

CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural psychology is a broad term for the scientific study of human behavior and mental or cognitive processes among cultures. In general, this field addresses similarities and differences among cultures. According to the American social psychologists there are differences between cultures (at least for cognitive processes) was not widely held in the twentieth century. Instead, most psychologists assumed that basic cognitive processes were universal—that the fundamental aspects of thinking and perceiving that involve attention, memory, learning, and reasoning operated in the same way among all cultures. Based on research the basic processes of thinking and behavior develop and are shaped by culture. At the same time, there are aspects of thinking and perceiving that may be innate (genetic or possessed at birth) that limit or constrain how culture can shape thinking and behavior.

Cross-cultural psychology is a branch of psychology that looks at how cultural factors influence human behavior. While many aspects of human thought and behavior are universal, cultural differences can lead to often surprising differences in how people think, feel, and act. Some cultures, for example, might stress individualism and the importance of personal autonomy. Other cultures, however, may place a higher value on collectivism and cooperation among members of the group. Such differences can play a powerful role in many aspects of life.

Cross-cultural psychology is also emerging as an increasingly important topic as researchers strive to understand both the differences and similarities among people of various cultures throughout the world. The International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was established in 1972, and this branch of psychology has continued to grow and develop since that time. Today, increasing numbers of psychologists investigate how behavior differs among various cultures throughout the world.

Key concepts; • Collectivistic cultures • Individualistic cultures • Religion • situational factors.

INTRODUCTION

Culture refers to many characteristics of a group of people, including attitudes, behaviors, customs, and values that are transmitted from one generation to the next. Cultures throughout the world share many similarities but are marked by considerable differences. For example, while people of all cultures experience happiness, how this feeling is expressed varies from one culture to the next.

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The goal of cross-cultural psychologists is to look at both universal behaviors and unique behaviors to identify the ways in which culture impacts our behavior, family life, education, social experiences, and other areas.

Many cross-cultural psychologists choose to focus on one of two approaches

The Etic approach focuses on studying how different cultures are similar.

The Emic approach focuses on studying the differences between cultures.

Cross-cultural psychologists also study something known as ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism refers to a tendency to use your own culture as the standard by which to judge and evaluate other cultures. In other words, taking an ethnocentric point of view means using your understanding of your own culture to gauge what is "normal." This can lead to biases and a tendency to view cultural differences as abnormal or in a negative light. It can also make it difficult to see how your own cultural background influences your behaviors.

Cross-cultural psychologists often look at how ethnocentrism influences our behaviors and thoughts, including how we interact with individuals from other cultures. Psychologists are also concerned with how ethnocentrism can influence the research process. For example, a study might be criticized for having an ethnocentric bias\

This branch of psychology is applied in nearly all subfields of psychology, including general psychology, cognitive psychology, and counseling and [clinical psychology](#). Individuals applying this branch of psychology methods obtain data and information from various societies to investigate the scope of human behavior and examine hypotheses of how culture affects that behavior. Cross-cultural psychologists who practice in clinical and counseling settings have applied a variety of cross-cultural psychology principles to many different types of psychotherapy and counseling. Generally, the goal of cross-cultural psychologists is to look at both unique behaviors and universal actions to recognize the ways that culture influences behavior, family interactions, education, social experiences, and other aspects.

The rise of this type of psychology reveals a universal process in social sciences that strives to purify certain areas of research that are currently subject to bias. This branch of psychology, combined with other subfields, seeks to make psychology less complicated. Cross-cultural psychology is taught at a variety of institutions of higher learning throughout the world.

Emic and etic refers to the two types of field research conducted.

The points of view are from the social group and outside factors. These approaches fall under cultural anthropology.

The Emic focuses on examining how different cultures are alike. This approach explores how local people think, view and classify the world; the way they behave; and how they explain things. Emic

knowledge and explanations are those that occur within a culture as determined by local beliefs and traditions.

The Etic method moves the emphasis from local observations to more scientific explanations. Etic refers to simplifications about human behavior that are regarded as true. It focuses on examining the differences between cultures, while understanding that individuals of a culture are commonly too involved in their actions to understand their cultures independently. This method also commonly connects cultural practices to aspects of interest to the researcher, such as ecological and economic conditions.

When the Emic and Etic approaches are united, the best view of a culture can be comprehended. Alone, the Emic method would have difficulty applying predominant values to a single culture. The Etic approach assists with preventing researchers from viewing only one feature of one culture and then applying it to cultures throughout the world.

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The psychology field is very complex and it encompasses a variety of branches, including cross-cultural psychology. This branch of psychology looks at the influences of diverse cultural aspects on how individuals, groups, and populations behave.

How is Cross-Culture Psychology Beneficial for Counselors?

Cross-culture psychology research is extremely useful for counseling psychologists who work with diverse patients. For example, independence and assertiveness are considered to be highly desirable traits. Therefore, a counseling psychologist in America might encourage a timid patient with self-esteem issues to become more sociable and outspoken. However, harmoniously introverted behavior is considered to be model behavior in China, where students are commonly encouraged to listen more than they speak and sacrifice their self-interest in favor of the group. As a result, an American psychologist who encourages a young Chinese born patient to challenge unfair parental controls may face criticism for being ignorant and insensitive. In view of this, cross-culture research helps counseling psychologists better understand and help their patients.

Cross-Culture Insight;

Cross-culture researchers have examined how societies across the world understand and interpret facial expressions. Not surprisingly, almost all cultures can recognize intense emotions. However, Chinese researchers found that Chinese people are less capable of recognizing common emotional expressions. The researchers noted that for thousands of years in the Chinese culture, people have been conditioned to act aloof and distant. Today, modern business people often struggle to interact with their Asian counterparts, who generally take longer to become socially comfortable. As a result, business people often take cross-culture training classes before departing on important business trips. These business people know that cross-cultural competency is a sign of intelligence and respect.

Going forward, cross-cultural psychology will continue to play an active role in breaking down differences and increase mutual respect and understanding between cultures and societies.

THE ADJUSTMENT PROCESS

When foreign students come to the United States to continue their education, they experience the phenomenon of "culture shock," as do all people who go abroad to varying degrees. Culture shock describes the initial stress and strain all people experience when they move from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Living in a different culture influences your mental, emotional and physical sense of well being. The impact can be obvious such as stomach upsets from new and unusual food, to the less obvious such as gestures and body language. Consciously or subconsciously, we perceive that we do not completely understand the customs, thought patterns and ways of behaving in another culture.

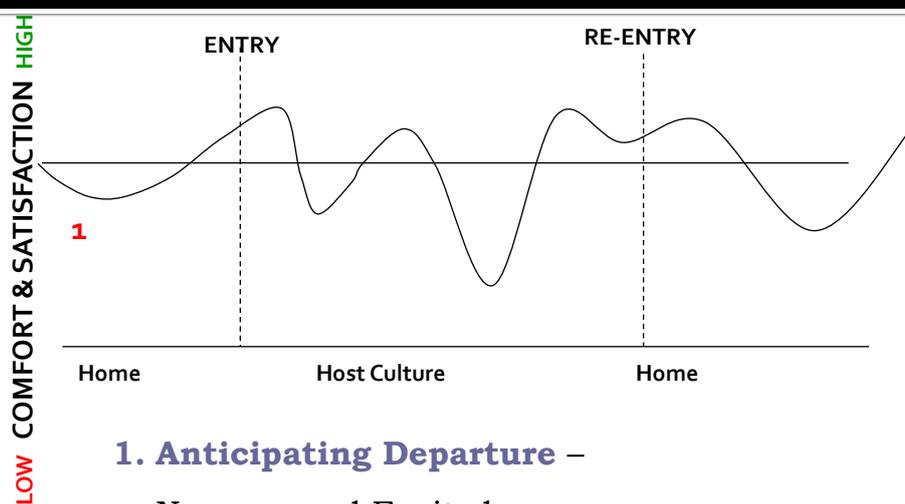
Foreign students studying in the United States are faced with transitional experiences, and must choose how to handle these experiences. When they choose to modify their behavior and adapt to the foreign culture, each event serves as a lesson, an opportunity to learn new behaviors.

When they choose not to adapt, those same interactions are experienced negatively, and are causes for frustrations, anger and often helplessness. Therefore, it is worthwhile to be clear on our choices and

intentions. Peter Adler, a researcher and trainer from the East-West Center in Hawaii, suggests a number of ways that culture shock can contribute to the growth and learning of foreign students in the United States. He believes:

- All learning involves change, and living and educational experiences in the United States provide opportunities for new learning.
- The feelings resulting from change can be thought provoking, and persons experiencing cultural shock can benefit from the analysis.
- A person experiencing culture shock most often receives feedback from individuals and from the environment. They can learn from this feedback.

Cultural Adjustment Cycle



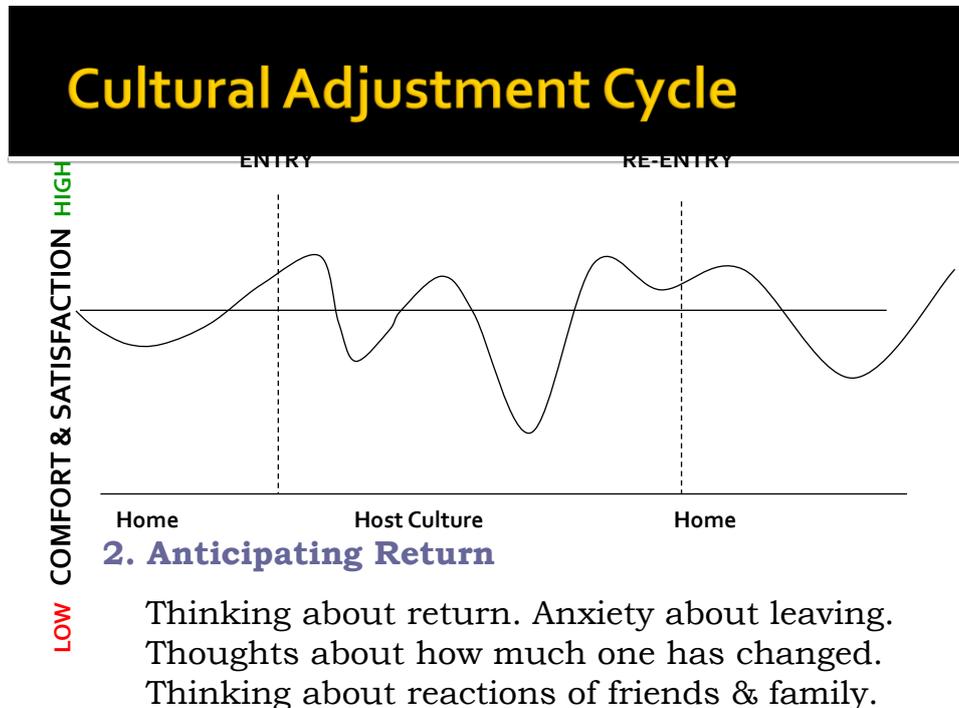
RETURNING HOME FROM ABROAD

When foreign students return home from the United States, they generally encounter reverse culture shock and feel confused. They sometimes feel ill at ease with friends, family and once familiar circumstances.

The political climate may also have changed or friends have married, moved, or simply seem different than remembered. Returning foreign students experience subtle forms of rejection. They go through many of the same mental, emotional and physical adjustments they did when they first went overseas. Again, however, it is a process, and after awhile they relax and feel at home.

Some, during this period, may begin to come to terms with the profound effect living in another culture has had on them. It is at this time that concepts studied abroad are questioned for relevancy and application to one's culture. Modes of functioning in a graduate school environment or practical

training experience sometimes do not appear to be related to one's "real" environment. The challenge of being able to "integrate" these learning experiences becomes a real, rather than a philosophical, topic discussed during a seminar.



CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

There is the need to understand the realities of communicating in a culture other than one's own. Because all nations are becoming more globally interdependent, it is imperative that as students we understand the complexities of living in a foreign culture. Communication across cultural boundaries is difficult. Differences in customs, behavior and values result in problems that can be managed only through effective cross-cultural communication and interaction. Persons of dissimilar backgrounds usually require more time than those of the same culture to become familiar with each other, to speak openly, to share in common ideas and to understand one another.

Most communication is manifested through symbols that differ in their meanings according to time, place, culture or person. Human interaction is characterized by a continuous updating of the meaning of these symbols. In the past 25 years, we have expanded our capacities for symbolic communication beyond what was accomplished in the previous 2,500 years. Our communication capabilities are extending beyond print to that of electronic technology; in the process, our whole thought patterns are being transformed.

Despite all the technological wonders that are occurring, we need to work with one another on a person-to-person basis. To be effective, we have to overcome stereotypes and language barriers. When individuals have misunderstandings or commit "errors" when interacting with persons from

different cultures, they are often unaware of any problem. Cross-cultural faux pas such as the examples previously mentioned, result when we fail to recognize that persons of other cultural backgrounds have different goals, customs, thought patterns and values from our own. It has been assumed that cultural differences are barriers and impede communication and interaction. To overcome these barriers one needs to understand the differences between one's own culture and another's.

For example, in the United States promptness is valued and schedules are adhered to. In other cultures, arriving late is the norm and a different meaning can be construed depending on how late one arrives or the circumstances.

All cross-Cultural communicators have a wide range of methods to use that go beyond words to include gestures, signs, shapes, colors, sounds, smells, pictures and many other communication symbols. The diversity of human culture in this regard may be demonstrated by the artist who may communicate both thought and feeling in paintings, sculptures, music and dance.

Every person operates within his or her own private world or perceptual field. This is what is referred to as life space, and it applies to individuals as well as to organizations and nations. Every individual communicates a unique perspective of the world and reality. Every culture reflects that group's view of the world. Every person also projects himself or herself into communication. We communicate our image of self-including our needs, values, standards, expectations, ideals and perceptions of people, things and situations

SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATORS

All cross-cultural communication skills can be learned.

Respect. The ability to express respect for others is an important part of effective cross-cultural communication. All people like to believe and feel that others respect them, their ideas and accomplishments. However, it is difficult to know how to communicate respect to persons from another culture. These questions may help. What is the importance of age in communicating respect? What is the significance of manner of speaking? Do you only speak when spoken to? What gestures express respect? What kind of eye contact expresses respect? What constitutes personal questions that may invade privacy?

Tolerating ambiguity. This refers to the ability to react to new, different and, at times, unpredictable situations with little visible discomfort or irritation. Excessive discomfort often leads to frustration and hostility and this is not conducive to effective communication.

Relating to people. Many Westerners are concerned with the job at hand. In transferring knowledge or skills to persons in another culture, the requirement to get the job done is not as important sometimes as making the individual feel as if they are part of the completed project and have benefited from being involved.

Being non-judgmental. Most people like to feel that what they say and do is not being judged without having the opportunity to fully explain. The ability to withhold judgment and remain objective until one has enough information requires an understanding of the other's point of view.

Personalizing one's observations. Different people explain the world around them in different terms. As one author wrote, "This is my way, what is your way? There is not 'the' way, it is all relative." One should be able to personalize observations, be more tentative in conclusions and demonstrate a communication competence that what is "right" or "true" in one culture is not "right" or "true" in another.

Empathy. This is the ability to put yourself in another's shoes. Most individuals enjoy communicating with those who attempt to understand things from their point of view.

Persistence. This is an important skill for the cross-cultural communicator. Often one's first attempts at bridging the communication barriers may not meet with much success. But having patience and perseverance and the courage to keep on trying will be rewarded.

CONCLUSION

A recognition and a few minor personal adjustments can greatly influence professional business relationships. Professional business managers should be aware of these differences and be prepared to make appropriate communication adjustments if these careers take them into different cultures.

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