

# Chapter 1

## The Necessity of Intercultural Communication

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### **CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

After reading this chapter, the students should be able to:

1. List and discuss the benefits of intercultural communication.
2. Identify and discuss the eight dimensions of communication.
3. Define and discuss the nature culture.
4. Identify and discuss the five contexts of intercultural communication.
5. Discuss the relationship between intercultural communication, uncertainty, and anxiety.
6. Assess their degree of intercultural communication apprehension.

### **CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Marshall McLuhan's vision of a *global village* is no longer considered an abstract idea but a virtual certainty. Technological and socio-political changes have made the world a smaller planet to inhabit. The technological feasibility of the mass media to bring events from across the globe into our homes, businesses, and schools dramatically reduces the distance between peoples of different cultures and societies. Telecommunication systems link the world via satellites and fiber optics. Supersonic jets carry people from one country to another faster than the speed of sound. Politically, the end of the cold war has brought decades of partisan tensions to an end. Countries that were once bitter enemies are now joining forces. Mass migrations force interaction between people of different races, nationalities, and ethnicities. Noted historian and Pulitzer Prize winner Arthur Schlesinger warns us that history tells an ugly story of what happens when people of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or linguistic backgrounds converge in one place.

The hostility of one group of people against another, *different* group of people, is among the most instinctive of human drives. Schlesinger contends that unless a common goal binds diverse people together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart. By replacing the conflict of political ideologies that dominated in the twentieth century, ethnic and racial strife will usher in the new millennium as the explosive issue. Only through intercultural communication can such conflict be managed and reduced. Only by competently and peacefully interacting with others who are different than ourselves can our global village survive.

### **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

#### I. Benefits of Intercultural Communication

- A. This part of the chapter emphasizes that while the challenges of an increasingly diverse world are great, the benefits are even greater.
  1. Healthier communities
  2. Increased international, national, and local commerce
  3. Reduced conflict
  4. Personal growth through increased tolerance

#### II. Diversity in The United States

- A. This part of the chapter demonstrates that the United States is becoming increasingly diverse. One need not travel to far away countries to experience the benefits of intercultural communication described above.
- B. Largely due to immigration trends, cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States is a fact of life. Between 1991 and 1993, a record four million legal immigrants came to the United States. Blacks, or *African-Americans*, make up 12 percent of the population and are the largest minority, or *microcultural*, group in the United States, numbering just over 30 million people. *Hispanics* are the second largest and numerically fastest growing co-cultural group in the United States today.
- C. An increasing number of groups are revitalizing their ethnic traditions and promoting their cultural and ethnic uniqueness through language. Language is a vital part of maintaining one's cultural heritage. Over thirty-two million people in the United States speak languages other than English at home.
- D. Although the United States prides itself as a nation of immigrants, there is a growing sense of uncertainty, fear, and distrust between different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups. These feelings create anxiety, which can foster separatism rather than unity.
- E. Many Americans are frustrated, confused, and uncertain. Only through intercultural communication can such uncertainty be reduced. Only when diverse people come together and interact can they unify rather than separate. Unity is impossible without communication. Intercultural communication is a necessity.

### III. Human Communication

- A. Communication is everywhere. Even when they are alone, people are bombarded with communication. Human communication—that is, the ability to symbolize and use language—separates humans from animals. Communication with others is the essence of what it means to be human. Communication is the vehicle by which people initiate, maintain, and terminate their relationships with others.

### IV. The Nature of Human Communication

- A. Because of its ubiquitous nature, communication is very difficult to define. Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of communication, there are certain properties of communication upon which most communication scholars agree describe its nature.
  1. *Process*. A process is anything that is ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous.
  2. *Dynamic*. The terms “process” and “dynamic” are closely related. Part of what makes communication a process is its dynamic nature. Something that is dynamic is considered active and/or forceful.
  3. *Interactive-Transactive*. Communication is interactive and transactive because it occurs between people. Communication requires the *active* participation of two people *simultaneously* sending and receiving messages.
  4. *Symbolic*. A symbol is an arbitrarily selected and learned stimulus that represents something else. Symbols can be verbal or nonverbal. Symbols are the vehicle by which the thoughts and ideas of one person can be communicated to another person.
  5. *Intentional*. Perhaps one of the most debated issues regarding the communication process centers around intentionality. Intentional communication exists whenever two or more people consciously engage in interaction with some purpose. Unintentional communication may exist, however. In this book, the type of communication that will be discussed is intentional communication.
  6. *Contextual*. Communication is dependent on the context in which it occurs. A context is the cultural, physical, relational, and perceptual environment in which communication occurs.

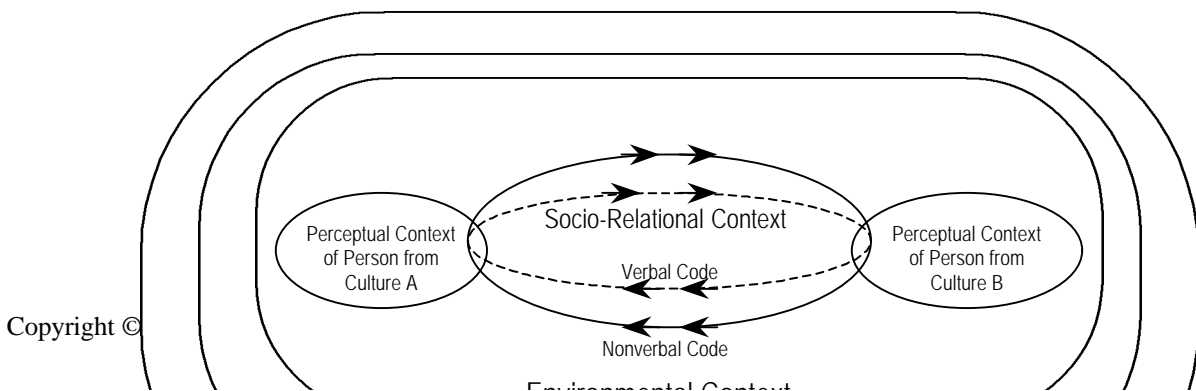
7. *Ubiquitous*. That communication is ubiquitous simply means that communication is everywhere, done by everyone, all of the time. Humans are constantly bombarded with verbal and nonverbal messages. Wherever one goes there is some communication happening.
  8. *Cultural*. Culture shapes communication and communication is culture bound. People from different cultures communicate differently. The verbal and nonverbal symbols we use to communicate with our friends and families are strongly influenced by our culture.
- B. Communication then, is the dynamic process of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal messages within a defined cultural, physiological, socio-relational, and perceptual environment. Although many of our messages are sent intentionally, many others, perhaps our nonverbal messages, can unintentionally influence others.

#### V. The Nature of Culture

- A. Like communication, culture is ubiquitous and has a profound effect on humans. Culture is simultaneously invisible yet pervasive. As we go about our daily lives, we are not overtly conscious of our culture's influence. Yet most of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are culturally driven. Culture has a direct influence on the physical, relational and perceptual environment.
- B. In this book, *culture* is defined as *an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system*.
1. **Accumulated Pattern of Values, Beliefs and Behaviors.** Cultures can be defined by their value and belief systems and by the actions of their members. People who exist in the same culture generally share similar values and beliefs. The values of a particular culture lead to a set of expectations and rules prescribing how people should behave in that culture.
  2. **An Identifiable Group of People with a Common History.** Because the members of a particular culture share similar values, beliefs and behaviors, they are identifiable as a distinct group. In addition to their shared values, beliefs and behaviors, the members of a particular culture share a common history.
  3. **Verbal and Nonverbal Symbol System.** The verbal and nonverbal symbols with which the members of a culture communicate are culture bound. Although two cultures may share the same verbal code they may have dramatically different verbal styles. Nonverbal codes systems vary significantly across cultures also.
- C. **Microcultural Groups.** Within most cultures there are groups of people, or *microcultures*, that coexist within the mainstream society. Microcultures exist within the broader rules and guidelines of the dominant cultural milieu but are distinct in some way, perhaps racially, linguistically, or via their sexual orientation, age, or even occupation.

#### VI. A Model of Intercultural Communication

- A. Intercultural communication occurs whenever a minimum of two persons from different cultures or microcultures come together and exchange verbal and nonverbal symbols. A central theme throughout this book is that intercultural communication is contextual.





- B. Intercultural communication occurs within a variety of contexts, including a cultural, microcultural, environmental, perceptual, and socio-relational context. The general theme of this book, as represented in the model, is that intercultural communication is defined by the interdependence of these various contexts.
1. The largest, outer circle of the model represents the cultural context. This is the largest circle because the dominant culture permeates every aspect of the communicative exchange, even the physical geography.
  2. The next largest circle in the model is the microcultural context. These groups are in some way different than the larger cultural milieu. Sometimes the difference is ethnicity, race, or language.
  3. The next largest circle in the model is the environmental context. This circle represents the physical geographical location of the interaction. While culture prescribes the overall rules for communication, the physical location indicates when and where the specific rules apply.
  4. The two circles in the model within the socio-relational context represent the perceptual contexts of the individuals interacting. The perceptual context refers to the individual characteristics of the interactants, including their cognitions, attitudes, dispositions, and motivations.
  5. The circle encompassing the perceptual contexts in the model is the socio-relational context. This refers to the relationship between the interactants. Whenever two people come together and interact they establish a relationship. In the model, the socio-relational context is graphically represented by two circles labeled nonverbal and verbal messages.
  6. The nonverbal message circle is larger than the verbal message circle because the majority of our communicative behavior is nonverbal. Whether we are using words or not, we are communicating nonverbally through eye contact, bodily stance, and space.
  7. The verbal message circle is a series of dashes in the shape of a circle to represent the *digital* quality of verbal communication. By digital, we mean that, unlike our nonverbal communication, our verbal communication is made up of words that have recognizable and discrete beginning and ending points.

#### VII. Intercultural Communication and Uncertainty

- A. When we interact with someone from a different culture we are faced with a lot of uncertainty. Uncertainty about the other person may make us feel nervous and anxious.
- B. To some extent, to effectively interact with someone from a different culture we must be able to predict how our interaction partner is likely to behave and, based on those predictions, select our appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages.
- C. Some types of communication situations may be more or less anxiety producing than others. Initial interaction with someone or interacting with someone from a different culture may produce heightened anxiety. If we are too anxious about interacting with strangers, we tend to avoid them. This type of communication anxiety can be labeled intercultural communication apprehension; that is, the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people from different groups, especially different cultural or ethnic groups.

#### VIII. Intercultural Communication Apprehension

- A. Successfully interacting with someone from a different culture requires a degree of communication competence. Most models of communication competence include a cognitive, affective, and behavioral component.
  1. The cognitive component refers to how much one knows about communication.
  2. The affective component includes one's motivation to approach or avoid communication.

3. The behavioral component refers to the skills one has to interact competently.

## **KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

**Communication:** The simultaneous encoding, decoding, and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal messages between people.

**Microculture:** An identifiable group of people coexisting within some dominant cultural context.

**Context:** The cultural, physical, social, and psychological environment.

**Culture:** An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system.

**Dynamic:** Something considered active and forceful.

**Environmental Context:** The physical, geographical location of communication.

**Intentionality:** During communication, the voluntary and conscious encoding and decoding of messages.

**Interactive:** A process between two people.

**Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA):** The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with a person from another culture or co-culture.

**Intercultural Communication:** Two persons from different cultures or co-cultures exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages.

**Process:** Anything ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous.

**Perceptual Context:** The attitudes, emotions, and motivations of the persons engaged in communication and how they affect information processing.

**Socio-Relational Context:** The role relationship between the interactants (i.e., brother/sister).

**Symbol:** An arbitrarily selected and learned stimulus representing something else.

**Transactional:** The simultaneous encoding and decoding process during communication.

**Uncertainty:** The amount of unpredictability during communication.

## **CLASSROOM EXERCISES AND ACTIVITIES**

- 1.1. Ask two students, who do not know each other, to stand in front of the class and hold a brief conversation. During their conversation, note the different types of behaviors that the two students use. After a few minutes, stop the conversation and discuss how typical their conversation was in terms of the values, norms, and behaviors of this culture. Almost always the students will begin their conversation by introducing themselves to each other followed by a discussion of their respective majors, hometown, etc. Note the kinds of behaviors they used (e.g., handshake, direct eye contact, smiling). Note the distance they assume from each other (e.g., "arm's length"). Note the topics they discuss (names, majors, hometowns, dorms, etc.). Emphasize that these behaviors are culturally driven; that in other cultures, one might bow, engage in indirect contact, etc. Note that arm's length distance is normative in US culture but not in many other cultures where the distance might be much closer or much farther away. If you have students from other cultures in the class, ask them to describe how the same conversation might progress in their native cultures.

- 1.2. Assign students the task of finding at least one definition of culture (from sources other than the dictionary) to bring to class for the following class discussion. Have the students read their definitions to the class. As a class, make notes and compare and contrast the various definitions.
- 1.3. Ask students who traveled or lived abroad to describe their experiences to the class. Ask them to recount what they perceived as the biggest difference and similarity of the other culture to US culture.
- 1.4. Have students interview a person from another culture, asking him/her the following types of questions:
  - a. Where is he/she from?
  - b. How long has he/she been in the US?
  - c. What was his/her first impression of the US?
  - d. What are some of the biggest differences between his/her native culture and the US?
  - e. What does he/she like (dislike) about the US?