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## *Cultural Frameworks and Their Importance for Leaders*

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### **Major Objective**

To identify and describe models of culture and their relationship to leader actions in the workplace

### **Secondary Objectives**

1. To identify several models of the various dimensions of culture
  2. To discuss intercultural sensitivity
  3. To outline a three-stage developmental sequence for developing multi-cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills
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**C**ulture has been defined as the source of ties that bind members of societies through an elusive “socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the

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physical environment” (Fiske, 2002, p. 85). These internalized rules create traditions that often go deeper than reason (Stuart, 2004). Using Kelly’s (1955) terms, cultural orientation could be thought of as the master plan behind superordinating constructs that covertly influence manifest cognitive content.

Because much of the strength of cultural influences stems from the fact that they operate in the background of behavior at the value, linguistic, and construct levels, people often have difficulty defining their cultural influences, and social scientists have difficulty measuring them. (Stuart, 2004, p. 4)

This chapter identifies several models of culture before introducing the three-stage developmental sequence that will be used as the foundation for the rest of the book.

### Leaders and Culture

The culture that we are embedded in inevitably influences our views about leadership (Hofstede, 1993). To make sense of the different types of cultural influence, Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh, and Bennett (2003) developed the three cultures model, which posits three cultural influences at work in corporations: personal culture, national culture, and organizational culture. They state that the model is based on work in global corporations, but it is our premise that it captures cultural influences in both global and non-global corporations.

Personal culture is the shared combination of an individual’s traits, skills, and personality formed within the context of his or her ethnic, racial, familial, and educational environments. Every one has a unique personal culture.

National culture is a shared understanding that comes from the combination of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors that have provided the foundation for the heritage of a country. Although national culture is a shared understanding, as is well known, individuals within a nation still have a very wide range of beliefs about their nation.

Corporate culture is a combination of widely shared institutional beliefs, values, and the organization’s guiding philosophy that is usually stated in its vision, mission, and values statements (Gardenswartz et al., 2003). Similar to national culture, individuals within an organization often view their organization differently. These varying views often align themselves with individuals’ levels within the company hierarchy. This results in leaders often having different views about their corporate culture compared to those in the lower levels in the organization. Keeping in touch with how these views differ is an important part of every leader’s job.

For interactions within organizations, culture is a mix of personal, national, and corporate culture. The focus of this book is on the personal

culture that has developed within the national culture that takes place within the corporate culture. Culture is not external but is “within the person”; it is not separate from other learned competencies. Developing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills should be seen as a professional obligation as well as an opportunity for a leader. With the millions of employees living and working in diverse environments, there are abundant opportunities for enhancing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. People who live in an unfamiliar culture are likely to become more multicultural in their awareness of alternative values, habits, customs, and lifestyles that were initially strange and unfamiliar. Sometimes they have learned to adjust even more profoundly and effectively than they themselves realize. They have learned to respond in unique ways to previously unfamiliar situations and come up with the right answers without always being aware of their own adjustment process. Again, as stated earlier, given demographic changes, understanding culture has great implications both domestically and internationally.

### **Seminal Work on Culture**

Differences in culture can significantly affect leadership practices. One of the earliest identifications of the dimensions of culture was developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961).

- **Basic nature of human beings:** Good—left to their own devices, individuals are basically good and will act in a reasonable and responsible manner; Evil—individuals are basically evil and are not to be trusted; Mixed—individuals are a mixture of good and evil.
- **Relationships among people:** Individualistic—the primary responsibility of an individual is to him- or herself. Individual abilities and characteristics are the primary consideration; Group—responsibility to family and groups is most important. Ability to fit into the group is more important than individual ability; Hierarchical—Similar to the group orientation with the addition that distinct differences in status are expected and respected.
- **Activity orientation:** Being—the point of life is to live and experience an understanding. Activity for activity’s sake is unimportant. Doing—the point of life is actually to do things, be involved, and accomplish goals.
- **Relation to nature:** Subjugation—nature and the environment determine human activities; Harmony—humans should live in harmony with their environment; Domination—Humans can exert domination over their environment while they control their own destinies.

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- Time orientation: Past—history is important in determining our present actions; Present—the current situation should determine what we do as we focus our energy on the present; Future—our actions should concentrate on the future and the attainment of future goals.

The power of national cultures can also be understood by examining seminal research conducted by Geert Hofstede (1984, 1985, 2001). Hofstede conducted research on IBM employees in 40 countries and discovered that cultural values strongly influenced relationships both within and between organizational divisions. Four of the significant cultural dimensions that Hofstede defined have been examined by many researchers. Understanding the way these dimensions influence culture is of increasing importance for both global leaders and those managing a diverse workforce.

- Power Distance refers to whether individuals accept inequality in power, including within an organization. Low power distance means individuals expect equality in power and do not accept a leader's authority just because of the leader's position.

- Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the feeling of comfort or discomfort associated with levels of uncertainty and ambiguity. Low uncertainty avoidance means that individuals easily tolerate unstructured and unpredictable situations.

- Individualism and Collectivism refer to the social frameworks in which individuals prioritize individual or group needs. In Individualistic societies, individuals are expected to take care of themselves; in collectivistic societies, individuals are expected to look out for one another, and organizations protect their employees' interests.

- Masculinity and Femininity refer to the emphasis a culture places on emotional and social roles and work goals. A masculine culture reflects a preference for assertiveness, achievement, and material success. A feminine culture values relationships, cooperation, and quality of life. Despite the label for this dimension, both men and women subscribe to the dominant value, whether it is masculine or feminine.

### **Additional Important Research Related to Culture**

It must be noted that although Hofstede's landmark work is widely cited, it also has its critics (see Dickson, Hanges, & Lord, 2001, for a review of literature defining culture, including a section on criticisms of Hofstede's work). In

addition to the work done by Hofstede, many other influences on behavior have been classified. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) also focus on cultural differences and how they affect business and management. They present data from more than 30,000 participants of training programs and describe seven dimensions of cultural difference:

- **Universalism versus Particularism:** In a Universalist culture, rules are more important than relationships; legal contracts are drawn up and are seen as trustworthy, you must honor them; In a Particularist culture, whether a rule applies “depends” on the situation and relationships evolve.

- **Individualism versus Communitarianism:** Essentially the same as Hofstede’s Individualism versus Collectivism dimension.

- **Neutral versus Affective (Emotional):** Individuals in a Neutral culture hide their thoughts and feelings while maintaining a cool self-control. Speech is often monotone, and individuals do not touch each other. In an Affective culture, individuals express their thoughts openly while using gestures and dramatic expressions. There is often a great deal of passion in discussions, and individuals often touch.

- **Specific versus Diffuse:** In Specific cultures, individuals are direct, clear, blunt, and to the point while examining the facts. In Diffuse cultures, individuals are more indirect and tactful. The context of a situation matters, and they tolerate ambiguity.

- **Achievement versus Ascription:** In Achievement-oriented societies, there is little focus on titles, which are used only when they reflect competencies. Leaders are judged on what they do and know. In Ascribed-status societies, titles are important; the boss is the boss, regardless of the situation. Leaders with authority are usually older males.

- **Attitudes toward Time: Past versus Present versus Future—**Essentially the same as Kluckhohn and Strodbeck’s time orientation dimension.

- **Internal versus External control:** Essentially the same as Kluckhohn and Strodbeck’s subjugation and domination orientations in the sense of being able or not being able to control what happens in the environment.

Ten distinct types of motivational values have been derived from the universal requirements of human existence and verified in cross-cultural research by Schwartz (1992) and colleagues (e.g., Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Bilisky, 1987, 1990; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995).

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The 10 types of motivational values are as follows:

Power: Social status and prestige, dominance or control over people and resources

Achievement: Demonstrating competence according to social standards

Stimulation: Challenge, excitement, and novelty in life

Self-Direction: Independent thought and action

Hedonism: Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself

Security: Harmony, stability, and safety of society, relationships, and self

Conformity: Restraining actions or impulses that would likely upset or harm others and violate social expectations

Tradition: Commitment, respect, and acceptance of the ideas and customs that traditional culture and religion provide

Benevolence: Preserving and enhancing the welfare of all people with whom one is frequently in contact

Universalism: Being broadminded and having an appreciation, understanding, and tolerance for the welfare of all people and for nature

Understanding values is important in cross-cultural interactions. Research has shown that personal values accounted for a large proportion of individual variation in readiness for contact with others from a different group (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995).

Ronen and Shenkar (1985) clustered countries based on patterns of similarity in employees' attitudes toward work and how well it met their needs. Eight country clusters, with four countries remaining independent of any cluster, were identified. The clusters include Near Eastern, Arab, Far Eastern, Latin American, Latin European, Anglo, Germanic, and Nordic. As an example, the Anglo cluster is made up of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and South Africa. The four independent countries are Brazil, Japan, India, and Israel, which have unique religions, languages, and/or histories. Cluster classifications were made after a comprehensive review of previous research that included assessments of how thousands of employees in close to 50 countries responded to questions about the importance of various work goals, the extent to which work satisfies certain needs, organizational and managerial issues, and the nature of work roles and interpersonal relationships (e.g., how well managers relate to subordinates).

Although there are limitations to Ronen and Shenkar's approach (many countries are not included), leaders can use the clusters to determine where broad similarities and differences of values and attitudes may exist between the countries that are listed. Since business practices often reflect values and

attitudes, this can help leaders to be more effective in their interaction with those from cultures not similar to their own.

## **GLOBE Research**

Perhaps the most comprehensive research conducted to date on national cultural dimensions has been made available by the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) Project Team. This project team is made up of 170 researchers who collected data over 7 years on cultural values, practices, and leadership attributes from 18,000 managers in 62 countries representing a wide variety of industries and organizational sizes. The GLOBE team identified nine cultural dimensions distinguishing one society from another and having implications for managers (Javidan & House, 2001). Four of the GLOBE dimensions identified (Uncertainty avoidance, Power distance, Institutional collectivism vs. individualism, In-group collectivism) overlap with Hofstede's dimensions and are described above.

Five GLOBE dimensions are different from Hofstede's dimensions:

- Assertiveness, which refers to the extent a society encourages individuals to be tough, confrontational, assertive, and competitive versus modest and tender. Germany and Austria are highly assertive countries that value competition compared to New Zealand and Sweden, which value prefer warm and cooperative relations and harmony.
- Future orientation, which refers to the level of importance a society attaches to future-oriented behaviors such as planning, investing, and delaying gratification. Singapore and Switzerland scored high on this dimension, signifying their propensity to save for the future and have a longer time horizon for decision making. This is compared to Russia and Argentina, which tend to have a shorter time horizon for decisions and place more emphasis on instant gratification.
- Performance orientation, which measures the degree to which a society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence. Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States score high on this dimension. This reflects the value of training and development and initiative taking along with a preference for a direct and explicit style of communication. Countries like Russia, Italy, and Argentina scored low on this dimension, reflecting an emphasis on loyalty and belonging. More value is placed on one's family and background as opposed to performance. Feedback is often viewed as discomforting for individuals from low performance orientation countries.

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- Humane orientation, which is the extent to which a society encourages and rewards people for being fair, caring, generous, altruistic, and kind. The Philippines, Ireland, Malaysia, and Egypt scored highest on this dimension, reflecting a focus on sympathy and support for the weak. Spain, France, and the former West Germany scored lowest on this dimension reflecting more importance given to power, material possessions, and self-enhancement.
- Gender differentiation, which refers to the extent to which a society maximizes gender role differences. Hungary, Poland, and Denmark report the least amount of gender-differentiated practices, meaning that women have a higher status and role in decision making. Men and women in low gender-differentiated cultures tend to have the same amount of education, and a higher percentage of women are in positions of authority compared to countries scoring high on this dimension, such as South Korea, Egypt, and China, where more men tend to have higher social status and few women hold positions of authority.

Research cannot pinpoint which cultural dimensions are most important for leadership behavior. Triandis (1993) suggests that Individualism/Collectivism may be one of the most important dimensions of cultural variation. Collectivist cultures would expect successful leaders to be supportive and paternalistic, whereas individualist cultures would more likely value an achievement orientation and participative leadership. It has also been suggested that power distance is particularly important for leaders (Dorfman, 2004). In low power distance cultures, subordinates expect to be consulted, while in high power distance cultures, subordinates expect leaders to act more direct and autocratic.

Research results from Hofstede and GLOBE can be very helpful to leaders in multicultural interactions. For example, it may be inappropriate to train leaders in very high power distance cultures to use participative decision making, since the leaders in these countries are supposed to have all the answers. By inviting subordinates to become involved, the leader may be viewed as weak and incompetent. In addition, in cultures with a long-term time orientation, subordinates may be more likely to accept development plans that have a longer time frame compared to those in short-term time orientation cultures. By developing awareness and anticipating cultural similarities and differences, leaders can develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to interact with dissimilar others in a way that leads to mutual appreciation. This type of appreciation can lead to a more productive and enjoyable work setting.

Leader behaviors that lead to beneficial results in one culture do not necessarily lead to positive results in another culture. For example, one of the first things Robert Eckert, CEO of Mattel, did when he started his job was to meet with employees in the cafeteria. He did this to build trust into the relationships

with employees. This makes sense in a low power distance culture like the United States, but in a high power distance culture like Malaysia, this behavior would likely weaken the relationship between employees and their leader.

## **Culture and Context**

Hall (1976) argues that cultures vary in terms of how contextual information is viewed and interpreted. The context of a situation is crucial to communication, often heavily influencing not only what is said and how it is said, but more important, how the information is perceived. Although the need for context in understanding information is universal, Hall states that some cultures rely more heavily on context in their perceptions and interactions with others. In high context cultures, such as China, Korea, Japan, France, Greece and many Arab countries, what is unsaid but understood carries more weight than what is actually written down or said. In addition, trust is relied upon during negotiations and agreements, and personal relations are often a central part of the interaction. In low context cultures, such as the American, Scandinavian, German, and Swiss, the focus is on the specifics of what is written or said, and trust is gained through legal agreements. Handshakes, while often given, are not sufficient to establish a contractual agreement, and personal relationships detract from business.

Hall argues that many cross-cultural problems can be understood by examining differences in how context is viewed. Leaders would be well advised to consider context in their interactions with those from a culture with a different context. Consider the experiences of a French manager working in a German company and a German manager working in a French company. After one year the German manager was let go because of alleged performance deficiencies. The German was taken by surprise because no one had told him what was expected in terms of performance. The French manager resigned from the German company because of frustration over constantly being told what to do, which threatened both his pride and his intelligence (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2003). Obviously context must be a consideration in all business dealings with those from cultures that differ on this important construct.

## **Developing Intercultural Sensitivity**

The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) was created as a theoretical framework to explain the reactions of people to cultural differences (Bennett, 1986, 1993b). There are six orientations. The first three are more ethnocentric, which means that one's own culture is experienced as central to

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reality, while the later three are viewed as more ethnorelative, which means one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

### ETHNOCENTRIC STAGES

**Denial of Differences:** One's own culture is experienced as the only real one. There is no recognition of cultural differences unless a difference is seen as impinging on him or her, in which case he or she acts aggressively to eliminate the difference. In an extreme form of Denial, those who are different are only seen as tolerable or exploitable and are usually dehumanized.

**Defense Against Difference (Reversal):** In this stage, one's own culture is experienced as the only viable one. Other cultures are viewed negatively. The level of threat felt from other cultures is higher than that found in the Denial stage because other cultures are recognized and the perspective is "Us" versus "Them." A variation of this stage is Reversal, where an adopted culture is viewed as superior to one's primary culture. Reversal is similar to Defense because it also polarizes the worldview to Us versus Them; however, it does not view the other culture as a threat.

**Minimization of Differences:** This stage represents the acceptance of superficial cultural differences. People are viewed as similar biologically (physical universalism) and/or religiously, economically, or philosophically (transcendent universalism). Universal absolutes may obscure deeper cultural differences, trivializing or romanticizing other cultures. For those from dominant cultures, minimization tends to mask recognition of their own culture and the institutional privilege that it often provides to its members.

### ETHNORELATIVE STAGES

**Acceptance of Difference:** This stage represents the view that one's own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally viable alternatives. Those from different cultures are viewed as different, but equal. Cultural relativity marks this stage.

**Adaptation to Difference:** Here we begin to develop communication skills that allow us to interact with those who are culturally different from ourselves. Individuals at this stage have empathy, which allows them to take the perspective of those from other cultures. This stage represents those who can shift their frame of reference to understand and be understood across cultures.

**Integration of Difference:** This stage is represented by an internalization of bicultural or multicultural frames of reference. Individuals construe their identities at the margins of two or more cultures. Bennett (1993a) suggests that cultural marginality may have two forms: an encapsulated form, where alienation

is experienced as part of the separation; and a constructive form, where movements through different cultures are a positive part of one's identity. Hammer et al. (2003) point out that Integration is not necessarily better than Adaptation in situations that demand multicultural competence, though it describes a growing number of individuals.

It is often stated that knowledge is power. If leaders understand their own intercultural sensitivity, they can use this information as a point of reference as they assess their own multicultural awareness.

### **Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Components**

In learning to interact with those from a wide variety of cultures, leaders can find a very rich pool of information in the area of intercultural communication. The field of intercultural communication has seen a proliferation of theories, research methods, and training models (Milhouse, 1996). An important issue that frequently comes up in the teaching of intercultural communication is how best to present the material and address learning goals. It has been recommended that instructors use a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of teaching and learning goals (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Wiseman, 1991). Cognitive goals focus primarily on understanding how communication is both different and similar across cultures. Affective goals focus on the motivation to communicate with others from different cultures and on issues of sensitivity. Behavioral goals relate to actually obtaining the skills necessary to communicate with people from other cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1991).

Cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes have also been proposed as three components that effect attitudes toward change (Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings, & Pierce, 1989). It is often asked which attitude is most important or which one should come first (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Rahman, 2003). Given that information gathered during the cognitive stage is used to form feelings and actions, it makes sense that cognitive attitudes set the stage for affective and behavioral attitudes. Although the cognitive-affective-behavioral framework is a popular three-pronged model within intercultural communication, it is not the only three-stage framework. Below, we present a three-stage developmental sequence that can be used by leaders who desire to enhance their ability to interact with individuals from all cultures.

### **A Three-Stage Developmental Sequence**

At this point, we introduce the three-stage developmental sequence that provides the foundation for developing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and

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skills that is presented throughout this book. As Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) suggest, "To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures" (p. 46). Given the impact that diversity and culture play for leaders, their decision making, and their relationships, the three-stage developmental sequence we describe moves from multicultural awareness to knowledge/comprehension to skill/applications. This process will guide leaders to competency without diminishing the ambiguous and dynamic complexity of diversity and cultures. First, auditing the assumptions being made by leaders and increasing the level of cultural self-awareness by both the leaders and those being led challenges culturally encapsulated conventions about management. Second, documenting facts and knowledge for increased comprehension is essential to meaningful understanding of how to present a problem in its cultural context and will provide or construct a receptive site for research, training, and direct intervention. Third, generating appropriate intervention skills for bringing about suitable and effective change will match the skill to the cultural context. The same shared values and expectations—common ground—may be expressed differently in each cultural context. By developing multicultural awareness, the leader is able to interpret employee or customer behavior in the cultural context where that behavior was learned and is displayed.

The three-stage developmental sequence of awareness, knowledge, and skills is based on work done by Sue and colleagues (1982) to develop interculturally skilled counselors. As will be evident, however, there are many relevant aspects of this framework that apply directly to the role that leaders must play within their companies. As part of this process, multicultural training programs that had failed were examined. Programs seemed to fail for three reasons. The first reason for failure was a program's overemphasis on awareness to the point that participants were sick and tired of being made aware of cultural bias in an effort that seemed nonproductive as an end in itself. The second reason for failure was a program's overemphasis on knowledge, facts, and information to the point that participants—lacking awareness and skill—could not see how all that information was relevant. The third reason for failure a program's jumping directly to teaching skills, but the participants—lacking awareness and knowledge—could not tell if their skills were making things better or worse! For that reason this three-stage developmental sequence from awareness to knowledge to skill was developed as an evaluation framework (Pedersen, 1981).

Much training skips over the primary stage of developing multicultural awareness about our underlying assumptions. It is difficult to know the culture of others until and unless we have an awareness of our own culturally learned assumptions as they control our life. We dare not assume that we, or those within our fields, have already achieved a high level of cultural self-awareness

since this is an ongoing incomplete developmental process. The importance of these unexamined underlying assumptions is frequently underestimated. Once we have achieved some degree of self-awareness, both as we perceive ourselves and as we are perceived by others, it is appropriate to move to the second level.

The second level involves accumulating information that will result in comprehension. Increased awareness will help us ask the right questions about the facts and information we will need. Increased awareness will also help us find the similarities and differences between and among the populations being led. Once we have accomplished both cultural self-awareness and accumulated the facts, information, and knowledge necessary to that comprehension, we are ready to identify the appropriate skills we will need.

The third level involves developing culturally appropriate skills. A skill that is appropriate in one culture may be completely inappropriate in another culture. Since every test and theory was developed in a specific cultural context, it is likely to reflect assumptions implicit in that context and, to a greater or lesser extent, be biased. Culture-centered skill is the ability to use data from culturally biased tests or theories and still apply them appropriately, meaningfully, and helpfully in a variety of different cultural contexts.

This book reviews the development of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills and applies them to the critical role that leaders fulfill within their diverse and multicultural firms every day. Readers—whether leaders or business students who are our future leaders—should benefit from this development in two ways. First, reviewing the influence of their own multicultural identity will help readers to better understand their own constantly changing viewpoint, and, second, they will be able to anticipate the right questions to ask as they adapt their lifestyle to multicultural alternatives.

## **Conclusion**

The numbers of different country and cultural classifications available may create an overwhelming feeling of confusion about which one is “right.” Instead of feeling overwhelmed, leaders who know that culture influences the assumptions that individuals have as to what makes an effective leader should embrace the various aspects of culture as opportunities to educate themselves on the many dimensions of culture and what they mean for leaders in a multicultural environment. Multicultural development, as presented in this book, is a continuous learning process based on the three stages of development. The AWARENESS stage emphasizes assumptions about cultural differences and similarities in behavior, attitudes, and values. Increased awareness provides more freedom of choice to those who become more aware of their own multiculturalism. The KNOWLEDGE stage expands the amount of facts and information about

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culturally learned assumptions. The SKILLS stage applies effective and efficient action with people of different cultures based on the participants' clarified assumptions and accurate knowledge. Leaders need to be trained in awareness, knowledge, and skills to develop multicultural competency.

## CHAPTER 3 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is understanding cultural dimensions as important for leaders of domestic companies as it is for leaders of multinational firms? Why or why not?
2. Should differences in culture affect leadership practices?
3. The three cultures model posits three cultural influences at work in corporations. What contextual factors do you believe influence which cultural influence—personal, national, or corporate—has the strongest impact on behavior?
4. Although many different cultural dimensions were presented, are there any work-related goals in your field that could be considered universal? What is the most important work-related goal that differs by culture?
5. Should research on determining the dimensions of culture continue or should research shift its focus?

**Critical Incident: Whose Holiday Is It, Anyway?**

As a leader in a large Southeastern insurance company you find yourself in the middle of a tense situation. Two years ago, the traditional yuletide decorations put up annually in your department were considered insensitive to the values of non-Christian employees. As far as you could tell, none of your employees complained, but a human resource manager said that out of respect for all religions, no holiday-related decorations should be put up if they didn't reflect all cultures. Last year, employees thought they had addressed the problem by putting up traditional Christmas decorations, along with a menorah and Kwanzaa-related decorations. Although they had not complained earlier, several Jewish employees explained that the menorah was a private symbol, and it was not intended for public display in an office lobby. All of the holiday decorations were ordered removed and several of your employees complained that the Grinch was alive and well in your company. You began to notice that divisions that had not existed earlier among your employees began to develop along religious lines, and you felt that overall performance levels were falling because of the conflict. This year you quietly tried to sidestep the entire holiday fiasco by telling your administrative assistant not to put up any decorations and not to mention it to anyone. However, a Hispanic group of employees

noticed the absence of Christmas decorations and asked your assistant why there weren't any since no one had specifically complained about the tree in the past. Your assistant told them that it was your decision, and they filed a grievance claiming that their cultural values required that they be allowed to put up a tree with decorations.

#### CRITICAL INCIDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With no initial complaints, was it appropriate to remove the Christmas decoration in the first place?
2. What was the correct action in response to the Jewish employees who objected to the menorah being displayed publicly?
3. How should you address the resulting conflicts between religious groups in your organization?
4. What is the best response to the grievance filed by the group of Hispanic employees?

### Exercise 3: Describing Cultural Identity

#### OBJECTIVE

To identify the complex culturally learned roles and perspectives that contribute to an individual's identity

#### DESCRIPTION

Participants are instructed to identify several of their personal identity groups affiliated with different cultures or social groups. Through this activity participants will become more aware of their multiple and simultaneous memberships in different cultural groups.

*Time required:* 30 minutes or less

*Risk/expertise level:* Moderate

*Participants needed:* Any number of participants plus one facilitator

#### PROCEDURE

1. In the blanks below, ask participants to please write answers to the simple question: "Who are you?" Participants should give as many answers as they can think of.

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2. Ask participants to write the answers in the order that they occur to them.
3. Allow 7 minutes for them to complete the list.
4. Gather participants in small groups to discuss and compare their responses.

### DEBRIEFING

1. If you had the time, would you be able to list a larger number of identities for yourself?
2. Which identities were most important to you?
3. How can these multiple identities be helpful to you?
4. Are all these identities equally strong for you?
5. Is there a maximum number of identities for an individual?

### INSIGHT

Each of us belongs to many different, potentially salient cultural identities at the same time.

### EXHIBIT

Identity list indicating the cultural roles of the participant:

I am \_\_\_\_\_

(etc.)

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SOURCE: Adapted with permission from Pedersen, P. (1997b). *Culture-centered counseling interventions* (pp. 25–26). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.