МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ
Минский государственный лингвистический университет

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ДИСКУРС МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБЩЕНИЯ

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION. CROSS-CULTURAL DISCOURSE

Допущено
Министерством образования Республики Беларусь
в качестве учебного пособия для студентов
учреждений высшего образования по специальности
«Лингвистическое обеспечение межкультурной коммуникации
(с указанием языков)»

Минск
МГЛУ
2023

УДК 811.111’243:316.77(075.8)
ББК 81.432.1-923.137
М74

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М74 Дискурс межкультурного профессионального общения / Cultural context of professional communication. Cross-cultural discourse : учеб. пособие для студентов учреждений высшего образования по специальности «Лингвистическое обеспечение межкультурной коммуникации (с указанием языков)» / Н. П. Могиленских. – Минск : МГЛУ, 2023. – 120 с.

ISBN 978-985-28-0190-4

Учебное пособие предназначено для самостоятельной работы студентов по учебной дисциплине «Межкультурный дискурс». Состоит из семи тематических разделов, каждый из которых включает теоретический блок, текстовый материал, вопросы для обсуждения и дискуссии. Текстовый материал представлен трудами американских классиков в области межкультурной коммуникации, примерами коммуникативных неудач в межкультурном взаимодействии с подробными комментариями и пояснениями.

Адресовано студентам учреждений высшего образования по специальности «Лингвистическое обеспечение межкультурной коммуникации (с указанием языков)».

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ББК 81.432.1-923.137

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ISBN 978-985-28-0190-4

ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

Основная цель учебного пособия – ознакомление студентов с возможностью корректной адаптации к другой культуре для успешного функционирования в ней на протяжении определенного периода времени с учетом конкретных ситуаций общения. Особое внимание обращается на совершенствование (наряду с развитием умений и навыков использования адекватных коммуникативных стратегий, тактик и языковых средств) конкретных практических знаний о бытовании в чужой культуре так называемых экспатриотов (экспатов) – людей, заключивших контракт на работу за рубежом. Таким образом обеспечивается овладение студентами информацией постепенного приобретения необходимых поведенческих навыков во взаимодействии с представителями культуры-донора на рабочем месте.

В издании представлены основные теоретические положения по межкультурной коммуникации, касающиеся культурно-поведенческих различий. Достаточное внимание уделено закреплению теоретического материала.

Учебное пособие включает 7 разделов, каждый из которых имеет четкую структуру и состоит из частей, где последовательно размещены: а) теоретические основы изучения культуры с упражнениями на закрепление их усвоения; б) вопросы для дотекстового обсуждения; в) текст для чтения; г) темы дискуссии по прочитанной и усвоенной информации с позиций основных параметров измерения культуры.

Каждый раздел содержит необходимые дискуссионные задания для овладения полученной после прочтения теста информацией. Поскольку издание рассчитано на самостоятельную работу студентов, предложенные дискуссионные задания могут быть выполнены в виде презентаций и докладов. Текстовый материал интересен с познавательной точки зрения. Наряду с рекомендациями/руководствами по адаптации к другой культуре, он включает исторические факты и множественные примеры из жизни экспатов с их анализом с применением положений теории межкультурной коммуникации.

U N I T I

ABC of cross-culturing

ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES

How do you form your attitudes towards people from other cultures? Do you expect them to be very different from you? Do you think of them as all being the same? Are you aware of how you appear to them?

1. Read the statement below and show how much you agree or disagree. Give your comment on each of them.

- Observation of different cultures allows us to form patterns.
- I don't wish to be classified. I am an individual.
- Generalizations capture similarities and hide differences.
- Regarding people of the same culture as all being the same is harmful and dangerous.
- People from other cultures often act strangely.
- Ignoring the differences between cultures is dangerous.
- We can categorize certain groups of people according to how they behave.
- We must learn to recognize the existence of different but equally valid styles.
- Different is dangerous.
- The fish is the last one to recognize the water.
- Statistical facts about cultures help us classify them.
- Other people don't try to adapt enough.
- One man's meat is another man's poison.
- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

2. Select the statement which most appeals to you and justify with examples.

3. Decide which one you find least accurate.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

National cultures are formed and influenced by a wide range of factors.

The lists below contain some of these factors, grouped into three main categories: structural, social and physical.

Structural: geography, communications, climate, population density and spread, centralization and power, role of religion, political system, role of authority.

Social: balance between family and work, class distinctions, dress, punctuality, emotional displays, ideas of physical beauty, taboos, humor, politeness to the outsider, respect for age, gender.

Physical: physical contact, physical gestures, physical distance; speech: volume, speed, handshakes and greetings, body language.

4. Look through the lists and make any improvements you think necessary: add items which are missing and take away any which you consider to be unimportant.

5. Try to decide which of these factors are important in shaping:

- your own national or regional culture;
- another culture which you know well.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions.

1. Does country shock exist from your point of view?
2. What characteristics of country shock can you name on the spot?

1. COUNTRY SHOCK

1.1. Climate

The first adjustments you make to the new country are starting, unavoidably, with the climate. Whether you come from a dry climate and are set down in a humid one or from a cold climate and are set down in a warm one, you're going to notice the weather. We tend to think of climate or weather more as part of the scenery of an overseas experience, as a characteristic of the setting in which adjustment takes place, than as something else we have to adjust to. But climate can in fact influence heavily on the unsuspecting expat: on your body, your health, your lifestyle, your pocketbook, and (sooner or later) your mind.

If you're not used to it, the heat and humidity of the tropics can be debilitating, even demoralizing. For the first few weeks, even months, you may feel a marked loss of energy, a need for more sleep, and any number of symptoms commonly associated with dehydration, such as headaches and low-grade fevers. You may have to rely on round-the-clock air-conditioning, though you consider it unhealthy; you may have to scrap plans to walk or bicycle to work (thus leaving your spouse at home without a car); you may have to give up tennis or jogging on your lunch hour, then gain weight because you don't get enough exercise; or you may have to buy new clothes, an unexpected expense; or your skin may break out, causing you to become depressed about your appearance.

Nor is too cold much of an improvement on too hot. Older flats and homes in many countries don't come with central heating, for example, or they may have inadequate insulation. You can heat a room or two, perhaps (when the power is on), but you can't heat the entire house. You may bathe less frequently because it's too cold, and you may catch cold more easily.

Then, there's too wet – in the form of the *monsoon* that occurs each year throughout much of Asia and the Pacific: two to three months of relentless rain, flooded, impassable streets and roads, mold sprouting on your shoes and clothes and creeping down the walls. At least in the hot weather you can still go outside

and move about, but in the monsoon, you have no desire to do so (though you don't want to be inside either). Like excessive heat and cold, the monsoon not only makes you uncomfortable; it can make you unhappy.

Wherever you live overseas, the list of things "they don't have here" sometimes seems to have been designed with you personally in mind. Bad enough in itself, this list normally calls into being a second list – of the things you can't *do* here – and taken together these lists can make you very unhappy and frustrated. The lists are different in different places and for different expats; it may be a favorite food, a spice you can't cook without, replacement parts, a certain type of service, books in your native language, an appliance you can't live without, or a favorite sport or pastime. Learning to get by without these requires you to make scores of tiny adjustments every day, and while most people manage to cope well enough –finding substitutes or getting cherished items from loved ones back home – the annoyance and inconvenience of doing without take their toll. Any veteran expat will tell you that it's not just the big things that get to you overseas, like not speaking the language or understanding the locals, but also the countless petty irritations that slowly wear you down.

1.2. The Loss of Routines

In a way, doing without is part of another, more all-encompassing issue, which we might call the loss of routines. What are routines, and why is losing them such a problem? A routine is something you do while your mind is on something else, an action you have done so many times you no longer need to think about it in order to perform it. Most routines involve simple, uncomplicated behaviors that are easily mastered and that are always executed in a predictable, unchanging manner. For most people, brushing their teeth is a routine, or, more accurately, many aspects of brushing one's teeth are routine. You don't have to be consciously aware of picking up your toothbrush, of opening the tube of toothpaste, of squeezing the tube, of raising your brush to your mouth, etc. You may give parts

of this procedure fleeting attention, but you are probably giving conscious attention to something else for most of the time it takes to brush your teeth. And the same can be said for numerous other actions and parts of actions you perform day in and day out. Many routines, though not all, involve basic coping and survival behaviors, such as bathing, dressing, eating, going to the bathroom, driving. More complicated behaviors can also become routines over time; for some people, cooking certain meals can be a routine. And even some of the most complicated behaviors can have routine elements. Routines by their very nature use up very little of your mental and physical energy, which is therefore available for higher order, more complicated – or brand-new behaviors, which do require your mental and physical energy (at least until such time as they too are reduced, or reduced in part, to routines).

The lifeblood of routines is the known and the familiar. Needless to say, when you move to a new country, where nothing is known and familiar, your routines get mightily disrupted. Suddenly, nothing... *is* a routine. The loss of routines means the time and energy that were available for higher order, more sophisticated tasks now go to basic coping and survival functions. Many routines can be easily reestablished – the second time you brush your teeth overseas, the action is fast becoming automatic – but others can take longer to reconstruct.

The loss of routines hits you at your core. You expect to have to learn how to do new things overseas and even new ways of doing familiar things, but you may be surprised to discover that you have to learn to do things you normally do without thinking.

Here's an expat describing the excitement of reestablishing a common routine, driving, his first day in England: "My very first day in England I went into work just to get the company car. It was *a stick shift*. I drove a stick shift about fifteen years ago for about a month.... The manager who was leaving drove me to a petrol station, filled it up for to the office about a mile or two away and he proceeded to show me where all the little gizmos were on the car. He said, "Okay,

you are on your own." And there I was with the car and no map and two hundred miles to drive that day with a stick shift, sitting on the wrong side of the front seat. It was a little terrifying..."

The problem with routines is that until you've reestablished them, you can have a very low opinion of yourself. If something this simple can be so difficult, then what am I going to do about something that's *genuinely* difficult?

1.3. Unfamiliar Faces

Another reality of being in a new country is not knowing anyone. For the first few weeks after your arrival, you will be interacting day in and day out, hour by hour, with people you don't know or don't know very well. There's nothing bad about this, of course – part of the adventure of being an expatriate is meeting new people – but it takes much more energy and effort than interacting with people you already know and who know you. When you are with people like this, you can relax and be yourself. Because you know they know you, you don't have to be especially careful of what you do and say to make sure they form a positive impression. With new people, however, who don't yet have an impression of you, you tend to be very careful of what you say and do until you see how they respond. Being careful like this, paying close, conscious attention to everything you say and do, takes considerable emotional and physical effort. A few hours of interacting with relative strangers, whether from your own or the host country, will leave you as tired as a whole day of dealing with people you already know and loved ones, and there's also the matter of not having the support and encouragement such people offer us during difficult times. As you face the difficulties of those early months abroad, you need the kind of unconditional acceptance and support only close friends and family members can provide; you need people who will listen to your tirades about the country and the natives without judging, people with whom you can fall apart without being embarrassed or worrying about what they might think. Your spouse may be available for this purpose, of course, but he or she may be looking to you for the same support. Whenever possible, you should plan to fall apart on different days from your spouse.

1.4. Additional Issues in Developing Countries

Expatriates working in developing nations often face an extra set of "country" issues, those that their counterparts in more modern countries don't normally experience. The communications infrastructure, for example, is delicate in many developing countries, posing all manner of special problems in a world increasingly dependent on technology. The issue is not so much having the technology as it is having a reliable source of electricity. Electricity supply has always been a problem in the third-world, but it mattered less in a less-wired world. When the power goes out these days, as it does increasingly in many developing countries, the impact is much greater. Work stops, in a word, and out come the teacups. Another chronic complaint is poor telephone service. While the situation has improved somewhat in the era of cell phones and satellite communications, any expat from a modern country who lives and works in a developing country has to adjust to considerably less reliable and efficient telephone service. Imagine for a moment having to visit, or send someone else to visit, a quarter or even a third of the local destinations you telephone or mail on an average day from work or from home. (And while you're at it, imagine not being able to contact at all some of the more far-flung destinations.) Without good telephone service, the amount of business you can conduct in Lahore or Harare may be only half what you are used to – and the effort may be double. In the West the telephone is like a third hand; when suddenly it's amputated, you miss it.

The absence of reliable communications is at least part of the reason for the expatriate's favorite complaint about how long it takes to get things done in developing countries. It likewise goes a long way toward explaining that other old standby about the slower pace of life in Asia or Latin America or around the shores of the Mediterranean. People have more time for each other, we hear; they enjoy each other's company more. While personal relationships are certainly more important in many countries than in the West, the fact is that when you can't call, you have to go, and a visit is naturally more personal than a telephone call and

always takes longer. No one thinks it odd if you hang up after three minutes, but if you leave someone's home or office three minutes after arriving (when you spent half an hour just to get there) you would certainly be thought odd, or worse.

Transportation is another issue in many developing countries. If you can't call and the matter can't wait, then you have to go. Whether the problem is crumbling roads and bridges, old and unreliable equipment (stop lights, airplanes, repair and emergency vehicles), fuel shortages, or missing parts, a weak transportation infrastructure can make getting around the country expensive, extremely time-consuming, and, in many cases, downright dangerous.

Tiresome as the above frustrations can be, surely the most inconvenient and unnerving problem expatriates often face in developing countries is the near constant threat of getting sick. No other difficulty can be quite so unsettling or require more time and effort to circumvent. This is only natural: while you can learn to manage without a working telephone or central heating, you can't do anything if you're confined to bed. And the combination of the unhygienic conditions common in developing countries and the pristine vulnerability of the expatriate from the antiseptic, sterilized West virtually guarantees that, feverish and cramp-ridden, it is to bed you will retire more than once during those early months abroad. A related worry, of course, is the often substandard quality of local medical care.

The worst part about being sick abroad is not what it does to the body, but what it does to the mind. In most cases expatriates manage to cope with the physical discomfort, but they struggle with the emotional and psychological effects of getting sick overseas. Being immobilized by giardia or amoebiasis only heightens your already elevated sense of vulnerability and helplessness, your feeling of not being in control. You become depressed. Your resolve weakens. Doubt arises. If I hadn't come here, you can't help feeling, none of this would have happened.

Have we mentioned insects yet? An annoyance barely noticed in more developed countries, insects can be the bane of your existence in many parts of the world. Ants, mosquitoes, chiggers, cockroaches, flies, gnats, mites, leeches, spiders, bedbugs – they come in nature's own bounty. They get into your food, your bed, your shoes, and your clothes. They find their way into your hair, your ears, your nose, and your mouth. They can make your skin itch, burn, sting, swell, or break out. They can keep you awake at night, make you sweat, give you a fever and the runs, or make you throw up. They can make you very unhappy.

It may sound a bit extreme, but many expats will find Joyce Osland's account of her early days in Burkina Faso not particularly farfetched. She writes, "It was a small cement-block house with no ventilation, on top of a laterite hill... Since we were worried the baby might get malaria from the numerous mosquitoes, we quickly put up screens on the windows and doors, prompting our French neighbors to ask, with flawless logic, "How will the flies get out?" With some difficulty we even screened the vent pipes that let hot air escape from the false ceiling. Even so, the inside walls of the house were too hot to touch during the dry season. The town had electricity only from 6:00 to 10:00 P.M. and when the house went dark we discovered why no one else had ever screened the vent pipes.... The bats who lived in the false ceiling used the vent pipes as their nightly exit and came down into the house, looking for a way to get outside. They swooshed through our humble home.... Nothing in Doctor Spock had prepared me for flying rodents and I was terrified a bat would bite the baby if she rolled against her mosquito net. ...By the time our belongings arrived six months later, we had a batless house. We managed to liberate our crate of household effects from customs just before the customs building burned down. As I stood on our porch gazing fondly at the long awaited crate, I noticed a black tide moving toward the door...the crate was full of thousands of black ants, intent on taking over the house. I emitted a ladylike shriek and ran to put the baby in a safe place.... A passing African grabbed the hose and together we repulsed the invaders".

1.5. A New Community

Another set of adjustments expatriates must make is to their new community. The challenge here is not so much emotional or psychological – as it is in adjusting to the new country – but practical. The issue is ignorance, not knowing anything about the community, and the solution is quite straightforward: learn about it. The only problem is that there's *so much* to learn.

One of the first things you have to learn about the community is how to find your way around – how it is laid out and where things are in relation to other things. The first time you drive to work or to the children's school or to the shopping district, you'll be quite disoriented. Not recognizing anything, you can't tell exactly where you are. Do I turn left or right at that church? Is that the same church I went by yesterday? This is normal in a new city, but it means you'll spend a lot longer just getting from place to place. If you don't speak the local language, finding your way around town is even more daunting, for you will be reluctant to ask people and thereby trigger one of those excruciating exchanges wherein the local citizen is trying hard to be helpful and you don't understand a word he or she is saying.

If you live in a large city, you may have to figure out how the subway or bus system works. Which train do I want? How do I know if it stops at my stop? How many of these little tokens do I need? Do I get on at the front of the bus or in the middle? How do I pay? What are these coins worth in the local currency? How do I know where to get off? Why is everyone staring at me?

Once you know where things are and how to get there, you have to understand how they work. What are the hours of these places? What's the "system" in a pharmacy, bank, post office, cinema, petrol station, market? How do the public telephones work? Will there be an attendant in the public lavatory whom I need to tip? Do I sit down and wait for someone to come to my table (in a bakery) or do I order at the counter?

Driving and parking can be especially nerve-wracking the first few times you go out. What do the curb markings and sidewalk signs say? What do the lane markings mean? Is this a one-way street? Can I turn left here? What's the speed limit? Is this the day cars with my kind of license plate are allowed in the city center? Where are the parking lots and garages and how do I pay? Is that an entrance or an exit? Why is that guy honking at me?

The first two or three weeks overseas are full of these kinds of incidents, situations where you don't know quite what you're supposed to do but know you have to do something. You can laugh them off to a point – they're all quite petty in the grand scheme of things – but most people tire quite quickly of making fools of themselves. These incidents may make for good stories later, but they're no fun when they're happening. One saving grace is that these kinds of problems aren't difficult to solve; your second subway ride or visit to the bank goes more smoothly than the first. On the other hand, the sheer number of such incidents can quickly become overwhelming. If you weren't going through scores of other adjustments at the same time, these minor irritations might not matter so much, but you are, so minor annoyances sometimes feel like catastrophes.

1.6. A New Job

Finally, there is adjusting to your new job. Apart from the cultural differences, any new job poses challenges. The biggest may be getting used to the change from being at the top of your form one moment, during your final months in your previous position, to being all thumbs the next. When you change jobs, after all, you leave a familiar situation, where you were very good at what you were doing, to go to a wholly unfamiliar situation, where you will initially be inept and incompetent. It's disconcerting in the best of circumstances to come face to face with your inadequacies, but it's especially hard when you are in the habit of excelling.

A new job often means new responsibilities and new skills to master, which will take time and effort. There will also be numerous procedures, regulations, and office protocols to learn, and many of your work routines will have to be painstakingly reestablished. As a result, you will have to be satisfied, in the near future, with smaller achievements than you may be used to. While you will one day be able to triumph, your goal for the moment must be to cope.

A new job may also mean all new colleagues, an office or division full of people you've never worked with before. People will be taking your measure even as you take theirs. You will have to spend several weeks carefully observing your colleagues and trying to take your cues from them, monitoring everything you do and say so as to make a favorable impression. Maintaining this high degree of self-awareness takes considerable effort and an energy, neither of which the typical expat has in abundance.

1.7. Issues for Spouses

Several studies have found that the most common reason expat employees fail to function effectively on an overseas assignment is the inability of the spouse to adjust to the new environment. This is not because spouses aren't as good at adjusting as the working partner; it's because spouses, it turns out, have much more to adjust to. They face all the adjustments already mentioned (except to a new job) and a number of others unique to their situation.

Let's start with work. While some spouses find work overseas, the majority do not. For those who are used to working, and especially for those with well-established careers, being unable to work can wreak havoc on their personal and professional identity. Spouses who defined themselves by and took satisfaction in their work back home may now feel unsure of themselves and unfulfilled. They may very well fashion a new identity for themselves, but it can be a slow and difficult process.

Meanwhile, these spouses have to figure out how to fill up a day having little or no structure. As nice as it can be to have some time to oneself, eight hours a day is more than most people bargain for. “I was always trying to find things to do with my time,” one spouse remembers. “I spent time sewing, and I *hate* to sew”. In many countries the situation is made worse by the custom of having household help; spouses who might have been inclined to fill their day looking after the house, taking care of small children, and preparing meals don’t have even those outlets. “I felt useless,” another spouse recalls. “I was a fifth wheel”. Spouses sick of household chores, on the other hand, won’t find this feature of overseas life hard to get used to.

Loneliness typically strikes the at-home spouse harder than it does the employee, especially if the at-home spouse worked before going overseas. The employed spouse, after all, is surrounded all day by colleagues and co-workers, but if the at-home spouse wants to interact with people, he or she has to make it happen. “I was very lonely,” one spouse remembers, “and my husband was not going through the same problems I was. And I felt more lonely because I couldn’t share my problems with him”. The at-home spouse also gets a bigger dose of culture shock than the typical employee. In many cases the working spouse spends the day in an environment very reminiscent of the work environment back home. Co-workers may either be compatriots or locals who speak their home country language, and the activities and rhythm of the workday are often very familiar. Even when he or she ventures out of the workplace, it’s usually to go to another, very similar workplace to interact with people more like oneself. But the at-home spouse lives very much in the local culture, if not inside the home itself (and there too, if there are servants), then every time someone comes to the door (the repairman, the flower seller) and every time the spouse goes out. Not surprisingly, expat spouses typically learn the local language faster than working spouses. “I had the fort of the office,” one working spouse remembers. And very often I would work seven days a week, just because it was comfortable. I had my

desk and my stapler; and the people there... knew who I was and would take care of me... and it took a while to get out onto the street. It was a strain on the family because I left it all to them. I left the problems to them while I went to work.

The at-home spouse also has a ringside seat from which to watch the adjustment of the children. While working spouses are also involved in the children's adjustment, they're often not as close to the drama as the primary caregiver. This is especially true when the working spouse is on the road a great deal, which is often the case with expat assignments.

Finally, many expat spouses have to come to terms with what is often called the resentment issue. When all is said and done, expat families usually go overseas because of an opportunity that became available for either the husband or the wife, but only rarely for both. While it's almost always a mutual decision, made after carefully weighing all the pros and cons for all family members, one spouse is almost always less enthusiastic than the other and likewise has to give up more than the other. For reasons just explained, at-home spouses typically make the greater sacrifice and also face more – and more difficult – adjustments than do employees. It is not surprising, then, that spouses typically have more occasion to regret the decision to move abroad, which often leads to feelings of resentment toward their partners. And then – and this is the core of the resentment issue – they feel bad for blaming their partner for what was, after all, a joint decision. It's really nobody's fault, and yet... Not all spouses will have all of these issues, nor is the life of an expat spouse merely one problem after another. It can also be a very liberating, enriching, and otherwise satisfying experience. But spouses would be wise to be prepared for the good times *and* the bad.

1.8. Consequences

What does it mean to be faced with all these adjustments? If you could deal with them one at a time, they wouldn't pose such a problem, but they don't appear one at a time, each patiently waiting its turn; they tend, rather, to travel in packs,

ganging up on you at inopportune moments. Or if they weren't so numerous, they might also be manageable; it's not the nature of these adjustments that makes them so daunting, but the sheer number and variety.

One thing it means is that you're going to be tired and under the weather a lot during your early weeks abroad. Individually and collectively, these adjustments demand a great deal of mental exertion, which can leave you physically and emotionally drained. And that, in turn, leaves you an easy mark for all manner of low-grade infections, fevers, and colds. Cornelius Grove has explained that clinically speaking the reason why intercultural contact – especially a complete immersion experience – potentially results in this condition is that the sojourner is obliged to respond not merely to isolated instances of novelty in an otherwise familiar and reasonably predictable environment, but to novelties throughout many or most of the subtle and complex patterns of daily life... Usually the problem is not that a single stressor in the new environment is completely overwhelming, but rather that the body must respond to multiple stressors on a constant basis over a period of time lasting throughout the first several weeks or even months of the sojourn...

Stress becomes a problem when the neurological and endocrine systems are compelled to respond to environmental novelty constantly over a long period of time. When this happens, the neurological system, and especially the endocrine system, can become debilitated through overstimulation. Among the consequences is a sharp reduction in the production of white blood cells...which in turn leads to susceptibility to various diseases and/or exacerbation of chronic illness. Furthermore, the body becomes more and more exhausted as energy is used constantly...to keep the brain and sensory organs in a high state of alertness, and to keep the body ready for fight, flight, or adaptation. Physiologically speaking, culture shock is precisely this state of debilitation, exhaustion, and susceptibility to disease.

Some other consequences of adjusting to so much that is new and different are frustration, anger, irritability, and impatience. And from time to time you may also feel threatened, vulnerable, anxious, incompetent, and foolish. Your self-esteem and self-confidence, in short, take quite a beating. You don't have to take all this lying down (unless you're sick in bed); there are things you can do about culture shock. The first and most important is to know it's coming; part of the shock of country shock is not expecting it, which causes you to react more strongly when you encounter it. Knowing these experiences are coming doesn't mean you won't get sick or feel the heat, but awareness at least mutes the psychological/ emotional impact. You'll still throw up, but you'll be much calmer about it.

You should also remember that many of these experiences aren't new. This isn't the first time you've adjusted to new people, a new community, new job responsibilities. All this chaos may be taking place in a very exotic location, but if you strip these adjustments down to their essence, there's not much here you haven't tangled with before. The scale of what you face may be novel – you may never have had to adjust to so much all at once – but the nature of what you're doing should be familiar. You can console yourself, then, with the knowledge that you already have most of the skills and instincts you need to prevail. You might have to apply them more deliberately and consciously, but you don't have to make them up on the spot. Try to stay healthy and get plenty of rest. Try also to do those things you normally do to unwind and relax, those things that rejuvenate you and lift your spirits. Stay in touch with family and close friends back home. It's comforting to know that other people are concerned and care about you. Especially until you make good friends abroad, you need to stay connected to people who care about you back home. Go out; see people; do things. If you're like most people, you may not feel like being around other people when you're depressed or off your stride. You're bad company, you think, and shouldn't inflict your low spirits on others, so you don't accept invitations or invite people over. But this only feeds your depression, whereas being with and having to respond to others makes you

turn your attention away from your troubles for a bit. In the process, you're likely to discover that other people are having at least some of the same reactions to being overseas that you are.

Don't be too hard on yourself. We're not talking here about getting the hang of one or two new paradigms; it's a whole new world. And whole new worlds can take some getting used to. So you can be forgiven for feeling a tad overwhelmed, for wondering what you've gotten yourself into or whether you've done the right thing, and for being irritable and not much fun to be around. Expats sometimes worry that they must be going about this all wrong that other people in their situation know something they don't or aren't having the same misgivings. "If only I had...." Relax; the problem isn't you.

Meanwhile, try to keep the big picture in mind. What if it is annoying running around Jakarta because the phones are out again, or learning to live without central heating or fresh oregano? Isn't this what you came for – for something different, the occasional adventure, a dash of risk and hardship? Surely you don't pull up your roots and take yourself and your family halfway around the world in the hope that everything will be exactly as it is back home. Where's the sense of accomplishment if there are no obstacles to surmount? How can you learn and grow from your experiences if you don't have any?

You can adjust to the country, in other words, and to the community, and even to the job, and still not be able to get along with the locals. And if you can't get along with the locals, you will never be successful in an overseas assignment. It's important, then, not to confuse adjusting to the country with adjusting to the culture. You will begin to get used to, understand, and function effectively in more and more of the situations. In a matter of weeks, some things that were very trying will gradually become second nature, and some others that seemed impossible will look less daunting. You will begin to feel comfortable and competent in more situations: at home, on the job, out in the streets and shops. But you should not let this growing sense of well-being and self-confidence blind you to the true nature of

your achievements. Simply because you've found the bakery or figured out the bus routes doesn't mean you understand the culture. Getting used to curry isn't the same as getting used to the people who eat curry.

Indeed, during the first few weeks of an overseas assignment, it's not unusual for expats to be somewhat insulated from many of the realities of life in the new country. People at work understand that you're new and a little overwhelmed, and other expats remember their first few weeks all too well and protect you from the rougher edges of the culture until you've toughened up. Your organization may run interference for you, handling many of the logistical details of settling in that might otherwise defeat you. In these and other ways, you're shielded from all but occasional contact with the local culture and could, therefore, be forgiven for thinking you've adjusted when in actual fact real contact, hence true adjustment, has yet to begin.

By all means, go ahead and pat yourself on the back as you score small triumphs, but stay alert. Country shock, for all its challenges and frustrations, is in many ways just a sideshow; the main event – adjusting to the culture – is about to begin.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. Innumerate the challenges an expat meets in another country. What points of adjustment to another country are the most difficult from your point of view? Why?
3. The loss of routines hits an expat at his/her core. Why? Don't your think it's an exaggeration?
4. Comment on the additional issues in developing countries. What do you think which of them can be overcome easily?
5. What's wrong with a new community an expat comes across?

6. Any new job poses challenge. Why is it so difficult to start working in unfamiliar situations where you will be inept and incompetent?

7. Why is it considered that at-home spouses make greater sacrifices and face more, and more difficult, adjustments than expat-employees do?

8. Comment on the pieces of advice, given in the text “Consequences”. Are all of them equally useful? Can you add anything to this list?

9. Comment on the following phrase “Getting used to curry isn’t the same as getting used to the people who eat curry”. Use the facts from the text “Consequences”.

U N I T II

ABC of cross-culturing

THE LOCUS OF CONTROL

Cultures differ greatly in their view of a person's place in the external world, especially the degree to which human beings can control or manipulate forces outside themselves and thereby shape their own destiny. Here are the two sides of this dimension.

Internal – the locus of control is largely internal, within the individual. There are very few givens in life, few circumstances that have to be accepted as they are, that cannot be changed. There are no limits on what I can do or become, so long as I set my mind to it and make the necessary effort. Life is what I do.

External – the locus of control is largely external to the individual. Some aspects of life are predetermined, built into the nature of things. There are limits beyond which we cannot be changed and must be accepted. Life is in large part what happens to me.

1. In the following sets of statements, find the statement that does not belong, either because it is characteristic of internal control and all the rest are external control or vice versa. Explain why.

1. Stoicism is the rule.
2. The laws of the universe can be discovered.
3. Progress is inevitable.
4. Every problem has a solution.

1. Optimism is the rule.
2. Some things are a matter of luck or chance.
3. Where there's a will there's a way.
4. People believe strongly in technology.

1. Unhappiness is your own fault.
2. Progress is not automatic.
3. The working of the universe are ultimately unknowable.
4. Nature cannot be dominated.

1. You make your own luck.
2. Some problems do not have solutions.
3. Where there's a will there's a will.
4. Unhappiness is a natural part of life.

CONCEPT OF POWER – HIGH AND LOW POWER DISTANCE

It is manifest especially in workplace relations, particularly in the role and relationship of the manager and the subordinate.

High power distance – people in these cultures accept that inequalities in power and status are natural or existential. In the same way they accept that some people are smarter than others, people accept that some will have more power and influence than others. Those with power tend to emphasize it, to hold it close and not delegate or share it, and to distinguish themselves as much as possible from those who do not have power. They are, however, expected to accept the responsibilities that go with power, to look after those beneath them. Subordinates are not expected to take initiative and are closely supervised.

Low power distance – people in these cultures see inequalities in power and status as largely artificial; it is not natural, though it may be convenient, that some people have power over others. Those with power, therefore, tend to deemphasize it, to minimize the differences between themselves and subordinates, and to delegate and share power to the extent possible. Subordinates are rewarded for taking initiative and do not like close supervision.

2. Define the kind of power distance in the following statements. Give your explanations

1. People are less likely to question the boss.
2. Elitism is the norm.
3. Students question teachers.
4. Freedom of thought is encouraged.
5. Those in power have special privileges.
6. The chain of command is mainly for convenience.
7. There are greater wage differences between managers and subordinates.
8. Workers prefer precise instructions from superiors.
9. Interaction between boss and subordinates is more informal.
10. Subordinates and bosses are interdependent.
11. Bosses are independent; subordinates are dependent.
12. Freedom of thought could get you into trouble.
13. It's okay to question the boss.
14. Less social mobility is the norm.
15. The chain of command is sacred.
16. The pecking order is clearly established.
17. Management style is authoritarian and paternalistic.
18. Management style is consultative and democratic.
19. Interaction of boss and subordinate is free.

3. These dialogues contain an example of a cultural misunderstanding. The expat does not recognize power distinctions in the same way as people in the host country. Note the difference in interpretation that you detect.

Bosses have their reasons

E x p a t: What did the headmistress decide?

L o c a l: She said we should put our plan in motion now.

E x p a t: But it's not ready.

L o c a l: I know, but she must have her reasons.

E x p a t: I don’t think she’s thought it through.

L o c a l: May be not, but she’s the boss.

E x p a t: I’m going to talk to her. I think I can change her mind.

A surprise for the chief

E x p a t: I finally figured out how to solve our storage problems.

L o c a l: How?

E x p a t: We could clean out that shed by the parking lot. It’s full of rotting crates that aren’t good any more.

L o c a l: That’s a great idea. What did Mr. Plonc say?

E x p a t: The chief? I didn’t tell him yet. I want to surprise him.

The golden spoon

L o c a l: Where do you want to have lunch?

E x p a t: How about the Golden Spoon?

L o c a l: Fine.

E x p a t: I’m going to invite the provincial representative, since he’s visiting.

L o c a l: Mr. Kamini? He won’t eat with us. He’ll eat with the supervisors.

E x p a t: He might like to let his hair down with us commoners.

A lesson

L o c a l: Did you talk with your department head?

E x p a t: Mr. Biswas? I thought about it, but it’s hopeless.

L o c a l: I know. He was given that job as a favor.

E x p a t: I’m going to go straight to the dean.

L o c a l: Now there’s somebody who gets results.

E x p a t: Maybe this will teach Biswas a lesson.

L o c a l: How do you mean?

E x p a t: If you don’t do your job, people will go around you.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions.

1. What do know about culture shock (the stages, the ways it develops and the like)?
2. Can a person adjust to another culture without any culture shock?

2. CULTURE SHOCK

2.1. Cultural "Incidents"

How do we define an unsuccessful interaction? For our purposes here, we will consider a cross-cultural encounter to have gone wrong whenever one or more of the parties is confused, offended, frustrated, or otherwise put off by the behavior of any of the other parties. In workplace terms, a cross-cultural interaction has gone wrong when it has in any substantial way undermined the ability or the desire of one or more of the parties to continue to work together. If the expatriate manager of overseas operations clashes repeatedly with a local, host country service provider, that relationship will be weakened, and the service threatened. If the expat head of accounting doesn't get along with her team of local CPAs that division's performance is going to suffer. If a negotiator thinks the other side is lying, common ground may be hard to find. If an expat spouse feels she is harassed by men at the local bakery cafe, she may turn against the culture.

By itself, no single cross-cultural "incident," as we will call these unsuccessful encounters, is going to sabotage an overseas sojourn or compromise a business or workplace relationship. But over time and in the aggregate, such incidents can slowly – and in some cases, quite rapidly – undermine relations between expats and the local people to the extent that constructive, successful interaction is no longer possible. Expats may very well continue in their assignments beyond this point, but they are no longer benefiting themselves

or their organization; indeed, they may very well be causing serious harm to both. If expats, whether spouses or employees, are to have an effective and positive overseas experience, then cross-cultural incidents must be kept to a minimum.

Before we consider why these incidents occur and how to prevent them, let's look at some examples. We divide cross-cultural incidents into two types: *Type I* are those incidents where the behavior of someone from another culture confuses, frustrates, or otherwise puts expats off. *Type II* is those incidents where the expat's behavior confuses, frustrates, or otherwise puts off someone from another culture. In the first instance the expat is the "victim," if you will, of the annoying behavior, and in the second, the expat is the perpetrator. In both cases, incidentally, it is the expat who suffers the most.

This distinction is, in one sense, artificial, for in fact the same problem or phenomenon – one person offending another person – is occurring in each type of incident; the only thing that changes is the perspective. But this distinction is important. Expats need to realize that it's not just *their* reactions to the local culture (what we're calling a Type I incident) that can undermine a cross-cultural relationship, but also the reactions of local people to the expat's culture (a Type II incident). You could be in a cross-cultural partnership, for example, where you have no complaints about your partner (where there haven't been any Type I incidents). But your partner, although managing to keep you quite happy, may frequently be put off by your behavior and want to end the relationship. Culture is still getting in the way here, if only in one direction, and this partnership cannot be considered a success. By definition, relationships only work when both partners are comfortable. To be truly effective, cross-cultural partnerships must be relatively free of both Type I and Type II incidents.

Type I: Expats Reacting to the Behavior of People from the Local Culture. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's look at examples of the two types of incidents to see what actually happens when people from different cultures meet. We begin with examples of Type I.

You're a European software engineer managing a team of Indian programmers in charge of developing and testing an important new application. You have an imminent deadline and have just explained to your team how to fix a new bug that has been detected. When you ask the team if they have understood your explanation, they say yes and return to their cubicles. The next day, when you check in with them, they have made no progress whatsoever, and it turns out they did not understand your explanation. You've lost twenty-four hours you can't afford to waste and are not happy.

You are the female expatriate manager of the Cairo-based operations of the British company you work for. The head of accounting, an Egyptian man, isn't used to working under a woman. On several occasions in the last month, he has double-checked instructions from you with your male deputy, another British expat, before obeying them. This is a nuisance for your deputy, and it's upsetting to you.

"I was once called in to advise a multinational firm that has operations all over the world," Edward Hall writes. "One of the first questions they asked was, 'How do you get Germans to keep their doors open?' Closed doors gave my clients the feeling that there was a conspiratorial air about the place and that they were being left out."

Edward Hall *The Hidden Dimension*

You're a professor teaching at one of the overseas campuses of the university you work for. When you give your first exam, you notice that some students are copying from the papers of other students, and others are referring to or copying information from papers they have brought to class. You are very upset at these instances of cheating.

You're the American in charge of your company's operations in Singapore. You have an extremely well-qualified deputy to whom you have delegated all responsibility for a number of important tasks. But he seems reluctant to make even the most routine decisions, insisting on checking with you before acting on any matter of importance. This is very time-consuming and frustrating for you.

"One of the terms most frequently used by Americans to describe the Japanese modus operandi," Hall has observed, "is the word indirection. *An American banker who had just spent years in Japan and made the minimum possible accommodation told me that what he found most frustrating and difficult was their indirection. "An old-style Japanese," he complained, "can drive a man crazy faster than anything I know. They talk around and around and around a point and never do get to it"*

Edward Hall *The Hidden Dimension*

You're an expat spouse posted in France. You're walking down the street with a French friend one day when she meets a friend of hers, and they engage in conversation. You are surprised and hurt when the conversation ends and you have not been introduced to your friend's friend.

You have been negotiating with a Chinese service provider on behalf of your company. You and your counterpart have finally agreed on terms and signed a four-year contract. Three weeks later, after you have incurred considerable startup costs, your Chinese counterpart telephones to inform you his department has come under new management and the contract has to be renegotiated. You remind him there were safeguards in the original contract against such contingencies, but he says they cannot be enforced in his country.

You're an American expatriate working in Buenos Aires. You have a 10:00 A.M. appointment with the Argentinean manager of a local public relations firm, and it's now 10:30. The receptionist tells you the person you've come to see is meeting with someone else. You wait another half an hour, during which time another person (who has the next appointment?) arrives. You become increasingly frustrated until, at 11:00 A.M., the manager emerges from his office to greet you. To your amazement, he neither acknowledges nor apologizes for making you wait an hour. You find this behavior extremely rude and are furious with him.

You're an Argentinean expatriate working in the United States. You're meeting with the American sales director of one your company's local subsidiaries.

Suddenly, at 10:30 A.M., she announces that you and she will have to continue this meeting later, "maybe this afternoon or tomorrow morning," because she has another appointment at this time. You're very surprised and upset not to be able to finish your business and to have to go to the trouble of coming back again later.

Not surprisingly, Type I incidents are the stock in trade of the best travel writers, so we conclude our list with a few examples from travel literature.

Nothing is more charming than southern courtesy, but sometimes they really are too sympathetic by half. For in order not to contradict you or give you a moment's pain by disputing the accuracy of your ideas, they will tell you what you want to hear rather than what would be of real use to you to hear. At the same time their own self-esteem will not permit them to confess a blank ignorance; they will rather tell you something incorrect than tell you nothing at all.

Aldous Huxley *Along the Road*

"I am not the type, monsieur, who feels himself superior to the rest of humanity. Indeed, I am no better than others. But these people, these Afghans. They are not human." "But why do you say that?" "You don't see why, monsieur? Have you eyes? Look at those men over there. Are they not eating with their hands? With their hands! It is frightful."

Robert Byron *The Road to Oxiana*

These are a few of the ways people from other cultures can frustrate and put you off. In isolation, as noted earlier, these incidents have a limited impact, but when you live overseas, they don't occur in isolation. You are, after all, surrounded by foreigners (though you are the real foreigner), with whom any interaction has the potential of becoming a Type I incident (and, as we'll see shortly, a Type II incident as well). When your whole day is punctuated by these incidents, followed by another such day, and then another, the strain of crossing cultures begins to take its toll. In a moment, we'll show you how by conjuring up a typical morning in the life of an expat, but first some examples of Type II incidents.

2.2. Type II: Local People Reacting to Expats

A cross-cultural encounter, by definition, is a two-way process. Even as you're being thrown by the annoying, unaccountable behaviors of the other person, chances are that person is also being put off by you. Let's look now at examples of Type II incidents.

You're an expat managing a team of software developers in the Philippines. At a recent meeting, you've given the team feedback on their work, beginning with a few remarks on how pleased you are in general with the quality and speed of their effort. You then spend a few more minutes mentioning two minor areas where things could be minimally improved. You learn later that in the Philippines what you have done constitutes damning with faint praise and is exactly how many Filipino managers would let a team know they were quite unhappy with its work. These managers, however, would never deliver this kind of feedback in a general meeting, thereby embarrassing the team leaders in front of their subordinates.

You're the New Delhi-based regional manager of your company's operations in the Middle East and South Asia. On a trip back to headquarters in Europe, you have a short stopover in Amman where you have scheduled a one-hour meeting with your Jordanian colleague who is in charge of marketing and public relations in the Middle East. Hussein wants to catch up on personal and family matters, but you feel pressured to resolve a couple of issues that have come up in the last several months, so you cut off the "small talk." You learn later that he was upset that you had only allowed an hour for this meeting and assumed this meant that you were angry with him about something. Moreover, when you then cut off the obligatory chitchat that always precedes business in the Middle East, he decided you must be on the verge of canceling the contract with his company. In fact, he may now cancel the contract first, in a pre-emptive move to save face.

You're a newly arrived American expat couple living in London. On Friday the working spouse learned that one of his English colleagues lives in the same neighborhood as you, so he wrote down the English family's street name and house number. On Sunday afternoon, while you're out for a walk, you happen by the house and decide to drop in. You learn later that among middle- and upper-class English people it's considered extremely rude to drop by someone's house unannounced.

You're a visiting British professor in a South American university. You think the role of the teacher is to help students learn how to learn, to help them develop problem-solving skills. You teach through case studies and other problem-posing methods and ask lots of questions. To your surprise, you learn that the students in your class are upset and have complained to the department chair that you're not teaching them anything, not passing on your knowledge and wisdom.

You're the expat manager of your Dutch company's affiliate operations in Mexico City. At a weekly meeting of division heads (where each is accompanied by two or three support staff), you correct some inaccurate sales figures quoted by the director of Sales and Marketing. You learn later that to correct her like this in front of her subordinates makes her look very bad and makes you look unkind and insensitive.

An article in Crossing Cultures, a *publication of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recalled how a major international blunder was successfully avoided when Nancy Reagan revised an earlier decision to bring along her White House china on a state visit to the People's Republic of China in 1984. The Chinese were offended by the implication that China, of all countries, might be deficient in this regard. On the same trip, President Reagan himself fell afoul of the*

local culture when he offended a shopkeeper by asking him to "keep the change" after paying for a small souvenir, an insult in a country where tips are reserved for lowly servants.

An expat couple has been invited to an Indian family's home for dinner. They arrive with a bottle of scotch for the host and flowers for his wife. At one point, the wife joins the hostess in the kitchen to ask if there's anything she can do to help. The meal is served in the traditional style, without utensils, and the left-handed expat husband eats with that hand. During the meal the wife, who has chosen mango juice for her beverage, offers a sip to her husband when he asks for a taste. How has the evening gone? From the Indian point of view, not very well. Some Indians are not allowed alcohol (Muslims and Sikhs, for example); the flowers, on the other hand, would be appreciated in most homes (but notfrangi-pani blossoms, which are only used for funerals). The couple should ask at the door whether it's okay to wear shoes in the house, and even if it is, they should never wear them in the kitchen. But then, guests should always stay in the guest room and not wander around the house. If it's a Brahmin (high-caste) family, the kitchen is sacred and becomes polluted the moment any non-Brahmin enters (and a priest may subsequently have to be called in to perform a purification ceremony). By asking to help (whether she enters the kitchen or not), the spouse may have insulted the family by suggesting they don't have any servants. On the other hand, if there are no servants, it's appropriate to ask. Even the most nontraditional of Indians would be shocked to see someone eating with the left hand, which is used for cleaning oneself after defecating. Finally, drinking from another person's glass or eating from their plate is considered jutho, *unclean, and is never done.*

As in the case of Type I incidents, travel writing is a treasure trove of these kinds of faux pas, and we offer a few examples.

My first shock came when I was requested, politely but firmly, by the guest-master to remove a pair of underpants then fluttering happily from the line. This, he pointed out, was a monastery; shirts, socks, handkerchiefs, even vests, might be dried with propriety within its walls. But underpants were a shameful abomination and could on no account be permitted. Meekly, I obeyed; but worse was to come. I woke the following morning at dawn. ...and made quietly for the wash-house. Its principal furnishing was a huge stone trough; and into this I now clambered, covering myself from head to foot in a deep and luxurious lather. At this point the guest-master appeared. Never have I seen anyone so angry. For the second time in twelve hours I had desecrated his monastery. Having already offended God and the Mother of God with the spectacle of my underpants, I was now compounding the sacrilege by standing stark naked under the very roof of the Grand Xavra. I was the whore of Babylon, I was Sodom and Gomorrah, I was a minion of Satan sent to corrupt the Holy Mountain. I was to put on my scabrous clothes at once and return with all speed to the foul pit whence I had come.

John Julius Norwich *Mount Athos*

I was travelling with a few of the nobles by train. Seeing "Beef" on the menu, I ordered it. The waiter said beef was off, so I had something else. Later, back in Dewas, the Maharajah said to me, with great gentleness, "Morgan, I want to speak to you on a very serious subject indeed. When you were travelling with my people you asked to eat something, the name of which I cannot even mention. If the waiter had brought it, they would all have had to leave the table. So they spoke to him behind your back and told him to tell you that it was not there. They did this because they knew you did not intend anything wrong, and because they love you."

E. M. Forster *The Hill of Devi*

2.3. A Typical Morning in Cairo

Now let’s imagine a typical morning in the life of an expatriate, illustrating the cumulative impact of Type I and Type II incidents on a typical expat. Imagine you're Claire, the female, Cairo-based manager of your company’s Middle East region, and your morning goes something like this. You enjoy a quiet breakfast in the sanctity of your home and then begin the drive to work. The streets are thronged with pedestrians, choked with donkey carts, and full of aggressive Egyptian drivers who take regular and prolonged solace in their car horns. You are alternately immobilized by all the confusion and driven to fits of frightening recklessness. You’ve been told repeatedly that everyone in your position uses a driver, but you’re determined to learn how to drive in Cairo; after all, you’re going to be living here for three years and you don’t want to always be dependent on someone else to get around.

You arrive at the office entrance, where you are smartly saluted by Mustapha, daytime watchman and trusted factotum, who opens your door and then proceeds to “park” your car. Mustapha doesn’t really drive so much as he coaxes your car into its narrow parking space at the side of the building. As you walk toward the entrance, you try not to listen for the sound of metal meeting up with stone. Your car has been scraped in this manner twice in the month you’ve been in Cairo, and Mustapha has denied responsibility both times, blaming the car.

You’re served strong Egyptian coffee as soon as you settle at your desk (you've asked twice for a weaker brew) and begin your morning as usual by going over your schedule with your assistant, Yasmina. As this meeting ends, you ask Yasmina if the data you requested yesterday afternoon on El Ghalawi Ltd. has been prepared. She says yes but doesn’t offer to bring it. You remind her you're meeting with Khaleed El Ghalawi at 9:30 A.M. and would like to review the information before then. You make a few phone calls, and before you know it, it's 9:30 and Yasmina is announcing Mr. El Ghalawi. When she shows him in, you ask again about the data, but she seems not to hear your question.

Your company is looking for a new shipper to handle its import and export needs, and you are close to reaching an agreement with El Ghalawi Ltd. The discussions and negotiations have gone well up to now, but at the end of your meeting this morning, Khaleed suddenly raises a new issue: he wonders whether you might find it in your heart to create "a small place" on your payroll for two of his cousins. You ask about their background and then explain that you don't have any suitable openings. Khaleed seems embarrassed and immediately drops the matter.

At 10:30 you walk two blocks to keep an appointment at the Ministry of Foreign Trade. You sit down to wait for the man you've come to see, assured by his secretary that he is due any minute, but after forty-five minutes and several more assurances, you decide to leave (and learn later that the man was out of town for the day and, further, knew he was going to be away at the time you originally pressed him for this meeting). On your way back to the office, you stop to buy the *International Herald Tribune,* which the vendor had assured you last night he would have. He doesn't ("God's will," he shrugs). You decide to relax with a coffee in the nearby bakery/cafe. As you try to enjoy a moment of peace and quiet, you're approached and harassed by two insistent male customers, and you decide to retreat to the relative safety of your office. As you leave the cafe, you glance at your watch: 11:45. The whole afternoon awaits you.

Some mornings will be better than others, of course, but most expats get quite an education during the early days of an overseas posting. The problem with cultural incidents is the reactions they provoke in us (Type I) and in the local people (Type II) and, even more importantly, what those reactions *lead to.* Those consequences are the subject of the next chapter, but before we discuss them we need to review our friend's morning and note the emotions it provokes in her and in the people she encounters. Driving to work in the chaos of rush-hour Cairo, for example, can be frightening and stressful; most people would want to avoid it. But in order to avoid it, you would have to give up your dream of not being

dependent on a driver every time you wanted to go somewhere in Egypt. So there's no good choice, and you arrive at the office conflicted and angry at the crazy Egyptians.

Chances are the morning parking ritual with Mustapha will do little to improve your mood. Is it too much to ask that the guy who parks your car should know how to drive? If this happens to be one of the days Mustapha scratches your car and, against all your best instincts, you decide to confront him, his complete denial of any wrongdoing, with the facts (a crumpled fender) staring him in the face, is bound to be deeply frustrating.

The incident with Yasmina is likewise not encouraging. You asked her yesterday to prepare the data on the shipping company, she indicated she would, and she hasn't done it. You ask again, reminding her of the urgency, and you still don't receive it in time. You can't help wondering how you're going to be able to work with her when she doesn't do what she says she will. This is both annoying and worrisome.

The meeting with Khaleed El Ghalawi is also disturbing. You can't bring yourself to hire people you don't need (you'd probably have to hide the fact from headquarters), and you resent what has every appearance of being asked for a bribe. If this is how business is done in this country, you doubt whether you can be effective here.

Then there's the abortive meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the incident with the newspaper vendor, two more examples of the fact that apparently you can't take people at their word in this country. As someone who has always considered trust fundamental to any successful relationship, you wonder how you're going to manage without it. Finally, there's the harassment at the bakery. It's going to be a long three years if you can't go out by yourself in public.

In a rather short time, our hypothetical expatriate has gone through an impressive inventory of negative emotions: fear, stress, anger, confusion, frustration, annoyance, worry, resentment, doubt, and mistrust. And these

incidents, don't forget, are only part of what's happening to our expat every day; she also has to deal with all the problems described in Unit 1. It should be no surprise that as these incidents pile up, triggering reactions like those above, the typical expat begins to develop a negative attitude toward the local people. When that happens, when expats start to turn against the local culture, their chances of succeeding abroad are seriously, perhaps even fatally, undermined.

2.4. The Morning Revisited

And that's only *half the* picture. Even as you are reacting left and right to the locals (Type I incidents), they are simultaneously reacting to you (Type II). While you might be tempted to say that's their problem, it's not that simple. It is their problem in the sense that they're the ones getting annoyed, angry, and frustrated, but it's also your problem if the local people start to turn against you. While they may be the ones feeling offended, you're the one who's going to suffer the consequences. In the end you can't afford to be in Type II incidents any more than you can afford to be in Type I. If you're wondering just which of the morning's encounters were Type II incidents, take another look at how these events unfolded – this time from the point of view of Mustapha, Yasmina, and the others. Mustapha's not blind; he sees how you cringe every time you turn your car over to him. He dreads these moments even more than you do, though unlike you, he at least tries not to show it. While he does indeed have a driver's license, acquired fifteen years ago after completing a rigorous six-week training and passing his driver's test, as a poor Egyptian and father of six, he can't afford a car and has no friends who can. Thus, he has had almost no opportunity to drive all these years, except for the few agonizing minutes every morning when he has to park your car. On those two dreadful occasions when he has dented the fender, he expects to be fired. What he doesn't expect is for you to humiliate him in front of the small group that has gathered by asking him if he's responsible. Of course he's responsible; just fire him and get on with it.

Yasmina isn't quite sure what to make of you. She's trying very hard to like you – you're going to be her boss for the next three years, if she can last that long – but things aren't off to a very good start. Late yesterday afternoon, you asked her to pull together some data on a shipping company. She was very polite, but she assumed you weren't serious; surely you know it takes longer than an hour or two to gather that kind of information. She probably should have told you, but she didn't want to be disrespectful and imply that you didn't know what you were talking about. This morning, much to her surprise and embarrassment, you ask her again for the information. She doesn't want to be rude, so she says yes to be polite but clearly signals the data isn't ready by not immediately producing it. If you can't read these signs, what can she do? The last straw is when you ask for the data a third time, embarrassing her in front of Mr. El Ghalawi. Yasmina sits back down at her desk, shaking her head and wondering how you can be so dense.

Mr. Khaleed El Ghalawi is also beginning to wonder about you. Everything seemed fine until this morning when he made the standard request to find a place for a couple of his cousins on your payroll. He's a little surprised, in fact, that he had to bring this matter up; after all, you're the one who's supposed to make the offer, so he doesn't have to look pushy. As a successful businessman, he's obliged to always be looking out for the welfare of the less well-off members of his extended family, and all you have to do is stick these two guys in menial, low-paying jobs where they can't do any harm. He's quite taken aback, incidentally, when you ask about their qualifications; their qualifications are that they're El Ghalawis, and you've just concluded a very favorable business deal with the El Ghalawi family and need to show your gratitude.

On to the Ministry of Trade. What was the man supposed to do, after all, when you insisted on meeting with him on a day he had to be out of town? Did you really expect him to say no? He did say no, of course, when he told you he would have his secretary check his schedule and call you back. When she didn't, that was your answer. When you then called him back, what could he say? He knew you

would call the day before to reconfirm, so at least you wouldn't waste your time. When he learned later that you actually came to his office and were surprised and upset that he wasn't there, he just shook his head.

The news vendor doesn't understand you either. You ask him a question about the future, which everybody knows is entirely in God's hands, and then you get upset with *him* when there's no newspaper. As for the men in the bakery/cafe; what are they supposed to think when a woman comes in by herself, makes eye contact, and even smiles? Only one kind of woman ever does that.

Our friend's morning, which she herself knows hasn't gone terribly well, has in fact gone much worse than she realizes. Even as she is beginning to develop negative feelings toward certain local people, they are beginning to develop similar feelings toward her. A process has now been triggered which, if allowed to continue, will greatly complicate and ultimately undermine her overseas experience.

2.5. Building a Model of Cross-Cultural Interaction

If we were to build a model of the entire process of crossing cultures, we now have the first two steps: ***a cultural incident occurs – we react (with anger, worry, etc.)***.

The companion model, illustrating the process of cross-cultural interaction from the perspective of the local people (Type II incidents), would be quite similar: ***a cultural incident occurs – a local person reacts (with anger, worry, etc.)***.

In closing, let's restore a bit of balance to the picture of cross-cultural encounters presented in this Unit. After spending this many pages in the company of people who aren't having much fun together, the reader might have concluded that *all* cross-cultural interactions are doomed to failure, that they inevitably deteriorate into an "incident," whether of Type I or Type II. But this is not the case. While people from different cultures do indeed have different values, beliefs, and behaviors – the ultimate source of all cultural incidents – they will also share

various universal values and beliefs, what is commonly called human nature. In other words while people from different cultures are different in *many* respects, they are not different in *all* respects. When they interact, therefore, if their encounter stays within the range of universal behavior (human nature), then no cultural difference will arise and there will be no cultural misunderstanding (though there may still be personal misunderstanding). All intercultural interactions, by their very nature, have the *potential* to turn into cultural incidents, but not all do. If we haven't paid much attention to successful intercultural encounters, it's only because they don't cause problems and don't need fixing. And while they can to some extent mitigate the negative feelings caused by unsuccessful encounters, they cannot prevent them.

The reader should also remember that cultural differences are not the only reason cross-cultural encounters sometimes go wrong. People from different cultures can fail to get along with each other for any number of reasons, of which culture is just one. If you clash with your Egyptian watchman one morning, the reason could be cultural or it could be that one or both of you had a bad night. This is important, for if you attribute every unpleasant encounter you have with a foreigner to a cultural difference, you will not only exaggerate the degree of difference between yours and the local culture, you will also fail to see the real explanation for what went wrong and thus be able to pursue appropriate solutions.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. Give a definition of unsuccessful cross-cultural interactions, described in the chapter.
3. What types of cross-cultural incidents are dealt with in the text "Cultural Incidents"?
4. Find a definition of Type I incidents.
5. Find a definition of Type II incidents.

6. Comment on the examples of Type I incidents in terms of cross-cultural theory.

7. Comment on the examples of Type II incidents in terms of cross-cultural theory.

8. Retell the text “A Typical Morning in Cairo”, commenting on the difficulties an expat faces there.

9. Give another look at the same problems, using material from the text “The Morning Revisited”.

10. Explain the model of cross-cultural interaction, given in the text “Building a Model of Cross-Cultural Interaction”.

U N I T III

ABC of cross-culturing

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

Degrees of directness

Direct – people say what they mean and mean what they say: you don't need to read between the lines; it's important to tell it like it is; honesty is the best policy; the truth is more important than sparing someone's feelings.

Indirect – people are indirect, they imply/suggest what they mean; understatement is valued; you need to read between the lines; the truth, if it hurts, should be tempered.

1. Each of the dialogues presented here contains an example of a misunderstanding due to differences in communication styles – indirect in one culture, direct in the other. Define the directness of the speakers after making cross-cultural analysis of the dialogues.

Quick trip

E x p a t: How did the visit to the co-op go?

L o c a l: Quite well, I think they're interested in using my expertise.

E x p a t: Did they show you around?

L o c a l: Yes. I saw the whole co-op.

E x p a t: The whole thing! That must have taken hours!

L o c a l: Actually, we were in and out in less than 30 minutes. They said another guy was coming at noon.

Committee meeting

1st E x p a t: How did it go with the committee members?

2nd E x p a t: A lot easier than I was expecting.

1st E x p a t: Really? Did you ask about buying the new equipment?

2nd E x p a t: Yes. I explained we had to have it and told them how much it would cost.

1st E x p a t: And?

2nd E x p a t: There was no discussion. They said fine and asked me to move on to the next item.

We'll get back to you

L o c a l: How did it go at the clinic?

E x p a t: Very well, I think, for the first meeting.

L o c a l: When will you see the director again?

E x p a t: In the end. I didn't meet with the director. I met with his assistant.

L o c a l: Did she ask you a lot of questions about the proposal?

E x p a t: A few.

L o c a l: When are you going back?

E x p a t: Probably next week.

L o c a l: You're not sure?

E x p a t: I asked for another appointment and she said she would get back to me.

Explanations

E x p a t: Miss Chang. What can I do for you?

L o c a l: Excuse me. I need some help with this new machine.

E x p a t: Of course. Let me explain it again.

L o c a l: I asked Li, but she couldn't help me.

E x p a t: No, she hasn't tried it yet.

L o c a l: It's a little bit complicated.

E x p a t: It's very complicated, but after I explained it to you and asked if you understood, you said yes.

L o c a l: Yes. Please excuse me.

Transfer

1st E x p a t: I asked the director for a transfer yesterday.

2nd E x p a t: What did she say?

1st E x p a t: Not much. She asked me how I was getting along with, Radu these days?

2nd E x p a t: What did you say?

1st E x p a t: I told her nothing had changed, that I wanted out because of him.

2nd E x p a t: Then what?

1st E x p a t: She said she understood my problem, that she knows Radu isn't easy.

2nd E x p a t: Do you think she'll transfer you?

1st E x p a t: Oh, I'm sure. She said she'd had a lot of complaints about Radu over the years.

ATTITUDE TOWARD UNCERTAINTY AND THE UNKNOWN – HIGH AND LOW UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

High uncertainty avoidance – culture characterized by high uncertainty avoidance feel especially anxious about the uncertainty in life and try to limit and control as much as possible. They have more laws, regulations, policies, and procedures and a greater emphasis on obeying them. They also have a strong tendency toward conformity, hence predictability. People take comfort in structure, systems, and expertise – anything that can blunt at or even neutralize the impact of the unexpected. The unknown is frightening.

Low uncertainty avoidance – people in these cultures do not feel quite so threatened nor anxious about uncertainty, and therefore do not have such a strong need to limit or control it. They seek to legislate fewer areas of human interaction and tolerate differences better. They feel boxed in by too much structure or too many systems. They are curious rather than frightened by the unknown and are not uncomfortable leaving things to chance. Life is interesting but especially daunting.

2. Define the kind of uncertainty avoidance in the following statements

1. Punctuality is highly valued.
2. People should keep emotions under control.
3. Different is dangerous.
4. People change jobs with more frequency.
5. People expect more formality in interactions.
6. People more readily accept dissent.
7. Take things one day at a time.
8. People should let their emotions out.
9. The chain of command should never be bypassed.
10. Conflict in organization is natural, nothing to be afraid of.
11. People believe less in common sense.
12. Conflict in organization should be eliminated.
13. Differences are curious.
14. People change jobs infrequently.
15. A general sense of anxiety prevails.
16. A general sense of well-being prevails.
17. People accept authority more readily; authority is comforting.
18. People accept authority less readily; authority is limiting.
19. Rules should be broken.
20. Rules can be broken if it makes sense, for pragmatic reasons.
21. Risks should be avoided.
22. Risks are opportunities.

3. In the following dialogues, see if you can recognize the evidence of high or low uncertainty avoidance. Give your explanations.

About Manual

E x p a t: How did your meeting go with Manuel?

L o c a l: Not very well. He's still seething about being passed over for that promotion.

E x p a t: Has he talked to the chief?

L o c a l: The chief knows.

E x p a t: But Manuel should get it off his chest if it's bothering him.

In over his head

E x p a t: I think the consultant from the Ministry of Environment is in over his head.

L o c a l: The expert from the capital?

E x p a t: Yeah, him.

L o c a l: But he has a Ph.D. and studied in France.

E x p a t: He still has no idea about how you change behavior in rural communities. His grazing proposal will never work here.

L o c a l: I heard some grumbling, actually. Maybe you're right. What do you think he should do?

E x p a t: It's simple, really. He should just admit he's wrong and start over again.

Regulations

E x p a t: We're getting nowhere with the textbook project.

L o c a l: I know. The teachers are getting frustrated.

E x p a t: It's all because of that regulation against using money from other budgets, even if they have a surplus.

L o c a l: We're stuck with it, I'm afraid.

E x p a t: We could just ignore it and say we didn't know any better.

Backlog

L o c a l: Did you hear? We won't be getting a new staff person after all.

E x p a t: I know. So much for getting rid of our backlog.

L o c a l: Well, we can resubmit the request next summer.

E x p a t: Actually, I've got a better idea. I've heard about some new accounting softwear that would make our workload a lot easier.

L o c a l: Has it been tried in organizations like ours?

E x p a t: In America. I don't know about here. We could probably get it free if we asked.

L o c a l: And then train everyone in it?

E x p a t: Right.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions

1. Can a person living in another culture be out of this culture?
2. Is it easy to resist another culture influence?

3. THE FALLOUT

Intercultural encounters are at the heart of the overseas experience; you can't very well live and work abroad without coming into contact with the local people. When these encounters go wrong, however, and turn into the cultural incidents we have been describing, they become a serious threat to expatriate effectiveness. Unless this threat is met and eliminated, an expat cannot expect to have a successful overseas assignment. We will examine why these cultural incidents are so dangerous.

3.1. Turning Against the Local Culture

The most immediate and arguably the greatest danger in cultural incidents is that they cause expats to turn against the local people – and vice versa. As we saw in Unit 2, Type I incidents usually provoke negative reactions in the sojourner (even as Type II incidents provoke similar reactions toward the sojourner from the local people). Expats are put off by the behavior of the locals: it doesn't make any sense; it's counterproductive and inefficient; it's irritating, offensive, and troubling. In a word, it's wrong.

Because of their behaviors, you begin to make negative judgments about the local people: they're lazy and have no ambition; they have no sense of time, don't care about deadlines, and aren't serious about their work; they're dishonest and can't be trusted; they have no work ethic, in fact no ethics of any kind; they just don't understand. If you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself. It's no wonder things don't work in this country.

Once you begin to develop attitudes like these, triggered by cultural incidents, they start to color all your subsequent interactions with the local people. You tend to see only those things which reinforce these attitudes and to overlook behaviors that might give you a more balanced view. You start to expect less and less of the local people and to look for ways to work around them. You begin devising elaborate (often costly) stratagems to get things done without involving them, or even deciding not to try certain things because you believe they won't succeed in these circumstances.

Or, alternatively, you may try to get the local people to change some of their ways. While this *can* work, it has to be done with great care and only after you understand why the locals behave the way they do. But most expats who try to change the way "things are done around here" start long before they have even a rudimentary understanding of the culture; they start, in fact, as soon as they begin encountering behaviors they want to change. Any time you try to fix something before you understand how it works, you will only succeed by accident, which is precisely why so many expat schemes for adding value or improving efficiency in overseas operations ultimately fail. When they do fail – largely because of your behavior, by the way, not the locals' – this only confirms the already low opinion you have of the culture.

Once you develop negative attitudes toward the local people, you will naturally want to limit your contact with them. After all, the emotions caused by cultural incidents -anger, fear, worry, frustration, to name just a few – are decidedly unpleasant; if you're like most people, you probably don't enjoy being

in these emotional states and instinctively try to avoid them as much as possible. Beyond that, you will likely try to avoid the circumstances that produce these emotions to begin with. This means avoiding or, where that's not possible, minimizing contact with people from the local culture, and for the local people, it means avoiding or minimizing contact with you.

Avoidance seems like it would be a tidy solution to the problem of cultural incidents: if there is no contact, after all, there can be no incident. If there's no incident, there can be no more negativity. The only difficulty, of course, is that even if it were possible to live abroad and not encounter the locals (which it's not), this wouldn't make you very effective. Another difficulty is that avoiding the locals, as we'll see below, does not in fact reduce negativity; in many cases, it actually increases it. In the end, the only real solution to the problem of cultural incidents is to keep them from happening in the first place.

3.2. The Foreign Community

Before we look at the dangers of avoidance, we should give it its due. While it may not propel us along the path to cultural effectiveness, it does make sense in certain situations, especially at the beginning of an overseas sojourn. Let's begin by explaining what is meant by avoidance, or, more precisely, what actually happens when expats withdraw from the local people. Quite simply, if you avoid or minimize contact with the locals, it means you either spend your time alone or, more likely, with people from your own country. If the root problem is the "foreignness" of the locals, then surely the antidote is to spend time with people who are not foreign. With people like yourself, after all, there will be no cultural incidents. Effectively, this means spending your time in what is usually referred to as the "expat subculture" (also known variously as the expat community, the foreign community, the foreign colony), a parallel culture, wherein they have achieved the rather dubious distinction of living abroad without ever leaving home. No matter how avoidance begins, this is almost always where it ends.

Perhaps the most famous and most extreme examples of such communities were the British expat compounds in India during the period of the Raj. Rather than live in India, the British colonials chose to bring their world to the subcontinent, constructing uncannily accurate copies of Wiltshire and Devon villages, complete with parade grounds, bandstands (with bands), stone churches, picket fences, gravel walkways, and even golf courses where feasible. There the colonials would cling tenaciously to a lifestyle more passionately British, if the truth be told, that many of them had ever lived back home.

Geoffrey Moorhouse has described the life of expat spouses inside what he calls India Brittanica:

"Discouraged in the first place from making real contact with India and lacking the will to pick up more than a smattering of language adequate for speaking to the servants, the spouses became progressively more isolated... [in an] expatriate sub-community of their own. They were renowned for their attempts to reproduce English gardens... in tropical or semi-desert conditions that turned all vegetation either to dust or jungle within a few months... They waited eagerly for the arrival of catalogues from the big London stores, which reached India towards the end of summer... so that if you moved fast you might expect to order Christmas presents and receive them just in time.

Their daily routine went something like this; up at 5 A.M. with horse-riding till 7 A.M.; breakfast on the verandah, followed by a cold bath before dressing to receive visitors at 10 A.M.; anything up to four hours of social chat with the visitors; lunch at 2 P.M. followed by a siesta, which might amount to lying in bed with a book till it was time to ride again and enjoy more social chat or a stroll near the bandstand... after nightfall a supper party, with songs round the table.

Over a hundred years later, official American expats live in a very similar world in the heart of downtown New Delhi. The particulars may be different, but "America land," as it's sometimes called, derives from the same set of needs and the same mentality, as we can see in this 1986 *Washington Post* profile of life in the foreign service community there. Officially referred to as the U.S. Embassy

compound, America land is nearly self-sufficient, spread over three adjacent complexes and thirty-eight acres. It includes the embassy itself, the ambassador's residence, a school, a four-bed hospital, offices, apartments, a restaurant, a movie theater, a swimming pool, an athletic field, a bowling alley and a barbershop. The commissary sells Kraft mayonnaise, Purina Puppy Chow and Cheerios.

"Every time I leave the compound," says Al Fried Bauer, a communications officer...

"I feel like I'm going into a country I've never been to."

For wives the American Women's Association organizes group expeditions into the old city of Delhi to buy jewelry and go sightseeing. "A lot of women don't feel comfortable going out, even shopping, alone," says Diane Hughey, the coordinator of the embassy's Community Liaison Office.

America land seems to fulfill a certain need. It is a study in how people grapple with culture shock.... Judy Hansen, wife of a World Bank economist, remembers bursting into tears when she couldn't find an open drugstore to buy medicine for strange, itching welts that had appeared on her legs. It was June, 110 degrees. "I came back to the house," she recalls, "and said: I just want to go home. I can't take it anymore."

If you are at all inclined to withdraw from the local culture, as anyone in the throes of country and culture shock surely is, these communities provide the perfect haven. Indeed, even for expats who are not inclined to withdraw, the lure of the expat world is almost irresistible. In their most completely developed form, these communities are the answer to every burned-out, culture-bashing expat's periodic prayer: living abroad without leaving home. A Safe Harbor While expat subcultures are a decidedly mixed blessing, at the right moments and in the right dose they serve legitimate, important needs. Every expat, no matter how earnest and sincere about crossing cultures, needs to get away now and then from the craziness of Bangkok or New York. After another day of cultural "experiences" – eight or nine hours of offending and being offended by people, not understanding and not being understood by people, causing scenes, and otherwise making a fool

of yourself, and all the while trying very hard to be a sensitive, nonjudgmental, open-minded, and genuinely decent human being – who doesn't need to unwind in a setting where everyone speaks your language, comes from your culture, and thinks you're normal. This isn't avoiding the local culture; it's just resting up from it. The expat colony can also be a welcome refuge for nonworking spouses who, unlike working expats, have no ready-made structure to slip into overseas or an office full of people waiting to interact with them. They have no structure except what they can cobble together themselves, and no one waiting for them. Moreover, spouses typically spend much more time in the local culture than do employees, getting a much bigger dose of country and culture shock. Isolated, lonely, and bored, spouses find an oasis of calm and much-needed companionship and support in the local expat subculture.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to read a newspaper from home, swap stories or compare notes with compatriots, or play a home-country sport that's not played in your overseas post. Expat subcultures can also be a great boon at holiday time, when traditions from home can be celebrated and maintained, and during important rites of passage, when expats feel a special need to connect to their own culture somehow. They also meet a number of important needs of the teenage children of expat families.

If avoidance always leads to spending more time in the expat subculture, that is not altogether a bad thing. At certain times, under certain circumstances, the foreign subculture offers expats a lifeline that keeps them from sinking beneath the weight of all the foreignness around them.

3.3. A Mixed Blessing

But there is also a dark side to the typical expat subculture, a side sojourners are well advised to pay attention to. As mentioned above, life in the foreign colony is very tempting, even somewhat restorative, especially during those first few months of country and culture shock. But if the expat is not careful, what starts out innocenty enough as an occasional retreat to "the Club" becomes a habitual

pattern of behavior that may be impossible to break. You begin to find yourself spending increasingly more time in the company of other expats, no longer out of any particular need but simply out of habit. Where once the expat community was a much needed safe harbor, it quickly becomes a place to hide out from the local culture. And once underway, the process of withdrawal tends to accelerate, almost as if it were feeding on itself. The more you retreat from the culture and the people, the less you learn about them, the more uncomfortable you feel among them; the more uncomfortable you feel among them, the more inclined you are to withdraw. Meanwhile, the local culture recedes further and further into the distance, taking with it your chances of becoming an effective expatriate.

Another danger of overdosing on the expat community is the negative, even hostile attitude many members have toward the local culture. There's more than a touch of irony here: people who have the least contact with the locals are often the most critical of them. There's also a certain perverse logic at work. Even as you slip comfortably into the expatriate lifestyle, your conscience is not altogether clear. At some level you realize what's happening, that you have undertaken to trivialize the experience of living abroad and perhaps even to undermine your own professional effectiveness. If you are sincere in your desire to live in and come to know another culture, or even just to succeed in your work, this is probably a realization you'd just as soon avoid.

So you look around for another, more palatable explanation for what has happened, one that fixes the blame elsewhere. And there is one ready to hand: it's not you who has withdrawn from the local culture; it's the local culture that has pushed you away. You really did try, but you just don't approve of so many of the attitudes and behaviors of the local people. For this self-deception to work – and there's a lot riding on it – you have to paint the culture in as bad a light as possible, a task, incidentally, in which you will be enthusiastically joined by numerous other escapees desperately needing to justify their own withdrawal. When it comes to criticizing the local culture, there is great comfort in numbers. This is how avoiding the local people often produces greater, not less, negativity in expats.

The anthropologist Kalvero Oberg, one of the first people to use the expression “culture shock,” has described “the hostile and aggressive attitude” toward the locals that many expats develop.

This hostility grows out of the genuine difficulty the visitor experiences in the process of adjustment. There is mail trouble, school trouble, language trouble, house trouble, transportation trouble, shopping trouble, and the fact that people in the host country are largely indifferent to all these troubles. You become aggressive; you band together with your fellow countrymen and criticize the host country, its ways and its people. This criticism is not an objective appraisal but a derogatory one. You talk as if your experiences are created by the people of the host country. You take refuge in the colony of your countrymen and its cocktail circuit, which often becomes the fountainhead of emotionally charged stereotypes. Criticisms of the host country “justified” or not, serve no useful purpose. At best they only reassure those who have withdrawn from the culture of the wisdom of their decision, and at their worst they raise doubts in those who are still trying to be open-minded. They are a meal best left untouched.

“My wife got invited one time to a *gringa* female expats party,” one man remembers of his experience in Mexico. “That was after the day she had met someone in the local Kmart who told her they have a group of twenty-four American women who get together in one another’s house once a month to, quote, bitch about these damn Mexicans, unquote.... But it was these damn Mexicans who helped us move in, who helped us find our way around town. And now that we were more or less settled, these aristocratic holier-than-thou’s show up and decide they want to be our friends. No, thank you”.

Even those who seek only minimal contact with their compatriots often find themselves pulled into the expat world much more than they intend to be. If it is to survive, the expatriate community has to be worked at; it is something of an illusion, after all, an artificial construct, and illusions, as any actor will tell you, require constant attention. So there are committees and committee meetings, cultural events, amateur theatricals, tennis tournaments, swimming, sculpture, gardening and history classes, barbecues, fund drives, and, of course, charity

events. Contact is the lifeblood of these communities, though the quality of the contact is not nearly as important as the frequency. The average expatriate, even if he or she genuinely desires contact with the local people, barely has the time for it. And after a while, the desire gradually dies.

Aldous Huxley wrote of his voyage to Asia in the 1920s.

"Everyone in the ship menaces us with the prospect of a very good time in India. A good time means going to the races, playing bridge, drinking cocktails, dancing till four in the morning, and talking about nothing. And meanwhile the beautiful, the incredible world we've come to see awaits our explorations, and life is short.... Heaven preserve me, in such a world, from having a Good Time! I shall see that my time in India is as bad as I can make it".

In some cases the regulars in the expat community get upset when the "occasionals" try to cut back on or limit their involvement. To "lose" a member to the local culture threatens the solidarity of the community, and an artificial community such as this is nothing without its solidarity. "*Some people refused to kowtow to all these social things,"* one expat observed about his time in Asia, "*and refused to belong to the Club.... But you were unwise not to become a Club member if you could. If you didn't belong...you were an outcast, a rebel, a rather courageous rebel".*

3.4. Closed Circle

Even for its most enthusiastic adherents, life in the expat community can sometimes be a sterile, unsatisfying proposition. In the end, there is about it the aura of missed opportunities and a failure of will. More often than not what binds its members together is not personal affinity or mutual respect or even common interests but a shared reluctance to delve into the local culture and take what comes. One expat has observed, "Outside we spent our time watching our step and watching what we said, and there was a certain relief to go amongst people of our own race at the club and let our hair down. On almost any evening you would see the club verandah... occupied by literally hundreds of people in groups of two,

four, and upwards. They would be busily chatting amongst themselves and drinks would be flowing freely.... Within those "basket chair circles" the conversation was said to be trivial in the extreme. A small community continually re-meeting could not be very original." Members of the expat community don't seek each other out so much as they collide with each other in their common flight from the indigenous culture. The irony is that if they take the time to find out, expatriates often discover they share as many values and interests with the natives they have declined to get to know as with the compatriots with whom they force themselves to fraternize. Peopled with such strange bedfellows, the expatriate community, at its core, is not a true community at all.

"There was my life in the British hospital," an expat character writes in Paul Scott's The Jewel in the Crown, his masterpiece about the expatriate experience in pre-World War II India, "which also included the all British club and the boys and girls and all the good-time stuff that wasn't really good at all, just the easiest, the least exciting, so long as you ignored the fact that it was only the easiest for the least admirable part of your nature.

After a while I began to see that the ease of companionship wasn't really ease at all, because once you had got to know each other, and had then to admit that none of you, really had much in common except what circumstances had forced on you, the companionship seemed forced itself."

3.5. Some Caveats

It would be wrong to see the expat subculture as nothing more than a collection of malcontents trying desperately to rally newcomers to their dubious cause. While there are indeed malcontents in most foreign colonies, by and large the expat community is made up of decent people whose only mistake is not to have tried a little harder. After all, very few expats deliberately set out to avoid the local culture and go overseas giddy at the prospect of meeting scores of their countrymen and spending every weekend at The Club. Avoidance is, rather, merely an instinctive, self-defensive reaction to unpleasant situations. So if expats do

retreat on occasion into the safety of the foreign community, it's only to recover from the excesses of country and culture shock. And if they go back more often and stay longer than they should, this is rarely because of a conscious, calculated decision to avoid the local people, but merely the failure to pay enough attention to how they spend their time. The fact that withdrawing is an unconscious, natural instinct does nothing to mitigate its negative consequences, but it does put expats in a better light. These aren't bad people; they're good people mixed up in a bad business.

Naturally, the mere existence of the expat community does not guarantee that all expats will join it, or that all those who do join it will overindulge, but these are strong possibilities. If you don't deliberately choose a lifestyle when you live overseas – and most people aren't in the habit of monitoring their behavior that closely – human nature is such that you will automatically gravitate toward the familiar, the known, and the comfortable end, few expats actually choose to live in the expat colony; they simply end up living there because they fail to choose anything else. This is what makes the expat subculture so dangerous – not that expats seek it out, but that it seeks them out. Many of these same people are the first to admit in retrospect that they missed out on the opportunity of a lifetime. "If I have a regret" one spouse reflected on her experience in New Delhi, "it's that I haven't been able to make [Indian] friends, just to make friends. And that's sad. Because as much as we like India, that would have enhanced our appreciation of it" *(Washington Post* 1986). The foreign colony lifestyle does not have to be an all-or-nothing proposition: either you stay away from the expat compound and live entirely in the local culture, or you play in tennis tournaments and never speak to the natives. Many expats manage to straddle both worlds quite nicely. This chapter has exaggerated the dangers of withdrawal to bring home the point. In the end, you don't have to choose which world you want to live in; you can live in both. But to do so, you will have to keep your wits about you. Remember, finally, that not everyone is a born culture-crosser. For any number of reasons, some people who go abroad aren't very good at and may not even be capable of adjusting

successfully to a foreign culture, and they do more harm than good if they force themselves to try. Moreover, those who adapt readily enough in one country may not adapt at all in another. For all of these individuals, making a life for themselves in the foreign colony may represent a considerable accomplishment and be the only alternative to going home early. If this describes you, you need not feel the expat subculture or feel somehow obliged to explain your behavior. Even so, try to avoid the trap of criticizing the local people and be alert for opportunities to learn more about their culture.

3.6. Adding to the Models

We are now in a position to add a new box to our model of cultural effectiveness begun in Unit 2. With the addition, the process now looks like this: ***A cultural incident occurs – We react (with anger, worry. etc.) – This causes us to try to avoid the local culture.***

Remember that avoidance, like reaction, is a two-way proposition, that the entire dynamic described in this chapter is also happening in the other direction. Even as you are reacting to and trying to avoid the local people, the locals are likewise reacting to your behavior and trying to minimize contact with you. And just as you swap stories about the annoying locals, locals complain about the annoying foreigners. Thus the chasm between you and the local culture widens from both sides. We need to add the avoidance component to our companion model of crossing cultures (illustrating the process from the local perspective), which now looks like this: ***A cultural incident occurs – The local person reacts (with anger, worry, etc.) – This causes him or her to try to avoid contact with us.*** The frequency of expat-to-local contact is much greater then local-to-expat contact, of course, meaning the chasm widens faster from the expat side. An individual expat is surrounded by the local culture and has numerous encounters with the local people every day. The typical local person, on the other hand, probably only interacts with a handful of expats on a regular basis, and most locals interact with expats only occasionally. Expats, then, are likely to experience considerably more

cultural incidents during any given period than are the locals and to feel, therefore, a greater urgency to escape. In the end, from whichever direction and in whatever ways the divide widens, it's not a positive development. Note also that your withdrawal from the local culture does not go unremarked. Observant locals can't help but notice if you seem to keep your distance and socialize largely with other expats. They note – and before long they begin to accommodate – your preferences. For this reason, even as you withdraw from the locals, the locals become less inclined to seek you out. "It would be better if they went to church", an Eskimo says of the development workers who live with the natives in Canada's far north, "even if they could not understand. It would show that they had some interest in what is happening in the settlement. Perhaps some problems would not arise if the Whites bothered to go to church with the Eskimos; may be they would understand things better. It would make the people think that the Whites belong to the settlement". If you aspire to be truly effective in your overseas assignments, you must break through this impasse and get beyond the temptation to withdraw from the local culture.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. What is the greatest danger in cultural incidents? Use materials from the text "Turning Against the Local Culture".
3. Characterize the phenomenon of "expat subculture". Give examples from the text "The Foreign Community".
4. Describe a dark side of a typical expat subculture (the text "A Mixed Blessing").
5. What is the source of a growing hostility toward the locals? Find the necessary information in the text "A Mixed Blessing".
6. Why the life of the expat community can be defined as a closed circle?
7. What are the additions to the model of cultural effectiveness given in the text?

UNIT IV

ABC of cross-culturing

THE KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY

Results – focusing on the task insures success. People won't always get along, but you have to move forward anyway. Harmony is nice but results are what count. If you get results, people will be more harmonious. Getting results is ultimately more important than how you get them.

Harmony – working well with other people is the key to success in any enterprise. Harmony in the workplace will ensure eventual success. Getting things done hinges on people getting along well. Results bought at the expense of harmony are too costly. How you get results is just as important as the results themselves.

THE SOURCE OF STATUS – ACHIEVED OR ASCRIBED

1. Read about two cultural dimensions – the two poles referred to as achieved and ascribed, and in other cases, as "doing" cultures and "being" cultures.

Achieved status – in these doing cultures, people are looked up to and respected because of their personal and especially of their professional accomplishments. You get ahead into positions of power and influence by virtue of your achievements and performance. Your status is earned and not merely a function of birth, age, or seniority. You are hired based on your record of success,

not on the basis of family background, connections, or the school you attended. People aren't particularly impressed with titles. Education is important, but not the mere fact of it; you have to have done something with your knowledge. Status is not automatic and can be forfeited if you stop achieving.

Ascribed status – in these being cultures, a certain amount of status is built into the person; it is automatic and therefore difficult to lose. You are looked up to because of the family and social class you are born into, because of your affiliations and membership in certain important groups, and, later, because of your age and seniority. The school you went to and the amount of education you received also confer status, whether or not you did well in school or have done anything with your education. Titles are important and should always be used. You are pressured to justify the power, respect and deference that you automatically enjoy. While you cannot lose your status completely, you can lose respect by not realizing your potential.

2. Analyze the following incidents involving status.

Upstanding status

You are a high school teacher in host country. When you enter the classroom, all your students automatically stand up until you give them the signal to sit. You are uncomfortable with this deferential behavior and tell your students they need not stand when you enter the room. After two weeks, the headmaster asks to speak with you. He informs you that the other teachers have heard that the students don't stand when you enter the room and the teachers are upset. They regard this behavior as a sign of disrespect, which they fear may spread to their classrooms. They worry moreover that you deliberately may be trying to blur the distinction between teacher and student. If students put themselves on the same level as teachers, chaos will result. What should you do about the teachers reactions?

Respect

You are an urban planner working for the city government. Every morning a truck bearing city sanitation laborers stops at your house to give you a ride to work. Your boss, an engineer, and a second professional always sit up front in the cab, but you like to sit in the back and banter with the laborers. After a few days, your boss says you are confusing the workers with your informal behavior and wants you that you will soon lose their respect if you don't start acting like a professional. How do you respond?

In the matter of Mr. Kodo

You're being asked to take sides in a faculty dispute. A few weeks ago a vacancy occurred in the department of the university where you teach. The two candidates for the position, both college graduates, were an older man (Mr. Kodo) who has been at this school for 15 years and a younger man with more up-to-date technical credentials, a superior education background, and two years of experience on this faculty. From a technical standpoint, the younger man was a much stronger candidate and also a more dynamic teacher, and he was in fact selected for the position by the British expatriate who chairs this department.

Mr. Kodo and many of his (and your) colleagues were stunned by the decision, seeing it as a repudiation of his years of experience and dedication to this institution. Mr. Kodo is extremely embarrassed at being passed over and has not appeared on campus since the announcement was made. Now his colleagues are circulating a petition to the chairman to reconsider his decision and put Mr. Kodo into the job he deserves. They have asked you to sign the petition, already signed by all of them as well of scores of students, and to participate actively in this campaign. You in fact feel the right choice was made and are reluctant to get involved, but you are under increasing pressure to "do the right thing". What do you do?

Considering the source

You are the technical expert at a provincial agricultural extension office. A delegation from the Minister's office is coming next week to discuss an important change in policy. You are the person who can make the most substantive contribution to this discussion, but you are not being invited to the meeting. Instead, your boss has been picking your brain for days and has asked you to write a report for him containing all the important points he should make. Finally, you ask him why he doesn't just bring you along to the meeting

And let you speak directly to the delegation. He says you are too young to be taken seriously, and besides you are a woman. Your arguments are too important, he says, and he doesn't want them to be discounted because of their source. How do you feel, and what's your response?

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions

1. Can you name the right way to avoid cultural incidents?
2. What theoretical issues do you know on dealing with another culture (stages of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism)?

4. THE PROBLEM EXPLAINED

It is possible to avoid cultural incidents, alas, at the cost of being less effective in an overseas assignment. Avoidance is thus not a true solution to the problem of such encounters. In the final analysis, the only true solution to these incidents is to keep them from happening in the first place, and in this Unit we will take the first and most important step in that process: we will look at what *causes* cultural incidents.

Let's return to one of the Type I incidents from chapter 2, the vignette of the American posted in Argentina:

You're an American expatriate working in Buenos Aires. You have a 10:00 A.M. appointment with the Argentinean manager of a local public relations firm, and it's now 10:30. The receptionist tells you the person you've come to see is meeting with someone else. You wait another half an hour, during which time another person (who has the next appoint merit?) arrives. At 11:00 the manager emerges from his office to greet you. To your amazement, he neither acknowledges nor apologizes for making you wait an hour. You find this behavior extremely rude and are furious with him.

Why is the American put off by the Argentinean's behavior? The short answer is because it's not "normal," not what people are *supposed* to do in such situations, and when people don't do what they're supposed to, other people get upset. But why is the Argentinean supposed to apologize for making the American wait? Because that's what an American would do in this situation. In other words, the American is angry because he expects the Argentinean to behave the way Americans do.

4.1. The Ethnocentric Impulse

It is precisely this belief, *that other people are like us*, that is the source of most cross-cultural incidents. If we truly believe other people are like us, then it's only natural to expect them to behave the way we do (the origin of Type I incidents) and to assume that we behave the way they do (the origin of Type II incidents). Look again at all the incidents in Unit 2. You will see that in every case the problem is the same: the person from Culture A was expecting the person from Culture B to behave like people from Culture A. When that person did not, when the person in fact behaved like people from Culture B, there was trouble. But why should this be? Why would we expect other people to behave like us? The answer, quite simply, is because they always have. That is, most of us grow up in circumstances where we are surrounded by people from our own culture, and while we might have occasional contact with someone from a different culture, most of

our interactions are with people like ourselves. And the reason these people are like us, of course, is that from birth we have been carefully and deliberately raised to be *like them.*

This is the phenomenon known as cultural conditioning wherein members of a particular group teach the next generation how to behave and how to function effectively and thereby survive in that group or culture. The adults (parents, teachers, and others) teach the code of conduct of that particular society, which stipulates what people should and should not do across the entire spectrum of interpersonal interactions. Children are rewarded when they do the right thing and punished when they do not, and what makes those things right or wrong are the values and beliefs of that particular culture. Another word for the right and wrong behaviors we learn through our cultural conditioning is *norms,* from which we derive our word *normal.* The essential fact to grasp about norms is that they not only make it easier to interact with other people – they make it possible. If there were no norms, if we could not rely on people to always behave in certain ways in certain situations, human interaction would be hopelessly unpredictable and chaotic. If we could not be sure, for example, that drivers would stay on their side of the road, always stop when required, and turn left only from the left-hand lane, we would surely hesitate to drive. "Staying comfortable," Edward Hall has written, "is largely a matter of culture. Informal or core culture is the foundation on which interpersonal relations rest. All of the little things that people take for granted...depend on sharing informal patterns". In the end, we do not merely *expect* other people to be like us; thanks to our cultural conditioning, we *depend* on it. Thus it is that the same conditioning which can make it so difficult for us to function overseas is what makes it possible for us to function at home. Is it any wonder we cling to it?

Because of our cultural conditioning, we not only think our actions are normal, the way everyone behaves; we also think what we do is right, the way everyone *should* behave. We therefore regard any behavior that is different from ours as wrong. Naturally, this puts cultural incidents into a whole new light. When

the locals do something that causes an incident, they're not simply behaving in a way we're not expecting; they're behaving in a way we don't approve of. Thus do values enter the cross-cultural dynamic and considerably raise the ante in cultural incidents. It's no secret that where values are concerned, people have very strong views, and when very strong views are in play, emotions run rampant – all the more reason, then, to get to the bottom of cultural incidents and learn how to prevent them.

Up to the moment you go abroad or otherwise have a significant encounter with people from another culture, you have no reason or basis for believing that other people, *including foreigners,* might not behave like you – for believing that some of the norms you've picked up over the years might be peculiar to your particular group or society. You have no idea, in short, that what is normal to you is not also universal, that much of what you think of as human nature is only *cultural.*

But what happens when you encounter someone from a different culture, someone raised with different conditioning and a different set of norms? How do you expect that person to behave? By now, the answer should be obvious: if you have not been raised in that culture or have had only limited contact with that culture, then you would expect that person to behave in the only way you've ever known other people to behave like you. That may be very ethnocentric of you, but ethnocentrism is a fundamental fact of the human condition. Hickson and Pugh have written, "We are all subject in our thinking, at least to some degree, to "ethnocentrism." This is the implicit assumption, often unawares, that our culture is the best, that our way of doing things is normal, the right way. ...We all overestimate the importance of our country and our culture in the scheme of things. When we see something different in another culture, we are liable to view it as abnormal and inferior... The development of this belief in our own culture is an important part of our ability to function effectively in it. But it is a feature of human nature which does lead to problems when we come to operate in other cultures."

4.2. Logic versus Instinct

But there's something wrong here, isn't there? Surely in the age of globalization and cross-cultural training we all know better that the world is home to a great variety of people and cultures, many of them nothing at all like us. Indeed, isn't one of the reasons we want to go abroad in the first place to encounter and learn about another culture? How is it possible to be steeped in the notion of cultural differences and at the same time assume everyone else is just like us?

In fact, we *do* know better than to expect foreigners to behave like us. But that knowledge doesn't make any difference. What we know to be true (or right or best) is not always what drives our actions. What the conscious intellect tells us – in this case, that foreigners are surely *not* like us – is no match for what a lifetime of cultural conditioning has taught us. For the notion of cultural differences to take deep and lasting root in our psyche, it must be constantly reinforced over a sustained period until it is internalized. Until that time, it's entirely possible – indeed, it's inevitable – that we can cheerfully subscribe to the view that foreigners are different and still be stunned the first time we see a Hindu drink cow urine.

To put all this another way, what we have actually experienced, what we know to be real, will always have more truth for us, more claim on our emotions, than what we've only read or heard about. Moreover, what we've experienced repeatedly will always seem truer than what we've experienced only once or twice. "Of the fact that it takes all sorts to make a world I have been aware ever since I could read," Aldous Huxley has written, the proverbs are always platitudes until you have experienced the truth of them. The newly arrested thief knows that honesty is the best policy with an intensity of conviction that the rest of us can never experience. And to realize that it takes all sorts to make a world one must have seen a certain number of the sorts with one's own eyes. There is all the difference in the world between believing academically, with the intellect, and believing personally, intimately, with the whole living self. So perhaps it isn't logical to assume other people are like us,

but we're not operating here at the level of logic. We're operating, rather, at the level of instinct, and logic never wins in a fair fight with instinct. "Truth is not that which can be demonstrated by the aid of logic," Antoine de Saint Exupery has observed. "Let logic wangle its own explanation of life".

We shouldn't be too hard on expats, then. The fact that they expect the locals to behave like them is not something expats dream up just in time to go overseas. Nor is it something they decide to do or are even consciously aware of doing. It's merely something they've done all their lives – in order to survive. It just happens to be something that doesn't serve them very well overseas.

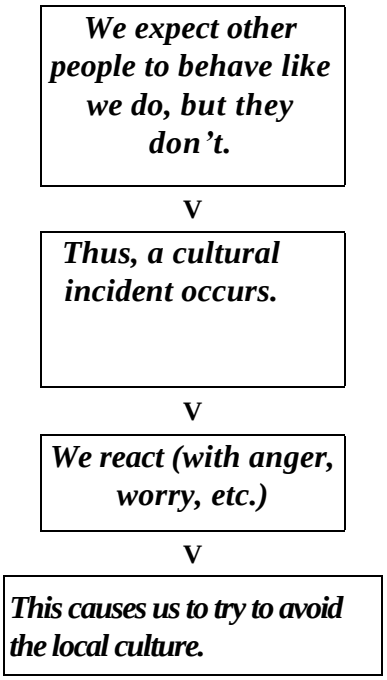
4.3. Imagining the Other

The capacity of the average person to fully conceive of the "other" has always been greatly exaggerated. It is interesting in this context, and also quite instructive, to reflect on so-called science fiction, on the people who are in the business of creating Not Us. Even these people, whose job is to imagine the "other," aren't very successful. Who doesn't know the famous bar scene in the film *Star Wars*, where Luke Skywalker, Obiwan Kenobe, and Chewbacca visit a local watering hole in search of an experienced pilot. The place is teeming with a wondrous variety of extraterrestrial bad guys. But when you think about it, they're not really *that* extraterrestrial. Oh, they may have a second head, some additional arms, and more eyes than you or I, but that's just it: they have *more* of these attributes (or sometimes fewer) but they don't have *different* attributes, something *instead* of heads, arms and eyes. They're just variations on a theme – humans – but not a new piece of music. Nor have the filmmakers come up with anything new, anything nonhuman, for these guys to do. They're just doing what guys like them everywhere do, apparently even in other galaxies: knocking back a few at the local neighborhood hangout. Not even George Lucas and Steven Spielberg can conceive of nonhuman behavior; there are no models. Most of us even conceive of animals in human terms, explaining their behavior exclusively in reference to our own.

The science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin makes just this point in her classic novel *The Left Hand of Darkness.* One of her human characters observes about an alien, when you meet a Gethenian, you cannot and must not do what a human naturally does, which is to cast him in the role of Man or Woman, while adopting towards him a corresponding role dependent on your expectations of the patterned or possible interaction between persons of the same or opposite sex. Our entire pattern of socio-sexual interaction is nonexistent here. They cannot play the game. They do not see one another as men or women. This is almost impossible for our imagination to accept. What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby? The old proverb notwithstanding, we cannot put ourselves in someone else's shoes. Or, more accurately, we can, but it's still our own feet that we feel.

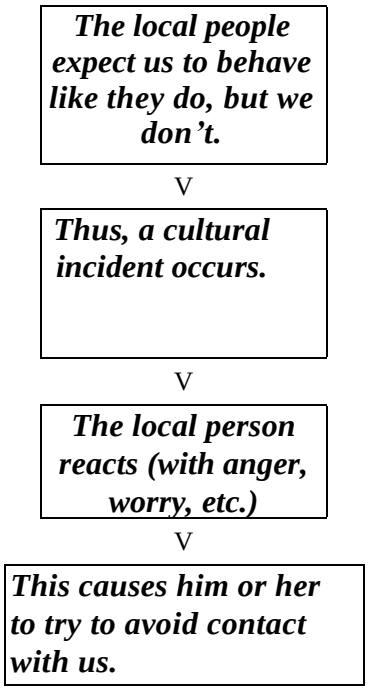
4.4. A New Step

We're now ready to add an important new step at the beginning of our model of cross-cultural interaction, the behavior that sets this whole process in motion.



As noted earlier, the conviction that everyone is the same is the cause of both Type I and Type II incidents. It creates Type I incidents because it means we are bound to get upset when the local people don't behave like we do. And it creates

Type II incidents because it means the locals are bound to get upset when we don't behave like they do. The only difference between the two types is in who is doing the expecting and who is getting upset. So we can also add a very similar new box to our companion model of the process of crossing cultures.



Strictly speaking, the local people are ultimately responsible for Type II incidents; the true cause of these incidents, after all, is the locals' belief that we will behave like they do. But our own ethno-centrism does contribute *indirectly* to Type II incidents, in the sense that if we believe everyone else is like us, then we must believe, as a natural corollary, that we are like everyone else. And if *we* don't find anything odd in our own behavior, then why would the locals? You don't think this all out, of course, but it does naturally follow from the basic ethnocentric premise. As we shall see in the next chapter, if you can break the grip of ethnocentrism, you can solve the riddle of both Type I and Type II incidents.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. What is the source of most cross-cultural incidents? Give examples from the text "The Ethnocentric Impulse".

3. Explain the term “cultural conditioning”.

4. In what way norms help us to interact with other people?

5. Comment on the words by Hickson and Pugh “We are all subjects in our thinking, at least to some degree, to ethnocentrism”.

6. Explain the title of the text of the chapter IV “Logic Versus Instinct”.

7. In what way do you understand the proverb: “We cannot put ourselves in someone else’s shoes” and the author’s words “We can, but it’s still our own feet that we feel”. Use the examples from the text “Imagining the Others”.

8. Which is the new step in the model of cross-cultural interaction, given in this chapter

U N I T V

ABC of cross-culturing

MOTIVATION

Professional opportunity – professional opportunity and success are important motivating factors. People want to learn, get ahead, move up in their professions or organizations and have greater power, authority, and responsibility. Job security is not as important as the chance to make more money and advance in one's career.

Comfortable work environment – people are motivated by the desire to have a pleasant work setting and good relationships with coworkers. Job security is important, as is an organization that takes care of its employees. Having more time off to spend with family is also very motivating. More power and responsibility are not of themselves attractive, even if they mean more money.

THE MOLE MODEL

The differences between corporate cultures in different countries are illustrated by John Mole in his book Mind Your Manners. He uses two main dimensions, each with two contrasting poles:

Leadership style	*Company structure*
• Individual-based, in which a strong leader takes initiatives and directs his/her people firmly along lines which he/she mainly decides. • Group-based, in which a consensus is sought among the group before major decisions are taken.	• Organic, in which loosely-defined roles and relationships allow things to develop in a natural, largely undirected way. • Systematic, in which clearly defined roles and relationships mean that people know what to do and how to behave towards other people.

1. Look at the list of attitudes below.

For Leadership style, say whether each attitude should be listed as being individual-based (I) or group-based (G).

For Company structure, say whether each attitude should be listed as being organic (O) or systematic (S).

Leadership style	***Company structure***
1. autocratic: taking decisions alone	1. the company is important, not the individual
2. bottom-up: employees talking freely to superiors	2. functional hierarchy: believing in the system
3. democratic	3. the individual is important
4. directive: giving orders	4. personal
5. all having equal rights	5. rational
6. participative	6. social hierarchy
7. believing in superiority	7. WHAT you do matters
8. top-down: telling people what to do, without consulting	8. WHO you are matters

2. Consider a company in which you have some experience of working. Think of the working styles and workplace culture, and say whether you have found people in this country to have:

- a leadership style which is predominantly individual-based or group-based
- a corporate culture which is predominantly organic or systematic.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions

1. We expect others to be like us. Does this assurance help us in cross-cultural interactions?

2. What cultural categories (attitude towards age, concept of fate and destiny, view of human nature, attitude towards chance, attitude towards taking risks, concept of suffering and misfortune, concept of face, source of self-esteem/self worth, concept of equality, attitude towards formality, degree of realism, attitude towards doing, view of the natural world) usually lead to cultural incidents?

5. THE PROBLEM SOLVED

Now that we've identified the cause of cultural incidents - the assumption that other people are like us – it should be clear, at least in a general way, how to prevent them: we have to stop making this erroneous assumption. How to do that is the subject of this Unit.

As we begin, we need to look a bit closer at the idea that our assumption of cultural sameness is what causes cultural incidents. If this is true, then ultimately it is not the behavior of the local people that causes cultural incidents but our own. The problem is not what the local people do, but the fact that we *are expecting them* to do something else. In other words, our expectation, not their behavior, is the real sticking point.

This is in fact very good news for the culture crosser. If the reverse were true, if the cause of cultural incidents was the behavior of the local people, then the solution would be for them to somehow change their behavior. And that's not going to happen. But if the problem is actually our own behavior, then there's hope, for while we can't very well expect the local people to change their behavior to conform to our expectations, we may be able to change our expectations to conform to their behavior.

5.1. The Starting Point

In general, then, the way to prevent cultural incidents is to stop assuming that other people are like us. If we didn't expect the local people to behave like we do, we would no longer be critical when they didn't. If we were no longer put off by their behavior, there would be no more cultural incidents (of Type I, anyway), and if there were no more incidents, it would not be so difficult to be culturally effective. To stop expecting other people to behave like we do is actually a two-step process: first we have to realize that we have this expectation, and second, we have to start expecting the local people to simply themselves.

The first step, realizing we expect others to be like us, is in many ways the most difficult, for it requires that we somehow become aware of behavior that is completely subconscious. Indeed, this particular expectation, as we saw in the previous chapter, is in fact a deep-seated survival instinct, and instincts (as we saw in that same chapter) are notoriously difficult to get hold of.

It so happens, however, that we have readily to hand a foolproof mechanism for raising this particular instinct to the level of conscious awareness: it is none other than that frustration, surprise, or anger that arises in us at the time a cultural incident occurs. These emotions are triggered precisely at the moment the locals fail to do what we expect; thus, if we could somehow train ourselves to become aware of these emotions, then we would by that very act be catching ourselves in the process of expecting the locals to behave like we do. When that happens, when you see yourself making this assumption – in complete defiance of all logic and in complete thrall to your cultural conditioning – it is deeply sobering. If you then combine awareness of this counterproductive behavior with an appreciation of its damaging consequences and with the further realization that *you* are responsible for this whole process – if you connect all these dots, you won't think much of the resulting picture. Thus, put off by your own behavior, you're ready to do something about it.

The key to this whole dynamic, as noted earlier, is to somehow become aware of your emotional reactions to cultural incidents. But awareness of emotional states actually runs counter to most people's experience; they are, rather, in the habit of *having* emotions, of experiencing their feelings, not taking note of them. You are used to being subject *to* your emotions, but not to subjecting those emotions to conscious observation. So, awareness is a practice that will have to be consciously enforced against opposing tendencies.

The best way to become aware of your reactions to cultural incidents is to schedule a time during or at the end of every day when you deliberately try to recall moments when you were upset or agitated by something a local person did. As you

reconstruct these incidents, you will see yourself, if only after the fact, in the act of expecting other people to behave like you do. Over time and with repeated practice, you should eventually reach the point of simultaneous awareness, when you will be able to observe your emotional reactions to cultural incidents as they occur. You should definitely keep this goal in mind and strive for it. But whether you become aware of your emotions at the time of such incidents or in retrospect, the effect is the same: the realization that it is ultimately *your own behavior* that makes you culturally ineffective. When you begin to see that your cross-cultural wounds are largely self-inflicted, you will then be motivated to take the final step to cultural effectiveness: to start expecting the local people to be themselves.

5.2. Filling the Information Gap

Awareness, then, brings us to the brink of solving the problem of cultural incidents. All you need now is some information about the local culture. You can't very well expect to recognize when the locals are behaving like locals if you have no knowledge of how the locals typically behave. You can learn about the local culture in three ways: through observing the locals in action, through asking them about specific behaviors, and through reading about or taking classes in the local culture.

Naturally, if you're able to observe how the local people behave in any given situation, you will then know what to expect from them in similar situations in the future. While this sounds simple enough, this kind of observation is neither as easy nor as straightforward as it may seem. This is because it's not possible to react to and closely observe a situation at the same time; in fact, the former effectively precludes the latter. It's well known, for example, that people rarely remember what happens during moments of great emotional intensity, when they're in danger, let's say, or in a rage. People don't think in such circumstances (much less observe); they simply act out of sheer instinct. When they are asked later what they did, there are periods about which they can recall nothing.

So, it will be with you in the midst of many cultural incidents. While your emotional reactions won't normally be as intense as those mentioned above, the basic principle still applies: agitated, angry, frustrated by the unexpected and "abnormal" behavior of a local person, you are not able to see very much of what happens after the triggering behavior has occurred. Prevented in this manner from being able to observe, you are not likely to take from such incidents cultural information about what to expect next time.

If we look again at the example of the American expat in Buenos Aires from the last chapter, we can figure out what this man might have been able to see if he had not been so busy getting upset. If he had seen some of these things, they would have given him important clues about Argentinean behavior, not enough to crack the code of the culture, perhaps, but enough to get him thinking differently.

You're an American expatriate working in Buenos Aires. You have a 10:00 A.M. appointment with the Argentinean manager of a local public relations firm, and it's now 10:30. The receptionist tells you the person you've come to see is meeting with someone else. You wait another half an hour, during which time another person (who has the next appointment) arrives. At 11:00 the manager emerges from his office to greet you. To your amazement, he neither acknowledges nor apologizes for making you wait an hour. You find this behavior extremely rude and are furious with him.

To begin with, the American might have noticed that the receptionist did not seem at all concerned when her boss did not emerge from his office on time to greet his guest. He might have noticed that she was not looking at her watch and, furthermore, that she did not take the initiative to apologize for her boss or otherwise assure the American that it would not be much longer. If there was something wrong here, something the American should have been reacting to, surely the receptionist would have been agitated as well. Moreover, when the person with the next appointment arrived, the appointment after the American's, the

American might also have noticed that this person did not seem concerned that the schedule was apparently backed up, that the receptionist again offered no explanation or apology, and that the new arrival wasn't glancing at her watch or otherwise acting inconvenienced. Finally, the American might have noticed that when the Argentinean did eventually emerge from his office, he offered no apology or explanation to either of the two people waiting for him.

As noted above, the American misses many of these things because he is in fact too upset to see them. If observation is to work for the American, he has to first stop reacting emotionally to cultural incidents and learn to observe his reactions to them as those reactions arise. He can then cut those emotions off and, in the calm that follows, truly observe what's happening around him. He will still miss some things, incidentally but he will at least be on his way toward more objective observation. When you have submitted to looking about you discreetly and to observing with as little prejudice as possible, then you are in a proper state of mind to walk about and learn from what you see.

5.3. Some Problems with Seeing

Observation across cultures is notoriously difficult for another reason: there's a great deal you will be unable to see, whether or not you're in the proper state to observe. The trouble is that you will not be able to see anything that does not constitute *meaningful behavior* in your own culture. You must remember in this context that it is not the eyes that see but the mind. The eyes merely convey images to the mind, which then interprets and confers meaning on those images it recognizes, things it has "seen" before, and confers no meaning on – and therefore does not see – anything it does not recognize. In some cultures, for example, pulling on the earlobe is a gesture that warns other people that the person speaking cannot be trusted. If you come from such a culture, this action constitutes meaningful behavior, and you would be capable of seeing it. But if you do not come from a culture where pulling on an earlobe has meaning, then the gesture

doesn't constitute behavior and you wouldn't be able to see it and, hence, learn from it. Would you understand, watching a Hindu friend arrange his bedroll, that he was trying to position himself so as not to be pointing his feet at anyone's head (instead of trying to get near the window or away from the door)? "He knew nothing yet well enough to see it," C S. Lewis writes of one of his characters in *Out of the Silent Planet;* "You cannot see things until you know roughly what they are". Edmund Taylor observes, *It is one of my regrets that I have not yet learned to see an Indian village or a bazaar; my eyes aren't trained, and I couldn't describe one to save my life. I love them and am endlessly fascinated; but all I can make out is a wild surrealist confusion of men and animals and many kinds of inanimate objects, arranged in completely implausible patterns.*

How much of the following would you see at a tea shop along the trail in the Himalayas if you didn't already know what was happening? Would you notice that your porter, from a low caste, doesn't enter under the roof of the shop but sits just outside (because low caste people aren't allowed inside the building)? Would you notice that the lady handing out the tea lets you take your cup from her hand but sets the porter's on the ground in front of him (lest her hands touch those of a low caste person)? Would you notice that she cleans your cup herself but pours water into his, lets him rinse it out once and set it on the ground, then pours more water in and rinses it out a second time herself? Would you notice, handing your porter a box of matches, that he doesn't take them from you but cups his hands to receive them? Most of these actions would have no meaning for you and would thus be imperceptible. "It is a repeated finding," Edward Stewart notes, "that perceptual responses are influenced by the individual's expectations. To an extent not usually recognized, perception resides in the perceiver, not in the external world". Another limitation of cross-cultural observation is that you will often misinterpret what you see. There are many behaviors that mean something both in your own and in the local culture, but not the same thing. Because these behaviors mean something in your culture, you will

be able to see them when they are exhibited by someone in the local culture, but you will most likely assign them an incorrect meaning. In India, for example, shaking one's head from side to side, which means no in many Western cultures, means yes. In the South Pacific, belching after a meal (rude in the West) is how people express appreciation of the food. In the Middle East, men who are good friends (and nothing more) walk hand in hand in the street. Clearly, what you "learn" from this kind of observation has limited value and can be quite misleading.

As a means of learning about another culture, of gathering the information that will form the basis of accurate expectations about the local people, observation clearly has its limitations. By itself then, observation is not an entirely reliable source of cultural knowledge, but if it is used critically and in conjunction with the other two sources mentioned earlier in this chapter, talking to the locals and studying about the culture, it is a perfectly respectable technique for learning.

5.4. Two Other Methods for Gathering Information

Talking to the local people would seem to be the surest way to learn about their culture; when you want to know something, go to the experts. And this is large the case, especially if what you seek is the kind of information we've been talking about here, the specifics of *what* the local people will do in various situations. But if you want to know more, and especially if you want to know *why* they act the way they do (we'll see in a moment why this is important), then the local people can only get you so far. While they generally know what they would do in most common situations, the local people are often among the last to know why they behave that way. After all, the people from a culture are the least likely to have ever observed or thought about their actions. They've had very little occasion to, for one thing, and no ready vantage point for another. Only if they have lived outside their culture would they have had the opportunity of actually seeing it (as every expat can attest).

The third way to learn about the local culture is to study it, through reading or perhaps through a class or intercultural training program. In these contexts you will learn not only how the locals behave in various situations – and be able to adjust your expectations accordingly – but also why they do these things, the basic values, beliefs, and assumptions that lie behind people's behavior and ultimately explain it.

These, then, are the three common ways to learn about the local culture: observation, conversation, and study. And you need to remember that it is learning about the local culture that makes possible the final step in the process of becoming culturally effective: expecting the local people to behave like themselves. In practice you will typically combine all three methods to educate yourself about the locals, using information from one source to verify or complement information you have learned from another. It is wise, in fact, to check all cultural information in this manner and not accept any one source as being definitive. Whether it's your own observation, the views of a local person, or information from a book or workshop, keep in mind that all sources are to some degree subjective.

We are ready now to complete the model of intercultural interaction we have been building over the last four chapters. Assuming you plan to follow the advice in this chapter, we can now remove the step of cultural avoidance and adjust the graphic accordingly. The process of becoming culturally effective, from beginning to end, now looks something like the previous model. Models like this make a tidy, irresistible package, but they are necessarily simplistic. These *are* the steps a person goes through in becoming culturally effective, but the actual experience is somewhat messier. While the general trend is certainly in the direction indicated, the process proceeds in fits and starts. It's not likely, for example, that one day you will be expecting your Italian accountant to behave like you, and the next day, because you read something somewhere, you'll be expecting him to behave like an Italian. The actual process whereby an expat replaces incorrect, ethnocentric expectations with culturally appropriate ones is slow and gradual. What usually

happens is that as you learn various bits about Italian culture, you gradually begin to have accurate expectations in some situations (those you are in the most often), but you will continue to have the wrong expectations in other situations. Moreover, if for some reason you are not in a certain situation for an extended period, you may forget what you learned: ***We expect other people to behave like we do, but they don't – Thus a cultural incident occurs – We react (with anger, worry, etc.) – We become aware of these reactions – and realize it is our own behavior (expecting cultural sameness) that causes cultural incidents – We are thus motivated to learn about the local culture – and begin to expect the local people to behave like themselves – And there are fewer cultural incidents – and revert to ethnocentric expectations the next time you are in a similar situation.***

Generally speaking, you will become more effective at those cultural interactions in which you are involved repeatedly and still be reacting to situations with which you are unfamiliar. But you are now firmly on the path to cultural effectiveness. As your knowledge increases, you will experience fewer incidents. The fewer the incidents, the less inclined you will be to avoid the local people. The more you interact with the local people, the more your knowledge will increase.

5.5. Preventing Type II Incidents

Learning about the local culture is also the solution to Type II incidents (wherein it is your behavior that upsets the locals). As you learn how the local people behave in various situations, you are perforce learning how they expect other people (including you) to behave in those situations. If you know what's expected of you and if you are willing and able to behave accordingly, then you will no longer commit Type II incidents.

As seen and experienced from the local point of view, the model of cross-cultural interaction would now be greatly modified and look something like this: ***The local people expect us to behave like the do – We behave the way the local people expect – and there are fewer cultural incidents.***

Many expats try to keep from committing Type II errors by reading books on local manners and customs, studying what's usually referred to as the do's and don'ts of the local culture (and much cross-cultural training also includes such lists). This information can indeed save you from embarrassing moments and more serious faux pas, but it should not be the only arrow in your quiver. Lists of do's and don'ts can't cover all contingencies, of course, and tend to greatly oversimplify cross-cultural effectiveness. And this simplicity is, of course, what makes lists so appealing. By all means consult such books, and then go on to other sources to deepen your understanding of underlying cultural values and beliefs.

Why not tell Americans never to point their feet at a person in Thailand, not to pat a child on the head in Laos, always to use polite and flowery expressions in Saudi Arabia, and not to expect punctuality in Guatemala? In short it should be possible to draw up a list of behaviors ranging from those that are desirable to those that are taboo. This approach is misleading for two major reasons.

The evaluation of behavior as desirable or taboo pursues the elusive goal of objectivity. Behavior is concrete but ambiguous: the same action may have different meanings in different situations, so it is necessary to identify the context of behavior and the contingencies of action before so-journeys can be armed with prescriptions for specific acts. Fulfillment of this strategy is impossible since the enumeration of possible events is unlimited.

You may think the local people will tell you when you have made a faux pas and imagine that this is how you will avoid committing Type II incidents. But this isn't likely. For one thing, locals will assume you understand their culture (the ethnocentric impulse) and that you are knowingly behaving badly. Even if they think you don't understand their culture, they're not likely to embarrass you by pointing out that people in their country never do what you've just done (anymore than you would embarrass an expat in your own country in this manner). It may not seem fair, but the onus of learning how to behave in the local culture falls squarely on the guest, not on the host.

The solution to dealing with cultural incidents described in these pages works in the vast majority of cases, but it does not work in all. Expecting the locals to behave the way they do does take the sting out of most cross-cultural encounters, but there are instances when knowing what the locals are going to do is not enough to prevent you from reacting. In some cases, in other words, the problem with a cultural incident is that it's unacceptable. In these latter cases, knowing the behavior is coming does very little to prevent an emotional reaction. The behavior of people in other cultures tends to fall into three broad categories. There are many things the locals do that you admire and may even adopt for yourself, none of which, needless to say, provoke a cultural incident. There are many other local behaviors that are not what you would do in that situation but that you can nevertheless learn to live with. These are the behaviors that often lead to cultural incidents and that respond best to the technique outlined in these pages. A key characteristic of these behaviors is that by and large they do not have an ethical or moral dimension at odds with your own; that is, the shock these behaviors produce, the reason they cause an emotional reaction, is because they are abnormal, not because they are immoral. While it may be annoying for an Argentinean businessman not to apologize for keeping an American businessman waiting, it's certainly not unethical or immoral. And the same goes for Germans who keep their doors closed, for Indian software programmers who say they've understood your instructions when they have not, or for your French friend who neglects to introduce you to one of her friends on the street. (See the list of Type I incidents in chapter 2 for other examples.)

The third category of local behavior can be much more troubling. These are behaviors that violate (or at least seem to violate) values so fundamental to your identity and sense of self-esteem that you must reject them. Whether expected or not, these behaviors always create a cultural incident, and usually a serious one. These behaviors will upset you from the day you arrive in the host country to the day you leave, no matter how much you learn about the culture in the meantime.

You may get used to them and learn to expect them but you will never fail to react to them, albeit less over time, and you will never approve of them. (Be aware, by the way, that certain of your own behaviors no doubt fall into this same category as far as the locals are concerned.)

Behavior in this third category can be further subdivided into two types, and it is important not to confuse them. One type is incidents that appear to violate your sense of right and wrong but that upon further analysis do not, and the other type is incidents that genuinely violate your moral principles. The latter deserve their status as intractable cultural incidents, but the former stand wrongly accused. Let's take the example of the Indian programmers from Unit 2:

You're a European software engineer managing a team of Indian programmers in charge of developing and testing an important new application. You have an imminent deadline and have just explained to your team how to fix a new bug that has been detected. When you ask the team if they have understood your explanation, they say yes and return to their cubicles. The next day, when you check on them, they have made no progress whatsoever and it turns out they did not understand your explanation. You've lost twenty-four hours you can't afford to lose and are not happy.

At first glance it appears the Indian programmers have lied to you; they said they understood your explanation when they did not. If this happens to be behavior you find unacceptable, then you won't be able to solve this incident simply by learning to expect Indians to deceive you in the future. But if you take the time or otherwise have the opportunity to learn more about this particular behavior, you may find that it's not really lying in the Indians' context, and therefore not offensive after all. The first thing you might learn is that yes can mean something very different to Indians than it does to you, that it is not necessarily an affirmation or indication of agreement but merely a polite, ritualistic response to most questions. You might learn further that in Indian culture to say you have not understood an explanation reflects badly on the person doing the explaining

(that would be you) and causes him or her to lose face, especially if that person is an authority figure. Finally, you may find (as is the case with many Indians) that subordinates are often very nervous about taking too much of a manager's time and will not want to ask for clarification if they haven't understood something. Bosses are supposed to know this, of course, and are expected to follow up any explanations by coming by the workstation a short time later to see if people are performing as instructed. If they are not, the boss should offer another explanation. But it's not up to subordinates to ask.

If your inquiries yield this kind of cultural information, you will probably be inclined to revise your conclusion that the Indians were lying to you and be able to accept this behavior the next time around. In this particular case, then, behavior that appeared to offend your sense of right and wrong turned out, after you had acquired more cultural knowledge, not to be that offensive after all, turned out, in other words, not to be a true cultural incident.

5.6. Unacceptable Behaviors

But cultural knowledge will not always be able to "explain away" the behavior of the local people and thereby neutralize cultural incidents. There will be some cases where even when you know why the local people are behaving the way they are – when you can see, for example, that while their behavior is offensive or shocking to you, it would not be so to them – even in such cases you may still be upset and offended by their actions. These cases will not respond to any amount of cultural explanation and will always create a Type I cultural incident.

Let's take the example of our English friend in the bakery in Cairo. The reader may remember that the hapless Claire retreated to the peace and quite of a Cairo bakery to lick her wounds after a busy morning of cultural incidents, only to become victim to one more incident when two male customers began to harass her. There is, of course, an explanation for this, as Fatima Mernissi observes in the following passage from *Beyond the Veil:*

Moslem sexuality is a territorial one, a sexuality whose regulatory mechanisms consist primarily of a strict allocation of space to each sex and an elaborate ritual for resolving the contradictions arising from the inevitable interferences between spaces. Apart from the ritualized trespasses of women into public spaces which are, by definition, male spaces, there are no accepted patterns for interactions between unrelated men and women....

Women using public spaces, trespassing on the male universe, are restricted to a few occasions and bound by specific rituals such as the wearing of the veil... The veil means that the woman is present in the men's world, but invisible; she has no right to be in the street Women in male spaces are considered provocative and offensive. If a woman enters a male space, she is upsetting the male's order and his peace of mind. She is actually committing an act of aggression against him merely by being present where she should not be.

The question is not whether there's a logic for any particular behavior within a culture – there's *always* a logic or why else would people behave that way? – but whether or not Claire can be persuaded by that logic. She may decide the Moslem view of sexuality is quite reasonable and not react the next time she is harassed in a bakery, or, more likely, decide not to frequent bakeries alone. Or she may decide that there is something fundamentally offensive about the fact that "public spaces are by definition male spaces" and continue to find this behavior upsetting whenever she encounters it. For Claire, this would be an example of local behavior that is not going to be justified by any amount of cultural information and that will accordingly continue to be a cultural incident for her as long as she remains in Cairo. The problem of unacceptable behaviors applies equally to Type II situations. Some of those same local behaviors you can't bring yourself to accept are, of course, behaviors the local people will expect *of you.* Needless to say, if you don't approve of these things when the locals do them, you're not about to do them yourself, even if that does mean committing a Type II incident. Many expats struggle mightily with this issue, for they know the more they conform to local

norms, the more successful and effective they can be in their assignments. In some cases, they don't realize why they can't behave in a certain way, and they blame themselves for what they perceive as personal inadequacy. This dilemma is especially acute in organizations that value and strongly encourage their members to be as culturally sensitive as possible.

In some of these dilemmas, there's a perfectly honorable solution. You can explain to the local people that, even though you know what's expected of you, what's normally done in such and such a situation, for "personal reasons" you are unable to comply. This allows you to demonstrate that you are a culturally sensitive sort - you're not behaving inappropriately because you don't know any better – and at the same time to avoid having to engage in the behavior that offends you. Moreover, it shifts the blame from the host culture to you (personal reasons). The local people can easily identify with the concept of personal reasons – we've all had them in one instance or another – and forgive you for them.

5.7. In the Final Analysis

In the end, expats should not hesitate to draw the line when it comes to certain local behaviors, to admit that there will be things about the local culture that they will never be able to accept. While they should be careful not to consign behaviors to the unacceptable category prematurely, if they have truly understood why the local people behave as they do in a given situation and still cannot bring themselves to accept that behavior, then so be it. Expats should never try to force themselves to accept behaviors that violate their fundamental values; cultural effectiveness should not – and ultimately cannot – be purchased at the expense of one's self-respect. Expats must at times strive to transcend their cultural conditioning, but they must also beware of trying to alter their personalities. If they genuinely respect the local culture, they must permit themselves to be appalled by it. "When you come automatically respect it. You must sometimes pay it the compliment of hating it".

This is a tricky business, as many observers have remarked. “To live in India,” the novelist Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has observed, *and be at peace, one must to a very considerable extent become Indian and adopt Indian attitudes, habits, beliefs, assume, if possible, an Indian personality. But how is this possible? And even if it were possible – without cheating oneself – would it be desirable? Should one try to become something other than what one is?*

T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia), culture-crosser extraordinaire, disappeared into Bedouin culture, the better, he thought, to achieve his mission. And achieve it he did, but at a cost he later came to question. “In my case,” he wrote, the efforts for three years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes. They destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin; it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith.... Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.

Becoming culturally effective does not mean becoming a local; it means trying to see the world the way the locals do and trying to imagine how they see you. If you can do that, you will have done all that’s necessary to function effectively overseas. You will still encounter cultural incidents, though far fewer than someone who has not made this effort, but you will have earned the right to be offended. “The art of travel,” Freya Stark wrote, “and perhaps of life, is to know when to give way and when not to”.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. Name two steps of the process towards cross-cultural effectiveness.
3. What is the best way of becoming aware of cultural incidents?

4. Describe three ways of the locals' typical behavior observation. Use the example from the text "Filling the Information Gap".

5. How do you understand the words "meaningful behavior" in the frame of cross-cultural communication? The examples from the text "Some Problems with Seeing" will help you.

6. Why isn't it enough to talk to the local people in case you want to learn about their culture?

7. Comment on the given model of cross-cultural effective communication in the text "Two Other Methods for Gathering Information".

8. What are three broad categories of the people's behavior in other cultures? Give examples from the text "Preventing Type II Incidents".

9. What is considered to be unacceptable behaviors? Is it correct from your point of view?

10. Do you agree with a statement that "becoming culturally effective does not mean becoming a local"? If "yes", why?

11. Comment on the words by F. Stark: "The art of travel, and perhaps of life, is to know when to give way and when not to".

UNIT VI

ABC of cross-culturing

THE CONCEPT OF TIME

Monochromic – time is given and people are the variable. The needs of people are adjusted to suit the demands of time – schedules, deadlines, etc. time is qualifiedly, and a limited amount of it is available. People do one thing at a time and finish it before starting something else, regardless of circumstances.

Polychromic – time is the servant and tool of people. Time is adjusted to suit the needs of people. More time is always available, and you are never too busy. People often have to do several things simultaneously, as required by circumstances. It's not necessary to finish one thing before starting another, nor to finish your business with one person before starting it with another.

THE HALL MODEL

In his book *The Silent Language* and *Understanding Cultural Differences*, E. T. Hall distinguishes between two pairs of contracting cultures:

High context cultures, in which people speak indirectly, show respect, and maintain harmony. They consider it rude to be too direct.

Low context culture, in which people speak directly, and say what they mean without adding unnecessary details or formulae. They are suspicious of people who speak indirectly.

Monochromic cultures, in which people like to do things one at a time and in sequence.

1. Which cultures do you think are represented in these extracts?

A. I'm afraid I can't fit a meeting in today. This morning isn't my weekly team meeting. Then I've planned two hours' work on the budget. I could see you tomorrow at 11 o'clock, between a visitor who leaves at 10.45 and a scheduled lunch appointment.

B. Do come to the point. I need to get back with a decision by four o'clock.

C. In the circumstances it would seem to be inappropriate to attribute more than a general description of those characteristics we will be seeking in our new employee.

D. Don't worry about the timing. Just come when you are ready. I have a few things going on at the moment, but I'm sure we can always squeeze in a discussion of your problem.

2. Define the kind of the concept of time in the following statements

1. Time is money.
2. To be late is rude.
3. Schedules are sacred.
4. The focus is on the is on the task, getting the job done.
5. Being made to wait is normal.
6. Interruptions are life.
7. Plans are fixed, once agreed upon.
8. This attitude is consistent with an individual viewpoint.
9. The focus is on the person, establishing a relationship.
10. This attitude is consistent with a collectivist viewpoint.
11. Deadlines are an approximation.
12. To be late is to be late.
13. Focus on the internal clock.
14. Plans are always changing.
15. Having to wait is an insult.
16. People are never too busy.
17. Interruptions are bad.
18. People stand in line.

Personal/professional separated – personal matters should not be brought to work. Personal/family obligation should be scheduled around work. The personal and professional lives should and can be kept separate. The human factor is real but can't be indulged in the workplace. People won't understand if you plead a family emergency.

Personal/professional intertwined – it is impossible to separate personal and family matters from work. You may have to interrupt work to take care of personal business. The personal and professional lives inevitably overlap. People will understand if you plead a family emergency.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions

1. Is it necessary to speak the language of the host country? Why?
2. What difficulties a person comes across while speaking foreign language?

6. LANGUAGE LESSONS

One of the greatest allies the expat has in the quest to become culturally adept is the ability to speak the local language. Language learning is not one of the steps in our model of cultural effectiveness – it is not an essential skill for crossing cultures – but all other things being equal, it can be a tremendous asset. Speaking the language doesn't guarantee you will be effective abroad – it's as easy to be a bilingual boor as a monolingual one – any more than not speaking it guarantees you won't. But of all the variables that influence the process of crossing cultures.

6.1. Practically Speaking

Speaking the local language works wonders on what we've called country shock, that series of adjustments to the country, the community, and the job described in Unit 1. Knowing the language to even a limited degree doesn't mean you won't have the same bewildering number of things to learn about and get used to in the new country, but imagine how much easier it will be to learn them if you can talk to and understand the local people. Nor should we forget that both the pace and stress of country shock directly affect how well and quickly you will adjust to the culture; anything that abets the former abets the latter.

Knowing the language can also have a direct impact on preventing cultural incidents. Just by virtue of understanding what's being said around you, you can better understand cross-cultural encounters. If you can speak the language, you can question a much broader range of people about the culture, often getting more valuable information than you do from the educated elites you must rely on if you don't know the language. Needless to say, whatever helps prevent cultural incidents, whether Type I or Type II, virtually guarantees greater effectiveness both on and off the job.

Because language is one of the principle means through which you can manipulate and control your environment and thereby enjoy a sense of well-being and security, the lack of language, not surprisingly, is one of the main reasons for feeling so helpless and vulnerable during the first few months abroad. There is the ever-present possibility that you may suddenly find yourself in situations where you can't make yourself understood, where, for want of being able to express your needs, you leave the situation with those needs unmet. Who hasn't had the experience of going to a shop and leaving without getting what you wanted for lack of being able to describe it or spot it on the shelf? And how much more serious is the issue if it is medicine you need, if you're lost, or if there's been an accident and you need help?

6.2. Invidious Comparisons

It's not much fun, as Edward Gibbon recalled in his Memoirs: *"When I was thus suddenly cast on foreign land I found myself deprived of the use of speech and hearing; and, during some weeks, incapable not only of enjoying the pleasures of conversation, but even of asking or answering a question in the common intercourse of life... . From a man I was again degraded to the dependence of a schoolboy... and helpless and awkward as I have ever been. My condition seemed as destitute of hope as it was devoid of pleasure"*. Clearly, feeling like a schoolboy does little to boost an expat's self-esteem and self-confidence, two more casualties of being unable to speak the local language. Average, articulate adults, capable in so many other ways, who are suddenly transformed into virtual mutes, who can only nod and smile foolishly when addressed by well-intentioned, monolingual locals, find the experience demeaning. For all their competence, they feel – and in a sense, are – inferior to the three-year-old neighbor child who may still wet his pants but at least knows how to count to ten. It's an open question who might fare better in a tight spot. In Living Poor, his classic book about the Peace Corps, Moritz Thomsen captures the feeling exactly. *"On this trip to Machala made my first close emotional contact with a man of about forty with a foxy little black moustache and quick, black buttonhole eyes. There was no place for him to sit on the bus, so he squatted in the aisle, put his head in my lap, and quietly passed out.... He awoke suddenly, after one particularly spectacular bump and found himself staring into the face of a gringo. He was thunderstruck; it was obvious he loved gringos. He began to pat my head. And he began to talk. He talked a torrent of Spanish, but I could scarcely understand perfect Castilian; let alone the coastal patois well mixed with sleep and alcohol I couldn't understand a word he said, not one single word, and I had to sit there smiling like a dummy surreptitiously wiping off the flecks of spit that he enthusiastically directed at my face. The other passengers were watching me with expressions of increasing pity as it dawned on them, one by one, that the gringo was a half-wit. My friend finally*

realized it too and gazed at me with a baffled look on his face.... To tell you the truth, for about three hours on that wild plunge to the coastal tropics, this was exactly how I saw myself."

Reeling from incidents such as these, you will want to run away illustrating another unfortunate consequence of not knowing the language: the necessity, or at least the tendency, to spend more and more time with your compatriots in the foreign colony Who likes to be reminded of their ineptitude or to be compared unfavorably to a three-year-old? Ego bruised, your pride under siege you crave the reassurance of the foreign community where you can once again be the master of the situation. There's no harm done, of course, as long as you can sally forth once your wounds have healed, but that's just it: it's very tempting not to. And then the entire dynamic, as noted in Unit 3, becomes self-sustaining; not speaking the language, insecure, you retreat into the expatriate subculture where – is it any surprise? – your command of the local language does not notably improve.

6.3. Deeper Meanings

Another dividend of knowing the language is the insight it offers into the culture; you can't learn the language of a people without also learning the "grammar" and "vocabulary" of their worldview. The student of Arabic, for example, learns that "God willing" *(N'sha'llah)* is automatically added to any statement about the future (just as "thanks to God" accompanies any reference to fortunate events of the past), that many common given names – Abdullah, Abdelsalam, Abdelwahid – translate as slave *(abd)* of God, appreciating, as a consequence, the essential fatalism of Arab culture. Similarly, the student of Nepali, struggling to sort out the myriad nouns for family members – there are four words for uncle, denoting whether the man in question is the brother of one's father or mother and whether he is older or younger than said parent – readily appreciates the importance of the family in Nepali society and may even intuit the relative insignificance of the individual. Language is not simply how people speak; it is who they are.

On a deeper level, if you can't communicate your ideas and opinions to people, how can they know who you are? And if you can't understand others, how can you know them? You can still interact with these people – they may know a little of your language and you a little of theirs – and relate in other ways, but these relationships must necessarily be superficial. Not truly knowing others, not feeling you are known by them, you feel alone and isolated. *"What I find trying in a country which you do not understand and where you cannot speak,"* Freya Stark has observed, *"is that you can never be **yourself**. You are English, or Christian, or Protestant, or anything but your individual **you**…".*

There is another kind of isolation many expats also feel. Language is the primary means of self-expression; when we don't have language, the self does not get expressed. When the self can no longer be expressed, does it still exist? There is a loneliness expats feel that has nothing to do with being away from family and friends or not having friends in the new country; they feel estranged from themselves. *"Because I speak no Portuguese,"* Moritz Thomsen wrote of a trip through Brazil, *"and have chosen to move through those parts of Rio de Janeiro where tourists do not go, I find after a few days of not speaking that I have begun to doubt my own existence".*

Perhaps the most compelling reason to learn the language of another land is the largely symbolic significance of the act of communication. Implicit in that act, after all, is the acknowledgment of the humanity and worth of the other person, especially when one is speaking in a language other than one's own. Anyone who has ever learned another language knows the effort involved and appreciates it, therefore, when a foreigner has gone to the trouble to learn their language. In the end, what matters is not what we say when we speak Russian or Chinese, but what the effort to speak Russian or Chinese says about us. *"Learning a native language,"* Charles Allen has observed, *"was perhaps the best thing that ever happened to people who went out to India, and those who failed to do so remained forever at a distance from the land and its people".*

This is all well and good, you may be saying, but I'm only here for two years and it will take me that long just to achieve basic competence, and that would only be if I had the time for language classes, which I don't. This is certainly a valid point, but it overlooks the fact that you can begin to enjoy most of the benefits of speaking the local language long before you become proficient, almost immediately in fact. You start to feel less vulnerable, for example, as soon as you master a few basic phrases and make your first purchase or the first time you successfully ask for and understand directions. You start learning about the culture as soon as you begin your language study, and you don't have to be fluent for people to appreciate the effort you're making to talk to them (especially if your native tongue is one of the "world" languages, such as English, Spanish or French). And you can always start studying the language before you arrive overseas. In any event, when considering whether or not to study the language, remember that proficiency is neither the only nor the most important criterion.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. Read the words of E. Gibbon in the text "Invidious Comparison". Comment on them, giving examples from the same text.
3. Explain the idea of the following passage "… you can't learn the language of people without also learning the 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' of their worldview".
4. Do you agree that the isolation many expats feel is because of the lack of language, as a language is the primary means of self-expression? Prove it with the examples from the text "Invidious Comparison".

UNIT VII

ABC of cross-culturing

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE

Face less important – face has moderate importance; the facts and expediency are more important than being careful about what you say; getting/giving information is the overriding goal of the communication exchange; criticism is straightforward; it's ok to say no, to confront people.

Face is key – face is paramount; saving face/non losing face takes precedence over the "truth"; maintaining harmony is the overriding goal of the communication exchange; confrontation is avoided; saying no is difficult; criticism is handled very delicately; what one says and what one feels often are not the same.

1. Analyze the following incidents involving harmony and saving face.

Crop failure

Your boss has come up with a new scheme for improving crop yields in your province. Since you are the technical expert in this area, he has come to ask you for your opinion. His scheme is based on unreliable data and will in all likelihood not work in you country. It's possible farmers could lose their whole crop if they try this experiment. What is your response?

End run

In the clinic where you work, the supervisor you report to is ineffective. Because of this person's incompetence, the project you're working on is getting

nowhere. You know if you could do directly to the person's superior, the manager of the entire division, you would get much better results – and get them much faster. But if you ignore or go around your supervisor, she will be hurt and embarrassed. How do you resolve this situation?

Moving up

The counterpart you work with is an agreeable person but not very competent. Now your boss, who is also his boss, has called you into her office to ask you whether your counterpart should be promoted to a new position. How do you respond?

Electronic mail

Three companies have been asked to bid the job of supplying electronic mail service to the organization you work for as a computer specialist. The ultimate decision will be made by your boss, but he is relying heavily on your advice in this matter. As it happens, a cousin of your boss owns one of these companies, the company asking for the most money and the least able to deliver the goods. Your boss asks you what you think of that company. What do you say?

Tight spot

At a faculty meeting, the head of your department states a position on an important matter. The school headmaster then turns to you and asks your opinion. You don't agree with the head of your department. Now what?

THE HOFSTEDE MODEL

Gee Hofstede, author of Culture's Consequences and Cultures and Organizations, uses five dimensions to describe company cultures, as listed below.

2. Select the dimension (a-e) which best describes it.

Power Distance Index (PDI)	a. The degree to which people can: • take risks • accept conflict and stress • work without rules
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	b. The degree to which people: • have a short- or long-term view of their work • accept convention • persevere with a job • spend or invest
Individualism/Collectivism (IDV)	c. The acceptance of the unequal distribution of power – the degree to which: • employees are independent • structures are hierarchical • bosses are acceptable • people have rights or privileges • progress is by evolution or by revolution
Masculinity/Femininity (MAS)	d. The degree to which people: • work in groups or alone • relate to their task or to their colleagues
Long-Term Orientation (LTO)	e. The degree to which people: • believe in consensus • put work at the centre of their lives • expect manages to use intuition

3. In the following pairs of contracting statements, say which dimension is being exemplified

1. A: hat was a very useful discussion, Nick; we've made a lot of progress. Thanks for coming.

   B: I don't care how you do it; just let me have the results. I'm busy too, you know.

2. A: It’s up to me. I’m going to get this contract signed before the end of the week, whatever else happens.
   B: We don’t seem to be pulling together. Perhaps some of our support teams have been pressurized by this project.
3. A: She’s the boss, so what she says is fine by me.
   B: I’m going to have a word with my manager to say why I think that isn’t reasonable.
4. A: We’ll have to look carefully at this plan. It has implications for our investment program.
   B: We’ll get some quick returns out of this, especially if we put a lot of money into it.
5. A: This is a very unconventional approach. It will put us under a lot of strain, and we have no guarantee it will work.

CONCEPT OF WORK

Work as part of identity – work has value in and of itself. Your job is an important part of your identity. People live to work, in the sense that getting things done is inherently satisfying.

Work as functional necessity – work is the means to paying bills and meeting financial obligations. It may be satisfying but doesn’t have to be. Life is too short to revolve around one’s work. Work is what I do, not who I am.

Text for discussion

Before reading the text answer the following questions

1. Is it possible to succeed in another culture, to develop one’s capabilities and talents?

2. Does a person understand much more about his/her culture after staying abroad for a long period?

7. THE PAYOFF

Cultural effectiveness comes at the cost of vigilance and sustained effort. It requires that you keep a close watch over how you spend your time, that you resist the natural temptation to seek out the familiar and the comfortable, that you train yourself to monitor your emotional states, and, finally, that you try not to judge the local people before you have understood them. If all this sounds a tad superhuman – and parts of it do seem to fly in the face of human nature – try to remember that there isn't any real alternative. If you're going to be truly successful in an overseas assignment, then you have to become culturally effective. Many expats do not, of course, settling for being somewhat or occasionally or slightly effective – as if that cost was somehow less dear.

So your task may be daunting, but as with any challenge worth taking up, the rewards are commensurate with the effort. Just what those rewards are is the subject of this final chapter.

7.1. Getting the Job Done

The most obvious reward for being culturally effective is that it greatly increases your chances of accomplishing whatever objectives you had in going abroad, both for yourself and for your organization. No one likes to fail, especially not in an undertaking of this magnitude, in which you invest months and years of your time and energy (and that of your family). Your company or organization doesn't want you to fail either, of course, having also invested considerably in your assignment.

Successful expats add great value to their organizations, not only in discharging their responsibilities and completing their mission overseas, but also in the form of greatly enhanced skills and knowledge the company can use, whether at headquarters or in other locations. In addition, successful expats are a great advertisement for global companies having trouble recruiting for overseas

assignments (just as early returnees are the worst kind of publicity). In a recent survey of 264 global corporations, two-thirds of the respondents cited finding qualified candidates as the most critical challenge to their international operations.

Another advantage of being culturally aware is that the better you understand the local culture, the harder it is for the locals to hide behind it. The Filipino marketing director who doesn't want the bother of developing a new advertising campaign can always find a cultural explanation for why the suggested new approach won't work. And who are you, even if you suspect a trick, to call the Filipino's bluff? If you have adapted, however, if you know the culture and therefore can see the director's game, you can make short work of it. Indeed, if the marketing director is perceptive or knows you well, she won't waste her time trying to fool you in the first place.

In this context it is interesting to note that the Japanese, unlike most peoples, do not always appreciate it when a foreigner speaks their language well. Part of the reason for this is that fluency in the language allows the foreigner to penetrate the public persona the Japanese so carefully cultivate and come to know the individual personality beneath. This in turn cancels the natural advantage the notoriously formal Japanese have in dealing with outsiders, particularly Westerners, who wear their thoughts and feelings on their sleeves. It is possible that the Japanese record of success in business is as much a function of their infamous inscrutability as it is their way with lasers and microchips.

A related advantage here is that if it is known that you know the culture, then any changes or improvements you need or want to make in local operations will be taken much more seriously by the indigenous workforce. Expats and their bosses back home are always looking for ways to add value and improve performance. If local employees know you understand the local reality and culture, they will be much more likely to give your schemes a fair trial. If they think you don't, they'll have little faith in your decisions and will spend most of their time trying to quietly distance themselves as much as possible from the imminent failure of the latest best practice.

Put yourself in the shoes of the locals. You're the head of public relations or new product development in New York or London. You get a new boss, from Germany, let's say, who's never lived in your country, speaks very ungrammatical English, makes cultural mistakes right and left, and has never quite got the hang of pronouncing your name. And she proposes a bold new scheme. What would *your* reaction be?

Another consequence of being culturally effective is the sense of security it allows you to feel. Ignorance is the breeding ground of fear and anxiety. Not knowing what the locals will do or how they will react to what you do next produces a constant tension and feeling of unease. You can never be altogether confident or comfortable, never free of the almost palpable suspicion that what you don't know can indeed hurt you.

On a related note, the process of coming to know the local culture frees you to relax and be yourself again. Not knowing which of your behaviors may be culturally acceptable and which may not, and knowing, furthermore, that your behavior reflects not only on you but also on your organization, you may err on the side of caution in your interactions with the local people, tiptoeing your way through intercultural situations in a state of semi paralysis. You closely monitor your behavior and your speech, alert to signs that anything you've done might have caused offense. It's the "walking-on-eggshells" syndrome, and it's exhausting. Indeed, the strain prompts many expats to limit discretionary contact with the local people so they can recover between outings. Once you begin to understand the culture, however, and learn what is appropriate and what is not, you can release your grip on your instincts and let your personality loose. In a word, you can relax. The relief you feel is enormous, and the local people, not incidentally, find it much easier to be with you.

The locals undergo a similar metamorphosis once you begin to understand their culture: that is, they too become themselves. They have been themselves all along, of course, but not to you. Until you know the local culture reasonably well,

you can never be sure, in your dealings with individuals, which behaviors of theirs are mandated by the culture and which are peculiar to them as individuals. If a colleague is hurt when you fail to remember her birthday, is it because the culture sets great store by birthdays and personal relationships in general (and you'd better not forget those of your other colleagues either) or is it merely that Rosita is particularly sensitive on this subject – a useful piece of information if it's true? When you shout at a merchant who won't take back a defective lamp, are you being boorish by reacting to an accepted cultural practice or is the man in fact a cheat, someone the locals would also shout at and whom you'd be foolish to indulge? Until you know the culture, you can never be sure.

But once you do, your experience abroad is radically transformed. You can now separate the individual from his or her culture or, more accurately, distinguish individuals within the culture. Suddenly, everyone has a distinctive personality; you like – or, rather, you are free to like – certain people and not others. And you understand that you must treat Horst in one manner and Klaus in another. You can begin to have personal relationships with people or have more, or sometimes less, confidence in those relationships you may already have established. And as the people you know are revealed more clearly to you, you in turn are comfortable in revealing more of yourself to them.

7.2. Seeing the World Anew

Another great boon of becoming culturally effective is the ability to see the world from a new perspective. As you learn about the local culture, and especially as you learn the beliefs and values behind various local norms, you begin to see the world from that point of view. This doesn't mean you abandon your own viewpoint (though you may make some adjustments) but only that you are now able to see the same behaviors and attitudes from more than one perspective. You begin to understand that behavior that makes no sense to you might make perfect sense to others. And vice versa. You're not so quick to judge anymore,

or at least to judge quite so harshly. You begin to think more seriously about, even to tolerate, opinions and actions you would have dismissed before.

You give the benefit of the doubt where previously you would have had no doubt whatsoever. You add to who you are. Aldous Huxley wrote, *"So the journey is over and I am back again where I started, richer by much experience and poorer by many exploded convictions, many perished certainties. For convictions and certainties are too often the concomitants of ignorance. Those who like to feel they are always right and who attach a high importance to their own opinions should stay at home. When one is travelling, convictions are mislaid as easily as spectacles; but unlike spectacles, they are not easily replaced."* The ability to see situations, problems, practices – the way we do things – from multiple perspectives, from the way *other people* see things, is a tremendous benefit to you and to your company when you go back home. Whatever the question or circumstances, you can always see alternatives to the standard response. Thinking outside the box, changing paradigms, reinventing the organization – overseas, you do it every day.

It is not only the specific ways expats change that are of such benefit to them, but also the realization that they are *capable* of changing in such significant ways. If people know they can change, that they're survivors, then the world becomes a much less formidable place. Expats who bounce back again and again from the challenges and frustrations of living overseas can be forgiven for thinking they can handle whatever life throws at them.

7.3. Discovering Your Own Culture

Another benefit of learning about a foreign culture is that in the process we learn a great deal about our own. At home we are rarely prompted to reflect on our cultural selves; we are too busy manifesting our behavior to examine it, and even if we were thus inclined, what would we use as our vantage point? Once we encounter another frame of reference, however, we begin to see what we never

could before. When we notice the unusual behavior of a foreigner, we are at that moment noticing our own behavior as well. We only notice a difference (something unusual) in reference to a norm or standard (the usual) and that norm we refer to is invariably our own behavior. Thus, it is that through daily contact with the customs and habits of people from a foreign culture, our attention is repeatedly focused on our own customs and habits, that in encountering another culture, we simultaneously and for the first time encounter our own.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the average expatriate, even the average tourist, returns from a stay abroad knowing more about his or her own country than about the one just visited. As T. S. Eliot wrote in a famous passage in *Four Quartets,*

> *We shall not cease from exploration,*
> *And the end of all our exploring*
> *Will be to arrive where we started.*
> *And know the place for the first time.*

Lawrence Durrell felt the same: *"Journeys,"* he writes, *"lead us not only outwards in space, but inwards as well. Travel can be one of the most rewarding forms of introspection".* It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of this inward journey. Living abroad presents us with a unique opportunity for self-discovery and, thereby, for self-improvement. Each of us has in effect two personalities: an individual one that is the product of the particular circumstances of our lives and that accounts for how we are different from those around us, and a cultural one that is the product of cultural conditioning and accounts for how we are the same as everyone around us. And each of these personalities (or aspects of our personalities) is the source of wholesome and unwholesome behavior. When we are made aware of these behaviors, we can try to cultivate the former and eradicate the latter.

But while we can come to know and change our individual selves without leaving our own culture (through interacting with other individuals), we cannot

come to know our cultural selves without the benefit of an equivalent vantage point. Thus it is that until we go abroad or otherwise spend time with foreigners, this cultural self lies beyond our awareness, directing and influencing our behavior in ways we can only guess at. “Those who go abroad,” Edmond Taylor writes, “step out of their own culture and begin to... discover how it influences personal life”. While we would no doubt approve of many of these influences if we were aware of them, we might not approve of others and might want to change them.

In going overseas and encountering local culture, we are able see our own cultural personality in action. And only when we’ve seen it can we decide whether or not we like it. “By broadening his conception of the forces which make up and control his life,” Edward Hall observes, the average person can never again be caught in the grip of patterned behavior of which he has no awareness. While it is true that culture binds human beings in many unknown ways, the restraint it exercises is the groove of habit and nothing more. Man did not evolve culture as a means of smothering himself but as a medium in which to move, live, breathe, and discover his own uniqueness.

As one expat put it, much more succinctly, “I have a better idea of how I tick”.

By far the greatest reward of becoming culturally effective is the fate it saves us from. The alternative is to live and work among people we don’t understand and therefore can never entirely trust. It means living and working among people who repeatedly annoy and upset us, toward whom we become increasingly critical and negative, and compared with whom we feel increasingly superior. It means the artificial reality and forced friendships of life in the expatriate subculture. It is a prescription for the narrowing of our humanity, for our ability to be sympathetic and compassionate people.

In another context, the anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano has chronicled this phenomenon. If we substitute our own “withdrawing” for his “waiting,” we have a picture of the true cost of turning away from the local culture.

In the very ordinary act of waiting, particularly of waiting in fear, men and women lose what John Keats called “negative capability,” the capability of so negating their identity as to be imaginatively open to the complex and never very certain reality around them. Instead, they close off; they create a kind of psychological apartheid....

You can only hope that when your sojourn is over and you are once again inclined to open yourself up to others, you will still know how.

Many expats won’t need a list like this to persuade them they should adjust to the local culture; they’ll do it simply because it’s the right thing. Even so, it’s nice to know the right thing has so much to recommend it.

Discussion points

1. Make up a detailed plan of the chapter.
2. What is the most obvious reward for being culturally effective?
3. Explain the following phrase from the point of view of cross-cultural communication: “…the better you understand the local culture, the harder it is for the locals to hide behind it”. Give examples from the text “Getting the Job Done”.
4. Explain using the information from the text how “to put yourself in the shoes of the locals”.
5. What is the “walking-on-eggshells” syndrome?
6. How to see a world from another perspective? Use the information from the text “Seeing the World Anew”.
7. When is our attention repeatedly focused on our own customs and habits?
8. Why is it possible to say that a person returns from a stay abroad knowing more about his or her own country than about the one just visited? Try to use your own experience and the material from the text “Discovering Your Own Country”.

APPENDIX

Master your cultural awareness

1. Cross-cultural clashes analysis algorithm

Place: Drive-through fast food window

Time: Around 10 P.M. on a Wednesday

Who was involved? Fast food clerk, customer (me) in car.

Gender & age: Clerk was a man probably in his 30s, I am a woman, aged 29.

Relationship: Customer / service worker. Never met before.

Other relevant characteristics: The man came from Ghana. I am biracial (African-American, German).

Description

I waited in line in my car, then ordered a cheeseburger and soft drink. The clerk spoke very softly. His right hand was on the cash register, his left at the window. When he handed me my order, he looked away briefly, then said to me "Very sorry. In my country, Ghana, it is very rude to do this." I must have looked blank, because he then added, "handing a customer food with this hand." I sensed that he felt bad, and I said in a bright smile, "Oh, whatever," and gave a wave of my hand. Then I drove away.

My interpretation

Only after I drove away did I realize that he was talking about the left hand being unclean. My mind was (frankly) on getting food and getting home quickly. I think he was probably talking to me as another Black person about something that really made him ashamed. At the time, I reacted in very American mode: I wanted to be friendly, to tell him that he didn't insult me, that everything was fine. And I wanted to get going.

In my culture, there's no particular stigma attached to using the left hand, so it didn't seem like a big deal to me.

Possible interpretations

It is possible that in his culture, the taboo against using the left hand is so strong that he can't put aside those feelings when he is in the U.S. even though he knows we don't care. Does he apologize to everyone? I think he assumed that a Black American would be more sympathetic, would listen to him as a real person, would honor his African culture. Or maybe it is just a routine courtesy to apologize and he *does* apologize to customers often without thinking much about it.

Evaluation

1. High context meets low context. Fast food is a very low context activity. Americans generally expect to order food, get it right away, take it away to eat it. We don't expect conversation, a relationship with the cashier. The clerk was probably from a more high context culture where interactions with other people was more important than efficiency or speed.
2. Assimilation of immigrants in the U.S. Probably no one at this restaurant ever thought about how serving food with the left hand would offend some of their employees or customers. Immigrants are pressed to assimilate in many subtle ways – in this case cultural control of body movements and interactions with customers.
3. Understanding cultural differences does not necessarily mean that you can overcome your own physical and emotional reactions. The clerk still retained his own culture's values even though he had changed contexts.
4. Keeping your culture to yourself. Cultural differences are complicated and dangerous to talk about in the U.S. When you do, even well-meaning Americans often don't understand what you're saying.

One thing I learned is that I need to take other people's cultural perspectives more seriously, and that adapting to the ways of U.S. culture even in the little things can be harder than I realize.

2. "Sit Where you Like" (Chinese vs. American culture)

In this example, we have an American company selling high-end technical goods to a potential Chinese buyer.

Relations have been going well and the Chinese have been invited for a factory tour in anticipation of the contract between the two companies finally being signed.

The evening after the tour, the Americans host the Chinese delegation for a dinner at a local restaurant. Upon entering the restaurant, the head of the Chinese delegation is greeted by a junior member of the US team. He asks where he should sit, to which he is told to, "sit where you like".

The next day the Chinese delegation left the USA without signing any contract. Days later the US team received word that the Chinese felt humiliated and were reconsidering the business relationship.

So, what happened?

Well, the cultural misunderstanding comes down to a few things. In Chinese culture, hierarchy is really important, whereas in American culture, its more about equality and displays of hierarchy aren't culturally comfortable.

So, when the head of the Chinese delegation was only greeted by a junior member of the team, rather than the most senior, he immediately felt a loss of face.

To add insult to injury he was then told to 'sit anywhere' – when, ideally, he should have been given the seat at the head of the table next to the most senior member of the US team. In Chinese culture, people tend to hide their feelings. For this reason, the team did not say anything at the time.

The US team had to work hard to repair the damage. This cultural misunderstanding led to an 8-month delay in the signing of the contract.

3. "It's fine" (Dutch vs. British Culture)

In this example, we have a Dutch national who has recently moved to the UK.

This individual really struggles to understand the British. For example, when they prepare a report or a presentation and show it to their manager for feedback they are told, "it's fine". However, after handing in the report or making the presentation they discover the manager is not pleased as things are missing.

They can't understand why they are being told something is fine, to only find out later, it is not fine. This along with other communication challenges is really bothering the Dutch national.

So, what's going on here?

Well, it's all about how different cultures communicate. The Dutch are used to being open, frank, and honest when giving opinions. If you say something is 'fine', then it's fine.

In the UK however, the British communication culture is very different. You need to listen to much more than the words in the UK. People say one thing but mean another. Saying something is "fine" in the UK really means it is not fine – it's the exact opposite. Among Brits, they understand what 'fine' means – it means it's 'not good enough' and that changes need to be made. The Dutch national however took the meaning literally – big mistake!

4. "I'm Just Joking!" (Australian vs. Thai Culture)

In this example, we have an Australian national who moved to work in Bangkok, Thailand.

Within a very short time, the Thai nationals in the office were not very impressed with their new addition. Complaints were being made against him for inappropriate behavior. Most notably many of the Thais said he was rude to them. He was being given the cold shoulder by his Thai colleagues and not feeling welcome.

So, what went wrong?

In this example of a cultural misunderstanding the Australian was trying to make friends through humor. He would make jokes about his Thai colleagues in front of other people. Now in Australia this is an acceptable way of making friends.

'Banter' between colleagues is normal and people will make jokes about one another as a means of showing friendliness.

In Thailand however, this simply does not translate. You don't make jokes about people in front of others, especially work colleagues. As a result of his behavior all the Thais in the office thought that the Australian was extremely rude and insensitive; in fact, he was just trying to be friendly.

As we see in all three examples of cultural misunderstandings, both sides have not understood that their culture, and their way of doing things, doesn't work in the new culture.

Much of this comes down to values and how cultures are shaped by the values they prioritize.

For example, the Chinese value hierarchy whereas the Americans value equality. The Dutch value transparency whereas the Brits value subtlety and diplomacy. The Thais value face, reputation and formality whereas the Australians value humor, friendship and a much more informal approach to business.

All cultures prioritize different values and a lot of the time when we see examples of cultural misunderstandings its usually a case of one culture looking at another culture through their own cultural lens.

5. Cross-Cultural Observation Exercise

1. Keep your eyes out for a cross-cultural situation, especially one that you have an emotional response to. Concentrate on an interaction that lasts 5 minutes or less.
2. Once you have a cross-cultural situation, use the four steps to assess the situation: Describe, Your Interpretation, Their Possible Interpretation, Evaluation.
3. Test the accuracy of your observations and conclusions with the persons involved or with some other source who has relevant cultural knowledge. How did you do?
4. If you are doing this exercise for research purposes or as a classroom exercise, it can be useful to write it up in an organized form.

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Учебное издание

Могиленских Наталия Павловна

ДИСКУРС МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБЩЕНИЯ

Учебное пособие

Ответственный за выпуск *Н. П. Могиленских*

Ст. корректор *С. О. Иванова*
Компьютерная верстка *Н. В. Мельник*

Подписано в печать 29.08.2023. Формат 60×84 $^{1}/_{16}$. Бумага офсетная. Гарнитура Таймс. Ризография. Усл. печ. л. 6,98. Уч.-изд. л. 5,57. Тираж 300 экз. Заказ 32.

Издатель и полиграфическое исполнение: учреждение образования «Минский государственный лингвистический университет». Свидетельство о государственной регистрации издателя, изготовителя, распространителя печатных изданий от 02.06.2014 г. № 1/337. ЛП № 38200000064344 от 10.07.2020 г.
Адрес: ул. Захарова, 21, 220034, г. Минск.