspects of your host culture. At some point, you will need to return to your first, or home, culture, but that transition will bring a sense of anxiety. People and places change, the familiar is no longer so familiar, and you too have changed. You may once again be elated at your return and the familiar, and experience a sense of comfort in home and family, but culture shock may again be part of your adjustment. You may look at your home culture in a new way and question things that are done in a particular way that you have always considered normal. You may hold onto some of the cultural traits you adopted while living abroad, and begin the process of reintegration.

You may also begin to feel that the “grass is greener” in your host country, and long to return. Expatriates are often noted for “going native,” or adopting the host culture’s way of life, but even the most confirmed expats still gather to hear the familiar sound of their first language, and find community in people like themselves who have blended cultural boundaries on a personal level.

Living and Working Abroad

In order to learn to swim you have to get in the water, and all the research and preparation cannot take the place of direct experience. Your awareness of culture shock

may help you adjust, and your preparation by learning some of the language will assist you, but know that living and working abroad take time and effort. Still, there are several guidelines that can serve you well as you start your new life in a strange land:

1. *Be open and creative.* People will eat foods that seem strange or do things in a new way, and your openness and creativity can play a positive role in your adjustment. Staying close to your living quarters or surrounding yourself with similar expats can limit your exposure to and understanding of the local cultures. While the familiar may be comfortable, and the new setting may be uncomfortable, you will learn much more about your host culture and yourself if you make the effort to be open to new experiences. Being open involves getting out of your comfort zone.
2. *Be self-reliant.* Things that were once easy or took little time may now be challenging or consume your whole day. Focus on your ability to resolve issues, learn new ways to get the job done, and be prepared to do new things.
3. *Keep a balanced perspective.* Your host culture isn't perfect. Humans aren't perfect, and neither was your home culture. Each location and cultural community has strengths you can learn from if you are open to them.
4. *Be patient.* Take your time, and know a silent period is normal. The textbook language classes only provide a base from which you will learn how people who live in the host country actually communicate. You didn't learn to walk in a day and won't learn to successfully navigate this culture overnight either.
5. *Be a student and a teacher.* You are learning as the new member of the community, but as a full member of your culture, you can share your experiences as well.
6. *Be an explorer.* Get out and go beyond your boundaries when you feel safe and secure. Traveling to surrounding villages, or across neighboring borders, can expand your perspective and help you learn.
7. *Protect yourself.* Always keep all your essential documents, money, and medicines close to you, or where you know they will be safe. Trying to source a medicine in a country where you are not fluent in the language, or where the names of remedies are different, can be a challenge. Your passport is essential to your safety and you need to keep it safe. You may also consider vaccination records, birth certificates, or business documents in the same way, keeping them safe and accessible. You may want to consider a "bug-out bag," with all the essentials you need, including food, water, keys, and small tools, as an essential part of planning in case of emergency.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Preparation is key to a successful international assignment. Living and working abroad takes time, effort, and patience.

EXERCISES

1. Research one organization in a business or industry that relates to your major and has an international presence. Find a job announcement or similar document that discusses the business and its international activities. Share and compare with classmates.
2. Conduct a search on expat networks including online forum. Briefly describe your findings and share with classmates.
3. What would be the hardest part of an overseas assignment for you and why? What would be the easiest part of an overseas assignment for you and why?
4. Find an advertisement for an international assignment. Note the qualifications,

and share with classmates.

5. Find an article or other first-person account of someone's experience on an international assignment. Share your results with your classmates.

18.8 Additional Resources

Visit the Web site of culture scholar Edward T. Hall.

<http://www.edwardthall.com/index.html>

Learn about intercultural awareness in the classroom by reading this article by Mark Pedelty (2001, Spring), "Self as other: An intercultural performance exercise," published in *Multicultural Education*.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3935/is_200104/ai_n8937001

Visit these sites to explore the history and traditions of some famous American businesses. <http://www.ford.com/about-ford/heritage>;

http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company/mcd_history.html

Learn more about Geert Hofstede's research on culture by exploring his Web site.

http://www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml

Read advice from the U.S. Department of State on living abroad

http://travel.state.gov/travel/living/living_1243.html

Visit ExpatExchange: A World of Friends Abroad to learn about the opportunities, experiences, and emotions of people living and working in foreign countries and cultures worldwide. <http://www.expateexchange.com/newsarchiveall.cfm>