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Crossing Cultures

Effective cross-cultural communication is of obvious importance for successful interactions, both within a culture and across cultures (see Chapter 4). It is, however, only one element that visitors, especially those on assignments of 3 or more months, must consider when crossing cultures. Even visitors who are in the host culture for less than 3 months can benefit significantly from knowledge about crossing cultures. Such knowledge greatly improves the probability of a successful experience, particularly when business must be transacted in a limited time, such as a few days or a week.

In crossing cultures there is, first, the issue of culture shock, which affects some visitors much more than others. *Culture shock* is the natural response that an individual manifests when attempting to react to and control the many new stimuli, perceptions, and feelings a visitor experiences. In extreme form, such shock is similar to what a stressed-out soldier in front-line combat undergoes. There may be so many new and unfamiliar stimuli, experiences, and feelings that the visitor becomes shell-shocked, even to the point of rarely venturing out of a “safe” apartment for a year or more before returning to the home culture. Fortunately, this occurs only rarely.

Frequently the spouse accompanying the expatriate, or expat, manager suffers more from culture shock than does the manager, who is immediately engaged in the culture through full-time work. Some spouses give up attractive positions in their home cultures to accompany the expat and cannot find comparable work, or any at all, in the host culture; other spouses devote so much time to the expat and their children, who are also actively involved in the host culture through school, that they begin to feel isolated. It is important to take the needs of spouses and children into consideration, as the

expat can easily experience more difficulty at home than at work if other family members are unhappy. In turn, performance at work may suffer.

However, most of us become relatively well adjusted to the host culture after approximately 6 months. We tend to follow a U-shaped pattern in responding to culture shock: During the initial period we experience an elevated and positive mood, which becomes negative and declines after a few weeks, reaching a low point between the fourth and fifth month and then gradually rising and leveling off after 6 months, but at a lower point than at the start of the visit (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). In some instances a person may undergo a second bout of culture shock, especially if the individual avoids contact with the host culture.

The focus in this chapter is on four issues directly related to culture shock. In the first two sections we examine the paradoxes associated with culture-based ethical systems, although arguably this term is an oxymoron: Cultural experiences and judgments tend to lead to the creation of ethical systems. Even when we are fluent in the language, surprises tend to occur because of conflict between the ethical systems of the visitor's home culture and host culture. Next, we examine the specific paradoxes that a long-term visitor or expat manager confronts. Then we look at both a three-stage model and a four-stage model for understanding the host culture. In the final section we look at the issue of reverse culture shock that visitors, particularly expat managers, experience when returning to the home culture.

Culture-Based Ethics: Relativism and Universalism

Paradox 5.1. Are ethical norms and standards universal or relative to the situation?

The word *ethics* stems from the Greek *ethos*, which relates specifically to the character and sentiment of the community. *Ethical behavior* refers to the degree to which individuals conform to these norms and standards. Any group can develop, either implicitly or explicitly, a statement or list of its norms and standards, and its members will tend to label behavior as either ethical or unethical in terms of them. Ethics can be in conflict with the legal system, as the sentiment of the community may be at variance with it.

Ethics may even differ from what most of us would view as acceptable and moral behavior. Jared Diamond (1997) describes a natural experiment involving the Maori and Moriori, close ethnic cousins who had been geographically separated for centuries. The Moriori were peaceful hunter-gatherers living in the Chatham Islands, 500 miles east of New Zealand. The Maori were farmers living on the densely populated North Island of New Zealand. On

November 19, 1835, the Maori arrived on the Chatham Islands armed to the teeth and demanded that the peace-loving and consensus-seeking Moriori become their slaves. Ironically, the Moriori outnumbered the Maori two to one and could have won any fight with the Maori, but their peace-loving and consensus-seeking ethics called for an offer of friendship, peace, and a division of resources. Before they could deliver the offer, however, the Maoris attacked and handily manhandled the surprised and disorganized Moriori. Resistance met with extreme brutality, including the deaths of hundreds of Moriori, cannibalism, enslavement of the remnants, and the random and whimsical killing of the slaves over the next few years. Clearly the ethical systems as well as the moral systems of the Moriori and the Maori were sharply different.

One of the well-known paradoxes that many visitors experience is that between universal and relative or particularistic ethical standards. Especially in individualistic cultures, there is a tendency toward widespread acceptance of *universal ethical standards* that apply to all, although there are exceptions. Most of us would oppose murder, cannibalism, deliberate corporate theft, and so forth. Collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize *relative standards*: What is ethical in one situation may be unethical in another situation, but again there can be exceptions.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) present a striking illustration of this difference between universal and relative standards. They asked more than 15,000 managers in 31 nations to respond to the following critical incident: You are riding in an automobile driven by a close friend, and your friend hits a pedestrian. The maximum allowed speed was 20 mph, and your friend was driving at 35 mph. Other than you, there are no witnesses. Your friend's lawyer says that if you testify under oath that the car was traveling at 20 mph, your friend may avoid serious consequences. First, does your friend have (a) a definite right, (b) some right, or (c) no right to expect you to protect him? Second, what would you do: (d) testify as requested or (e) refuse to testify as requested? Before reading further, you are invited to provide personal answers.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner posited that if a manager answered b plus e or c plus e, the manager was considered to possess a universal ethic. The overall results are striking, as illustrated by the following percentages for those nations with the most extreme scores at each end of the continuum of 31 nations: Venezuela, 32; Nepal, 36; South Korea, 37; Russia, 44; China, 47; Switzerland, 97; United States, 93; Canada and Ireland, 92; and Sweden and Australia, 91. The collectivistic and individualistic cultures clearly diverge from one another in terms of their responses.

One reasonable explanation for such divergence is that citizens in some collectivistic nations do not trust the honesty and objectivity of their institutions, including the legal system. In this instance individuals place their trust in well-established relationships, family networks, and kinship groups, as

occurred in southern Italy at the time the Mafia originated (see Paradox 2.14). Southern Italy is more collectivistic than the north and accords situational ethical considerations higher priority than universal ones, in large part because the institutions, including the legal system, have a long-standing reputation for corruption. The Mafia became a broker for, and protector of, the average citizen who was attempting to work within the institutional frameworks of the legal system, educational system, and so on.

As globalization proceeds, the movement toward individualism and universal standards seems to be intensifying, although there is a countermovement, as events in such nations as Russia and Colombia suggest. It is very difficult to transact global business in an environment in which situational standards dominate: One party may terminate a contract unilaterally without being penalized, there is widespread acceptance of outrageous bribes, both citizens and visitors openly disregard patents and copyrights, and counterfeit products are sold openly. Mexico, in fact, had to develop a new legal system parallel to its traditional legal system to meet the demands of foreign investors who insisted on universal standards.

A few years ago I visited the area in Beijing around the American embassy where merchants would blatantly disregard patents and copyrights, selling pirated and counterfeit products such as computers and musical instruments at very low cost. My host repeated a refrain that I had heard many times when visiting developing nations: The United States is a very prosperous country, and we are a poor country trying to become better off; such matters as counterfeit goods are of little consequence to the United States. However, developed nations, including the United States, voice the opposite sentiment. Because of intense pressure from the World Trade Organization, the Chinese government closed down this area. We can expect many similar actions in the future among national governments seeking to be a part of the globalized trading system.

There is also a related movement among business ethicists toward universal standards that apply globally. Donaldson (1989) argued that all cultures should respect 10 fundamental rights, including the rights to ownership of property and to a fair trial and freedom from torture. Donaldson also created a method called an *ethical algorithm* to facilitate ethical decision making among firms doing business globally, particularly when what is allowed in the host nation is outlawed in the home nation. This algorithm consists of two rules, the first of which is that if the difference is based *solely* on economic conditions, the practice is permissible *only if* the members of the home national culture, under similar economic circumstances, would regard the practice as legal and permissible. Some host cultures are developing nations with such a great need for food that they condone the use of risky and dangerous pesticides outlawed in the home culture, and under such circumstances

Donaldson would approve of a global firm selling these pesticides outside the United States. Donaldson's second rule is that if the conflict between the laws of the home culture and the host culture is not based on economic differences, a practice will be permissible *only if* it (a) is required to conduct business successfully in the host culture and (b) does not violate a fundamental international right.

Donaldson and Dunfee (1994, 1999) have expanded on these ideas in their *integrative social contracts theory*, which revolves around the concept of *hypernorms*. These are fundamental universal principles that become higher-order norms by which lower-order norms are judged. Hypernorms include fundamental human rights or basic prescriptions common to most major religions. Donaldson and Dunfee encourage managers to think in terms of hypernorms when making a business decision, even if the decision-making process needs to be extended.

However, a culture's history, in terms of its trials and tribulations, its geographical location, and its resources, appears to influence whether universal or relative standards prevail (Carroll & Gannon, 1997). China serves as an excellent example of a nation that developed relative ethical standards because of these factors (Fang, 1999). In this nation's 5,000-year history, invaders have been such a major and constant threat that the famous Great Wall of China was erected to keep them at bay. Periodically China also experienced civil war, including two in the 20th century. As a result of the most recent civil war, Mao Tse-tung put the nation through a wrenching and startling period (1949–1976) unique in history, during which he concocted wild schemes that resulted in the deaths of millions of Chinese.

One such scheme was the widespread seizure of woks from the peasants, who had relied on this one valuable household item for centuries to cook food. Mao strove to move China from an agricultural base to a technological base, and so the centuries-old woks were melted down to provide raw material for pitiable "steel mills" that unfortunately did not work. Without the woks the peasants were unable to cook their meager rations, and many died as a result (Lou, 2005). Similarly Mao wanted to get rid of all sparrows, which he regarded as unhealthy. On an appointed day everyone in the nation clanged pots and pans to keep the birds disoriented and flying until they dropped to their deaths. This effort was very successful. Unfortunately, the sparrows served a major function of eating bugs, which, uncontrolled, created an outbreak of widespread and deadly diseases.

Mao even attacked the core of the Chinese culture by separating family members geographically into different communes, encouraging children to spy on their parents, and publicly humiliating selected parents, teachers, professors, and professionals. Also, he believed that "to learn to swim, one only needs to jump in the water" and, analogously, anyone could be a professional

such as a doctor or lawyer with minimal amounts of training. In one celebrated instance a professional woman was jailed, during which time she developed a very serious stomach ulcer, but an 18-year-old “doctor” diagnosed it as a heart problem requiring an operation; she lived in prison for several years with the untreated ulcer rather than submit to such an unnecessary and dangerous operation (Cheng, 1982). Given such a tumultuous history, it is understandable why the Chinese developed relative norms and came to rely on family members and kinship groups—a phenomenon captured by the Chinese term *guanxi*—rather than on the legal system.

There is, then, an ongoing tension between cultures espousing universal ethical standards and those espousing relative ones. This tension is not likely to go away in the foreseeable future, but the trend seems to be toward globalized business activities in which individualism and the rule of universal principles predominate. For instance, major Chinese companies that want to operate multinationally in numerous nations are now abiding not only by the dictates of the World Trade Organization but also by each and every contract they sign, thus minimizing the impact of *guanxi*. There are, however, exceptions to this trend; for instance, the Russian government has seized private firms, and the culture is struggling with rampant corruption, disease, pollution, poor health facilities, and a decrease in life expectancy. As globalization strengthens, we can expect that the spread of universal norms will increase, although slowly and arduously, and that there will most probably be exceptions such as Russia.

Generic Cultures and Ethics

In this section we return to the four generic types of cultures developed independently by Harry Triandis and Alan Fiske (see pages 22–23): community sharing, authority ranking, equality matching (egalitarian), and market pricing. There are some minor differences between these formulations, but for our purposes they can be treated as equivalent, and there is ample documentation supporting the typology (see Haslam, 2004; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Paradox 5.2. Are there universal ethics across generic cultures, or do ethics vary by generic culture?

As in previous chapters, we invite you to select one of the four choices for the two items below, which Gelfand and Holcombe (1998) included in their instrument measuring these four generic types:

1. Teams of five people entered a science project contest. Your team won first place and a prize of \$50,000. (Note: The amount in the original survey was only \$100.) You and another person did 95% of the work on this project. How should the money be distributed?
 - a. Split it equally, without regard to who did what.
 - b. The other person and you get 95% of the money, and the rest goes to the group.
 - c. The group leader decides how to split the money.
 - d. Divide the money in the way that gives you the most personal satisfaction.

2. Which candidate will you vote for in the election for mayor of your small town? (Note: This is a rephrasing of the original survey item, which focused on the presidency of the student government.)
 - a. The one your friends are voting for
 - b. The one you like best
 - c. The one who will reward you personally
 - d. The one who is a member of a local organization important to you (The status of that organization will improve if that candidate is elected.)

The answers for each of the four choices fitting the generic cultures are given at the end of the chapter. These two items clearly reflect ethical considerations.

Fiske (1991a; see also Fiske, 1991b), in particular, effectively relates the four generic cultures to the four types of statistical scales: nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. His argument is that individuals have difficulty making decisions because the demands of daily life require them constantly to evaluate situations and reach conclusions, frequently very quickly. Individuals use these four scales as rough approximations for determining how to interact with others. Thus community sharing represents *nominal scaling*, as names are given *only* to entities, such as African Americans and white, Anglo-Saxon Americans. Under such conditions there is one set of norms for in-group members and another set for out-group members. In-group members may openly share resources, leave their doors unlocked, welcome in-group visitors even when they have not given advance notice, and so forth. However, they may well condone unfair treatment of the out-group members, including charging them more for products, restricting them to dangerous parts of any geographical area, treating them as second-class citizens, and even forcing them into slavery, as happened with the Moriori and the Maori.

In an authority-ranking culture, individual A may be more important than B, and B is more important than C, but there is no common unit of measurement, for example, a unit of 1 between successive points on the

scale. The scale is *ordinal* in nature. Hence we cannot say that A is twice as important as C. But it is clear that those in higher-status positions are treated deferentially and receive a disproportionate share of the community's resources and rewards. Nations such as Japan and Korea fit into this generic category.

In equality-matching or egalitarian situations, the culture has a common unit of measurement, but its members do not make value judgments about individual worth. There are too many dimensions along which people can be measured, and there is no true zero point allowing one dimension to be compared directly to another. In this sense the scaling is *interval*, as happens in the Scandinavian nations. Finally, in market pricing, there is a common unit of measurement and a true zero point (zero money), which allows members of the culture to transform all dimensions and compare them monetarily. In this case the scaling is *ratio*. The principle of pay for performance, especially the rank ordering of managers and employees, represents such scaling and logic, as our discussion of GE indicates (see Chapter 3).

Fiske provides an insightful example of these four types of culture in his discussion of a small town's decision about the purchase of an expensive fire truck. The issue becomes, who should receive the new fire protection? The choices are the following: (a) Only those in the community receive equal protection, and out-group members remain unprotected; (b) all members of the in-group (those who contributed to the purchase) receive protection, but the leaders and other high-status people receive more attention and monitoring of their homes, and out-group members are excluded; (c) everyone in the city and those living close to it should be protected; and (d) only those who contributed to the truck's purchase should be protected. You may want to stop at this point to make a personal choice.

Here are the answers: (a) community sharing, (b) authority ranking, (c) equality matching, and (d) market pricing. This example is not far-fetched. In the United States there have been several recorded instances of fire trucks that did not respond, sometimes because a home was just outside the fire department's district and sometimes because the owners of the homes had not contributed monetarily to the fire department's upkeep.

The visitor to a host culture frequently can ascertain whether it tends toward one of these four generic types. There are variations within each type; for example, some authority-ranking cultures may become more individualistic as globalization proceeds, and some adhere more closely to democracy or at least the electoral process than others do. However, such cultural changes are much slower than economic changes.

The perceptive reader has probably noticed that there is tension between Paradoxes 5.1 and 5.2. Since ethical systems are culturally based, and since

there are four generic cultures, any ethical system would need to fit into one of them. There is, however, a trend to go beyond the nation-state, incorporated in the concept of a world or global culture and allegiance of citizens to it, in which case there would be no such phenomenon as generic cultures. Euro-Watch regularly conducts surveys in Europe that indicate a growing and close identification among citizens of some European nations with the European Union. As the European Union grows in strength and maturity, the intensity of this identification will probably grow (see Chapter 10). Eventually what is happening in the European Union may generalize beyond it into a movement toward a world or global culture.

As this and the previous section demonstrate, ethics are culture based and cannot be imposed on a community, although it is possible to impose a perceived unfair law at variance with community sentiment. Knowing a culture's generic type can facilitate and enhance our understanding of its ethical system. In turn, we increase our probability of successfully traversing a host culture by avoiding areas where there will be open conflict between the ethical systems of the host and home cultures.

Expatriate Paradoxes

There is a well-developed literature on expat managers that analyzes their experiences in several ways, such as the types of training and education they should receive for their sojourn in the host nation, the personal characteristics predictive of success in the host culture, such as being flexible and open to new experiences, and the problems they face when reentering the home culture (see Bird & Osland, 2006; Mendenhall, Kuhlman, Stahl, & Osland, 2002). More specifically, Joyce and Asbjorn Osland (2006; see also Osland, 1995) have completed an intensive and interview-based empirical analysis identifying nine paradoxes that expat managers face. The Oslands have also identified four independent areas or dimensions into which their nine paradoxes fall: cultural intelligence, mediation, self-identity, and cautious optimism. This chapter's discussion of the nine paradoxes, which I have shortened and paraphrased, follows the lines of this classification.

It is noteworthy that the Oslands (2006) correlated several measures of involvement in the host culture both at work and in interactions with others outside work and demonstrated that as involvement increased, so did the expats' awareness of paradoxes. Increasing awareness of paradoxes, then, can be viewed as a very positive rather than a negative development. Awareness of each of the nine paradoxes among the expats ranged from 46% to 77%.

Paradox 5.3. Is the general stereotype of the host culture valid?

The Oslands begin with a discussion of cultural intelligence, or the social acuity necessary to decode behavior in the host culture and respond flexibly. Although they oppose universal stereotypes that allow for no exceptions, they show that expats see as valid the general stereotype of the host culture but also realize that many host-culture nationals do not fit the stereotype. There are numerous exceptions, and the more involved in the host culture one is, the easier it is to identify them. Similarly, as globalization brings us closer together, these exceptions will increase in number. The largest percentage of the expats, 77.1%, were aware of this paradox.

Paradox 5.4. How can the expat manager be simultaneously powerful and powerless?

Expatriate managers are typically very powerful, as they have the force of the home office behind them. They are in a position of authority and are expected to accomplish goals using it. However, they soon discover that they need to operate within the framework of the host culture in many instances. Since the locals have cultural knowledge and contacts, the expats are dependent on them, which is a form of powerlessness. If the host culture emphasizes participative decision making that slows down processes and activities, the expat must adjust to the situation in order to accomplish long-term goals. One U.S. expat manager working in Britain failed to honor the slower process. He belatedly and at great cost discovered that the statement of a top British manager about being 99% in support of a proposed major organizational change actually represented a message of extreme disapproval to all at a companywide meeting. In the Oslands' study 68.6% of the expats described this paradox as important in their lives, both at and outside work.

Paradox 5.5. How can the expat manager be simultaneously free of home-country norms and restrained by host-country norms?

Mediation is the area or category into which three of the paradoxes (5, 6, and 7) fall. It represents the mediation that the expat must emphasize when

trying to resolve issues involving the home office and the local subsidiary and the markets in which it operates, as well as the differing perspectives of the home and host cultures.

One of the most exhilarating experiences is the freedom from home-country norms that require the expat to behave in a very predictable manner in the United States. In fact, the home office frequently requires only periodic reports of progress and achievements, as superiors have great difficulty monitoring an expat closely. Simultaneously expats tend to enjoy the freedom to respond to new situations differently from the way they would in the United States. There are permanent expats who grow to love this style of life outside the United States so much that they deliberately try to avoid a reassignment to the home office, sometimes marry a host-country national, and settle in the host nation for several years if not permanently.

Simultaneously, however, the expat must conform to the norms and expectations of the host culture for full acceptance, both at home and at work. In authority-ranking cultures the expat is expected to act as the distant superior, demanding special treatment but sensitive to the needs of all.

Joyce Osland (1995) described an amusing situation in this area of mediation encountered in various forms by many visitors. Both Asbjorn and she were in the Peace Corps working in Colombia, during which time her position involved traveling periodically in the organization's jeep. Although she would reserve the use of the jeep days in advance, the driver on the appointed day would inform her that "someone else" had been granted its use, and apparently that meant everyone in the organization other than this lowly Peace Corps volunteer. When Asbjorn left the Peace Corps and became the local director of a development agency, the largest employer in town, the issue disappeared. Suddenly he was "*Don Asbjorn, el patron*" and she was "*Doña Joyce*," even though she continued working for the Peace Corps. She went from "fighting for a chauffeur to fighting off obsequious chauffeurs who were more than willing to make other employees wait if the boss's wife needed a car" (p. 105).

However, Joyce was expected to behave in terms of the cultural dictates of authority-ranking cultures, and she admits—as many who have experienced this phenomenon do also—that there was a specific psychological enjoyment and prestige in doing so. One expat claimed that he was unable to readjust to the U.S. environment on reentry simply because he had grown accustomed to others' handling his daily routine, including preparing meals, taking care of all household tasks, and being available at all hours of the day and night. Nearly 63% of the expats touched on this paradox in their interviews.

Paradox 5.6. How can the expat manager simultaneously accept the ideal cultural values of the home culture and realize that they do not exist in the home culture or exist only in attenuated form?

The second mediation paradox represents the tension between the ideal and actual values of the home culture. The United States prides itself on supporting a level playing field in all realms, including hiring, treatment of customers, and employee promotion. However, even in the United States, there are numerous situations in which such ideals do not equate with actual practices.

Still, when abroad, the expat is representative of the ideal that is portrayed in American films, television, and books and articles. Moreover, the expat realizes that this is the general stereotype of the United States. As such, the expat attempts to act out the home-country values as much as possible, although there are clearly tensions between many of these values and those in the host culture. Expats feel pressure to act as good ambassadors of their country and to demonstrate the home-country values, even though they realize those values are not always followed at home. For example, in an authority-ranking culture, nepotism and favoritism based on various criteria not related to actual performance dominate actions in organizations to a far greater extent than they do in the United States. When expats want to hire someone competent rather than someone with connections, they may experience great difficulty. They realize their performance at home is being judged in terms of goal accomplishment; they also realize nepotism occurs in some situations in the United States. Also, they need to satisfy others in the subsidiary who expect the expats to play favorites and hire the candidate with prestigious connections. In the Osland survey (2006), 54.3% of the expats identified this paradox in their work and life abroad.

Paradox 5.7. How can the expat manager resolve the conflict between contradictory demands of the home office and the host-culture subsidiary?

The final mediation paradox focuses on the tension created by the contradictory demands of the home office on the one hand and the host-culture nationals and situation on the other. For example, the expat's headquarters superior in the home culture may demand that the work be completed in a way that tramples on the values and expectations of host-culture nationals. Acting in such a manner creates tension for the expat, who is trying to act out the ideals of fairness of the home culture but still meet the wishes of his

home-culture superior. This paradox frequently revolves around the time allotted for the completion of goals. The home office in the United States, following the cultural norm of specific sequencing of activities and the times allotted to each, tends to demand the completion of goals in a short and constricted time frame. However, this is frequently not feasible and in many cases not possible, given the resources available in the subsidiary, the laws and regulations of the host culture, and the cultural bias toward a longer time frame than that preferred by the home office.

Sometimes the expat will closely follow the dictates of the home office and demand the completion of specific tasks and goals, only to realize subsequently that the resulting work is substandard because of differing cultural expectations about which tasks are most important. Moreover, the expat may realize that it is not feasible to make such demands if long-term goals are to be achieved. Of the expats surveyed, 51.4% identified this paradox as problematic in their work.

Paradox 5.8. How can the expat manager simultaneously give up some home-country values and strengthen other home-country values?

The next two paradoxes fall into the category of self-identity, or the willingness of the expats to open themselves to new experiences and the risk of being changed in the process.

It is a truism that visitors to a host culture learn as much about the home-country values as they do about the host-country values, and many times much more. Admittedly, the visitor gains a tremendous amount of knowledge about the host culture in a short time simply out of necessity if not interest. However, just as important, expats develop great insight into home-country values and the unconscious or semiconscious manner in which they have accepted those values until the exposure to the host culture.

As a result of this dynamic, it is not unusual for the expat to give up some home-country values. A few expats take this dynamic to the extreme, giving up all home-country values and practices. They convert to the host-culture's religion, immerse themselves completely in the host culture, and wear the distinctive clothing of the host culture. However, the normal pattern is for expats to give up some noncore values of the home culture while strengthening core values to gain acceptance or to be effective. For instance, they may become less extroverted and informal while coming to believe even more fervently in the emphasis on a level playing field in the hiring and promotion of subordinates. Laurent (2002) touches on this paradox when he shows that expats tend to become more identified with the home culture

after being sent abroad than prior to departure. Among the expats surveyed, 60% talked about this paradox in their interviews.

Paradox 5.9. Is it possible for the expat manager to become more cosmopolitan and more idiosyncratic simultaneously?

Visitors to the host culture inevitably become more cosmopolitan simply because of the exposure to the many new stimuli and experiences. Paradox 5.8 reflects this change, as the expat tends to shed some noncore values but strengthens core values. Even cultural practices not related directly to values, such as preferences in food, tend to change. One expat in Thailand initially could not eat the delicious but hot Thai food yet came to love it over time. On his return to the United States, he complained frequently about the dullness of the U.S. cuisine and constantly sought out exotic restaurants that he had studiously avoided before departure.

Expats also become more accepting of the norms and values of the host culture. They begin to understand that a “yes” may mean “no” or “maybe” in different situations, and they act accordingly. While they may have been demanding and impatient in their home cultures, they become less so, not only because such practices are unsuccessful in the host culture but because of the expats’ newfound acceptance of such values as “we work to live” rather than “we live to work.”

Simultaneously, however, expats begin to become more idiosyncratic, taking into account the local beliefs but putting together their own value systems and their own “take” on the world. They adapt and integrate values and practices from other cultures to create a more authentic self. Frequently they change their perspective from making immediate judgments and evaluations to taking a more thoughtful approach consistent with host-culture values. In all, 48.6% of the expats talked about this paradox of contrasting cosmopolitan and idiosyncratic orientations in their interviews and described it as the most significant paradox.

Paradox 5.10. How can the expat manager simultaneously think well of the host culture and avoid being taken advantage of?

Our final two expat paradoxes fall into the category of cautious optimism. We tend to think well of the host culture if we become culturally involved at work and outside work, as the Oslands demonstrated. Positive regard for the

host-country nationals is a key aspect of intercultural effectiveness. However, the typical person does not want to be taken advantage of, regardless of the culture involved. A common experience among visitors is being outrageously overcharged by taxicab drivers, which also happens in the home culture. However, many people from the United States and similar cultures tend to be accustomed to fixed and fair prices and do not like to bargain, even with taxicab drivers. Over time the U.S. expats learn that they can save a good amount of money doing so, as they are frequently charged 5–10 times what is expected in the host culture. The act of bargaining indicates to the representatives of the host culture that you are indeed becoming knowledgeable about the local culture, which increases their respect for you.

However, bargaining with a taxicab driver is a minor concern compared with the demand for a major bribe. This is the most common issue confronting expat managers when dealing with host-culture nationals (see Robertson, 2002). One senior executive of a U.S. company seeking to operate in Russia after the acceptance of capitalism after 1990 reported that at the initial formal dinner with top government officials, several of them openly and blatantly solicited major bribes. U.S. managers are required by law to adhere to strict guidelines in the area of small gifts, which are allowed, and major bribes, which are not. The acceptance of major bribes has led to lengthy jail sentences for some U.S. expats. They frequently develop alternative approaches to avoid such activities while keeping in the good graces of the host culture. The issue of bribes is irksome to many expats, as they must compete for business with European and Asian multinationals, who are legally free to offer major bribes, thus putting U.S. companies at a perceived disadvantage. As many as 54.6% focused on this issue in their interviews.

Paradox 5.11. How can the expat manager be simultaneously at home anywhere in the world and fit comfortably nowhere?

A common experience among expats is the feeling of being at home anywhere in the world yet not being completely comfortable anywhere. Also, as indicated previously, some expats grow so comfortable in the host culture that they remain as permanent residents for the rest of their lives, even though they are never completely accepted in the host culture. Furthermore, some expats become uneasy when they return to their home cultures periodically and calm down only when they come back to the host culture, even when the fit is not perfect.

Other expats move about the world every few years, sometimes changing not only geographic locations but also their employers. These cosmopolitan

expats tend to become extremely knowledgeable and worldly wise. They reach a point at which returning to the home culture permanently is not preferable to the style of life to which they have become accustomed. Some of them continue to move about the world constantly or every few years for their entire careers.

Global firms tend to require 5–10 years' experience outside of the home culture for those competing for senior and top management positions. The globalized world has become borderless in many ways, and firms are representative not only of their own home cultures but also of the global culture in which they operate. It may happen, however, that the expat will feel at home anywhere but fit in nowhere, and this can be problematic for those seeking a greater sense of stability and community. Of the expats surveyed, 45.7% discussed this issue during their interviews.

Expats probably experience additional paradoxes, but the Oslands have made a major contribution to the study of this issue. They have also provided us with a classification system with four independent categories or dimensions into which these nine paradoxes fall. In doing so, the Oslands have enlarged our understanding of the dynamics of the visitor's life in a host culture.

Understanding Cross-Cultural Interactions via Cultural Sensemaking

As our discussion suggests, it is very helpful to understand the ethical system of the host culture and the paradoxes that the visitor is likely to experience. When the visitor possesses a model through which these and related phenomena can be assessed, the entire process of crossing cultures is enriched significantly. Joyce Osland and Allan Bird (2000; see also Bird & Osland, 2006) have developed a three-stage model for understanding cross-cultural interactions, particularly communications, that helps facilitate the process of crossing cultures. This model is based on the work of Karl Weick (1995) and has three stages: framing the situation, making attributions, and selecting a script.

Humans tend to frame, or structure, situations in many ways. For example, a conservative politician who argues for tax relief is suggesting that decreasing taxes will stimulate the economy, as purportedly those with higher incomes will be more motivated to invest in the economy. This is a far cry from left-leaning activists seeking the imposition of new taxes on the rich to help the poor; their rhetoric would not include the concept of tax relief but would stress responsibility to others in society, particularly the poor and the disadvantaged. Similarly, patients are more accepting of the

necessity of a major operation if the doctor says “the success rate is 70%” rather than “the failure rate, including death, is 30%.”

Given the constant and incessant need to make sense of the many stimuli and experiences to which we are exposed, humans tend to employ cognitive structures or schemas to interpret them, and these structures in turn elicit behavioral responses or scripts. When someone frames the situation correctly and employs appropriate schemas that have worked in the past, there is no problem. However, when the stimuli and experiences are unfamiliar, as happens in cross-cultural interactions, it is more difficult to employ time-tested schemas. It should be realized, of course, that the same problem can occur within one culture, as humans are prone to make errors.

The second stage of the model involves making attributions about the stimuli and behaviors but withholding judgment; the focus is on the particular people involved as evaluated in terms of their social identities and histories. To make such attributions, the individual should analyze the profile of a nation’s culture in terms of such dimensions as individualism, power distance, and so forth; identify whether the other party is using a particular communication style, such as high context and indirect; and engage in sophisticated stereotyping by examining the cultural metaphors that serve as a shortcut for understanding a culture’s values and practices (see Gannon, 2004). Finally, the individual should select a script that seems appropriate for the situation, modifying it as soon as new information becomes available.

As this discussion suggests, Bird and Osland (2006) believe that cross-cultural sensemaking is normally much more difficult than monocultural sensemaking. They also argue for sequencing, that is, framing the situation and making attributions before selecting a script and making a decision.

Similarly, Gannon (2004) has developed a four-stage model of cross-cultural understanding that complements the Osland and Bird model. In the first stage, the visitor must identify the degree to which process, or getting to know the other party personally, must be emphasized before goals and specific business items can be discussed. During this stage it is useful to identify the degree to which emotions and feelings can be expressed openly. During the second stage, the four generic types of culture provide the platform for framing the situation. Then in the third stage it is helpful to employ the various dimensions of national cultures that Hofstede and others have identified. Cultural metaphors are employed in the fourth stage to obtain a rich understanding of the host culture.

There are related models and approaches that a lack of space precludes us from examining (see, for example, Gesteland, 1999). Quite possibly and even probably, the visitor will temporarily forget about a specific model when actually interacting in the host culture. It is not necessary to know

every detail of each model, but accepting their utility helps us have a detached and objective perspective for analyzing cross-cultural dynamics. Further, our brief discussion suggests some commonalities in such models. First, it is very useful to understand some cross-cultural concepts, such as the ones described in this book, before analysis and mistakes created by ignorance occur. Sequencing is also explicit in such models, and the visitor should defer evaluative judgments until a sufficient amount of independent data is available. In sum, suffice it to say that the use of such models should help enhance the cross-cultural interactions, the communications that take place, and the probability of success. Without them, the visitor must frame understanding in terms of schemas that may work well in the home culture but are of questionable value in the host culture.

Reentry Into the Home Culture

While some visitors and expats never return to the home culture, most of them do. Most of them come back as changed people, having become more cosmopolitan. They uniformly report that their experiences have been very positive in terms of attitudinal changes, improved work skills, and increased knowledge. Through the cross-cultural process they have given up some values that they once accepted completely and have simultaneously strengthened their core values. Most are eager to talk about their experiences, the people they have met at work and elsewhere, and new ideas their firms should consider implementing. It frequently comes as a surprise that others are not enthusiastic about these experiences (presumably because the others cannot identify with the expats' experiences and possibly because they view the expatriate experience as a boondoggle).

More seriously, expats sometimes return to a position of lower or changed authority, as they probably had to give up their positions in the home office in exchange for the assignment abroad. They can experience a sense of frustration if their superiors greet their newfound ideas critically and unfavorably. In extreme cases the expat will leave the firm because of a growing sense of dissatisfaction. Studies during the 1970s suggested that 9 of 10 expats performed less effectively after reentry than before the departure to the host culture. Today, because of better preparation and cross-cultural education, this figure is now only about 3 out of 10. Still, even this lower figure suggests that the expat experience is less than ideal in terms of some specific consequences, at least in some instances.

And it is not only the expat who may suffer. The spouse and children tend to go through a similar process of cultural reacclimatization. This, in turn, can have a negative effect on the expat, both at home and at work.

Gradually, however, the former expat adjusts to the environment in most instances, both at home and at work. Expats on reentry suffer from a reverse culture shock that parallels the stages of culture shock described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, although typically with less severity because of their familiarity with the home culture. In the long run, if the individual continues to be flexible and open, it is highly probable that the expat experience will prove very beneficial. This is especially true in global firms that are demanding 5–10 years' international experience of applicants for senior-level positions. Still, while the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages, the expat experience does have its downside, even when reentering the home culture.

Takeaways

1. Visitors should expect to experience both culture shock in the host culture and reverse culture shock on reentry to the home culture.
2. Ethical standards are by definition based on culture or the sense of a community, whether it is a firm, a volunteer organization, or a generic culture. Such standards reflect the values and practices of the four generic types of cultures and can be universal or relative to the situation.
3. Donaldson's *ethical algorithm* is a technique that managers can employ to solve specific ethical dilemmas when completing business activities in host cultures (see pp. 102–103).
4. Ethical standards differ from legal standards and even moral standards. What is perceived as immoral in one culture, such as cannibalism and bribery, may be seen as moral in another culture. Similarly laws can be at variance with ethical standards and perceived as unfair or irrelevant by a community or culture.
5. Expats confront many paradoxes when working in the host culture, including feeling powerless and powerful, giving up some values and strengthening core values, and being at home everywhere but fitting in nowhere.
6. Awareness of such paradoxes is related to several measures of cultural involvement, both at work and away from it. As such, experiencing paradoxes is a very positive experience leading to increased insight and maturation. That is, being involved in the host culture helps broaden the perspective and understanding of the expat.
7. Understanding a host culture is most effectively completed in stages and requires the suspension of judgment until the expat has a sufficient amount of data to frame the situation correctly and act accordingly.

Discussion Questions

1. Since ethical standards are an expression of a specific culture's expectations, is it possible to have ethical standards that apply to all cultures around the globe? Why or why not?
2. Describe some examples, from either your personal experience or other sources, of relative or particularistic ethical standards. Can there be conflicting ethical standards within one culture? Why or why not?
3. Define and differentiate ethical standards, moral standards, and legal standards. Is it possible for these three types of standards to be completely separate from one another? Why or why not?
4. This chapter describes two models for understanding cultures when we cross them. What are three commonalities or conclusions that can be derived from these models?
5. Does crossing cultures involve only cross-cultural communication? Why or why not?
6. What is culture shock? Does reverse culture shock operate in the same fashion as culture shock? Why or why not? Who seems to suffer the most from culture shock, the expat or the spouse? Why?
7. How does the distinction between universal and relative ethical standards relate to the four types of generic cultures? Which of the types reflect the use of relative standards and universal standards? Please explain.
8. What is the difference between a small bribe and a major bribe? Is this distinction important? Why or why not?

Exercises

1. Each member of the class should visit the Web site of a major company, where the firm's codes of ethical conduct are normally outlined. In small groups of five persons each, discuss the ethical standards of five companies. Points to consider are (a) whether the behavior of these companies follows their codes of ethics and, if not, why not; and (b) the commonalities and differences in the five codes. One person from each group should report the results to the class, followed by questions and discussion.
2. Each person in the class should interview a manager from the United States who has either worked abroad as an expat or been intensely involved in cross-cultural business activities in one or more nations. Using the cultural metaphors in Gannon (2004) and other sources, the interviewer should construct a series of questions asking for comparisons between doing business in

the United States and doing business in a country where the manager has worked. It is particularly useful for the interviewer to read the chapter on "American Football" from Gannon (2004) and the chapter on the chosen nation to hone a number of in-depth questions that will facilitate such comparisons. Also helpful is the critical incident methodology, that is, asking the interviewee to think of a time, and then to describe it orally, when a major problem resulted directly from the differing perspectives of U.S. executives and their counterparts in the chosen nation. Each interviewer should write a five-page, double-spaced paper describing the interview, after which there can be a general class discussion.

Answers to the Two-Item Survey

For the first item, the answers are a, community sharing; b, market pricing; c, authority ranking; and d, equality matching. For the second item, the answers are a, community sharing; b, equality matching; c, market pricing; and d, authority ranking.