CHAPTER 6: CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS AND DIVERSITY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with insight into, and skills for, relating effectively to people from other cultures. Relating effectively to diverse people within one’s own culture or from other cultures requires similar knowledge and skills.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

As is well known, today’s workplace is diverse. Minority group members in the United States are growing seven times as fast as the majority population. Minorities and workers from other countries occupy 26 percent of jobs. Cultural diversity is also reflected in the increasing internationalization of business. To succeed in today’s workplace one must be able to relate effectively to people from different cultural groups from within and outside his or her country.

I. THE DIVERSITY UMBRELLA
To appreciate diversity, a person must go beyond tolerating and treating people fairly from different racial and ethnic groups. The true meaning of diversity is to respect and enjoy a wide range of cultural and individual differences. To be diverse, is to be different in some measurable way even if the difference is not apparent on the surface.

The diversity umbrella is supposed to include everybody in an organization. To value diversity is to appreciate individual differences among people. The goal of a diverse organization is for persons of all cultural backgrounds to achieve their full potential, not restrained by group identities such as sex, nationality, or race.

Cultural as well as individual factors contribute to cultural diversity. For example, people can be diverse because of ethnicity or their height-to-weight ratio.

II. UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
The male-female differences in communication patterns described in Chapter 3 represent one aspect of cultural differences. The groundwork for developing effective cross-cultural relations is to understand cultural differences.

A. Competency Goals
Setting competency goals will improve one’s chances of effectively understanding cultural differences.
1. **Cultural Sensitivity.** To relate well to a person from a foreign country, a person must be alert to possible cultural differences. When working in another country, one must be willing to acquire knowledge about local customs, and learn how to speak the native language at least passably. Cultural sensitivity is an awareness of and a willingness to investigate the reasons why people of another culture act as they do. Good cultural sensitivity enhances interpersonal relationships.

2. **Respect for All Workers and Cultures.** An effective strategy for achieving cross-cultural understanding is to respect all others in the workplace (white males included). Respect comes from valuing differences.

3. **Cultural Fluency.** A high-level goal in understanding cultural differences is to achieve cultural fluency, the ability to conduct business in a diverse, international environment. Achieving cultural fluency includes a variety of skills such as relating well to people for different cultures, and knowing a second language.

B. Dimensions of Differences In Cultural Values

One way to understand how national cultures differ is to examine their values. Text Table 6-1 compares values in the United States to the collective values of many Western and Eastern countries. Here we deal with eight key values.

1. **Individualism versus collectivism.** Individualism is a mental set in which people see themselves first as individuals and believe that their own interests take priority. Collectivism is a feeling that the group and society receive top priority.

2. **Power distance.** The extent to which employees accept the idea that members of an organization have different levels of power is referred to as power distance. In a high power-distance culture the boss makes many decisions simply because she or he is the boss.

3. **Uncertainty avoidance.** People who accept the unknown, and tolerate risk and unconventional behavior, are said to have low uncertainty avoidance. A society ranked high in uncertainty avoidance contains a majority of people who want predictable and certain futures.

4. **Materialism versus concern for others.** In this context, materialism refers to an emphasis on assertiveness and the acquisition of money and material objects. It also means a de-emphasis on caring for others. At the other end of the continuum is concern for others, an emphasis on personal relationships and a concern for the welfare of
others.

5. **Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation.** Workers from a culture with a **long-term orientation** maintain a long-range perspective, thus being thrifty and not demanding quick returns on their investments. A **short-term orientation** is characterized by a demand for immediate results and a propensity not to save.

6. **Formality versus informality.** A country that values formality attaches considerable importance to tradition, ceremony, social, rules, and rank. **Informality** refers to a casual attitude toward tradition, ceremony, social rules, and rank.

7. **Urgent time orientation versus casual time orientation,** People with an **urgent time orientation** perceive time as a scarce resource and tend to be impatient. People with a **casual time orientation** view time as an unlimited and unending resource and tend to be patient.

8. **High context versus low context cultures.** Cultures differ in how much importance they attach to the surrounding circumstances. **High-context cultures** make more extensive use of body language. (Examples include Hispanics and African-Americans.) **Low-context cultures** make less use of body language. People in low-context cultures seldom take time in business dealings to build relationships and establish trust.

A starting point in using information about cultural differences would be to recognize that a person’s national values might influence his or her behavior. Two dimensions of cultural differences that influence job behavior considerably are attitudes toward hierarchy and status, and time-consciousness. For example, a person who values deference might not want to collaborate in decision making with a manager of long experience.

C. Cultural Bloopers
An effective way of being culturally sensitive is to minimize actions that are likely to offend people from another culture based on their values. In attempting to avoid cultural mistakes, remember that members of any cultural group show individual differences. Remember also that one or two cultural mistakes will not peg one permanently as a boor. Skill-Building Exercise 6-2 (text) lists cultural mistakes to avoid.

English has become the language of business and science throughout the world, yet communicating in a customer’s native tongue has its advantages particularly when you attempting to sell.
III. OVERCOMING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Cross-cultural differences can create communication barriers. To minimize the problem, follow these guidelines:

1. Be sensitive to the fact that cross-cultural communication barriers exist. If you are aware of these potential barriers, you will be ready to deal with them.
2. Show respect for all workers.
3. Use straightforward language and speak slowly and clearly.
4. Observe cultural differences in etiquette.
5. Be sensitive to differences in nonverbal communication.
6. Do not be diverted by style, accent, grammar, or personal appearance.
7. Be sensitive to individual differences in appearance.

IV. BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cross-cultural understanding including overcoming communication barriers can improve profits. Establishing rapport with people from other cultures, and not antagonizing them, leads to customer loyalty. An illuminating example is the experience of J. C. Penney in appealing to the custom of many black women to wear a white dress to church every fifth Sunday.

V. TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVING CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS

VALUING DIFFERENCES

Many training programs have been developed to improve cross-cultural relations and to help employees value diversity. Often they include some of the information already presented in this chapter.

A. Cultural Training

**Cultural training** is a set of learning experiences designed to help employees understand the customs, traditions, and beliefs of another culture. Many industries train employees in cross-cultural relations.

Cross-cultural training is taken seriously in the home-building and real estate industries. Workers in these industries are learning the Asian cultural language. Workers learn about subtle cultural differences between Eastern and Western people. Topics include money-matter discussions, business etiquette, and design preferences in a home (such as feng shui, or creating a harmonious home environment). It is important to recognize that patience is a virtue in selling real estate to Asians.

B. Language Training

Learning a foreign language is often part of cultural training, yet can also be a separate activity. Knowledge of a second language builds better connections
with people from other cultures than does relying on a translator. Companies invest heavily in helping employees learn a target language because it facilitates conducting business in other countries.

C. Diversity Training
The general purpose of cultural training is to help workers understand people from another culture. **Diversity training** attempts to bring about workplace harmony by teaching people how to get along better with diverse work associates. All such training programs center around increasing people’s awareness of and empathy for people who are different in some noticeable way from oneself.

Training sessions in valuing differences focus on the ways that men and women, or people of different races, reflect different values, attitudes, and cultural backgrounds. Objectives of these programs include (a) fostering awareness an acceptance of individual differences, (b) enhancing work relations between people who are different from each other.

Learning to empathize with the point of view of people from a diverse group is an essential part of improving relations. To help participants develop empathy, representatives of various groups explain their feelings related to workplace issues.

A recent trend in diversity training is **cross-generational diversity**, or relating effectively to workers much older or younger than you.

1. **Cautions about Diversity Training.** When employees are too blunt during valuing differences sessions, it may be difficult to patch up interpersonal relations in the work group later on. Another problem is that revelations made during a valuing differences session may backfire against the company later on.

**ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Several well-known companies such as conduct **awareness weeks** to celebrate certain diverse groups such as Hispanics or gays and lesbians. What is your opinion about the effectiveness of such activities in bringing about workplace harmony?

The net effect of such awareness weeks probably does result in improved workplace harmony. Nevertheless, the people who take an extreme moral or prejudiced position may experience ruffled feelings. For example, some stockholders have written letters of protests about activities recognizing gays and lesbians.
2. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, many observers in the United States though that an appreciation for cultural diversity suffered a setback. To what kind of setback are they referring?

The attacks of September 11 have made many people less tolerant of Arabs and Muslims. The Justice Department’s massive program of fingerprinting and photographing people of Middle-Eastern descent in the United States is also a blow for appreciating cultural diversity.

3. Some companies, such as Singapore Airlines, make a deliberate effort for customer contact personnel to all be of the same ethnic group (Singapore natives). How justified is this practice in an era of cultural diversity and valuing differences?

Here is a touchy argument. Some people would argue that hiring people of the same ethnic group for a specialized service like Singapore Airlines is close to being a bone fide occupational qualification. Also, the Singapore natives contribute ambiance to the Airline. Others would argue that hiring only one ethnic group for whatever reason is job discrimination.

4. A major purpose of diversity programs is to help people celebrate differences. Why should people celebrate a difference such as an attention-deficit disorder?

Celebrating a difference such as an attention-deficit disorder can lead to compassion for the challenges such a person faces. Celebrating such a difference can also help workers understand that a person with an attention-deficit disorder can be a productive, creative person.

5. Provide an example of cultural insensitivity of any kind that you have seen, read about, or could imagine.

After studying the topic briefly, students should be able to furnish a number of examples. A man from Turkey contributed a humorous example. He said, "In Turkey, we hug the children of friends and strangers. I found out that in the United States, this is a big mistake. The Americans don’t want you hugging their children."

6. Why is knowing the language of the other person more important when selling rather than buying from that person?

In a selling-buying exchange, the buyer holds more power, and must therefore be pleased. If you are buying, the other person goes out of his or her way to please you. Yet, people in many cultures will not tolerate an insensitive, or bullying buyer.
7. How could the information presented in text Table 6-1 comparing U. S. values to other countries help you succeed in business?

A person who is sensitive to differences in cross-cultural values will be able to make adjustments that will enhance interpersonal relationships. The improved relationships will in turn lead to more effective business transactions. One of many examples is that after studying this table, an American might move cautiously in being informal with a European business contact he or she had met for the first time.

8. If you were a supervisor, how would you deal with a group member who had a very low value for power distance?

It would be important to explain to a low-power-distance worker that in this organizational and national culture, the supervisor has some formal authority that must be respected. A discussion could then be held about the areas in which accepting power distance was important, such as the supervisor having the authority to enforce working hours and conduct the performance evaluation.

9. The cultural bloopers presented in Skill-Building Exercise 6-2 in the text all deal with errors people make with people who are not American. Give an example of a cultural blooper a person from another country might make in the United States.

One example would be kissing and hugging the babies of strangers, as the Turkish man explained above. Another might be a Scandinavian worker in a U. S. company who is so casual about rank that he or she would drop by the CEO’s office just to chat.

10. Many people speak loudly to deaf people, blind people, and to those who speak another native tongue. Based on the information presented in this chapter, what mistakes are these people making?

A major mistake committed by speaking loudly to the groups just mentioned is that of cultural insensitivity. If the loud speaking person empathized with people who are deaf, blind, or foreign, he or she might realize that speaking loudly in these circumstances is insensitive. A greater appreciation for cultural differences would also reveal that speaking loudly is not an effective tactic with any of these groups.
ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

Confused and Concerned in South Korea

This case illustrates how cultural differences in attitudes can create severe work problems.

1. What cross-cultural errors is Kim Young committing?

Kim Young is making the major cross-cultural error of not being culturally sensitive. He perceives Annie Lee to be willing to carry out the same role as most South Korean women office workers. He also assumes that high respect for age is characteristic of Korean-Americans.

2. What cross-cultural errors are Annie Lee and her coworkers committing?

Annie Lee and her coworkers are judging Kim Young by their perceptions of how a manager should behave, based on an American concept of a manager’s role. Perhaps Lee and her coworkers should be flexible enough to negotiate some of their differences.

3. What can higher management do to restore harmony in the translation department?

Higher management might speak separately to Kim Young and the Korean-American workers about cultural differences in male-female roles. Having a group meeting with Young might be too threatening. However, a group meeting with the Korean-American workers and the president is a possibility.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

Cross-Cultural Skills and Attitudes

Most people perceive themselves to have good cross-cultural skills. This quiz points to specific behaviors suggesting how much progress a person has actually made in becoming cross-cultural.

Developing Cultural Sensitivity

A possible conclusion these exercise might point toward is that some products and services might have to be marketed differently in certain cultures. For example, American jeans are a luxury item in Russia and therefore might not be marketed as everyday work clothing.
Charting Your Cultural Value Profile

Charting this profile reinforces the existence of these eight dimensions of cultural differences. A good topic for class discussion is to hypothesize about the typical American (or Canadian or Mexican) profile.

Cultural Mistakes to Avoid with Selected Cultural Group

Reading about these cultural mistakes alone will not lead to skill development. Most students should be able to find at least one opportunity to behave in a manner opposite to one of the cultural mistakes described.

Cross-Cultural Relations Role Play

Students will enjoy a group role-play of this nature, especially when they attempt to portray such roles as grandparents or elementary school children. The role play also provides an opportunity to practice the essential skill in cross-cultural relations--being culturally sensitive.

Using the Internet to Help Develop Foreign Language Skills

Most students who follow through with this daily drill in foreign language and culture will be pleasantly surprised about their progress. Also, Americans will receive the double benefit of obtaining news about their own country in their target language.

Developing Empathy for Differences

Repeated application of this exercise with various groups demonstrates that it is a meaningful experience. The sources of being different are so varied, including being perceived as very short, very tall, and a black person being perceived as "too white." After the presentations have been completed, a class discussion ensues about the contribution of this exercise to interpersonal relations.
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(c) 1. The American work force now has fewer new workers who are
   b. Hispanics.
   c. white males.
   d. females.

(d) 2. The true meaning of valuing diversity is to
   a. tolerate and treat fairly people from many different groups.
   b. establish quotas for hiring and promoting minority group members.
   c. recognize the major way in which one is different.
   d. enjoy a wide range of cultural and individual differences.

(b) 3. The diversity umbrella is supposed to include
   a. men as well as women.
   b. everybody in an organization.
   c. all members of the work force except top management.
   d. members of all groups who have been discriminated against in the past.

(c) 4. The primary goal of a diverse organization is for
   a. minority group members to be promoted frequently.
   b. the employee mix to match the customer mix.
   c. persons of all cultural backgrounds to achieve their full potential.
   d. all employees to receive training in cultural sensitivity.

(d) 5. Individual factors, such as a person’s weight-to-height ratio
   a. lie outside the diversity umbrella.
   b. are the primary target of efforts toward valuing differences.
   c. account for most of the job discrimination in industry.
   d. can also be sources of job discrimination.

(a) 6. An important implication of the diversity umbrella is that
   a. many types of differences should be understood and appreciated.
   b. job discrimination is widespread in the workplace.
   c. some differences should be tolerated, whereas others should be appreciated.
   d. the least desirable differences relate to individual factors.

(b) 7. A key principle in recognizing cultural differences is to
   a. avoid looking for behaviors typical of a given culture.
   b. be alert to these differences.
   c. expect less of people from a different culture.
d. carefully observe nonverbal communication.

(a) 8. A major aspect of cultural sensitivity is a willingness to investigate
   a. the reasons why people from another culture act as they do.
   b. why one dislikes people from another culture.
   c. opportunities for overseas work.
   d. opportunities for overseas travel.

(c) 9. A person with high cultural sensitivity is likely to
   a. regard people from different cultures as pretty much the same.
   b. be too sensitive to criticism from people from different cultures.
   c. recognize nuances in customs among cultures.
   d. overlook nuances in customs among cultures.

(d) 10. A basic strategy for achieving cross-cultural understanding is to
   a. ignore differences in cultural customs.
   b. establish a ranking of preferred cultures.
   c. hire people from different cultures.
   d. respect others in the workplace.

(b) 11. The most recent aspect of respecting all workers is to
   a. celebrate the right of a person to be a "skin head."
   b. respect the rights of majorities, particularly white males.
   c. choose team leaders and managers based on their race, sex, or
      national origin.
   d. hang United Nation flags throughout the office and factory.

(a) 12. Rhonda is culturally fluent, which means that she can
   a. conduct business in a diverse, international environment.
   b. speak three languages fluently.
   c. make friends with people from different cultures.
   d. conduct business in different regions of her own country.

(d) 13. Cultural fluency includes
   a. using a computer program to translate from one language into
      another.
   b. wearing latex gloves to avoid germs when visiting other countries.
   c. getting homesick on long visits overseas.
   d. knowledge of the international business environment.

(b) 14. A key difference noted between U. S. values and those of people from
   other countries is that Americans are more likely to
   a. have a long-term emphasis.
   b. value individual competition.
   c. emphasize formality.
d. emphasize hierarchy and authority.

(c) 15. The national value opposite to individualism is
   a. materialism.
   b. power distance.
   c. collectivism.
   d. uncertainty avoidance.

(a) 16. People from a culture with a long-term orientation are likely to
   a. have a propensity to save and invest.
   b. believe that top managers should hold most of the power.
   c. demand quick returns on their investments.
   d. spend now, thinking they will make more money in the future.

(b) 17. Which one of the following values is likely to be strongly held by Americans?
   a. casual time orientation
   b. urgent time orientation
   c. high importance to the context of an event.
   d. long-term orientation

(c) 18. A person from a high-context culture is likely to
   a. attempt to conduct business without first building a relationship.
   b. overlook the circumstances surrounding an event.
   c. make more extensive use of body language.
   d. make less extensive use of body language.

(d) 19. A worker’s attitude toward hierarchy and status is most likely to influence whether he or she
   a. will accept full-time employment.
   b. feels comfortable working with opposite-sex coworkers.
   c. is willing to work overtime regularly.
   d. offers suggestions to an elder manager.

(a) 20. An example of a cultural blooper would be for an American to
   a. pressure an Asian job applicant to bring about personal accomplishments.
   b. de-emphasize organizational rank when conducting business in Scandinavia.
   c. upon first contact, address a French executive by title and last name.
   d. give a small gift to a Japanese business associate.

(c) 21. Consumers are four times more likely to purchase a product online if the Web site
a. has links to a foreign Web site.
b. contains ample cartoons.
c. is written in their preferred language.
d. includes photos of people from different races and ethnic groups.

(d) 22. A recommended tactic for overcoming cross-cultural communication barriers would be to
a. use the same nonverbal communication signals from one culture to another.
b. make extensive use of idioms and figures of speech.
c. use complicated language to capture the attention of the person from another culture.
d. be sensitive to differences in nonverbal communication.

(a) 23. In cross-cultural relations, being attentive to individual differences in appearance helps overcome the problem of
a. confusing the identity of people from the same racial or ethnic group.
b. being politically correct.
c. appearing cold and distant to people from a different culture.
d. being too informal toward people of another culture.

(b) 24. An important goal of a diversity training program is to
a. achieve minority hiring quotas.
b. help employees relate comfortably to people of different cultures.
c. move women and minorities into managerial positions more quickly.
d. market products to ethnic groups more effectively.

(d) 25. The major purpose of cross-generational awareness training is to
a. teach younger workers to become more patient about promotions.
b. teach older workers to adapt better to information technology.
c. develop mentoring relationships between younger and older workers.
d. help older and younger workers get along better with each other.

True/False

(F) 1. Minorities and workers from other countries have become a much smaller part of the U. S. workforce.

(T) 2. An estimated 10 to 15 percent of jobs in the United states depend on trade with other countries.

(T) 3. According to the idea of valuing diversity, everybody is different in at least one important way.
4. The goal of a diverse organization is for all workers to achieve their potential, not held back by group identities such as sex, nationality, or race.

5. The diversity umbrella includes mostly people who have been discriminated against in the past.

6. The differences between men and women in speech patterns are thought to be inherited rather than cultural differences.

7. A person with cultural sensitivity is willing to investigate the reasons why people of another culture act as they do.

8. A recent movement has emphasized the importance of respecting the rights of white males in the workplace.

9. The term cultural fluency refers generally to having a working knowledge of two languages in addition to one’s native language.

10. A key difference between values of people in the United States and those of people in other countries is that Americans emphasize planning and preparation while the other countries emphasize an action bias.

11. A value difference between the United States and other countries is that the U. S. has a task emphasis while the other countries have a people emphasis.

12. In a low power-distance culture, managers are likely to make many decisions by themselves simply because they are the boss.

13. Ian, an Australian, has been a high risk taker all of his business career. His behavior fits the cultural value of low uncertainty avoidance.

14. American workers are noted for their urgent time orientation.

15. Maria, a Cuban, says that the major reason she makes such extensive use of body language is that she is from a high-context culture. Maria is presenting an accurate national stereotype.

16. The importance of avoiding cultural bloopers has multiplied because of E-commerce and other forms of Internet communication.

17. Now that English is the universal language of business, communicating
in the native tongue of your customers offers very little advantage.

(F) 18. An example of a cultural blooper would be for an American selling in China to attempt to cultivate a personal relationship before asking for the order.

(F) 19. When relating to people from other cultures, it is recommended that you make extensive use of idioms and analogies specific to your language.

(F) 20. When working with people from different cultures, it is best to address them by their first name to avoid appearing stiff and informal.

(F) 21. Fortunately for the international worker, nonverbal communication signals tend to be the same from one country to another.

(F) 22. Most people have such ethnic and racial pride that confusing the identity of people from the same ethnic or racial group is considered to be a compliment.

(T) 23. A study in the banking industry suggested that having a racially diverse workforce contributes to profitability primarily when banks are growing and expanding.

(T) 24. The major purpose of diversity training is to bring about workplace harmony.

(F) 25. The most successful diversity training programs are those that heavily emphasize confrontation and angry feelings.