

Anka Jacobs

Cross-Cultural Communication



Noordhoff Uitgevers

First edition

Cross-Cultural Communication

Anka Jacobs

Eerste druk

Noordhoff Uitgevers Groningen / Houten

Ontwerp omslag: Welmoet de Graaf/www.welmoet.nl

Omslagillustratie: Yagi Studio/Getty

Foto achterkant omslag: Mireille Droste-Spoolder, www.eenpurefoto.nl

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ISBN (ebook) 978-90-01-84830-9

ISBN 978-90-01-80777-1

NUR 812

Introduction

The way someone was raised will affect the way that person communicates, just as much as your communication style is largely determined by your upbringing. When Mubarak refused to step down, protesters took off their shoes and waved them above their heads to communicate their dismay. An Iraqi journalist once attacked President Bush with a shoe. If you take off your shoes in the Netherlands and wave them at someone, nobody will interpret that as an insult. Unless, of course, you are smacked over the head with someone's shoe: that would communicate a certain level of displeasure.

Cross-cultural communication, also known as intercultural communication, is not about being aware of every detail of every culture. This would be impossible. Cross-cultural communication is, however, about understanding yourself in relation to someone raised in a different culture. Researchers in the fields of anthropology, psychology, and communication do not have a simple definition of what cross-cultural communication is. A definition I, personally, like is by Karlfried Knapp, who defines intercultural communication as the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behavior.

Cross-cultural communication is not about definitions, though: it is about recognizing and respecting the way you have been shaped by your culture, just as others have been shaped by their culture. Even though I have tried to avoid generalizations, it is hard to escape them, and the exception often proves the rule. While reading these chapters, remember that the world is constantly changing and evolving. Be proactive when approaching a new culture. This is a learned skill, meaning that it will require research, practice, and growth. I trust that the tools you gain by reading this book will enhance your cross-cultural communication skills.

Enjoy!

Anka Jacobs
Borne, February 2011

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Knowing
yourself is
the beginning
of all wisdom.

— (Aristotle)

1

Knowing yourself

- 1 Which Dutch town has the most inhabitants, per capita, of Turkish descent?
 - A Almelo
 - B Almere
 - C Rotterdam
 - D Schiedam
- 2 In 2009, the Netherlands exported 3.7 billion flower bulbs. What country imported the most bulbs?
 - A Germany
 - B France
 - C United States
 - D Canada
- 3 Suriname used to be a Dutch colony. When did Suriname become independent from the Netherlands?
 - A 1945
 - B 1955
 - C 1965
 - D 1975
- 4 Which famous Dutch person said “Somewhere we know that without silence, words lose their meaning, that without listening, speaking no longer heals, that without distance, closeness cannot cure”?
 - A Vincent van Gogh
 - B Harry Mulisch
 - C Queen Beatrix
 - D Henri Nouwen

- 5 Which European city is often used for test marketing due to its largest diversity in terms of population and languages?
- A Amsterdam
 - B Brussels
 - C Paris
 - D Rome

Answers to the questions in **Appendix 1**

Chapter overview

- 1.1 Cultural competence
- 1.2 Cross-cultural communication
- 1.3 Immigrants
- 1.4 Personalities around the globe
- Summary
- Do's and don'ts
- Cultural quiz

You start a book about cross-cultural communication thinking you are going to learn about others, yet it starts off with getting to know yourself. The truth of the matter is that you have to start with yourself if you want to become an excellent international communicator. Nobody leaves their culture at home, nor do people first introduced to the topic realize how conditioned they are by the culture they were brought up in. It is not until you cross a border to go to school or work overseas that you realize how different you are. Even then, it is difficult to pinpoint what makes you different and where the communication process breaks down.

1.1 Cultural competence

Even though we all know at an intellectual level that we are different from people raised in Turkey, for example, our actions demonstrate that often it is ourselves that we see rather than other people. Consequently, we behave as if they are or should be just like us. Before you can begin to understand other cultures, you will have to start off by understanding your own culture. Once you recognize what makes your culture unique and how you are conditioned by your culturally specific behaviors, attitudes, values and beliefs, it will make adjusting to a different culture a lot easier.

In the following sections you will discover what stereotyping is, the difference between intracultural and intercultural communication, the different components used to measure cultural competence and how you can determine your own cultural competence.

1.1.1 Cultural competence defined

To understand what cultural competence means it is important to understand how the terms “cultural competence” and “culture” are defined. Read the following two definitions carefully and repeat them until you know exactly what they mean.

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different backgrounds and cultural heritage.

Culture represents the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave and make judgments about their world.

A culture shares a system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations and norms of behavior. Culture – the unwritten rules that are hard to explain but need to be understood if you wish to integrate into a different culture – is your point of reference. Few people are born with cultural competence: you will have to work hard to develop the skills to allow you to seamlessly slip into a completely different system of unwritten rules.

Culture

To develop your cultural competence, you will first need to identify the factors that have an effect on international communications. When you learn to recognize that you are a product of your upbringing and the way you were brought up, you will realize that your way is not necessarily the only way. To develop cultural competence you will first need to examine your biases and prejudices.

Class exercise: Imagine you are mentoring a student from Russia who will attend your university for a semester. Describe situations in which the student should address someone formally, when they should shake hands with another person and when it is appropriate to kiss upon greeting.

IMAGE 1.1 When visiting Russia by Mart Melis and Marlon Snijders, students at Saxion University



1.1.2 Stereotyping

Biases and prejudices are also known as stereotyping. Every culture has its stereotypes and every person stereotypes: this is the reality of being human.

Unfortunately, people are not very willing to admit to negative or positive stereotyping, being prejudiced, or discriminating against others. This is a shame, because it is only when you examine the source of the stereotypes you have that you can work towards modifying your own thought processes.

Discrimination Stereotyping is often seen as the main cause of discrimination.

Discrimination is when you treat someone who belongs to a different group less favorably.

Stereotyping is acceptable behavior because you are not treating a person negatively, or at least, not yet. Discrimination, however, is a slippery slope and one that prevents integration and healthy communication patterns.

To truly understand stereotyping you must know the difference between stereotyping that occurs in an intracultural setting and stereotyping that occurs in an intercultural setting.

Intracultural communication: communication that takes place between members of the same dominant culture.

Intercultural communication: communication takes place between members of two distinct cultures.

POINT TO PONDER:

Why do we attribute desirable and undesirable behaviors to members of groups other than the ones we belong to?

1.1.3 Intracultural communication

Intracultural communication takes place between members of the same culture and can trigger such things as gender-related stereotypes as well as stereotypes relating to the elderly and people with a disability. The very use of the term “disabled person” indicates a stereotype, and unfortunately, people with a physical disability often find themselves labeled as having a mental disability as well.

Through communication and interactions within our own culture we also learn what masculine and feminine means within our own group, and what that means in terms of our own behavior. An example of stereotyping of this sort is a woman being supposed to be soft and fragile. A man is supposed to be strong. Another excellent example of intracultural stereotyping is elderly stereotyping. In the Netherlands, the elderly are often overlooked and stereotyped as physically unable to perform tasks or not being mentally alert anymore.

To understand the intracultural stereotypes you are influenced by, finish the following sentences.

Men are...?

People in a wheelchair are...?

Whites are...?

Doctors are...?

Women are...?

Professors are...?

Soccer players are...?

Actors are...?

Each of these aforementioned statements will trigger an intracultural stereotype. As such, stereotypes do get in the way of how we think and feel. It makes us judgmental about others, and unfortunately, our judgments may be quite erroneous.

1.1.4 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication triggers stereotyping of cultures. Most of these stereotypes turn out to be erroneous and build walls between cultures.

To understand the intercultural stereotypes you are influenced by, finish the following sentences.

Dutch people are...?
 Germans are...?
 Belgians are...?
 Americans are...?
 Turks are...?
 South Africans are...?

Stereotypes in an intercultural setting eliminate the challenges of understanding people who are different from us. The stereotypes we use give us a general overview of whole groups of people so we know what to expect and how to act. Human beings like to know what to expect: it gives us a certain amount of security, hence our need to stereotype. Unfortunately, so many stereotypes are inaccurate and lead to “them” versus “us” behavior. Remember, we don’t always agree with or like the way people from other cultures behave: because it is different, we perceive it as wrong, and develop negative stereotypes. When we have problems with someone from a different group, we tend to identify the problem as having to do with the group rather than ourselves or the specific person.

People from new and different cultural groups are often negatively stereotyped because of their differences compared to the main culture. Stereotypes make it even more difficult to challenge and approach the different people around us. However, people are increasingly beginning to challenge stereotypes.

POINT TO PONDER:

Would we feel more comfortable if we were all the same?

1.1.5 Stereotypes in closing

Both intracultural and intercultural stereotyping prevent us from identifying the feelings that are really going on inside of us. When we stereotype we will continue to believe that something has been done to us rather than thinking that the problem might lie in our perception. When we stereotype we get caught up in the issue of what “they do” and how “those people” are, instead of being in touch with who we actually are.

Stereotypes are fed to us from birth. To prevent stereotyping it is important to see each person as an individual rather than put a label on them (a disability, a gender, a generation, and so on).

In chapter two you will learn how the Dutch are viewed and stereotyped worldwide. Words such as direct, good traders, honest, individualistic, proud, tall and wealthy come to mind. Again, there may be some truth in these generalizations: as long as you leave room for individual personality traits you are well on your way of understanding your own biases and prejudices.

1.1.6 How competent are you?

Now that you are aware of the type of stereotypes you might be influenced by, both negative and positive, a natural next step is to examine how culturally competent you are. It will help you in the process of determining what skills you lack and what you need to learn.

**Culturally
competent**

The Diversity Training University International (DTUI) has isolated four cognitive components for measuring culture competence. (www.dtui.com)

- 1 Awareness
- 2 Attitude
- 3 Knowledge
- 4 Skills

- 1 *Awareness* of one's own cultural world view and the consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. For example, a Dutch police officer who recognizes that he profiles black people as "potential criminals" has a cultural awareness of his reactions to this group of people.
- 2 *Attitude* towards cultural differences. The DTUI emphasizes the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs in general and training that has participants carefully examine their own beliefs and values in relation to cultural differences.
- 3 *Knowledge* of different cultural practices and world views. Are our values and beliefs about equality consistent with our behavior? Are you prejudiced and does that mean you are not culturally competent?
- 4 The *Skills* component focuses on practicing cultural competence. Developing cultural competence skills will result in an ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures.

To test your intercultural competency, ask yourself the following questions in relation to a specific person you know from a different culture, either in your class or in your social circle.

- 1 What is my knowledge of the culture (fill in name) was raised in?
- 2 What are his\her personal qualities (such as openness, flexibility, tolerance, sense of humor etc)?
- 3 What are his\her values and beliefs?
- 4 Do I have any stereotypes of the culture (fill in name) was raised in?
- 5 Am I accepting of his\her culture?

Now that you have learned about what cultural competence means and what stereotypes you have developed both within your own culture as well as other cultures, you can start assessing yourself by filling out the table below. Rate yourself in terms of 1 awareness 2 attitude 3 knowledge and 4 skills on a scale from unsatisfactory to fair to good to excellent.

TABLE 1.2 Determine your cultural competence

Determine your cultural competence by assessing yourself				
	Unsatisfactory	Fair	Good	Excellent
Awareness				
Attitude				
Knowledge				
Skills				

Class exercise: Add up everyone's scores and determine the overall cultural competence of the class.

1.2 Cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural competence requires skills in cross-cultural communication. Excellent cross-cultural verbal and non-verbal communication skills are necessary to be able to exchange information across cultural boundaries. Globalization has drastically increased our need to be able to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. You might choose to study overseas or find yourself sharing a classroom with people raised in different cultures. Whether at school, or work, at home or in your own community, we are a melting pot of different cultures. What happens if we are not able to understand each other?

In the following sections you will read about what can go wrong, the assumptions you might make and whether you need to adapt.

1.2.1 What can go wrong?

If you are not able to understand a person raised in a different culture, you will be unable to study or work together effectively. Your interactions will become tense or will cease altogether, and most likely will have been based on false assumptions.

Sameness

The number one pitfall is to assume sameness. Not everyone's thoughts and actions are like yours. Note too that people from different cultures encode and decode messages differently, increasing the chances of misunderstanding.

The hospitality industry is a good example of assumptions of sameness. It is an industry that is always busy attracting new customers from different countries but often finds itself ill-equipped to deal with the needs of guests from other cultures. Tourists travelling around the world tend not to be

aware of their own culturally conditioned expectations either. To take some examples: a Japanese guest expects rice for breakfast in a hotel in Rotterdam, a Dutch businesswoman fails to tip in a restaurant in San Francisco, and Germans swim naked in a pool in Ootmarsum.

The assumption is that these guests are odd or rude, when in reality nobody is wrong, merely misunderstood. It is up to hotel owners and their staff to get to know their guests so they can anticipate their needs, and also communicate the local ways in an appropriate manner. They could start by asking themselves some simple questions: what are the names of three famous people from that country, three favorite dishes, and three major tourist attractions? It has been shown that hardly anybody can come up with all the answers, and it can only be concluded that if they want to host guests from overseas they must start by showing a sincere interest in the background of foreign guests.

1.2.2 How do you feel?

As mentioned before, understanding another culture starts with reflecting on the way you think, feel and behave. Ask yourself about the assumptions you make. For example, do you value a certain amount of personal space around you? If you are Dutch, it is likely that you will frown upon making body contact or intruding into another person's personal space. Ask yourself where you learned how much personal space you prefer and how much body contact you appreciate when conversing with another person. What assumption do you make when someone stands really close to you while having a conversation?

Assumptions

When you board a bus or a train, do you do this in an orderly fashion and apologize if you bump into someone? Where did you learn this behavior and what does it suggest? Is your behavior endorsed or frowned upon? What behavior would be considered unacceptable in such situations?

1.2.3 Should you adapt?

When in Rome do as the Romans do. That said, when you find yourself in a multicultural environment, which we all do these days, meet in the middle and be flexible, and show sincere interest. The result will be gratifying. When a student from Latin America stands very close to you, avoid jumping to the conclusion that he wants greater intimacy with you. You need to realize that in Latin America, people stand a lot closer to each other than the Dutch do.

When you are on an overseas business trip during your future career or on a foreign internship, remember that your host country will not expect you to learn to speak their language fluently or understand their culture, but they will be extremely impressed by those who take the time to learn a few words and use local customs.

Right now you will probably be in a classroom or business setting. Look around and take inventory of the people around you. How many were born overseas and how many are children of immigrants? What is their religious background, what languages do they speak at home, what holidays do they celebrate and so forth? You will be surprised about how little you know about one another.

Cultural note: Research in 42 countries show Americans to be the least culturally sensitive, with the British coming in a close second. In order to be able to travel overseas, George W. Bush had to apply for a passport after becoming president of the United States. Oddly enough, even though American ways and culture have infiltrated every corner of the globe, only a very small percentage of Americans own a passport.

POINT TO PONDER:

Why do you think American culture has had such an influence around the world?

1.3 Immigrants

When a meat factory closed its doors due to bankruptcy, a large group of minority immigrants lost their jobs. It was only then that the local governments realized how little attention they had paid to this group. When they offered a helping hand, it was firmly rejected by the immigrant population. Some even ran away. The reason was simple; none of them had had good experiences with government representatives. Their own government was often the reason they had to relocate in the first place. When asked for advice on how to help this specific group, the first change made was to get the public officials to dress casually and thus make them less of a threat.

In the following sections you will learn about Dutch immigrants, the barriers to integration that immigrants face, and what we have in common.

1.3.1 Immigrants in the Netherlands

The largest immigrant population groups in the Netherlands hail from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba. According to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), in 2010, the total immigrant population in the Netherlands was 3,359,603 people. With a total population of 16,574,989, immigrants represent a fifth of the Dutch population. It is important to note that the immigrant population includes every Dutch citizen born overseas and citizens with one or both parents born overseas.

The numbers most telling of the need for better cross-cultural communication in the Netherlands are the numbers that represent the four biggest migrant minority groups.

Turkey 383,957
 Morocco 349,005
 Suriname 342,279
 Dutch Antilles and Aruba 138,420*

*The Netherlands Antilles, also referred to informally as the Dutch Antilles, used to be an autonomous Caribbean country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, consisting of two groups of islands: Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire (just off the Venezuelan coast); and Saint Eustatius, Saba and

Saint Maarten (southeast of the Virgin Islands). In 1986, Aruba seceded as a separate country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the rest of the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved on 10 October 2010, resulting in two new constituent countries, Curacao and Saint Maarten, with the other islands joining the Netherlands as “special municipalities.”

For the purposes of improving integration and to prevent isolation of the aforementioned immigrant groups, enhancing the communication skills of all parties involved is vital.

In plain English, everyone needs to understand what is being said verbally and non-verbally as best as they can, without assumptions, stereotyping, fear of the unknown or fear of change. By making a sincere effort to understand other cultures, the barriers faced by immigrants can be significantly reduced.

Verbally said
Non-verbally said

In the small town of Azelo, in the eastern part of the Netherlands (population 220), roughly 250 refugees were added to the town’s population when a refugee center was opened. Currently, the refugees live in close proximity to another, awaiting word as to whether they will be allowed to become permanent residents of the Netherlands or be deported. In the coming year the number of refugees will increase to 550. When the town first opened its doors to the refugees, the local population found themselves dealing with a host of problems.

Class exercise: What type of issues do you think the refugees in Azelo faced and what type of challenges did the local government have to address?

IMAGE 1.3 The entrance of the Azelo refugee center in the Netherlands



1.3.2 Barriers to integration

Tensions can run high when several cultures have to coexist. While immigrants are themselves responsible for their integration and learning the language and customs, we would do well to remember what they go through before we judge their willingness to adapt. Immigrants face a formidable language barrier. New immigrants are often no longer in the prime of life, which makes learning a new language all the harder for them. Immigrants also have to work to sustain themselves and their families, leaving little time to study a new language. In addition to the language barrier, body language may be different and they may have to cope with family tensions due to the immigration experience itself and the experience of being isolated and discriminated. Remember, at home they may not have been in a minority, but in their new country they are. Immigrants have been separated from strong networks of friends and family on whom they relied for support. That network has to be rebuilt. Due to the language barrier, immigrants often rebuild a social network with other immigrants, leading to further isolation and a loss of opportunities to learn the language and customs of their new home.

Once the families resolve the initial challenges (this can take years), other cultural conflicts rear their head. Think of role changes in the family structure (men who were the primary breadwinners in the country of origin may lack the credentials required to perform similar work in their new country). Women who never held jobs in their country of birth may go to work, sometimes earning more income than their husbands.

Tensions within families may increase as older family members seek to preserve traditional values and customs while younger ones are seeking to adapt to their new home. Adjusting to a new culture while attempting to maintain their own valuable heritage can be very stressful – merging two cultures in the context of everyday life. This is why the children of immigrants are referred to as third-culture children. They take bits from the parent’s culture and bits from their new culture and merge them into something that works for them.

Third-culture
children

1.3.3 What we have in common

Whether we are immigrants facing communication and integration issues, students in an international classroom trying to understand and work together or business people negotiating a global deal, we are all people who have as much in common as we are different from one another.

To build bridges in communication, find common ground and meet in the middle. To find the middle, you need tools. The first tool you have been presented with in this chapter is how to measure your cultural competence by assessing a) awareness, b) attitude, c) knowledge and d) skills. The second tool involves the “Big Five”. The big five personality traits are five broad factors or dimensions of personality discovered through experiential research. The first public mention of the model was in 1933, and it has been researched and worked on over the years.

“Big Five”

In the following section “the Big Five” model will be described and how it is used in determining global personality types. Again, this knowledge will help you learn about yourself before learning about others.



1.4 Personalities around the globe

In a 1981 symposium in Honolulu, four prominent researchers – Lewis Goldberg, Naomi Takemoto-Chock, Andrew Comrey, and John M. Digman – reviewed the available personality tests of the day and concluded that the tests which held the most promise measured a subset of five common factors. This event was followed by widespread acceptance of the five-factor model.

What separates the five-factor model of personality from all others is that it is not based on the theory of any one particular psychologist but rather on language, that natural system that people use to communicate their understanding of one another.

The five factors are Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN, or CANOE if rearranged). They are also referred to as the “Five-Factor Model” or FFM.

OCEAN
Five-Factor
Model

TABLE 1.4 OCEAN model

Trait	Description
Openness	Curious, original, intellectual, creative, and open to new ideas.
Conscientiousness	Organized, systematic, punctual, achievement oriented, and dependable.
Extraversion	Outgoing, talkative, sociable, and enjoys being in social situations.
Agreeableness	Affable, tolerant, sensitive, trusting, kind, and warm.
Neuroticism	Anxious, irritable, temperamental, and moody.

In the following sections you will learn more about the Five-Factor Model (FFM), openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. You will discover how the five personality traits change according to geographical location and through multidimensional scaling.

1.4.1 Openness

To be open is to value art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, imagination, curiosity and variety in experiences. Imaginative people tend to be less conventional people. People who are open to experience are intellectually curious, appreciative of art, and sensitive to beauty. Compared to closed people, they tend to be more creative and more aware of their feelings. They are more likely to hold unconventional beliefs.

People with low scores on openness tend to have more conventional, traditional interests. They prefer the plain, straightforward, and obvious over the complex, ambiguous, and subtle. They may regard the arts and sciences with suspicion, regarding these endeavors as abstruse or of no practical use. Closed people prefer familiarity over novelty. They are conservative and resistant to change.

1.4.2 Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is the tendency to demonstrate self-discipline, act dutifully and aim for achievement. The conscientious person shows a preference for planned rather than spontaneous behavior. The way in which we control, regulate and direct our impulses will be affected by how conscientious we are. The benefits of a degree of high conscientiousness are obvious. Conscientious individuals avoid trouble and achieve high levels of success through purposeful planning and persistence. They are also positively regarded by others as intelligent and reliable. On the negative side, they can be compulsive perfectionists and workaholics.

1.4.3 Extraversion

Extraversion – also spelled extroversion – is characterized by positive emotions and the tendency to seek out stimulation and the company of others. The extravert is marked by a pronounced engagement with the external world. Extraverts enjoy being with people, and are often perceived as full of energy. They tend to be enthusiastic, action-oriented individuals who are likely to say “Yes!” or “Let’s go!” to opportunities for excitement. In groups they like to talk, assert themselves, and draw attention to themselves.

Introverts lack the exuberance, energy and activity levels of extraverts. They tend to be quiet, low-key, deliberate, and less involved in the social world. Their lack of social involvement should not be interpreted as shyness or depression. Introverts simply need less stimulation than extraverts and more time alone.

1.4.4 Agreeableness

Agreeableness is the tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. How agreeable a person is will be reflected in that person's desire for social harmony. Agreeable individuals value getting along with others. They are generally considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise with others. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. They believe people are basically honest, decent and trustworthy.

Disagreeable individuals place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally unconcerned with others' well-being, and are less likely to put themselves out for other people. Sometimes their skepticism about others' motives causes them to be suspicious, unfriendly and uncooperative.

1.4.5 Neuroticism

Neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anger, anxiety or depression. It is sometimes called emotional instability. Those who score high in terms of neuroticism are emotionally reactive and vulnerable to stress. They respond emotionally to events that would not affect most people, and their reactions tend to be more intense than normal. They are more likely to interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and minor frustrations as hopelessly difficult. Their negative emotional reactions tend to persist for unusually long periods of time, which means they are often in a bad mood. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish a neurotic's ability to think clearly, make decisions and cope effectively with stress.

At the other end of the scale, individuals who score low in terms of neuroticism are less easily upset and are less emotionally reactive. They tend to be calm, emotionally stable, and free from persistent negative feelings. Freedom from negative feelings does not mean that low scorers experience a lot of positive feelings. Frequency of positive emotions is a component of the extraversion domain.

Class exercise: together with a fellow student fill out the questionnaire and find out how you score on the Big Five.
www.outofservice.com/bigfive

1.4.6 The Big Five globally

Dr Robert McCrae of the National Institute on Aging has taken the Big Five model one step further and applied the parameters of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness globally. Together with the Estonian researcher Dr Jüri Allik from the University of Tartu, a study was conducted amongst 36 cultures to see how the five universal character traits hold up globally.

The following table shows the characteristics of the sample utilized in the study by Dr McCrae and Dr Allik.

TABLE 1.5 Characteristics of the samples, adapted from McCrae (2002)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Language</i>	Subsample n			
		<i>College Age</i>		<i>Adult</i>	
		<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Austria	German	28	110	120	186
Belgium	Flemish	34	68	527	490
Canada	English		282	566	
China	Chinese		115	86	
Croatia	Croatian	233	233	123	133
Czech Republic	Czech	90	152	161	167
Denmark	Danish	52	40	545	576
Estonia	Estonian	119	398	189	331
France	French	54	338	279	395
Germany	German	290	454	1185	1801
Hong Kong	Chinese	60	62		
Hungary	Hungarian	36	56	92	128
India	Marathi	107	107		
India	Telugu	157	102		
Indonesia	Indonesian	34	138		
Italy	Italian	26	41	315	308
Japan	Japanese	176	177	164	164
Malaysia	Malay	124	327		
Netherlands	Dutch	615	690		
Norway	Norwegian (1)	74	18	397	295
Norway	Norwegian (2)		148	210	
Peru	Spanish	274	165		
Philippines	English	152	236		
Philippines	Filipino	134	375		
Portugal	Portuguese	205	253	606	816
Russia	Russian	26	91	201	192
South Africa (Black)	English	19	46		
South Africa (White)	English	41	168		
South Korea	Korean (1)	1257	1096		
South Korea	Korean (2)		278	315	
Spain	Spanish		89	107	

TABLE 1.5 Characteristics of the samples, adapted from McCrae (2002) (continued)

Country	Language	Subsample n			
		College Age		Adult	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Sweden	Swedish	21	30	286	383
Switzerland	German		44	63	
Zimbabwe	Shona	36	35	135	106
Taiwan	Chinese	173	371		
Turkey	Turkish	123	137		
United States	English	148	241	500	500
United States	Spanish	24	49		
Yugoslavia	Serbian	72	547	256	245

Source: Adapted from McCrae (2002), where data sources are detailed.

Note: College age respondents are typically between the ages of 18 and 21 but vary somewhat across cultures.

Adults are over age 21. Two independent translations of Korean and Norwegian were used.

1.4.7 Geographical patterns in personality traits

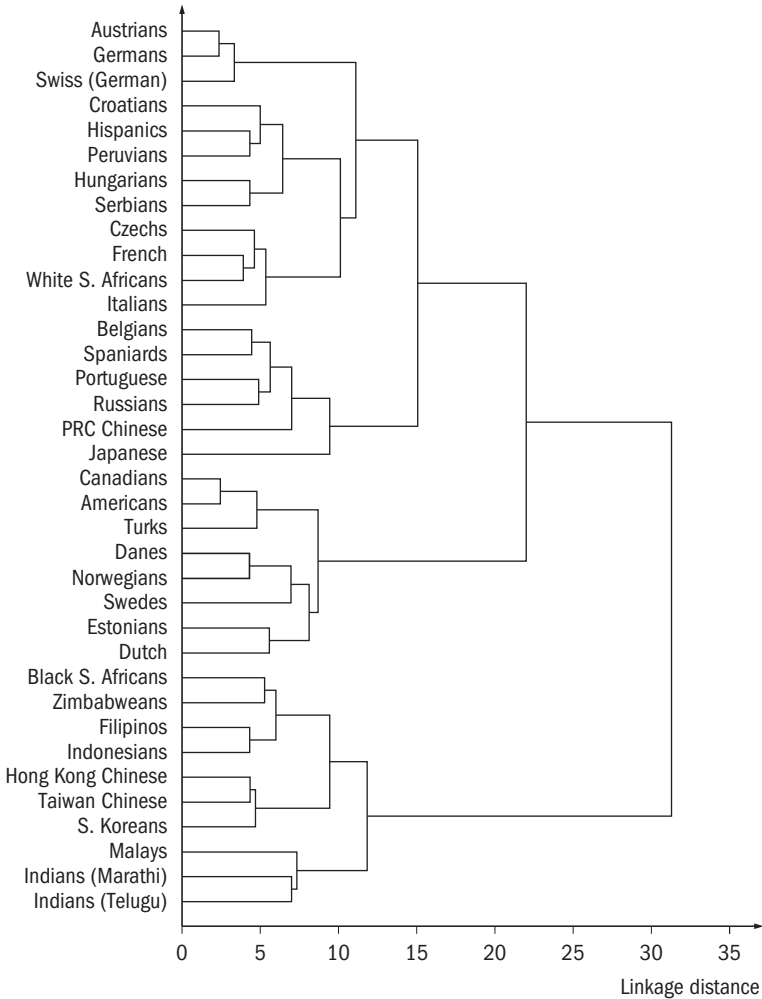
Dr McCrae and Dr Allik have identified geographical patterns in personality traits, although these patterns do not fully explain them. For example, an analysis showed that geographically proximate cultures often have similar profiles, but it also showed that European and American cultures contrast clearly with Asian and African cultures. European and American cultures score very much alike on the Big Five, yet are not geographically close. Both Europeans and Americans are high in extraversion and openness to experience and lower in agreeableness.

Personality similarities among people in close geographical proximity might have several causes.

- Shared genes
- Shared culture
- Shared physical environment
- Shared climate and diet
- Shared genetic ancestry
- Shared cultural customs and beliefs

The researchers went on to describe the relationship between different cultures using cluster analysis. It was concluded that Austrians and Germans show the greatest similarity. Other close pairs include Hispanics and Peruvians, Hungarians and Serbians, French and White South Africans, Belgians and Spaniards, Portuguese and Russians, Canadians and Americans, Danes and Norwegians, Estonians and Dutch, Black South Africans and Zimbabweans, Filipinos and Indonesians, Hong Kong and Taiwan Chinese, and Marathi-speaking and Telugu-speaking Indians.

IMAGE 1.6 Tree Diagram of Clusters of Cultures (Ward's Method)



Note: The horizontal axis represents the Euclidean distance between clusters; thus, cultures linked nearer the left side show closer resemblance on the 30 personality facets, standardized across cultures.

Source: Alik, McCrae/GEOGRAPHY OF PERSONALITY © 2003, Sage Publications

Some of these pairings make complete sense where others might be surprising. Even though this classification is not perfect, it appears to make some geographical sense when you look at a world map.

One could also conclude that a Dutch student would probably do well at an Estonian college due to cultural similarities.

1.4.8 Multidimensional scaling and relations between cultures

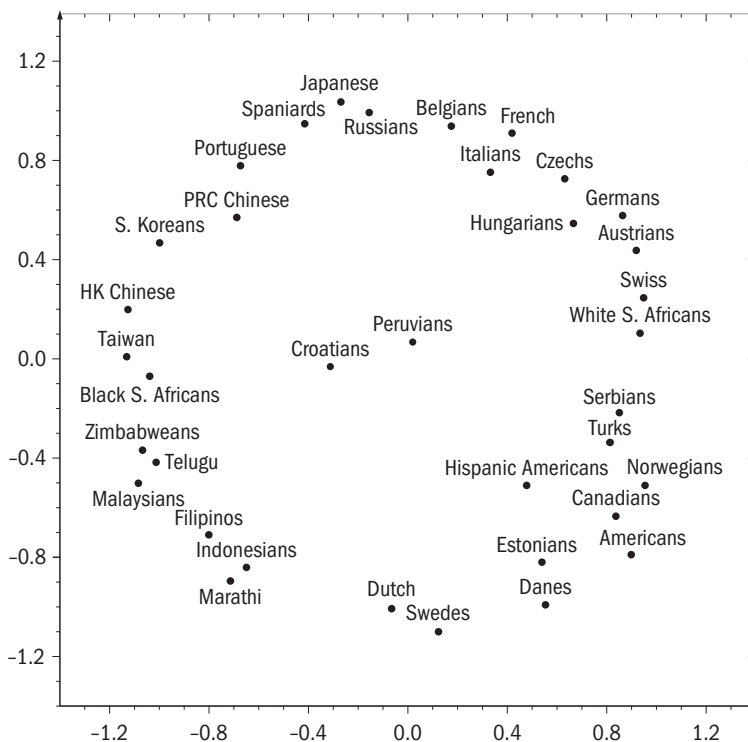
Another way to interpret the data collected from the 36 cultures is via multidimensional scaling (MDS). The researchers took the two personality



traits that have the strongest association with one another – neuroticism and extraversion – and put them on a scale. They also separated European and American cultures (in the figure, on the right) from Asian and African cultures (on the left). As mentioned before, these culture groupings have the most in common with each other in terms of the five universal character traits. If you look at the figure you will see that it corresponds to some extent to the mapping of the countries on the globe. The following conclusions were drawn by the researchers: the upper right quadrant includes mainly Catholic cultures, the lower right, Protestant, the lower left, Muslim and the upper left Confucian cultures. With the exception of Japan, which seems to be closer to European than to other Asian cultures, it appears that psychological distance again parallels physical distance in many cases.

People from European and American cultures appear to be outgoing, open to new experiences and forceful, whereas people from Asian and African cultures are introverted, traditional and compliant.

IMAGE 1.7 Multidimensional Scaling Plot of 36 Cultures



Note: As a mnemonic, it can be noted that North in the figure is associated with N (neuroticism) and East with E (extraversion)

Source: Allik, McCrae/GEOGRAPHY OF PERSONALITY © 2003, Sage Publications

Cultural note: Higher levels of neuroticism and agreeableness are consistently recorded for women than men across nations; higher extraversion and conscientiousness are also more often reported in women. Surprisingly, sex differences in personality traits are greater in prosperous, healthy and egalitarian cultures in which women have more opportunities that are equal to those of men.

For the complete copy of the article “Toward a geography of personality traits, patterns of profiles across 36 cultures” visit www.psych.ut.ee

1.4.9 Global personalities concluded

Based on what you have learned in this chapter you will now be able to narrow down personalities globally based on the five personality traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN, or CANOE if rearranged). You will also know how you score on each of these five personality traits. This information will help you significantly in your interactions with other cultures. The following examples will put what you have learned in context.

From the research we can safely stereotype as follows: Australians lead the way in extroversion, and the Japanese are the world’s shrinking violets. If you scored high on extroversion you will most likely get along very well with a student from Australia and you would be better off not to do an internship in Japan. That is, unless you are not willing to change. Being aware of the fact that you are extroverted but have an interest in going to Japan or in future business dealings with Japanese people you will be aware that you are entering a culture where being an extrovert is unusual and most likely not generally accepted as a character trait. It will be up to you to count to ten before you speak, and to practice patience.

To find agreeable cultures go to Russia and Botswana, with Argentina and America bringing up the rear.

If you prefer harmony in your daily life you are going to feel at home in Russia. However if you want to find a job in America in the future you will want to prepare yourself for a battle. Ask yourself beforehand whether you are up to that.

Conscientiousness is very high in Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, and low in Turkey and Indonesia. If you cannot keep a deadline and tend to run late, you will do better working with people from Turkey and Indonesia. Your specific character will be understood in these cultures. This will not be the case in Germany. As a matter of fact, you will most likely lose a job or deal quicker than you can say the word “deal” if you turn up late more than once. Neuroticism is high in Northern Italy but not in the South, and for openness to new experiences, go to the Netherlands. Please remember when you read this that these are generalizations. Always leave room for the individuality of each person you meet. Studies such as these are a good guideline.

Summary

The information presented to you in this chapter will enable you to understand the role of self-knowledge in cross-cultural communication.

The chapter has dealt with:

- Cultural competence and what it is
- How culturally competent you are
- What stereotypes influence you
- The term “cross-cultural communication”
- The conditioning of our own culture
- What challenges immigrants face
- Why and when you should adapt
- The five global personality types
- Getting to know yourself a little better

Do's and Don'ts

DO make a sincere effort to understand yourself in relation to those from a different culture.

DO acknowledge the stereotypes that influence you and work on changing them if you feel they are wrong.

DO work on improving your cultural competence.

DO ask yourself about the assumptions you make and why.

DON'T treat someone that belongs to a different group less favorably.

DON'T make false assumptions and increase the chances of misunderstanding.

DON'T judge immigrants before making a sincere effort to build cross-cultural understanding.

DON'T look for differences: instead, look for similarities.

Cultural quiz – *What would you do?*

- 1 While having lunch in a pub in Dublin, you are approached by a group of children who are poorly dressed and hungry. They extend their hands and beg for money.
 - A You ignore them completely.
 - B You push them aside and tell them you have no money to give them.
 - C You take all the cash you have in your purse and hand it to them.
 - D You press a coin in their hands and wish them a good day.

- 2 As you enter the home of your Japanese host family, you begin to remove your shoes, though your host insists it is not necessary for you to do so.
 - A You remove your shoes anyway.
 - B You leave your shoes on.
 - C You take one off and leave one on.

- 3 Upon arriving at the home of the Spanish family that will house you while you attend college in Barcelona, you receive a glass of iced water from

your Spanish host. You see that it comes straight from the faucet and you have been warned about drinking untreated water in Spain. What do you do?

- A You ask if the water has been boiled.
- B You drink the water and hope you won't get sick.
- C You say you are really not that thirsty.
- D None of the above.

4 You are on the bus headed for your first class at the University of Hong Kong, where you will be following classes for a semester. As you have to get off at the next stop, you signal the driver. He slows down but doesn't stop. Now what?

- A You are puzzled and decide to wait for someone else to signal the driver and see what this person does.
- B You take a leap from the bus as it slows down.
- C You become angry and yell at the bus driver to stop.
- D None of the above.

5 A Dutch student brings a wrapped gift for an American family. What can you expect the American family to do with the gift?

- A Unwrap it immediately.
- B Wait for you to invite them to unwrap the gift.
- C Wait until you leave to unwrap the gift.

6 When you are introduced to a Chinese family, they say "You must come dine with us sometime." What will your answer be?

- A You say "Thank you" and continue the conversation, knowing that the invitation was probably just a formality.
- B You immediately make an appointment to dine with the family.
- C You do not acknowledge the invitation in any way and continue on with the conversation.
- D You decline because you don't know what the appropriate answer is.

7 True or false?

Suffering from an awful cold, you travel to Japan. When attending meetings it is appropriate to use a handkerchief as discreetly as possible.

8 True or false?

Feeding your dog from the chair next to you in a French restaurant is not considered poor manners.

9 True or false?

In Saudi Arabia, it is forbidden to use dogs in advertisements.

10 True or false?

In Germany, never keep your left hand in your pocket while shaking hands with your right.

Answers to the questions in **Appendix 1**