

Preface

This text, *Understanding Intercultural Communication*, is written for you to increase your knowledge and skills about intercultural communication. With increased globalization and demographic changes in U.S. society, it is inevitable that you will be communicating with people who are culturally different. Developing constructive, quality intercultural relationships can make life enriching and exciting to ourselves and to people around us.

This book is an introductory text designed for undergraduate students, teachers, and practitioners who are searching for a user-friendly text on the fundamentals of intercultural communication. With the lens of flexible intercultural communication, we are able to thread through an abundance of intercultural material with a very practical theme. This book emphasizes a strong value-orientation approach and its effect on intercultural communication. It also addresses the complex role of cultural-ethnic identity and its relationship to intercultural contacts in our increasingly pluralistic U.S. society.

This book is distinctive because of its well-balanced emphasis on both international/intercultural communication issues and U.S. domestic diversity issues. It is a text with many special hooks and original features. For example, it offers first-time students the following:

- A comprehensive **introduction** to all the important concepts of intercultural communication.
- A sound **knowledge base** of recent intercultural communication research areas.
- A practical entry into the world of culturally different others by hearing their voices and reading their real-life **intercultural examples**.
- **An Intercultural Toolkit** at the end of each chapter to remind students to practice flexible intercultural communication skills in everyday interactions.

- **Jeopardy** boxes to increase students' global, pop culture, and domestic diversity literacy.
- **Double Take** personal narratives and stories to connect abstract intercultural concepts with meaningful understanding.
- **Picture This** poems for students to visualize the intercultural experiences of culturally diverse others.
- **Snapshot** photos to transport students to culturally different communities where they will experience culture shock.
- **Know Thyself** mini-assessments and fun quizzes to motivate students to interact with the book in an enjoyable, active learning manner.
- **Active Dialogue** scenes to illustrate the dynamic intercultural message exchange process.
- Simple **Tables and Figures** to highlight various important intercultural and interethnic communication ideas.
- A well-designed **Instructor's Manual** with many active learning exercises and activities plus instructional tips for managing challenging topics in the intercultural classroom.

Three initial assumptions guided the development of this text. First, we wanted students to enjoy learning about the various concepts of intercultural communication. Second, we wanted to signal to the students that there is no one right way to practice intercultural communication—instead, there are multiple paths and risk-taking efforts to connect with culturally different others. Third, we wanted to have fun writing this book together—as a way of celebrating our friendship. As we approach the ending journey of writing this text, we believe that we have realized our goals with joy.

This book is organized in three parts. The first part lays the foundational frameworks and concepts of intercultural communication. The reasons for studying intercultural communication and practicing flexible intercultural skills are articulated. Major research areas, such as cultural value patterns (e.g., individualism-collectivism) and cultural-ethnic identity, are explored—especially through the reflections of many cultural voices and personal stories.

The second section emphasizes the process of intercultural communication. Topics such as developmental culture shock, language functions and culture, and diverse cultural verbal styles, as well as fun topics such as nonverbal space violations and cross-cultural hand gestures are discussed and accompanied with lively intercultural examples.

The third section focuses on intercultural-interpersonal relationship development contexts. Important factors such as E.S.P. (i.e., ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and prejudice) are discussed in depth. Practical knowledge and skills to manage intercultural conflict competently are proposed. Many animated conflict dialogues and interpersonal examples are used to illustrate the development of intimate intercultural relationships. The contemporary topic of the development of a hybrid, global identity is addressed through a new concept we coined as the “e.net individual.” We discuss the impact of technology and pop culture and its effect on our shifting value patterns. Finally, a cornerstone theme, becoming an ethical intercultural communicator, rounds out the book. Throughout this book, personal stories, poems, snapshots, fun quizzes, ethical dilemmas, and practical toolkits are posed to invite students to engage in active learning to master the foundational concepts of intercultural communication. At the same time, we strive to give first-time students an accurate and enjoyable basic text to learn about intercultural communication. We want them to come away with a special appreciation for the mindful effort it takes to communicate across cultures. We hope we have succeeded in this endeavor. ♦

Chapter I

Why Study Intercultural Communication?



Chapter Outline

□ Practical Reasons to Study Intercultural Communication

- Adapting to Global and Domestic Workplace Diversity
- Improving Multicultural Health Care Communication
- Engaging in Creative Problem Solving
- Enhancing Intercultural Relationship Satisfaction
- Deepening Self-Awareness
- Fostering Global and Intrapersonal Peace

□ Intercultural Communication Flexibility

- Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills
- Flexible Intercultural Communication: Four Criteria

□ Mastering Intercultural Communication Flexibility

- A Staircase Model
- Communicating Flexibly

As we enter the twenty-first century, direct contact with culturally different people in our neighborhoods, community, schools, and workplaces is an inescapable part of life. With immigrants and minority group members representing nearly 30 percent of the present workforce in the United States, practicing intercultural communication flexibility is especially critical in today's global world.

Flexible intercultural communication means managing cultural differences adaptively and creatively in a wide variety of situations. The underlying values of a culture (e.g., individual competitiveness versus group harmony) often shape communication expectations and attitudes. How we define a communication problem in a work team and how we approach the communication process itself are also likely to vary across cultures, ethnicities, situations, and individuals. For example, some cultural groups (e.g., German and Dutch work teams) may believe that addressing a workplace problem directly and assertively can be stimulating and spark further new ideas. Other cultural groups (e.g., Chinese and Japanese work teams) may believe that approaching a conflict issue indirectly and tactfully can facilitate a more harmonious communication process.

With such layered complexity facing global and domestic diversity issues, we need to practice intercultural communication sensitivity when dealing with culturally different others. This chapter examines the rea-

sons why we should understand intercultural communication from a flexibility approach. This approach is developed in three sections. First, we offer several practical reasons why we should pay special attention to the study of intercultural communication. Next, we explain the necessary components and criteria of intercultural communication flexibility. Last, we present a staircase model to increase your communication flexibility in dealing with cultural and ethnic differences in everyday life.

Practical Reasons to Study Intercultural Communication

With rapid changes in the global economy, technology, transportation systems, and immigration policies, the world is becoming a small, intersecting community. We find ourselves having increased contact with people who are culturally different. In a global workforce, people bring with them different work habits and cultural practices. For example, cultural strangers may approach problem-solving tasks or nonverbal emotional expression issues differently. They may develop friendships and romantic relationships with different expectations and rhythms. They may also have different communication desires, goals, and emphases in an intercultural encounter process. In this twenty-first century global world, people are constantly moving across borders, into and out of a country. Neighborhoods and communities are changing. In what was once a homogeneous community, we may now find more diversity and cultural values in flux.

The study of intercultural communication is about the study of communication that involves, at least in part, cultural group membership differences. It is about acquiring the necessary knowledge and dynamic skills to manage such differences appropriately and effectively. It is also about developing a creative mind-set to see things from different angles without rigid prejudice. There are indeed many practical reasons for studying intercultural communication. We offer six reasons here: global and domestic workforce diversity, multicultural health care, creative problem solving, intercultural relationship satisfaction, deepening self-awareness, and global and intrapersonal peace.

Adapting to Global and Domestic Workforce Diversity

To begin, do you know which companies have the most valuable global brands? Take a guess and then check out Jeopardy Box 1.1. Workplace diversity on the global level represents both opportunities and challenges to individuals and organizations. Individuals at the forefront of workplace diversity must rise to the challenge of serving as

global employees and leaders. According to a recent international business trend report (*Training and Development*, 1999), three competencies that are essential in the global workplace in the twenty-first century are intercultural communication skills, problem solving, and global leadership. Intercultural communication skills are needed to solve problems, manage conflicts, and forge new visions as a dynamic global employee or leader.

Jeopardy Box 1.1 Top-Ten Most Valuable Global Brands by Dollar Value

<u>Brand Name</u>	<u>Industry</u>
1. Coca-Cola	Beverages
2. Microsoft	Technology
3. IBM	Technology
4. General Electric	Diversified
5. Intel	Technology
6. Nokia (Finland)	Technology
7. Disney	Leisure
8. McDonald's	Food Retail
9. Marlboro	Tobacco
10. Mercedes (Germany)	Automobiles

Note: All U.S.-owned unless otherwise stated.
 Source: Interbrand, <http://www.bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2003/index.asp> (Retrieved February 1, 2004).

In this new era, it is inevitable that employees and customers from dissimilar cultures are in constant contact with one another—whether it is through face-to-face, cellular phone, or e-mail contacts. By the way, do you know which countries have the most Internet users? And which countries have the most cellular mobile phone subscribers? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 1.2 and Jeopardy Box 1.3. As we communicate across the globe through various electronic or wireless media, flexible intercultural communication becomes critical in a global work environment.

In the domestic U.S. context, a *Workforce 2020* trend report indicates that four of every five new jobs in the United States are generated as a direct result of international business. Furthermore, 33 percent of U.S. corporate profits are derived from import-export trade (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). According to a recent U.S. Labor Bureau report, 350,000 U.S. individuals are currently working in overseas assignments. Although most U.S. international employees are considered technically competent, they may lack effective intercultural communication skills to interact productively in the new culture. Researchers estimate that the proportion of U.S. workers who fail in their global assignments (i.e., return prematurely) ranges from 10 percent to 45

Jeopardy Box 1.2 Top-Ten Countries With the Most Internet Users

- | <u>Country</u> |
|-------------------|
| 1. United States |
| 2. Japan |
| 3. China |
| 4. Germany |
| 5. United Kingdom |
| 6. South Korea |
| 7. Italy |
| 8. Canada |
| 9. France |
| 10. India |

Source: <http://www.c-i-a.com/prl202.htm> (Retrieved January 23, 2004).

Jeopardy Box 1.3 Top-Seven Countries With the Highest Ratio of Cellular Mobile Phone Users

- | <u>Country</u> |
|----------------|
| 1. Taiwan |
| 2. Hong Kong |
| 3. Singapore |
| 4. New Zealand |
| 5. South Korea |
| 6. Australia |
| 7. Japan |

Source: Adapted from Madanmohan Rao, "Asia: Centre of the World's Wireless Explosion." Institute for Media Communications Management. Copyright © 2003, Madanmohan Rao. <http://www.electronicmarkets.org/files/cms/44.php> (Retrieved January 25, 2004).

percent—with the highest failure rates associated with assignments in developing countries. This means that one in ten to nearly half of all U.S. employees sent overseas fail to accomplish their particular overseas assignments (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999).

Even if we do not venture beyond our national borders, cultural diversity becomes a crucial part of our everyday work lives (see Snapshot 1.1). The study of intercultural communication on the U.S. domestic front is especially critical for several reasons. First, according to U.S. Census (2000) data, we are now a nation with increased multicultural complexities and nuances—of the nation's 281.4 million people, 69.1 percent are Whites/non-Hispanics, 12.5 percent are Latinos/Hispanics, 12.3 percent are African Americans/Blacks, 3.6 percent are Asian Americans, 0.9 percent are American Indians/Alaskan Natives, 0.1 percent are Native Hawaiians, and 2.4 percent report as mixed races. The most dramatic demographic change has occurred in the

Latino/a population, which has grown 58 percent over the last decade. California, New Mexico, and Texas are the three most racially diverse states in the United States. Conversely, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire are listed as the three most homogeneous states (check out Jeopardy Boxes 1.4 and 1.5).

Second, we are moving at an accelerated pace with increased foreign-born diversity in the nation. According to the U.S. census data for 2000, 28.4 million people representing 10.4 percent of the total U.S. population are foreign-born nationals.

Among the foreign born, 51.0 percent were born in Latin America, 25.5 percent were born in Asia, 15.3 percent were born in Europe, and the remaining 8.1 percent were born in other regions of the world. The current and future generations in the United States include many individuals whose parents or grandparents were born in a Latin American or Asian region. Thus, the influence of multicultural customers is expanding in every industry. Automakers, retailers, banks, and media and entertainment industries have to learn to reach out to these multiethnic customers with increased intercultural sensitivity and skills.

Third, skilled and highly educated immigrants (especially in the areas of computer and engineering service industries) play a critical

Snapshot 1.1



In the twenty-first century, it is inevitable that people from different cultures will work side by side.

Jeopardy Box 1.4 Top-Ten Most Racially/Ethnically Diverse States in the United States

1. California
2. New Mexico
3. Texas
4. New York
5. Hawaii
6. Maryland
7. Nevada
8. Arizona
9. New Jersey
10. Florida

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2000).

Jeopardy Box 1.5 Top-Ten Most Racially/Ethnically Homogeneous States in the United States

1. Maine
2. Vermont
3. New Hampshire
4. West Virginia
5. Iowa
6. North Dakota
7. Montana
8. Kentucky
9. Wyoming
10. South Dakota

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2000).

role in the U.S. advanced-technology industries. The payrolls of leading information technology (IT) companies such as Intel and Microsoft include “many highly skilled, foreign-born employees. In their absence it would be difficult for America to regain its global lead in IT” (Judy & D’Amico, 1997, p. 21). Many U.S. immigrants have contributed positively (historically and presently) to the social and economic development of the nation. The richness of cultural diversity in U.S. society has led to dramatic breakthroughs in the fields of physics, medicine, and technology.

Attention to diversity issues bolsters employee morale, creates an inclusive climate in the workplace, and sparks creative innovation. Many recruiting experts say that they are launching aggressive campaigns to recruit the top management candidates who have experience and skills in managing diversity issues, such as culture, race, gender, and age. Workplace trend reports indicate that losing an employee can cost up to four times an employee’s salary. Losing a vital employee with significant ties to a multicultural or diverse community can cost many missed business opportunities and fruitful outcomes.

Improving Multicultural Health Care Communication

As borders continue to merge and divide, one area rich in conversation is the state of multicultural health care. When Liliana was giving birth to her daughter, the doctor was surprised that her husband, Senel, did not stand by Liliana. He did not coach her along or support her through the various stages of labor pain. In fact, he was not even in the delivery room to witness the delivery of a beautiful baby girl named Aryana. The doctor was quite perturbed and puzzled. Several months later, during a routine baby check-up, in chatting with Liliana, the doctor finally realized that Senel was not in the delivery room because of his Muslim faith and belief. For Muslims, birth comes through the

“house” with a midwife in attendance, a very sacred place, and no man should be inside the room during baby delivery. Similarly, Native Indians in Belize and Panama also believe that the father should not be in the delivery room with the mother or the baby or else harm can come to both of them. If you were a trained nurse or health care professional, would you likely be aware of this religious tradition concerning child-birth?

Many immigrants and multicultural citizens have high expectations that health care workers will respect their personal beliefs and health care practices. This is not always the case. For example, Fadiman (1997) documents a case in which a Hmong child became brain-dead after doctors in Merced, California, continuously miscommunicated with the parents. The clash between traditional Hmong beliefs and the role of Western medicine resulted in a tragic incident.

Multicultural health care in this global age is an additional concern because of the aging population. Many must agonize over the rising cost of providing quality care to aging parents and grandparents. They also have to struggle with their own cultural and personal values of taking care of their aging parents at home or sending them away to a health care facility. Additionally, immigrants with limited English skills have to struggle to communicate with the hospital staff, nurses, or doctors to convey a simple message. Many immigrants also use their children as translators—which easily tips the balance between the parental role and the child’s role in a status-oriented family system. Worse, even if the child speaks English fluently, she or he may not know how to translate all the medical terms or medication prescriptions for a parent.

In addition, different cultural beliefs and traditions surround the concept of “death.” For many U.S. Americans, death is a taboo topic. Euphemisms are often used, such as “He is no longer with us,” “She passed away peacefully,” “She’s in a better place,” or “May he rest in peace.” There are also a number of different cultural traditions in terms of burial practices. For example, the tradition among Orthodox Jews is to bury the deceased before sundown the next day and have postdeath rituals that last for several days. When Muslims approach death, they may wish to face Mecca, their holy city in Saudi Arabia, and recite passages from the Qur’an (Purnell & Paulanka, 2003). Some Mexicans hold an elaborate ceremony such as a *velorio*, which may appear like a big party; in fact, they are celebrating the person’s life as she or he has actually lived it fully. Likewise, the Irish hold a *wake*, and they eat and drink and celebrate the person’s bountiful life. However, if you do not subscribe to any of the foregoing rituals, you would likely find it odd that some of these groups actually laugh and sing and dance during painful periods of grieving.

Concepts such as ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, cultural value patterns such as “doing” and “being,” and intercultural conflict skills such as facework management and mindful reframing (as explored in the next few chapters) can serve as basic tools and conceptual building blocks for effective multicultural health care communication. Learning some of these basic concepts and skills can help professionals and service providers to launch their first steps toward practicing respectful intercultural attitudes and adaptive communication styles.

Engaging in Creative Problem Solving

Our ability to value different approaches to problem solving and mindfully move away from traditional “either/or” binary thinking can create and expand diverse options in managing team intercultural problems. According to creativity research (Sternberg, 1999), we learn more from people who are different from us than from those who are similar to us. At the individual level, creativity involves a process of taking in new ideas and of being thrown into chaos. If the uncertainty or chaos is managed with an open-minded attitude, team members can come up with a synergistic perspective that involves the best of all viewpoints. A **synergistic perspective** means combining the best of all cultural approaches in solving a workplace problem.

At the small-group level of research, results indicate that the quality of ideas produced in ethnically diverse groups has been rated significantly higher by experts than that in ethnically homogeneous groups (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996). Of course, culturally heterogeneous teams also have more conflicts or communication struggles than homogeneous work teams. However, if such conflicts are managed competently and flexibly, the outcome of heterogeneous team negotiations often results in a better quality product than that produced by a homogeneous team. Culturally and ethnically diverse teams have the potential to solve problems creatively because of several factors. Some of these factors include a greater variety of viewpoints brought to bear on the issue, a higher level of critical analysis of alternatives, and a lower probability of groupthink due to the heterogeneous composition of the group (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

A cultural synergistic approach to problem solving in heterogeneous teams often involves the core intercultural communication skills of mindful listening and careful perception checking. By mindfully listening to the diverse viewpoints articulated by members of different cultures, we can understand their cultural standpoints and expectations. In carefully perception checking the accuracy of our understanding, we can ensure that our interpretation of what we have heard is accurate. Through mindful dialogue with culturally different others in

a team, we can learn to “bounce off” creative ideas that can incorporate the best of all cultural viewpoints.

Global managers and employees, international human resource groups, global product development teams, multiethnic customer service groups, international marketing and sales teams, multicultural counselors, and school teachers and advisors can all benefit from mastering intercultural communication competencies. Any individuals or groups who have to communicate on a daily basis with culturally diverse coworkers, clients, customers, or classmates can benefit from acquiring the awareness, knowledge, and skills of flexible intercultural communication.

Enhancing Intercultural Relationship Satisfaction

A meaningful life often entails deep relationship contacts with our families, close friends, and loved ones. However, with close contact often comes relationship disappointments and expectancy violations. If we already feel inept in handling different types of interpersonal relationships with people from our own cultural groups, imagine the challenges (plus, of course the rewards) of dealing with additional cultural factors in our intimate relationship development process. Interpersonal friction provides a sound testing ground for the resilience of our intimate relationships. According to expert researchers in interpersonal conflict (e.g., Cupach & Canary, 1997), it is not the *frequency* of conflict that determines whether we have a satisfying or dissatisfying intimate relationship. Rather, it is the *competencies* that we apply in managing our conflicts that will move the intercultural-intimate relationship onto a constructive or destructive path. Even if we do not venture out of our hometown, the places for people to meet, to socialize, and to date are changing. For example, in Guam, the Kmart store, which opened in 1996, changed the social life of Guamanians. Kmart is “the island’s social center, its unofficial town square, a place where you never fail to run into a neighbor, a friend, or a cousin” (“Shopper Flock . . .” 1999). When locals want to shop, they come early in the morning. If locals want to hang out and meet people, they come at night before the store closes at midnight.

Another interesting phenomenon is online dating, both domestically and globally. In the past, dating was considered to be a private affair. Now, online dating services, chat rooms, and services allow people to meet on the basis of criteria they find important. Some people may disclose their ethnicities, and some people may not, in the early stage of courtship and flirting. Brooks (2003) reports that 40 million U.S. individuals date online! With match.com and various dating services, the supply is definitely in demand in this Hook-Up Age. With the dramatic rise of intercultural marriages and dating relationships in the United States, intimate relationships are a fertile ground for culture

shock and clashes. According to U.S. census data for 2000, the nation has more than 1.3 million racially mixed marriages. California is reported as the top-ranked U.S. state with a biracial heritage population of 1.6 million, followed by New York and Texas. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that more than twice as many U.S. teenagers of all races reported a willingness to date interracially as did teenagers in a similar poll in 1980. Teenagers are often more receptive to developing close friendships and dating relationships across all racial lines than their parents' or grandparents' generations.

Intimate personal relationships often involve friction because we have such high hopes and expectations riding on these exclusive relationships. Understanding the possible external and internal obstacles that affect an intimate intercultural relationship can increase our acceptance of our intimate partners. Intercultural relationship conflict, when managed competently, can bring about positive changes in a relationship. It allows the conflict partners to use the conflict opportunity to reassess the state of the relationship. It opens doors for the conflict individuals to discuss in-depth their wants and needs in a relationship.

On the topic of intercultural relationship satisfaction, for many U.S. adoptive families, which countries do you think most foreign-born adopted children come from? Take a guess and check out Jeopardy Box 1.6. The U.S. Census Bureau's very first profile of adopted children reveals that 1.6 million adopted kids under age 18 are now living in U.S. households. Although foreign adoptions are increasing and getting the most headlines, the report shows that 87 percent of adoptees from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds under 18 were born in the United States. As more U.S. families are becoming families of color, the challenge is to grapple with issues of race and ethnicity. For example, Matt Plut and his wife adopted a 4-year-old African American boy. He recalls, "We are white parents. We don't know what it is like to grow up black in America. Looking back, I know I was a sheltered white person in a white community. I remember how my peers and everyone talked about race. It is not a comfortable feeling to know this is what you were taught" (as cited in MacGregor, 2002, p. E1). Other relevant and important issues include where to live and raise a biracial family, reaching out and making connections with those ethnically similar to the adopted child, and understanding the dilemmas and problems of a child's or adolescent's racial/ethnic identity development stages (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 11).

Culture-sensitive intercultural communication can increase relational and family closeness and deepen cultural self-awareness. The more that intercultural partners and family members get to know each other on a culturally responsive level, the more they can appreciate the differences and deep commonalities among them. The power of being

Jeopardy Box 1.6 Top-Ten Countries of Birth for Foreign-Born Adopted Children Under Age 18 in the United States

<u>Country</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1. South Korea	47,555	24
2. China	21,053	11
3. Russia	19,631	10
4. Mexico	18,201	9
5. India	7,793	4
6. Guatemala	7,357	4
7. Colombia	7,054	4
8. Philippines	6,286	3
9. Romania	6,183	3
10. Vietnam	4,291	2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2000).

understood on an authentic level can greatly enhance relationship quality, satisfaction, and personal insight.

Deepening Self-Awareness

The late Tupac Shakur once rapped: “*Words of wisdom, they shine upon the strength of a nation. Conquer the enemy, on with education. Protect thy self, reach with what you wanna do. Know thy self, teach with what we’ve been through*” (from Shakur’s *2Pacocalypse Now*, 1991).

As we systematically acquire the building-block concepts and skills to deal with cultural differences, this knowledge base should challenge you to question your own cultural assumptions and primary socialization process. We acquired our cultural beliefs, values, and communication norms often on a very unconscious level. Without a comparative basis, we may never question the way we have been conditioned and socialized in our primary cultural system. Cultural socialization, in one sense, encourages the development of ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism means seeing our own culture as the center of the universe and seeing other cultures as insignificant or even inferior (see Chapter 9). As Charon (2004) describes the development of ethnocentrism, “Groups develop differences from one another, so do formal organizations, communities, and societies. *Without interaction with outsiders, differences become difficult to understand and difficult not to judge.* What is real to us becomes comfortable; what is comfortable becomes right. What we do not understand becomes less than right to us” (p. 156).

Without sound comparative cross-cultural knowledge, we may look at the world from only one lens—i.e., our own cultural lens. With a

solid intercultural knowledge base, we may begin to understand the possible value differences and similarities between our own cultural system and that of another cultural system. Intercultural knowledge can deepen our awareness of who we are, where we acquired our values in the first place, and how we make sense of the world around us. To increase our self-awareness, we need to be in tune with our own uncertainty and emotional vulnerabilities. We need to understand our own cognitive filters and emotional biases in encountering cultural or ethnic differences. Knowledge brings the power of new insights. New insights, however, can be at times disconcerting and threatening. Confusion is part of the intercultural discovery journey.

Fostering Global and Intrapersonal Peace

The need for global peace has never been more apparent. Look at the headlines in any international or local newspaper, and the top stories will include bombings and death tolls in Iraq, a nuclear threat in North Korea, and concerns over bioterrorism. The United States has never experienced terrorism so close at hand as on September 11, 2001, when almost 3,000 individuals perished in the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The death toll includes individuals from many other countries, such as Australia, China, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, and Sweden (cnn.com).

To practice global peacemaking, we need to hold a firm commitment that considerations of fairness should apply to all identity groups. We need to be willing to consider sharing economic and social resources with the underprivileged groups to level the fear and resentment factors. We need to start practicing win-win collaborative dialogue with individuals or groups we consider as our enemies. We need to display a mindful listening attitude even if we do not like the individuals or agree with their ideas or viewpoints. In displaying our respect for the other nation or groups of individuals, we may open doors for more dialogues and deeper contacts. Human respect is a prerequisite for any type or form of intercultural or interethnic communication.

On the bright side, many active conflict peacemaking groups and efforts are under way. For example, in 1998, the late Joan Kroc established the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego (USD), with an endowment of \$25 million. Joan Kroc envisioned a center where people could come together to make peace, study peace, and work for social justice. The mission of the institute is to establish harmony, safety, and hope in a context of mutual respect and fairness in international, national, and local communities through its peace studies, research, and outreach programs. After her recent death from illness, Kroc's estate gave USD and the University of Notre Dame two of the largest gifts ever given for the study of peace, which

totaled \$100 million. The \$50 million USD endowment will establish the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, and the other \$50 million will establish the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Through these peace centers, we can train more students and professionals in intercultural peace-building skills and nonviolent approaches to conflict.

Global peace-building is closely connected to intrapersonal peace-building. If we are at peace with ourselves, we will hold more compassion and caring for others around us. If we are constantly angry and fighting against ourselves, we will likely spread our anger and resentment to others. His Holiness the Dalai Lama made comments to this effect in a recent interview (see Double Take 1.1).

Double Take 1.1

As a Buddhist monk, I try to develop compassion within myself, not simply as a religious practice, but on a human level as well. To encourage myself in this altruistic attitude, I sometimes find it helpful to imagine myself standing as a single individual on one side, facing a huge gathering of all human beings on the other

side. Then I ask myself, “Whose interests are more important?” To me it is quite clear that however important I may feel I am, I am just one individual while others are infinite in number and importance. . . .

Dalai Lama Interview, *Shambhala Sun*, September, 2003, p. 63.

Finally, let’s go to Picture This 1.1 and read the lyrics by John Lennon. Perhaps by listening to this song, we can engage in some imaginative peace-building work in our everyday lives—with our loved ones, families, close friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors, coworkers, and cultural strangers that come our way.

Picture This 1.1

IMAGINE

*Imagine there’s no heaven,
It’s easy if you try,
No hell below us,
Above us only sky,
Imagine all the people
Living for today . . .*





*Imagine there's no countries,
It isn't hard to do,
Nothing to kill or die for,
No religion too,
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace . . .*

*Imagine no possessions,
I wonder if you can,
No need for greed or hunger,
A brotherhood of man,
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world . . .*

*You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one,
I hope some day you'll join us,
And the world will live as one.*

Source: Words and music by John Lennon. Copyright © 1971 (renewed 1999) LENONO. MUSIC. All rights controlled and administered by EMI BLACKWOOD MUSIC, INC. Used by permission.

In this section, we have discussed six practical reasons why the study of intercultural communication is such an important topic. With the knowledge and skills gained as an intercultural student, and with imagination and creativity, we hope that you will find yourself in many diverse settings applying this intercultural knowledge and these communication skills. We now turn to a discussion of the components and criteria of intercultural communication flexibility.

Intercultural Communication Flexibility

What is intercultural communication flexibility? How do we know that the individuals in the communication process have communicated inflexibly or flexibly? Intercultural communication flexibility has three content components—knowledge, attitude, and skills (see also Chapter 2). **Flexible intercultural communication** emphasizes the importance of integrating knowledge and an open-minded attitude and putting them into adaptive and creative practice in everyday communication. **Inflexible intercultural communication** stresses the

continuation of using our own cultural values, judgments, and routines in communicating with culturally different others.

While inflexible intercultural communication reflects an ethnocentric mindset, flexible intercultural communication reflects an ethnorelative attitude. An **ethnocentric mindset** means staying stuck with our own cultural worldviews and using our own cultural values as the baseline standards to evaluate the other person's cultural behavior. An **ethnorelative mindset**, however, means to understand a communication behavior from the other person's cultural frame of reference. In an optimal state of ethnorelativism, a flexible mindset, an alert emotional awareness, and competent interaction behaviors come together and help us to become dynamic, flexible intercultural communicators. We first discuss the three components of flexible intercultural communication. We then discuss the four criteria for evaluating whether the cultural members in the process have behaved flexibly or inflexibly.

Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills

Knowledge here refers to the systematic, conscious learning of the essential themes and concepts in intercultural communication flexibility. Conscious learning can be developed through formal studying and informal immersion experiences. *Formal studying* can include taking classes in intercultural communication and ethnic-related studies. It includes attending intercultural communication seminars and diversity-related training. It could mean taking a foreign language class or a global history class. *Informal learning* experiences can include international traveling, studying abroad, volunteering for community service, and visiting ethnic neighborhoods, temples, or stores in our own backyard. It includes reading international newspapers and magazines. It could mean putting ourselves in constant contact with culturally different others and learning to be comfortable with the differences.

To digest the knowledge we have learned, we have to develop an open mindset and an attentive heart. **Attitude** can include both cognitive and affective layers. The cognitive layer refers to the willingness to suspend our ethnocentric judgment and readiness to be open-minded in learning about cross-cultural difference issues. The affective layer refers to the emotional commitment to engage in cultural perspective-taking and the cultivation of an empathetic heart in reaching out to culturally diverse groups. It also means we have spent time reflecting on our own identity and emotional vulnerability issues in dealing with the changes within our own affective state. A receptive and responsive attitude serves as the basis to push us forward to communicate adaptively with people from diverse cultural communities.

In developing cognitive and affective openness, we try to intentionally put on a new pair of “glasses” or “lenses” (i.e., the practice of ethnorelative thinking and empathy). A flexible intercultural attitude

means engaging in ethnorelative thinking to understand someone else's behavior from her or his cultural point of view. From an ethnorelative lens, we put our ethnocentrism on hold and suspend our snapshot cultural judgments.

Skills are our operational abilities to integrate knowledge and a responsive attitude with adaptive intercultural practice. Adaptive communication skills help us to communicate mindfully in an intercultural situation. Many interaction skills are useful in promoting flexible intercultural communication. Some of these, for example, are value clarification skills, mindful tracking skills, attentive listening, verbal code-switching, nonverbal sensitivity skills, and intercultural conflict management tools (see the Intercultural Toolkit section at the end of each of the remaining chapters). These skills will be discussed under different topics in later chapters.

Flexible Intercultural Communication: Four Criteria

The criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness, adaptability, and creativity can serve as evaluative yardsticks of whether an intercultural communicator has been perceived as behaving flexibly or inflexibly (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1999) in an interaction episode. A dynamic, competent intercultural communicator is one who manages multiple meanings in the communication exchange process—appropriately, effectively, adaptively, and creatively. All four criteria can also be applied developmentally to an individual who is attempting to increase her or his mastery of knowledge, an open attitude, and skills in dealing constructively with members of diverse cultures.

Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviors are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture. Individuals typically use their own cultural expectations and scripts to approach an intercultural interaction scene. They also formulate their impressions of a competent communicator on the basis of their perceptions of the other's verbal and nonverbal behaviors in the particular interaction setting. The first lesson in communication competence is to “tune in” to our own ethnocentric evaluations concerning “improper” dissimilar behaviors. Our evaluations of “proper” and “improper” behavior stem, in part, from our ingrained cultural socialization experiences. If your friend has never eaten with a knife and fork, this does not mean your friend lacks good manners. Perhaps your friend eats with chopsticks, hands, a spoon, or a combination of these.

To understand whether appropriate communication has been perceived, it is vital to obtain competence evaluations from the standpoint of both communicators and interested observers. It is also critical to obtain both self-perception and other-perception data. We may think

that we are acting appropriately, but others may not concur with our self-assessment. Appropriate communication behaviors can be assessed through understanding the underlying values, norms, social roles, expectations, and scripts that govern the interaction episode. When we act appropriately in an interaction scene, our culturally proper behaviors can facilitate communication effectiveness. Instead of saying to your friend, “You are so weird!” you may ask him if he can teach you how to use a pair of chopsticks.

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutually shared meaning and integrative goal-related outcomes. Effective encoding and decoding processes lead to mutually shared meanings. Mutually shared meanings lead to perceived intercultural understanding. Interaction effectiveness has been achieved when multiple meanings are attended to with accuracy and when mutually desired interaction goals have been reached. Interaction ineffectiveness occurs when content or relational meanings are mismatched and intercultural noises and clashes jam the communication channels.

Communication effectiveness can improve task productivity. Productivity is closely related to outcome factors, such as the generation of new ideas, new plans, new momentum, and creative directions in resolving the intercultural problem. In an unproductive interaction episode, both sides feel that they have wasted their time and energy in being involved in the interaction in the first place. Both sides feel they have lost sight of the original goals in the stressful interaction episode. In a productive communication exchange, both sides feel that they have mutual influence over the communication process and that they have devoted positive energy in creating the constructive outcome.

Communication adaptability refers to our ability to change our interaction behaviors and goals to meet the specific needs of the situation. It implies behavioral flexibility in dealing with the intercultural miscommunication episode. It signals our mindful awareness of the other person’s perspectives, interests, goals, and communication approach, plus our willingness to modify our own behaviors and goals to adapt to the interaction situation. By mindfully tracking what is going on in the intercultural situation, both parties may modify their nonverbal and verbal behavior to achieve a more synchronized communication process. In modifying their behavioral styles, polarized views on the intercultural content problem may also be depolarized or “softened.”

Flexible intercultural communication requires us to communicate appropriately and effectively in different intercultural situations, which necessitates adaptation. By having an open-minded attitude that motivates our behaviors, we generate intercultural interest and curiosity in the intercultural relating process.

Last, **communication creativity** is one of the critical criteria for evaluating intercultural communication flexibility. To create is to produce something inventive through an imaginative lens and flexible skills. It takes a flexible mindset to combine the best practices of both cultures to arrive at a synergistic solution. It also takes a well-balanced heart to move beyond the practices of both cultures and utilize a third-culture approach to sensitively bridge the cultural differences. An individual with an open mindset is able to flex her or his communication muscles and can flow adaptively through a diverse range of intercultural situations.

Communication creativity requires us to be sensitive to the differences and similarities between dissimilar cultures. It also demands that we be aware of our own ethnocentric biases when making snapshot evaluations of other people's communication approaches. It also asks us to communicate appropriately, effectively, adaptively, and playfully in a culturally respectful manner.

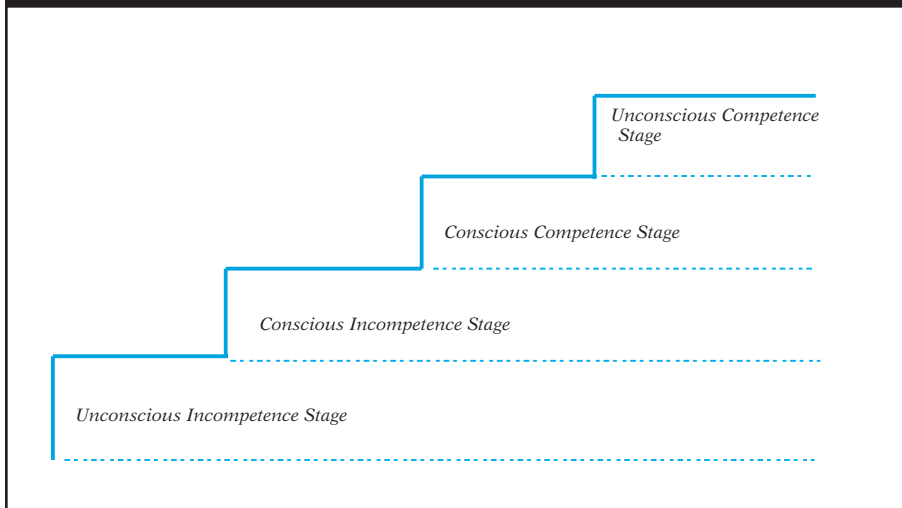
Mastering Intercultural Communication Flexibility

To understand intercultural communication flexibility from a long-term developmental viewpoint, we present the staircase model to reinforce your learning and stretch your imagination.

A Staircase Model

Flexible intercultural communication can be conceptualized along the following stages (see Figure 1.1): (1) unconscious incompetence—the ignorance stage in which an individual is unaware of the communication blunders he has committed in interacting with a cultural stranger; (2) conscious incompetence—the stage in which an individual is aware of her incompetence in communicating with members of the new culture but does not do anything to change her behavior in the new cultural situation; (3) conscious competence—the stage when an individual is aware of his intercultural communication “nonfluency” and is committed to integrating the new knowledge, attitude, and skills into competent practice; and (4) unconscious competence—the stage when an individual is spontaneously practicing her intercultural knowledge and skills to the extent that the intercultural interaction process flows smoothly from an “out-of-conscious awareness” rhythm (Howell, 1982).

In the first stage, the **unconscious incompetence stage**, individuals have no culture-sensitive knowledge (nor do they have responsive attitudes or skills) to communicate competently with the host members of the new culture (see Snapshot 1.2). This is the cultural obli-

**Figure 1.1 Intercultural Communication Competence:
A Staircase Model**

ousness stage or cultural ignorance stage. Cultural members operate from a total ethnocentric worldview. For example, Esteban, who is Cuban American, likes to tell racial jokes . . . about Cubans. He has been corrected and told it was inappropriate. In the second stage, the **conscious incompetence stage**, individuals have some notions (i.e., attitudinal openness) that they behave incompetently; however, they lack the knowledge or skills to operate adaptively in the new culture. They do, however, start questioning their own ethnocentric lens and communication habits. For example, Esteban still admits to telling racial jokes out of habit—although he is aware of his terribly offensive behavior.

In the third stage, the **conscious competence stage**, individuals are actively pursuing new intercultural knowledge to improve their communication competencies. Given time and practice, they would probably move from the conscious semi-competence phase to the conscious full-competence phase. In the fully developed conscious competence phase, individuals are able to connect knowledge, a responsive attitude, and skills into competent applications. In the conscious competence stage, individuals try to stay in tune and be fully mindful of the

Snapshot 1.2

What stage do you think describes your position on the staircase model of intercultural competence?

communication process itself. They use an ethnorelative lens, rather than an ethnocentric lens, in interpreting what is going on in the intercultural encounter process.

For example, if we decide to spend time in Spain, we must learn new behaviors conscientiously, from “*el punto del sal*” (a Spanish custom that says one should not add salt to a meal until after tasting it, because you doubt the competency of the chef; the food should arrive at the table with the correct amount of salt) to “always wearing shoes or slippers inside the house” (bare or stocking feet are unseemly and improper, according to the Spanish culture). Becoming consciously competent can allow you to pick up everyday intercultural meaning and also practice competent intercultural behaviors.

The fourth stage, the **unconscious competence stage**, is the “mindlessly mindful” stage in which individuals move in and out of spontaneous yet adaptive communication with members of the new culture. They can code-switch effortlessly between the two different intercultural communication systems. Their effort appears to be very “seamless”—thus, the notion of “unconscious” competence. For example, once a person becomes conscious of the Spanish custom of always wearing shoes inside a Spanish house, with repeated practice it becomes a spontaneous habit—done without awareness. However, if the same person now travels to Japan, he has to now learn new rules of behaving (e.g., taking off his shoes before entering a traditional Japanese house and wearing a pair of nice, clean socks). Thus, in any intercultural situation, the most flexible intercultural communicators often rotate between the conscious competence stage and the unconscious competence stage. Through such rotation between stages, the flexible intercultural communicator is constantly updating his knowledge about cultural difference issues and refreshing his attitude in dealing with culturally diverse situations.

If an individual stays in the unconscious competence stage for too long without a humble attitude, cultural arrogance may set in without notice. The individual may easily fall back into the unconscious incompetence stage because of overconfidence or cultural condescension (see Figure 1.2).

Communicating Flexibly

A flexible communicator is a well-trained individual with a vast amount of knowledge in the domain of intercultural communication. She is able to make creative connections among cultural values, communication styles, and situational issues. She is also able to combine ideas and skills and use them flexibly and adaptively in a wide range of intercultural terrain.

A creative, flexible communicator practices both convergent and divergent thinking. **Convergent thinking** focuses on synthesis and

Figure 1.2 Intercultural Incompetence

analytical problem solving to reach a clearly defined outcome. **Divergent thinking**, on the other hand, emphasizes a fluid thinking pattern, the ability to switch from one perspective to another, connecting unrelated ideas in a meaningful fashion, and the ability to bring a new idea to completion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Thus, a creative intercultural communicator is alert to systematic patterns in a culture and, at the same time, is able to see the individual variations and layered complexity within a culture.

A flexible communicator is also a mindful cultural scanner. To engage in a state of mindfulness, an individual needs to learn to (1) be open to new intercultural concepts and ideas; (2) be receptive to the fact that multiple lenses exist in framing an intercultural incident; and (3) be committed to or receptive to the multiple lenses when applying divergent cultural viewpoints in analyzing a miscommunication situation (Langer, 1989, 1997). Being open to new concepts requires a curious mindset and the suspension of immediate culture-centric judgment. Being receptive to multiple cultural lenses means being aware that there are multiple frames of explanation in making sense of an intercultural incident. Being committed to applying divergent cultural viewpoints means taking the time and patience to work out the cultural differences.

To be flexible intercultural communicators, we have to increase the complexity of our intercultural communication knowledge. We have to develop a keen sense of alertness on two fronts—one is increasing self-awareness as a cultural and unique being, and the other is increasing our awareness of others as complex cultural and unique beings. Fur-

thermore, we have to develop a more layered sense of understanding by realizing that many cultural, ethnic, situational, and personal factors shape and, in turn, affect an intercultural miscommunication episode. We will lay out some of these ideas in the coming chapters.

Intercultural knowledge opens doors to the diverse richness and breadth of the human experience. It reveals to us multiple ways of experiencing, sensing, feeling, and knowing. It helps us to start questioning our own stance regarding issues that we once took for granted. It widens our vision to include an alternative perspective of valuing and relating. By understanding the worldviews and values that influence others' communication approaches, we can understand the logic that motivates their actions or behaviors.

In summary, this chapter discusses several reasons why we should study intercultural communication. It also covers the components and criteria of intercultural communication flexibility. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of a staircase learning model—from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence—and the role of mindfulness in achieving intercultural communication flexibility. To be a dynamic, flexible intercultural communicator, you need to start practicing some of the ideas you have read in this chapter in your everyday intercultural encounters. Let the learning journey begin. ♦