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part one

Culture and Communication at Work

chapter one

Introduction

In modern societies, interpersonal communication is central to most forms of work, and that communication often takes place between people who come from different backgrounds. At work interpersonal communication – two-way interaction between individuals or within groups – impacts on everything, from just getting basic tasks done at all to the overall organizational performance. For instance, many professional roles depend critically on communication – those of doctors and lawyers cannot be performed at all without frequent communication with patients and clients, while near-continuous communication is intrinsic to the role of a teacher. In business, communication is central to the activities of buying and selling. For managers of people, the activities generally understood as central to the role – motivating, facilitating, even directing and controlling – are primarily communication activities. All organizations depend on communication for the purposes of co-ordination and so for the processes

Box 1.1

Even in software development, which is often regarded as an area where interpersonal communication is not a central issue, two studies have found that performance depends on task-related internal communication. 'High communication facilitates project performance, especially in early stages of the project life-cycle and when standardization of methods and tools is low.'^a

'Software development, particularly in the early stages, requires much communication. In fact, software projects have two complementary communication needs. First, the more formal, official communications need a clear, well-understood interface. [Second,] informal "cor-

ridor talk" helps people stay aware of what is going on around them, what other people are working on, what states various parts of the project are in, who has expertise in what area, and many other essential pieces of background information that enable developers to work together efficiently.'^b

Sources: (a) Brodbeck, F.C. (2001) 'Communication and performance in software development projects', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, **10**(1): 73–94

(b) Herbsleb, J.D. and Moitra, D. (2001) 'Global software development', *IEEE Software*, March/April: 16–20

of organization itself. In our twenty-first-century 'age of information', organizations also depend on communication to transfer knowledge; communication failures can leave pockets of information isolated and often useless. Furthermore, for individuals, job satisfaction and career success depend on good relations with superiors, colleagues and subordinates, and these only flow from skilled and sincere communication.

A feature of modern societies and organizations is that they are composed of people who differ widely in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, education, social class or level of (dis)ability – in other words, in terms of their demographic profile or social background. The countries of world regions (such as Europe and Asia¹) are becoming integrated, their markets and workforces diverse and their organizations international. At work, therefore, more people than ever before now interact with 'different others' – people whose demographic profile or social background is different from their own. Individuals are now likely to interact with a highly diverse range of people as colleagues, subordinates, managers, clients, patients, customers, students, professional advisers and other service providers, sales representatives and other interface workers.

There is a naïve view that interpersonal communication at work is unproblematic – that it just happens without people needing to attend to it or be skilled at it. This view is mistaken, as research has conclusively shown. All communication is error-prone: it is liable to lead to misunderstanding or even conflict because of poor encoding of messages by senders, or because of transmission failures or distortion by receivers who are inattentive or emotionally aroused. These problems can arise even between two people from identical backgrounds and who have a large measure of shared experience. They are, however, undoubtedly exacerbated when interactors are from different backgrounds. People from different cultures (nationalities, ethnicities or religions) and subcultures (genders, age groups, sexual orientations or levels of [dis]ability) may communicate differently and may have differences of attitudes or beliefs. These differences can add to their difficulties in communicating with one another.

This book is about the different ways in which people at work communicate, about how those differences can lead to misunderstanding, conflict and low performance. More positively, it is also about how understanding between people who communicate differently can be increased, conflict avoided and performance enhanced. In particular, it is about differences in how people communicate that originate in their background – their culture or their subculture. It also deals with communication problems and breakdowns that occur, not because of differences in ways of communicating or lack of communication skill, but because of differences in attitudes and beliefs that originate in their background.

About this book

Part I of the book analyses diversity at work in terms of cultures and subcultures. It also analyses cultural and subcultural similarities and differences in how we communicate at work and how the factors such as motives and the processes such as perception that influence communication are affected by (sub)culture. This chapter (Chapter 1) has three main purposes: to begin describing what intercultural communication is by clarifying 'work communication' and 'culture' and to begin to substantiate the claim that intercultural communication at work is of great and growing importance and the further claim that it is not unproblematic and so requires and justifies study and skill development. Some of the material in this chapter serves all three purposes. For

instance, facts about the size and employment position of different societal groups demonstrate the amount and range of intercultural encounters that must be happening. These facts are also relevant to the beliefs, attitudes and so to the communication behaviours of the participants. Admittedly, there is a problem with this last point: it is people's perceptions that influence their beliefs and attitudes, rather than any 'objective' facts, and in individual cases the two may diverge quite widely. Nevertheless, the facts are useful as an overall foundation for understanding how people view the intercultural social world of work.

Nearly half a century of cross-cultural research has firmly established that there are differences in the ways that members of different societal groups behave, both in private life and at work. Chapter 2 analyses cultural differences, using a range of models. Many of these models are taxonomies based on underlying factors, such as values; others are based on communication itself, such as Hall's (1976) 'high-context/low-context communication' distinction. The three final sections of Chapter 2 consider the impact of culture and cultural difference on work behaviour, on work organization and management and on aspects of organizational environments. Chapters 3 and 4 cover communication at work and the effects of (sub)cultural differences. The subject of human communication is a huge one, and radical selection has been necessary for this book: it has been done by selecting those elements of general communication which differ between cultures, such as the concept of 'politeness', and those which feed in directly to intercultural communication, such as 'elaborated and restricted codes'. Chapter 3 deals with analyses of overt communication behaviour at an individual level; Chapter 4 expands the analysis into the intrapersonal level and covers the psychological factors and processes affecting behaviour, including, of course, communication behaviour.

Part II of the book is about intercultural communication at work. Chapter 5 presents the argument that intercultural communication is problematic in particular ways. It describes the wide range of barriers that apply. It both deals with 'universal' factors, such as stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, and builds on the analyses of Chapters 2, 3 and 4, by showing how (sub)cultural differences also impede intercultural communication. Chapter 6 is concerned with how intercultural communication can be made more effective. Its coverage ranges from inclusive language to the practical application of a number of intercultural communication theories. Attention is paid to behaviours and traits such as tolerance for ambiguity, mindfulness and self-monitoring. There is discussion of the underlying motivations, goals, emotions and cognitions as well as the processes of intercultural encounters.

Part III consists of applications and extensions of the understanding of (sub)cultural difference and intercultural communication developed in Parts I and II of the book. Chapter 7 deals with the different situation that arises when the work context is that of a culture other than the individual's own. Sojourners and people on international assignments need additional skills and new attitudes to work effectively in a foreign culture. Chapter 8 discusses cultural differences in, and effective intercultural communication for, selection interviewing, service encounters, mentoring, conflict resolution (mediating), negotiating, working in groups or teams, and leadership and management. Chapter 9 draws out the effect of five important contexts for working and communicating interculturally: working in virtual teams, offshoring, international joint ventures and other intercultural alliances, multinational enterprises and business-to-business relations. In addition to the impact of these contexts on intercultural communication and of cultural differences on these contexts, there are issues around computer-mediated communication, knowledge transfer and co-ordination,

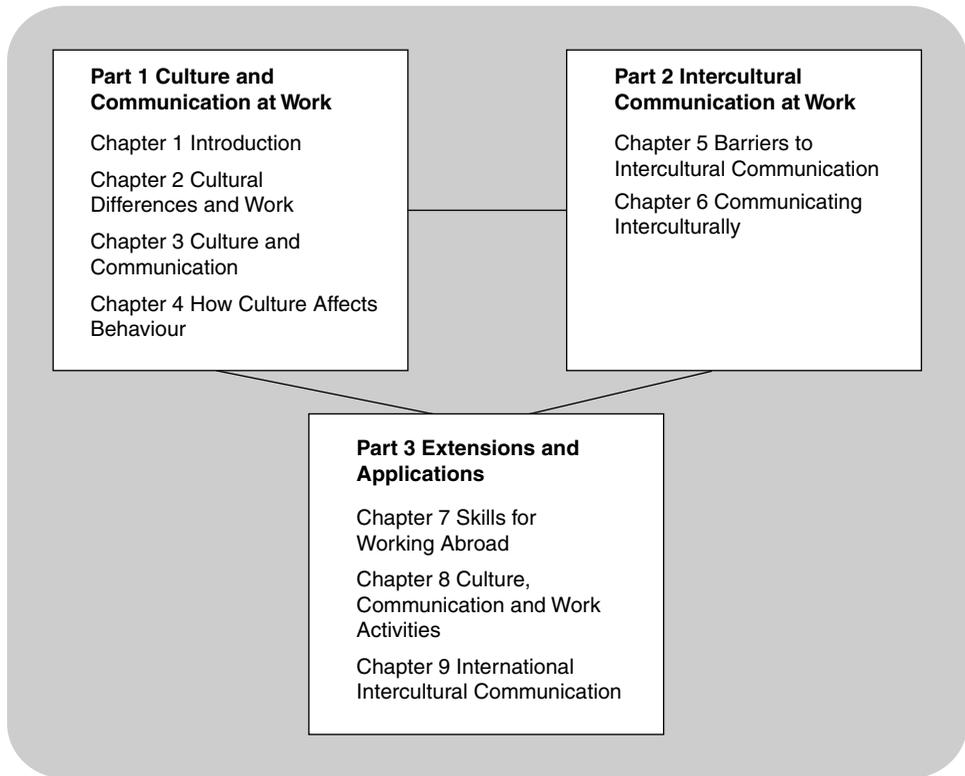


Figure 1.1 *The structure of this book*

which are discussed at the start of this chapter. Figure 1.1 shows the structure of this book in a diagram.

This book is about culture, subculture and the impact of these on how people at work communicate with one another. It is also about how to overcome the obstacles to communication that (sub)cultural differences may create. This knowledge leads to understanding how to communicate effectively at work with people from different backgrounds.²

1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK COMMUNICATION

Communication can be defined as the ‘collective and interactive process of generating and interpreting messages’.³ Work communication is essential for co-ordinating activities; co-ordination is fundamental to organization. Work communication also leads to both understanding or misunderstanding and good or poor work relationships. All communication is complex; work communication is less complex in some ways, more complex in others. Focus on tasks may reduce work communication complexity but it is made more complex by continuous interaction, often with ‘different others’, by the high stakes often involved for both individuals and organizations, by the conflicting motivations of participants and by the need to work in groups.

The significance of any activity at work can be judged by the amount of time employees spend at it, and by its impact on how effectively and efficiently the work is carried out, on job satisfaction and career success for individuals, and on profits or other measures of results for organizations. By all these measures, it is likely that communication is the most important work activity, especially in modern, service-oriented, team-based organizations. Communication has been described as a revolutionary discovery,⁴ energized by technological development, increasing global literacy and ‘the philosophies of progressivism and pragmatism, which stimulated a desire to improve society through widespread social change’.⁵ In the world of work and organization, many scholars now acknowledge the central role of communication, and there is a large literature devoted to it.⁶

The new recognition that, in order to compete, modern organizations need to tap the creativity, expertise and know-how of all their employees places a premium on interpersonal communication. There is considerable evidence that both individual achievement in organizations and organizational effectiveness are closely related to the communication abilities of staff. Research in a large insurance company and two other organizations showed that persuasive ability was a relatively strong predictor of performance appraisal ratings, job level and upward mobility.⁷ Another study investigated the link between communication abilities and organizational achievement among 394 employees of three south-east US organizations. This research established that communication abilities and achievement were closely linked for both men and women. The researchers concluded: ‘The results lend additional support to the claim that these abilities help people attain desired social outcomes.’⁸ It has also been shown that small business owners who give directions and control to their employees in a ‘person-centred’ way – that is, skilfully adjust their instructions and feedback to the characteristics of the individual employee – are perceived more positively as leaders by their employees. Research has linked person-centred communication by doctors to health outcomes, including the degree to which patients comply with ‘doctors’ orders’.⁹ There is a developing body of work showing that teacher communication methods influence student empowerment.¹⁰

New technologies have increased communication opportunities but also their complexity. For instance, call centre staff in Asia, responding to callers from the UK, must adjust to time-of-day differences and may need to respond to comments on local UK concerns such as soccer results. Again, staff who need to send frequent emails to colleagues or customers in another continent can experience difficulty if they have never visited it and have no first-hand knowledge of local conditions. Chapter 9 describes some effects of technological mediation on interpersonal communication.

Communication can claim to be the most important single work activity, and interpersonal communication has increased in importance with organizations’ new emphasis on individuals and teams. Technology has expanded the scope of work communication while often adding to its complexity.

1.2 THE GROWTH IN CONTACT WITH ‘DIFFERENT OTHERS’ AT WORK

Several trends of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries increased the number and types of ‘different others’ that many people meet through work. These

trends included the phenomenal growth of both international communications and business and the increasing diversity of domestic workforces.

Prior to the 1980s, telecommunication monopolies were generally under the direct control of state ministries of postal services and telecommunications, and these monopolistic national networks co-ordinated international traffic flows using standard rate-sharing formulae. This changed rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s as a transnational commercial communication system was set up; this resulted from major improvements in communication technology and from barriers to the commercialization of media and communication systems being relaxed. 'The recent expansion of global access to voice telephony has been almost violent. During the 1990s, wire-line phone access shot upward; while, increasing from a tiny base as recently as 1990, 1 billion mobile phones were in use by 2002.' In addition to the growth of international dial-up circuits, activated international private line circuits (the in-house corporate and organizational telecommunication networks that employ leased circuits and other proprietary facilities on a full-time basis) grew exponentially, increasing tenfold in the years 1997 to 2000 alone. As a result, business users assimilated networks into a vast and growing range of business processes: payroll accounting, employment relations, inventory, sales, marketing, research and development, and so on. 'By revolutionizing network systems and services, large corporations acquired new freedom of manoeuvre in their attempts to reintegrate their operations... on a broadened, supranational basis.' Transnationally, organized networks employed a lengthening list of media, including wireless, telephone lines, cable television systems, fibre optics and satellites, plus the software-defined means for network access, operation and management. This development expanded the geographical organization of business: by 1997 to 1999 fully half of global telecommunication investment was being absorbed by developing and transitional countries.¹¹ This global expansion of telecommunications connectivity not only enabled a huge growth of work-related interpersonal contact within and between organizations, but also supported other trends that reinforced the amount of that communication through developments such as offshoring, virtual teams, the application of social networking to work and the growth of world trade, especially in services.

Although world trade is affected by recessions, between 2000 and 2008 world exports grew by an average 5 per cent year on year; most regions of the world shared in this growth. Over the same period of 2000 to 2008, Asian exports rose by 10 per cent a year; while those of the 27 countries of the European Union (EU) increased by only 3.5 per cent annually, this still meant that they nearly doubled from 683 to 1306 thousand million euros between 1999 and 2008.¹² Service business tends to involve more interpersonal contact than other sectors. The service component of many developed economies grew dramatically in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, both in absolute terms and as a share of their total gross national product, pointing to a very large increase in the number of enterprises engaged in the service economy. Global trade in services grew even faster than that in merchandise, at 12 per cent per annum for the years 2000 to 2008.

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, workforces in many parts of the world became increasingly diverse – that is, they came to be composed of people from many different national and ethnic backgrounds, of women to nearly the same degree as men, and to include more people with disabilities. Workforces came to reflect legal recognition that people are entitled to differing sexual orientations, religious affiliations and family structures. The extension of working age limits and the

cumulative effects of the open labour market also expanded the diversity of people at work in regions such as Europe. Additionally, in some countries, such as Japan, India and those of the EU, substantially increased legal rights increased the visibility and voice of women and minority groups, who were increasingly found in positions of power and influence. Furthermore, for most people the diversity of the people they met through work – as patients, students, pupils and their parents, clients, customers, suppliers, advisers, accountants, bankers and lawyers – was already wider than that among their colleagues alone and was growing. For business executives and managers, for instance, the diversity of the backgrounds of their contacts increased even faster than the rate at which it increased among colleagues, due to globalization. For the caring professions, because people were living longer and, as they aged, needed more medical and support services, mainly young or middle-aged nurses, doctors and care workers were dealing with more and more elderly or very elderly people; women live longer than men and so were disproportionately served by doctors who were still predominantly male (though decreasingly so); members of ethnic minorities had a higher birth rate and so used more maternity services; and so on.

Although organizations often fail to notice the benefits of diversity, a growing number do, and encourage it in their workforces, thereby increasing it. The benefits are of two kinds. The first kind has been defined as affecting divergent activities. These are those activities where creativity is required, which range from generating strategies to writing advertising copy, from developing new products to improving systems. When people of different ethnic, national, gender, religious, sexual orientation, social class and specialist backgrounds share perspectives and approaches, it helps ferment ideas, while the tests applied by such a cross-section help filter out the good ideas from the bad. Diversity also helps guard against the dangers of over-conformity and groupthink, which are real perils in organizations. The second benefit of diversity in organizations is that it gives them an increased capacity for dealing with the inescapable diversity that exists in the environment, for domestic and international organizations alike, in markets, user groups and publics, and, for international organizations, in governments. A study of the success of nine organizations confirmed that companies benefit from valuing ‘diverse cultural modes of being and interacting’, where ‘all cultural voices... participate fully in setting goals and making decisions’. Managers in these companies assessed cultural biases and devised new ways for people to work together. These included extensive cultural awareness training at all levels, from entry employees to senior staff; analysis of interpersonal communication and interactive styles; active support groups to share issues and mentor all employees; increased assistance to parents in the form of daycare and flexible leave; and bias-free hiring, evaluating, and promoting.¹³

Different societal groups

The rest of this section shows the context of communication at work in terms of societal diversity. It discusses the position of different societal groups.

Nationality and ethnicity

Nationality, as the term is used here, is decided by a person’s national status, which is a legal relationship involving allegiance on the part of an individual and (usually) protection on the part of the state. This usage distinguishes nationality from ethnicity, since a nation may be composed of many ethnic groups but only one nationality,

no matter how many foreign nationals or people with dual citizenship live within its borders. However, the importance of nationality itself to how people behave, and so to its impact on work communication, is far from clear. In multi-ethnic countries, many peoples contribute to the creation of the national culture.

An ethnic unit is 'a population whose members believe that in some sense they share common descent and a common cultural heritage or tradition, and who are so regarded by others'.¹⁴ Another definition of ethnic identity reflects a similar idea: it is 'identification with and perceived acceptance into a group with shared heritage and culture'.¹⁵ Thus ethnicity is socially constructed.¹⁶ Minority ethnic groups share a sense of heritage, history and origin from an area outside or preceding the creation of their present nation state; they often also share a language or dialect. Ethnic identity is situational; it is possible to be simultaneously English, British and European, stressing these identities more or less strongly in different aspects of everyday life. Similarly, a person might self-identify as Gujarati, Indian, East African, Asian or British depending on the situation, his or her immediate objectives and the responses and behaviour of others.

The significance of national and ethnic differences for communication at work is affected by the size of the stock of foreign population living in a country or region, by the stock of ethnic minorities in a population and by the labour market participation and employment rates of foreign nationals and ethnic minorities. Although affected by recession, indications are that the long-term trend in these factors was a rising one in many parts of the world during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Gender

Gender differences have growing significance for communication at work. Gender has been defined as 'patterned, socially produced distinctions between female and male... Gender is not something that people are... rather for the individual and the collective, it is daily accomplished'.¹⁷ The term gender, therefore, refers to a society's beliefs about the differences between the sexes and its rules for appropriate behaviour for males and females.

In the world as a whole, men outnumber women in the ratio 100 to 98.6, and in Asia (where the ratio is distorted by the cultural preference for male children) by 105 to 100, but in Europe women outnumber men by 105 to 100. The proportion of women in the European labour market continued to increase more important between 2000 and 2006, as it had over the previous 15 years; in Asia it declined slightly and varied from China's 66 per cent down to Pakistan's 20 per cent (in 2008). In the EU, labour market participation and employment rates are correlated with level of educational qualification: the higher the educational attainment, the higher the employment rate. This finding applies to both sexes but is more significant for women than for men. As the educational qualification level of women continues to increase, female employment rates are also expected to rise. Unemployment rates in Asia and Europe slightly favoured women by the year 2009, when the unemployment rate for women in the EU27 was for the first time lower than that for men.

Despite their growing participation in labour markets and their unemployment advantage, women face 'harsh realities'. They are more likely to be in part-time work (which is generally less secure, less protected, less well paid and more lacking in benefits than full-time work). As a result of these and other factors, women are disproportionately represented among the low-paid. Again, while women managers 'appear to have achieved parity in salaries', when differences in productivity, behavioural

Box 1.2

'Within the next few months women will cross the 50 per cent threshold and become the majority of the American workforce. Women already make up the majority of university graduates in the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries and the majority of professional workers in several rich countries, including the United States. Women run many of the world's great companies, from PepsiCo in America to Areva in France.

Women's economic empowerment is arguably the biggest social change of our times. Just a generation ago, women were largely confined to repetitive, menial jobs. They were routinely

subjected to casual sexism and were expected to abandon their careers when they married and had children. Today they are running some of the organizations that once treated them as second-class citizens. Millions of women have been given more control over their own lives. And millions of brains have been put to more productive use. Societies that try to resist this trend – most notably the Arab countries, but also Japan and some southern European countries – will pay a heavy price in the form of wasted talent and frustrated citizens.'

The Economist, 30 December 2009

factors and age are controlled for, it is clear that 'gender plays a significant role in salary determination'.¹⁸ The supply of women qualified for jobs in management, or in executive, administrative and managerial occupations, continued to increase as more women accumulated work experience and completed management and professional education programmes. However, although women made progress in obtaining managerial jobs, their median weekly earnings continued to be well below those of male managers.

Younger and older people

Age distributions of working age populations (15 to 65) show wide variations by region. In Asia, excluding the Near East, in 2009, 26.1 per cent of the population was aged between 15 and 29, while 18.8 per cent was in the age range of 45 to 65; in Western Europe the equivalent figures were 17.8 per cent and 26.6 per cent respectively and for Eastern Europe they were 21.6 per cent and 26.4 per cent.¹⁹ Projected age distributions for the developed world show an ageing population, while the developing world outside China is expected to continue to benefit from continued growth in its young working age population. The unemployment facts both in Europe and some parts of Asia point to a serious disadvantage for young people; however, the predominant cause is less likely to be discrimination than labour market rigidities: the difficulty for younger people is to gain entry. Most job opportunities arise only as the total number of jobs expands or as natural wastage creates vacancies. People in the age group 25 to 49 tend to have a degree of tenure in the jobs they occupy. Worldwide, the unemployment rate for the 15–24 age group is twice as high as for the workforce as a whole, and it has been increasing over the last 18 years.²⁰ In Europe and some parts of Asia (Japan and China, but not India) an existing situation of disadvantage for both younger and older workers may be about to change, however, as Box 1.3 suggests.

Box 1.3

'Companies in the rich world are confronted with a rapidly ageing workforce. Nearly one in three American workers will be over 50 by 2012, and America is a young country compared with Japan and Germany. China is also ageing rapidly, thanks to its one-child policy. This means that companies will have to learn how to manage older workers better. ... How do you encourage older people to adapt to new practices and technologies? How do they get senior people to take orders from young whippersnappers? Happily a few companies have started to think seriously about these problems and generate insights that their more stick-in-the-mud peers can imitate. The leaders in this area are retail companies. Asda,

a subsidiary of the equally gerontophile Wal-Mart, is Britain's biggest employer of over-50s. Netto, a Danish supermarket group, has experimented with shops that employ only people aged 45 and over. ... When BMW decided to staff one of its production lines with workers of an age likely to be typical at the firm in 2017, at first "the pensioners' line" was less productive. But the firm brought it up to the level of the rest of the factory by introducing 70 relatively small changes, such as new chairs, comfier shoes, magnifying lenses and adjustable tables.'

Source: *The Economist*, 4 February 2010

People with disabilities

Persons defined as having disabilities are those with physical, sensory or mental impairments that can make performing an everyday task more difficult. Most disabilities are not 'handicaps' in the sense of making people unable to work and take part in community life on an equal footing with others. This includes severe disabilities such as being confined to a wheelchair. Often it is only the fact that an environment is not adapted – there are no wheelchair ramps or lifts – that makes full participation difficult for people with such impairments. A qualified person with a disability is someone who, with or without reasonable adjustment by the employer, can perform the essential function of the employment position that s/he holds or desires. Disability increases with age in a rising curve.

People with disabilities are a significant part of the European workforce (no figures are available for Asia). For instance in Great Britain in 2009 nearly one in five people of working age (7 million, or 18.6 per cent) had a disability. There were 1.3 million disabled people in the UK who were available for, and wanted to, work. Although only half of disabled people of working age were in work (50 per cent compared with 80 per cent of non-disabled people), that still meant that around 650,000 people with disabilities were at work in the UK. Employment rates varied greatly according to the type of impairment a person had; only 20 per cent of people with mental health problems were in employment.²¹ Data from the European Community Household Panel for the period 1995–2001 for 13 European countries showed that people with disabilities were more likely to be self-employed than people without disabilities. Self-employment provides flexibility and a better adjustment between disability status and working life. (Moreover, the levels of satisfaction with job, type of job and working conditions of self-employed disabled people are higher than those reported by disabled people who are wage and salary earners.²²) Whether self-employed or employed, people with disabilities are an important part of workforces and are significantly involved in work-related communication of all kinds.

Homosexuals

Estimates for the numbers of male homosexuals and lesbians are, for obvious reasons, unreliable: the figures quoted for the EU range from 2 per cent to 10 per cent; none are available for Asia, where discrimination remains strong and most homosexuals stay 'in the closet'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that homosexuals often attain seniority at work more rapidly than the majority population; this is sometimes attributed to their greater commitment, owing to the demands of family life being lower for them than for heterosexuals. Although homosexuals may be affected by prejudice (discussed in Chapter 5), they constitute an important sector of the working community and are extensively involved in all kinds of communication at work.

Religious groups

Across the world, Christians were estimated at 32.88 per cent in 1999, Muslims 19.54 per cent, Hindus 13.34 per cent, and Buddhists at 5.92 per cent, with the rest of the world population spread across various religions and atheism.²³ No figures are available for labour market participation or employment by religious group, but it is likely that cultural values reduce participation by some groups (Muslim women, for instance). Lack of accommodation to religious needs, such as Muslims' need to worship five times a day or the need of Orthodox Jews to be home by sunset on Fridays, distorts the employment pattern towards self-employment or part-time working. Clearly, though, the adherents of the various religions compose the majority of workforces worldwide, and participate, therefore, in work communication to an important extent.

Social class, education and other differences

Social class is one dimension on which Western European societies became less diverse during the last quarter of the twentieth century, with the growth of a large category of 'intermediate' and other non-manual workers and a decrease in the percentage of all manual workers, especially the unskilled. These changes were largely a result of the decline of manufacturing and heavy industry. These trends are set to continue, reinforced by government policies that see an increase in the educational and technical skill levels of the population as essential to international competitiveness. In Asia, increasing industrialization led to a major shift away from rural employment to urban, and to substantial growth in the size of the middle class.

Final educational level is undeniably a major source of difference between individuals in the workplace. There is in the EU, for instance, a considerable amount of initial job segregation of graduates, 18-year-old school leavers with higher-level school qualifications (such as A-Level), 16-year-old school leavers with qualifications and those who leave school at the earliest legal date without qualifications. In this respect, the UK, for instance, is still elitist, despite recent changes, compared with some international competitors, such as the USA or South Korea, where about 70 per cent of the population receive university-level qualifications.

Other educational/professional differences also create significant differences between groups of people at work. Examples include subject specialization (especially science versus arts), independent versus state-maintained schooling (because of its perceived implications for social class) and professional training (consider the problems created by legal jargon, 'academese' and civil-servant-speak.) These non-cultural differences are not, however, a main focus of this book.

Box 1.4

'In Britain, class and money overlap, but only partially, like circles in a Venn diagram. Not all posh people are rich (some are shabby genteel, scrimping and saving for the school fees), and vice versa. Class is a magical amalgam of education, occupation, accent, vocabulary ("lounge" or "sitting room"), outlook and habit.

There is no denying that class is alive and potent. The structure of the British economy has changed, with the proletariat shrinking and the middle class bulging; celebrities have ousted aristocrats in the gossip columns. But most Britons still instinctively filter themselves and others into social classes, with attendant suspicions and snobberies.^a

'Sixty years after India's constitution banned caste discrimination, Hinduism's millennia-old hierarchy retains a tight grip. Lonely-hearts ads in the newspapers are classified by caste and sub-caste. Brahmins, at the top, dominate many professions. There are still hundreds of "honour killings" by which families avenge inter-caste marriages and liaisons. Caste discrimination is still dreadfully evident in the wretched lives of *dalits*, formerly "untouchables", who remain India's poorest and least educated people.^b

Sources: (a) *The Economist*, 10 December 2009

(b) *The Economist*, 10 June 2010

By the beginning of the third millennium, several forces were bringing about a great expansion in the amount and range of contacts with 'different others' experienced by people round the globe through their work. This section has shown that, numerically, both the population at large and the workforces in Europe and Asia are diverse and are continuing to become more so. This implies a significant increase in the amount, and therefore the importance, of inter-group (intercultural) interpersonal communication at work. This section has also shown that, despite an improvement in their societal position, minorities' earnings, employment rates and career prospects are still below those of the majority group. Furthermore, there is an increasingly important interface between workers in developing countries such as India and workers or customers in the developed countries. The inevitable discrepancies in economic security and disposable income are part of the context of intercultural communication at work.

1.3 THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF (SUB)CULTURAL DIVERSITY AT WORK

The diversity described in the previous section was demographic. There is some agreement that demographic factors are important particularly for their effects on psychological factors, such as values, beliefs and attitudes, and thus on behaviour, especially communication behaviour. Arguing that researchers should examine other facets of diversity in addition to demographic background traits, Dansby and Knouse (1999) pointed out that, in a group dynamics study, as the time that group members worked together increased, the effects of surface-level diversity (demographic and physical differences) decreased, whereas those of deep-level diversity (attitudes, beliefs and values) increased.²⁴ As later chapters will show, differences in attitudes, beliefs and values are related to culture. This section makes the case for linking diversity with (sub)cultural differences in the context of work. There are many different understandings of culture. These will be discussed in Sections 1.4 and 1.5, but for now we will use the term to mean a society or social system from the point of view of its members' shared beliefs and preferred ways of doing things. Subcultures are groupings that exist within or cut

across cultures – ‘French women’ or ‘women’ respectively, for example. The meaning of subculture will also be discussed in Section 1.5.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the trends described in Section 1.2 substantially increased the need to adapt to cultural difference at work: it started to become a major concern of general management, marketing and human resource management. Among the reasons were the exponential growth in the amount of contact among ‘different others’ at work, noted above. Another was the demonstration by researchers that from the point of view of work the significant differences among ‘different others’ included cultural differences as well as those of language, education and experience. Researchers also showed for the first time that cultural differences between modern societies are profound, significantly affect how people behave, may be less amenable to training or retraining than other sources of difference and are not disappearing, so that the ‘investment’ to adjust for them was seen as worthwhile. In the words of one author: ‘Culture pervades and radiates meanings into every aspect of the enterprise.’²⁵ The following are some ‘aspects of the enterprise’ affected by culture and the reasons for their increasing importance:

- Cultural differences are known to affect people’s purchasing behaviour, and therefore the most effective ways of marketing to them. Content analyses of Chinese and US food advertisements showed that community, popular, ornamental, status, health and nutrition appeals were more frequently used in China than in the USA, where independence appeals were more common. These differences were linked to cultural differences between the two countries: China is collectivist, high in power distance and has a strong long-term orientation; the USA is more individualistic. Overall, the findings suggested that advertising appeals in global markets reflected the dominant cultural values in each country.²⁶ Another 11-country study found that cultural variables influenced the focus of consumers’ product information search activities.²⁷ With spreading globalization, more organizations must take these kinds of difference into account. Factors that influence perceived service quality, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles and empathy, are influenced by culture.²⁸

Box 1.5

‘As consumers, Koreans look for a complex product and service. This explains the failure of Walmart in Korea. Korean superstores, such as those of Emart, which is the dominant chain, unlike Walmart are attractively laid out and provide helpful assistants. Westerners are more practical in their shopping; Koreans are more emotional, and seek a pleasant shopping experience. Again, South Korean IT is unique – it shows high creativity and innovativeness. The country has 7 or 8 web search engines and they are very different in style from Google or

Yahoo. Each page is much more densely filled with a variety of content. This may reflect a culturally-influenced, more holistic, less “linear” way of using information and thinking. Again, for Koreans, their mobile is a navigation tool – it has been developed to have that functionality. Korea developed a social networking web service before Facebook, called “I Love School”.

Source: interview with a South Korean executive, author’s research

- A study of adoptions by medium-sized companies in ten European countries found that national cultural differences helped explain the variance in firms' decisions to adopt innovations such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. This finding indicates that globalizing business-to-business marketing as well as consumer marketing requires allowing for cultural difference.²⁹
- In service businesses, success depends on effective interactions and communications between people. 'Delivering service products requires employees with well-developed interpersonal skills; cultural similarity between the service provider and the customer may improve the effectiveness of service delivery and the perceived quality of service.'³⁰ The clear implication here is that culture influences the interactions between services providers and their customers. Several studies have found that ethnicity and gender affect interactions between employees and customers in service businesses. Organizations may better understand and meet customers' needs in ethnic and international markets if they not only have a diverse workforce but also 'listen' to its diverse contributions.
- The importance of culture for international business and the problems managers have in dealing with it have been summarized as follows: 'As markets globalize, the need for standardization in organizational design, systems and procedures increases. Yet managers are also under pressure to adapt their organization to the local characteristics of the market, the legislation, the fiscal regime, the socio-political system and the cultural system.'³¹
- Diversity in domestic organizations became a growing concern, 'as more and more minorities are brought into domestic work forces.'³² From about 1960, fairness concerns and pressure from minority groups led many countries to pass equal opportunities legislation. It became unlawful to discriminate in employment against people on the grounds of their 'race' (ethnicity) or gender. Over subsequent years, the coverage and demands of this kind of legislation gradually expanded. However, traditional equal opportunities approaches came to be criticized for denying differences. 'Equal rights necessarily came to mean we are all the same.'³³ A later trend was towards valuing diversity, which means 'viewing people as having equal rights while being different'. Valuing diversity in the workplace 'is about recognising, valuing, and managing people's differences and about sharing power and communicating'. Workplace diversity focuses on 'empowering people of all kinds to develop and contribute their own unique talents to solving our business problems', rather than having employees 'give up their own ethnic, gender, or individual identities to be successful'. Heightened concern with diversity stems not only from the growing presence of women and minorities in the work force, but also from modern organizational strategies that require more interaction among employees of different functional backgrounds. The effects on performance were, and still are, unclear. Studies have found both positive and negative effects of workforce diversity on performance. Some have shown that group diversity both enhances and diminishes task performance. The negative effects may result from poor management of diversity. Even though working with diversity is intrinsically more demanding, good management of diversity can enhance overall performance.³⁴

Tung (1993) argued that there are important similarities, as well as differences, in managing diversity in international and national contexts. There was a need, however, for more emphasis on the domestic issue rather than the international one.³⁵ In a later presentation, Tung (1996) explained why: '[First] due to the localization policies of most host countries and the rising costs of expatriation, there will be a decrease in the number of expatriates. In comparison, the problem of managing intra-national diversity is definitely increasing in size and magnitude ...;

[second]...expatriates involved in managing cross-national diversity do so on a short-term basis (2 to 3 years). In contrast, in light of the changing demographics of the ... workforce, those involved in managing intra-national diversity are expected to have a long-term (permanent) commitment to such policies and practices.³⁶

In addition to these trends that increased the importance of cultural difference at work, there was also concern with 'capturing individual capabilities and motivating the entire organization to respond to the demands of the environment'. Earlier, companies were mainly concerned with strategy; organizational structures were designed to support strategy. Companies believed that by changing their structure they automatically changed the 'shared norms, values and beliefs that shape the way individual managers think and act'.³⁷

Box 1.6

The 500 employees of a British-owned start-up in India are all Indians but they speak nine different languages as their mother tongue. The working language is English, but away from the office they speak to one another in Hindi, unless they are from South India. Hindi is the common language of North Indians but is little known and

less used in the south. In spoken Hindi there is a strong admixture of English words, and not only for technical or modern terms or where there is no Hindi equivalent. For instance, the Hindi for 'table' is 'mez', but 'table' is used.

Source: author's research

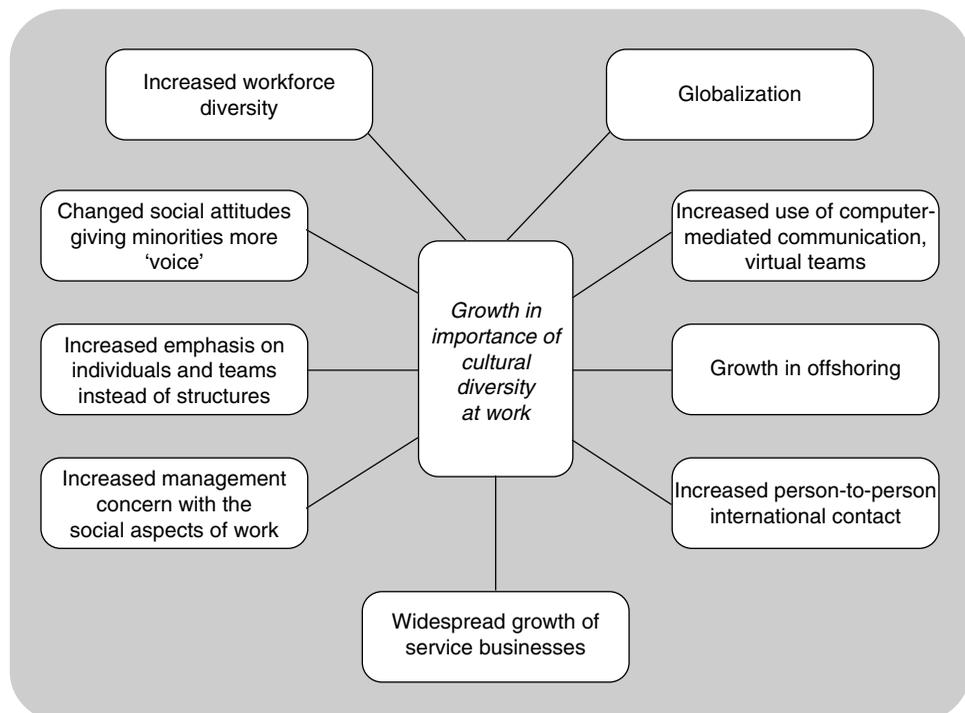


Figure 1.2 Factors increasing the importance of cultural diversity at work

Because these assumptions of managerial responsiveness were false, many organizations were incapable of carrying out the sophisticated strategies they developed.

Recognizing the constraints placed on strategy implementation by individuals' limitations brought a shift in organizational priorities; there was a new emphasis on individual capabilities and motivations as key factors for implementing strategy. Growth, development and prosperity were seen to depend on developing a creative, consultative culture in which individuals could contribute fully. Human capital came to be regarded as the strategic resource of the future;³⁸ the role of managers began to change from directing to facilitating, coaching and mentoring.³⁹ Organizations started to try 'to build into their very structure' the capacity for individual learning and development.⁴⁰ Finally, the increasing use of teams as a way of organizing work added to the pressure for attending to the social aspects of work.⁴¹

Figure 1.2 summarizes these influences on the growing importance of cultural diversity at work.

1.4 WHAT IS CULTURE?

Individuals are rarely conscious of their culture, yet culture affects practically all aspects of the way the people of a society or societal group interact with each other or with outsiders. There is a whole range of ways of defining culture, many of which provide complementary views of what it is.⁴² Table 1.1 briefly describes those understandings of culture that are drawn on in this book as underpinning for the study of cultural differences in communication.

Box 1.7

A dataset of 41 large European firms in the banking and insurance industry found that entry into new foreign markets and new cultural zones was associated with higher levels of international capacity at top management team level.

Source: Greve, P., Nielsen, S. and Ruigrok, W. (2003) 'Transcending borders with international top management teams: a study of European financial multinational corporations', *European Management Journal*, 27(3): 213–24

Table 1.1 *Cultural theories*

Theoretical approach	Basis of explanation
Anthropological Communication perspective	Core values shared by communities explain variations in behaviours. Process, interaction and meaning are central; people co-create their culture.
Cultural studies Social identity	Culture is about shared meanings. Culture is a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms.
Cultural psychology	Culture provides 'symbolic systems' and only by participating in these can the intentional states by which human experience and action are shaped be realized.

Note: Other definitional elements have been added by other scholars. For instance, Hall (1997) saw culture as drawing arbitrary lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour;⁴³ Triandis (1994) emphasized a characteristic way of perceiving a social environment;⁴⁴ Spencer-Oatey (2005) brought in a description of the functions that culture performs, especially the function of influencing the interpretation of other people's behaviour.⁴⁵

Cultural diversity assumed greater importance as organizations came to recognize that increased demographic diversity meant increased cultural diversity and that culture affects many aspects of business and management.

Values as the basis of culture

Values have been defined as follows: 'Concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states or behaviors, transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events and are ordered by relative importance'.⁴⁶ Values are also broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs to others. Terms like good or evil and dirty or clean usually express values. Many values have to do with someone's position on, and the importance they attach to, various moral, religious, political or ecological issues. They have been described as 'the most important indicator in the analyses and prediction of human action and behavior' and 'a means to understanding the underlying motivation (the "why") behind individual behavior'.⁴⁷ A literature review found that values are related to such practical work concerns as decision style, strategic action, innovation, creativity, commitment, managerial satisfaction and organizational competitiveness.

A major part of cross-cultural research has sought to identify values or motivational goals that differentiate cultures. This emphasis on values was advocated by Rokeach (1993), who wrote: 'The value concept, more than any other, should occupy a central position....able to unify the apparently diverse interests of all the sciences concerned with human behavior.'⁴⁸ Within this approach, values are viewed as the criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events. Societal institutions such as the family, education, economic, political and religious systems function according to, and their goals and their modes of operation express, cultural value priorities. For example, in societies where individual ambition and success are highly valued, the organization of the economic and legal systems is likely to be competitive. In contrast, a cultural emphasis on group well-being is likely to be expressed in more co-operative economic and legal systems. Because cultural value priorities are shared, role incumbents in social institutions can draw on them to select socially appropriate behaviour and to justify to others their behavioural choices, such as to go to war or to fire employees.⁴⁹ Section 2.3 describes values approaches in more depth.

Communication as the basis of culture

Over a number of years, approaches that place communication at the centre of culture have gained increasing acceptance. For instance Aldridge (2002) defined culture as follows:

[Culture is] the shared system of symbolic knowledge and patterns of behavior, derived from speech communication, that human individuals carry to provide predictable internal and external psychological stability so as to prevent chaos among human individuals. We learn cultural codes for social life, role expectations, common definitions of situations, and social norms in order to provide predictability and survival of the human species. Human language (spoken and written) is the symbolic glue for human culture.⁵⁰

A communication perspective emphasizes process, interaction and meaning. Most communication theorists argue that people are not passive representatives of culture but regulators of a complex system, which they co-create during interaction.

For Kincaid *et al.* (1983), communication was the work required to sustain a human group; it consists of the transfer of information among individuals, groups or cultures. Groups cluster together according to common beliefs, values and behaviour. Cultures are nothing more than common ways of thinking and acting, which develop because of relatively isolated within-group communication. Cultures differ from one another because there is less contact between cultures than within them. If everybody communicated with people outside their culture as much as they do with people within it, cultures would soon disappear.⁵¹ Haslett (1989) held that culture and communication are acquired simultaneously: neither exists without the other. Culture by definition was a 'shared, consensual way of life and sharing and consensus is made possible only by communication'; in turn, humans communicate in a cultural environment that constrains the form and nature of communication. Through communication, members of a culture share a perspective or world view, although members may not share that perspective equally or in every aspect of experience.⁵² According to Burke *et al.* (2002), too, culture and communication are closely linked.

Culture as communication is the process of creating and using shared meanings within a specific community and its history. This cultural approach to communication emphasizes that people exist in a world of shared meanings, which they (usually) take for granted. Additionally, members of a culture continually participate in the production, maintenance and reproduction of a shared sense of what is real.^{53,54} (Thus this cultural model of communication is based within the theories associated with the social construction of reality.) Human beings live in a world whose meaning they have produced through their own culture. This notion is reinforced by most theories of socialization, which suggest that within modern societies certain activities and institutions, such as religions, families and schools, function to tell citizens or group members who they are and how they are to behave.

Shared meanings as the basis of culture

For scholars in the cultural studies tradition, such as Stuart Hall (1997), culture is about 'shared meanings'. Meanings are produced and exchanged through language, which is

Box 1.8

'There are some commonly held attitudes in our [Italian] culture which are different from those in other European countries and which must be taken into consideration if we want to study in more depth the anomalous situation of the Italian family in a European context. We have found some aspects which are... strongly anchored in tradition: the lack of development of a "single" way of life, "over-coddling", the protection offered by the family, the desire for certain guarantees in order to leave home without running any risks and the emphasis placed on the parental role. These are all aspects which show the importance and the role of the family in Italy and which provide an answer – a family

one – to the structural difficulties encountered by young people which have led them to "emancipate themselves within the family rather than to emancipate themselves from the family". Two elements have emerged that indicate a change in family characteristics, i.e. a change in the parent/child relationship and an attenuation in gender differences due to the female entrance in the labour force.'

Source: Menniti, A., Misiti, M. and Savioli, M. 'Italian stay-at-home children: attitudes and constraints', URL: www.demogr.mpg.de/Papers/workshops/000906_paper01.pdf (internal references omitted), last accessed on 14 December 2010

the medium through which we 'make sense' of things. Meanings can only be shared through language. Thus, 'to say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other.' To communicate, people must speak the 'same language' – broadly, be able to use the same 'cultural codes'; they must interpret visual images, sounds, body language and facial expressions in broadly similar ways. They must also know how to translate their feelings and ideas into these various codes.⁵⁵

'This is not to deny that, within a culture, there may be different meanings, even for the same word or symbol, or that people within a culture may feel that they belong to different groups, have different identities or think different thoughts.'⁵⁶ Furthermore, culture is not only 'in the head'; it organizes and regulates social lives. It is a process or set of practices which means that individuals function within a context of cultural assumptions as well as a network of social, political and economic factors. Cultural studies treats discourses as ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: they reflect the ideas and assumptions implicit in the communication of a group or society. For example, medical discourse refers to the ideas and assumptions associated with the medical world. While any one society includes multiple discourses, some discourses may be dominant in their influence and ability to shape what is defined as reality. This means that discourses have power relations embedded in them. For instance, the phrase 'doctor's orders' expresses the power exerted over patients by doctors – power based on their expertise and assumed beneficence.⁵⁷ Following this logic, culture can be defined as the way of life of a group or society including meanings, the transmission, communication and alteration of those meanings and the power relations that decide which meanings are accepted and which have more significance than others.

As an example of the practical application of the 'shared meaning' view of culture, it has been argued that 'brand personalities' are symbols and carriers of culture. Research found that Spanish brand personalities had some dimensions in common with North American (sincerity, excitement and sophistication) and others that differed – passion (Spanish) and competence and ruggedness (American). Japanese brand personalities shared sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication with American, but also had the dimension of peacefulness.⁵⁸

Figure 1.3 shows the key ideas of the 'culture as communication' theorists described in this chapter.

Social or cultural identities as the basis of culture

Communication and culture are seen as inextricably intertwined within another approach – cultural identity theory. A cultural identity is part of an individual's self-construal, or sense of selfhood. (Self-construals are explained further in Chapter 4.) Cultural identity is the part of the self-construal that derives from a person's knowledge of his or her membership in a cultural group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. A cultural identity is an aspect of social identity. That part of the self-construal not accounted for by social identity is personal identity. Within cultural identity theory, culture is defined as a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms. Symbols and meanings are what groups of people say, do, think and feel. To be a member of a group is to communicate with other members. This interpretation of culture is radically different from those approaches in which cultural status is determined mainly by birth rather than by subscribing to a system of symbols and meanings.

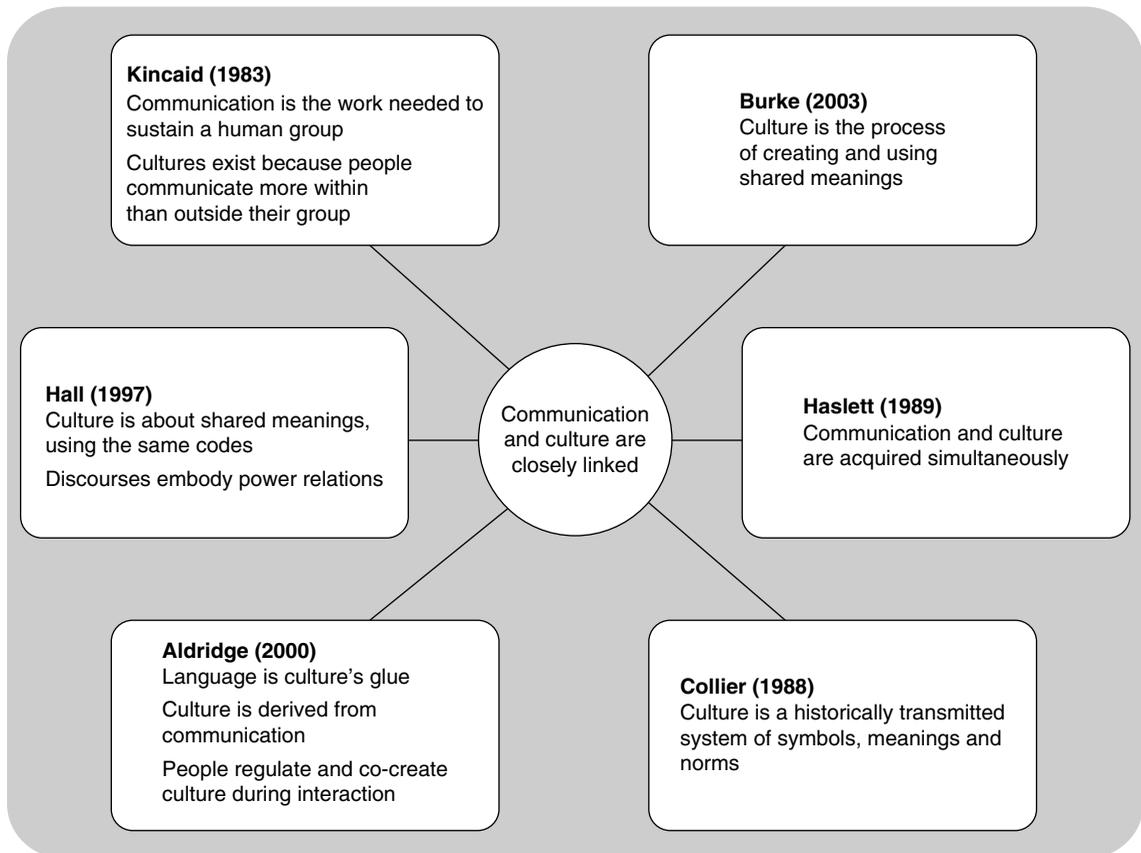


Figure 1.3 Key ideas of culture theorists for whom communication is central to culture

Box 1.9

'Switzerland's EU ties are governed by a web of some 120 agreements and treaties, and this bilateral approach is still the preferred choice of government, business and most voters. Swiss people fear their identity might "dissolve" in the EU, says Ms. Calmy-Rey [the Swiss

foreign minister]. It is an identity that revolves around neutrality and an awkward tradition of citizens' referendums.'

Source: *The Economist*, 3 December 2009

The close link between communication and identity is reflected in findings that inter-group identity issues appeared to account better than either power differentials or language competence for conversation style differences observed when discourse analysis was applied to intercultural decision-making meetings, specifically those involving US-born native English speakers and participants from East Asian countries.⁵⁹

Core symbols are particularly important. For example, a core symbol for collectivist cultures, such as Mexico's, may be bondedness, whereas a core symbol for a more

individualist culture, such as mainstream culture in the US, may be individual accomplishment.⁶⁰ Meanings include metaphors, stories and myths. Norms are patterns of appropriate ways of communicating; attached to norms are prescriptions, proscriptions and social sanctions, while stories that are told often relate to norm violations and how they are punished. For example, the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah refers to Hebrew norms against certain sexual practices; the folk tale of the fisherman who was granted three wishes but lost everything through asking for too much refers to a widespread norm against greed.

There are different types of culture corresponding to different types of groups which, according to cultural identity theorists, meet the requirements for being a culture. Cultural groups include corporations, support groups, national groups or civil rights groups; cultural groups are any such groups that are bounded (have restricted membership), have histories and are significant to individuals. This is why each individual has a range of cultures to which s/he belongs. Symbols and norms change over the lifetime of culture systems, but there is enough consistency in what is handed down to make it possible to define the boundaries between systems and distinguish members of one cultural system from those of another.

Thus, for cultural identity theorists, national cultures are only one type among many. (This, of course, exposes the theory to the criticism that you end up with a 'culture of one'.) In fact, because many people contribute to the creation of a national culture's symbols, meanings and norms, national culture is diffuse. Ethnicity, gender, profession, geographical area and organization are other bases for cultural difference. The meanings and associations attributed to any category of people 'are a product of the enduring images and characteristics people have ascribed and assigned to men [sic] in groups over time'.⁶¹ For instance, masculinity can be defined as a social and symbolic construct. Based upon a survey of contemporary published research regarding masculinity, Chesebro and Fuse (2001) concluded that masculinity is now a construct that attributes ten traits to people viewed as masculine. These traits, it is suggested, overlap with, but are not identical with, those that would have been part of the construct of masculinity at other times. Cultural identities are enduring yet dynamic; for instance, the idea of what it means to be a woman changed considerably during the twentieth century, but the underlying idea of difference from men persisted.⁶² A further point was made by Delmestri (2006), who argued that individuals are able to participate in multiple cultural traditions and to maintain distinctive and inconsistent action frames. Quantitative information on 418 Italian middle managers, working for local and international firms in Italy, and qualitative information on 113 of them, revealed that, whereas the majority in Italian firms enacted a traditional Italian identity, the majority in international firms enacted Anglo-Saxon identities, and more so in US and British firms.⁶³

An identity to which people normally pay little attention becomes more important to them when, for instance, they meet for the first time with people whom they perceive to have a different cultural identity – for example, when they travel abroad. This point will be seen to have considerable importance in Chapter 6 when intercultural communication is considered.

The cultural theories relevant to this book variously emphasize values, communication, shared meanings and identity. Culture and communication are strongly related in the last three of these approaches.

1.5 OTHER CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

A number of important conceptual issues remain to be discussed – the questions of whether the very concept of ‘culture’ is an error, of how explanatory and how generalizable concepts of culture are, of whether intracultural behaviours can be generalized to intercultural situations and of whether cultures are converging.

Is to use the term ‘culture’ to fall into an essentialist error?

The assertion that the term ‘culture’ is a reification has gained ground since about the year 2000. For example, Gjerde (2004) wrote: ‘Cultural psychology, as conceived by many [cultural psychologists] is typically based on the supposition of unified groups that can be studied in their organic totality. The result is essentialism: the assumption that a group contains features emblematic of all its members. This assumption is perilous because it easily can lead people to be viewed as exchangeable carbon copies and promote disregard for heterogeneity, agency, and individuality.’⁶⁴ Clearly, if that was the assumption of cultural psychologists, it would be an error. However, the assertion seems disputable. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991), in one of the articles cited by Gjerde (2004) as falling into the essentialist error, includes in its conclusion the words ‘Is it the case, as we suggest here, that these norms can sometimes be internalised to the extent that they determine the nature of one’s experience?’⁶⁵ The use of the unanswered question and the word ‘sometimes’ surely exonerate Markus and Kitayama (1991) from a charge of supposing that unified groups can be studied in their organic totality. Equally, Hofstede (1981) made it clear that not all members of a culture would hold the culture’s values to the same degree,⁶⁶ as Section 2.1 of this book explains. Certainly the position taken here is that culture can be and is often, but not always, an influence; but it is never a determinant.

How much does culture explain?

Given that any one individual is potentially a member of multiple cultural and subcultural groups, how can behaviours be identified with any one type of group? Secondly, with so many factors influencing behaviour, including genetic, epigenetic, familial, local, social (such as the environment of a particular school or a particular set of friends) and individual experience, how can we know what behaviours to attribute to culture? As Hickson and Pugh (1995) pointed out, it may be hard to determine whether a ‘highly personal, verbal practice of communication [in an organization] is due to a culture that values person-to-person contact or to illiteracy among employees who could not read written instructions’.⁶⁷

When transcripts of intercultural negotiations between Taiwanese and US Americans were analysed to compare the two cultures in their use of self-positive, other-positive, self-negative and other-negative facework, it was found that culture and other aspects of an interaction combined to influence communication choices, rather than culture playing the dominant role. This contradicts a perspective that culture has a global influence.⁶⁸ As Hickson and Pugh (1995) suggested, ‘Perhaps it helps most to see the world as multi-causal, with many factors acting and interacting simultaneously.... Whatever one’s view, a sensitivity to the part likely to be played by societal cultures does aid understanding. Difficult though it may be to say exactly what that part is, the notion of culture is persistently useful and its manifestations are persistently recognizable.’

How broadly can concepts of culture be applied?

National boundaries are a convenient synonym for a culture. This framing of the concept is somewhat imprecise, however, since no nation is so pure that all of its members share a worldview. Nevertheless, members of a nation face a set of common experiences, themes and institutions that help shape their values and ways of viewing the world. These shared experiences include geography, climate, economy, political system, racial mix, religious mix, media, language, educational system and so on. They result in a unique national character that is often more apparent to foreigners than to the nationals themselves.⁶⁹ Some scholars have argued that particular types of national culture, such as a country's political culture, are most relevant for certain analyses. For instance, 'At first sight, Switzerland is a country with multiple internal cultures and borders; [however] a closer analysis shows that the Swiss people share a common political culture based upon attachment to local communities and institutions, to government through consensus and to conflict solving by resorting to arbitration and pragmatism.' In the Swiss case, it is argued, management practices are embedded in national political cultures.⁷⁰

There seems to be agreement that the term 'culture' can be applied to a much wider range of groupings than the national or ethnic. For example, Kim (1988) wrote: 'Culture is not viewed as limited to the life patterns of conventionally recognizable culture groups such as national, ethnic or racial. Instead it is viewed as potentially open to all levels of groups whose life patterns...influence individuals' behaviour.'⁷¹ Hofstede (1981) wrote: 'The word culture is used here in the sense of the "collective programming of the mind" which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another. The "category of people" can be a nation, regional or ethnic group (national etc. culture), women versus men (gender culture), old versus young (generation culture), a social class, a profession or occupation (occupational culture), a type of business, a work organization or part of it (organizational culture) or even a family.'⁷² However, Hofstede also considered that gender, generation and class cultures can only partly be classified by the dimensions found for national cultures. This was because they are not *groups* but *categories* of people. Countries (and ethnic groups too) are integrated social systems. The dimensions (individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity – see Chapter 2, Section 1) apply to the basic problems of such systems. Categories such as gender, generation or class are only parts of social systems and therefore not all dimensions apply to them. Gender, generation and class cultures should be described in their own terms, Hofstede (1981) argued, based on special studies of such cultures.

Surface culture differences are to be found in all types of grouping – age groups (e.g., the different ways pensioners and teenagers dress), religions (the Muslim shalwar kameez versus Western Christian teenagers' mini-skirts), genders (skirts versus trousers), occupations (the relative formality of most bankers' work clothes with the shirt-sleeve approach in the creative departments of advertising agencies). With deep culture, however, the case appears less clear. As Chapters 3 and 4 will show, research has found significant differences among genders, age groups, religious groups and so on in some communication behaviours and in some underlying values, attitudes, orientations and motivations. In Switzerland, empirically measurable differences in attitudes, openness to technical communication forms and ethnocentricity clearly correlated with the linguistically distinct cultures of the German-speaking and Latin areas.⁷³ Other studies have shown that subgroups that vary in acculturation may have similar cultural values. A scale of cultural identity developed for Latino adolescents included

cultural values such as *respeto* (respect for authority) and *feminismo* (attitudes towards traditional sex roles). However, those cultural values did not differentiate among subgroups of Latinos identified as Latino, American or bicultural.⁷⁴ In most cases it has not been demonstrated whether or not specific subcultural differences extend beyond broader cultural or civilizational boundaries. For example, the declining communicative abilities of people over the age of 65, widely observed in the West, may or may not extend to those collectivist countries where the elderly are revered. We simply do not know as yet.

In this book nationality, ethnicity and religion are regarded as full cultural divisions. Of these, the term 'culture' is widely applied only to 'nationality'; 'ethnicity', where it does not correspond to nationality, has not been well researched, so that the interaction of the two variables is not understood, while there is disagreement over whether religion is a fundamental influence on culture. (Hofstede (1981) saw language and religion as rather insignificant in cultural terms, but Huntington (1997) saw them as 'the central elements of any culture or civilization'⁷⁵). However, nearly all the generalizations about cultural influences in this book apply to these three categories of groups. A statement such as 'Culture implies a shared world view and set of values which are largely held unconsciously because they were inculcated in childhood' would apply to most members (not all) of the same national, ethnic or religious groups. The members of some other social categories, such as gender, social class or occupational groups, typically conform to many of the norms and values of their dominant culture, but also have beliefs, attitudes, habits and forms of behaviour that deviate from those of others in their society. This reasoning leads them to be treated here as subcultures. The statement 'Culture implies a shared world view, etc.' would not apply easily to gender groups. Women with different religious beliefs do not share a world view; generally, men from Japan are positioned well apart from men from the USA on some cultural dimensions, whereas Americans of both genders and all social classes are closer together. On the other hand, a statement such as 'Cultural differences lead to differences in communication styles' does apply to gender, social class and occupational groups: women communicate differently from men, working-class people differently from upper-class people, engineers from publishers (especially at work) across national, ethnic and religious boundaries. Overall, however, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age and educational, technical, professional and experiential background, though having a profound effect on the way people think and behave, do not meet the full criteria for cultures. For these societal subdivisions, some, but not all, generalizations about cultural influences will apply. Disability and sexual orientation are to some degree unknown. Some people with disabilities were born with them, and may have acquired particular world views and values as they grew up. Others will not have.

All these distinctions have fuzzy boundaries. There is substantial intra-group variation as well as inter-group difference. Not every Japanese person has a highly collectivist outlook; not every Muslim practises polygamy. The important point is to be aware of cultural and subcultural influences and how they may be affecting one's own and others' behaviour, while still remembering that individual variations due to differences in heredity, family, schooling and experience sometimes modify and outweigh those influences.

There is a view that groupings below the level of nation, such as those based on age, class, sex, education, ethnicity, religion, abilities or sexual orientation, and other unifying elements, should be termed co-cultures. 'The term co-culture is embraced over other terminology to signify the notion that no one culture...is inherently

Box 1.10

Although less well known in the West than the Chinese Feng Shui system of architectural design, India has its own, called Vaastu, which is widely adhered to. New homes are advertised as 'Vaastu compliant' and newspaper columns are devoted to solving the problems caused by a lack of Vaastu compliance in the home. The term Vaastu, a Sanskrit term meaning a dwelling place, was initially used to refer to the homes of gods. However, with time, it came to be associated with the right location as well as design of almost any structure. Some examples of Vaastu principles are that the kitchen should be in the

South-East, the dining room in the West, the living room and the master bedroom in the South-West, the guest bedroom in the North-West, the bath room in the East or the North, the prayer room in the North-East and so also the well and water supply. Such general principles are, however, inadequate to make a building fully Vaastu compliant, and detailed charts are used to ensure compliance.

Source: author's research and URL: <http://www.homedesignfind.com/how-to-tips-advice/principles-of-vaastu-shastra/>, last accessed on 14 December 2010

superior (though it may be dominant) over other co-existing cultures. The intention is to avoid the negative or inferior connotations of past descriptions (i.e., *subculture*) while acknowledging the great diversity of influential cultures that simultaneously exist.¹⁷⁶ In this book, the term subculture will be retained, but it is not intended to connote inferiority, only that we are talking about a level of analysis below that of broad cultures.

Can intracultural behaviours be generalized to intercultural situations?

This question is clearly important. Although cultural differences in behaviour are intrinsically interesting, a major part of the concern with them has been with a view to facilitating intercultural communication. Unfortunately, we do not really have an answer to the question. There has been a tendency to assume that intracultural interactive behaviours will generalize to intercultural situations, but a serious argument has been made in the context of negotiating that this may be a false assumption, particularly among people from cultures where ingroups are treated very differently from outgroups:

'Intracultural dyads with collectivist cultural values were found to be more likely to emphasize certain cooperatively oriented tactics than intracultural dyads with individualist cultural values.'¹⁷⁷ 'In a negotiation with an out-group member, however, a negotiator with collectivist values may strongly discriminate against the out-group, since mistrust and suspicion of out-group members is high.'¹⁷⁸

As this researcher concluded, 'One should not assume that intracultural processes and behaviors of a cultural group will generalize to the intercultural context.' The position taken here is that, except in the one or two instances where research has demonstrated a disjunction between intracultural and intercultural behaviour, it is as well to keep in mind the possibility of cultural influence on the behaviour of different others, though without a mind closed to alternative interpretations. As far as the intercultural communication behaviours advocated in Chapter 6 are concerned, moreover, most of them would be worth practising in any communication context.

Are cultures converging?

Some readers may wonder whether cultural differences are disappearing so fast that it is unnecessary to allow for them. People increasingly buy the same products, use the same labour-saving, transportation and communication devices, are entertained in the same way by television and music systems. Many now dress in Western-style clothes, live in Western-style houses, work at Western-style jobs and conduct many of their conversations in English. Does this mean that cultures are converging? Are people worldwide coming to share the same values, world view, kinship system and social organization? This is a question that a number of scholars and researchers have addressed. The answers vary. For instance, Pinker (1994) noted that the difference between two cultures generally correlates with how long ago they separated; this suggests that cultures evolve.⁷⁹ On the level of individuals, research undertaken to extend the understanding of how culture functions investigated the cultural orientations of people originating from one nation, but working in two different national settings. The cultural dimensions of 429 Indian natives living and working in India were compared with those of 151 Indian migrants living and working in the USA. The study found significant cultural value differences between the two groups, both in terms of their total populations and in terms of breakdowns by occupation, gender, age, and level of education. The results suggested that the cultural values of individuals are more malleable than previously thought when they are exposed to another culture. (This may be particularly true when that culture is an aspirational one for many people.⁸⁰)

Li and Karakowsky (2002) argued that national culture and cultural influences on businesses are not necessarily stable, enduring characteristics. They can be altered, for instance, by consistent government policies. For example, in recent years, because of the effects of such policies, respect for authority, a traditional element in ethnic Chinese culture, has become less salient in both Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁸¹ On the other hand, Hofstede's (1981) study provided little evidence of global convergence, but this was based on a comparison between points of time only four years apart – 1968 and 1972. However, Hofstede concluded, on more general grounds, 'There is very little evidence of international convergence over time, except an increase of individualism for countries that have become richer. Value differences between nations described by authors centuries ago are still present today, in spite of close contacts. For the next few hundred years, countries will remain culturally very diverse.'⁸² As Aldridge (2002) pointed out, 'Each culture provides predictability, thus changing culture can be quite difficult unless the cultural value being changed has been demonstrated to be of less value or no longer useful to a particular group.'⁸³

Empirically, the conclusion drawn from an analysis of the longitudinal World Values Surveys is that, if anything, values are diverging, and that change is being brought about, not by poorer countries adopting rich country values as a result of exposure to mass media, but by rich country values changing rapidly while poor country values are changing more slowly. Furthermore, it is a myth that there is a single 'Western' culture for other cultures to converge towards:

The results of the analysis...suggest some important points that the convergence thesis overlooks or underestimates. The evidence indicates that culture in post-industrial nations is far from static or uniform. Convergence implicitly assumes that unchanging cultural values exist in richer nations, and exaggerates the degree of consensus between the core values of Americans and Europeans. The convergence thesis then goes on to assume that developing societies assimilate this monolithic American/Western culture.

But post-industrial societies themselves are experiencing profound long-term processes of value change – and they also differ significantly amongst themselves. There is a wealth of research demonstrating that the younger generation in rich nations differs significantly from their parents and grand-parents on self-expression values, such as tolerance of homosexuality, support for gender equality, concern about environmental protection, and willingness to ... take part in direct political action. Far from being a static and homogeneous 'Western culture', the process of value change creates a moving target that affects all countries in the world.... Moreover important cultural differences exist between Protestant and Catholic Europe, and between Western and Orthodox Europe, as well as between Europe and the United States. The persistent imprint of deep-rooted cultural traditions, left by given societies' religious heritage, as well as by distinctive historical experiences, ethnic cleavages, and social structures, means that the values found in contemporary post-industrial societies differ in important ways.⁸⁴

Concerning subcultures, there are indications that ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and religious consciousness are increasing among some groups, and that the claims for rights made by these groups are evidence of an increased cultural and subcultural awareness and sense of difference. In the USA, and to a lesser extent in Western Europe, the ideal of a pluralistic, multicultural society has largely replaced the old ideal of the melting pot. Minorities that sought to preserve and enhance their sense of a separate identity have now come to be seen to have a strong moral case. In earlier times they were often seen by the majority as eccentric. There are backlashes, including among members of ethnic minorities themselves, but these may be regarded as signs of a general acceptance of the multicultural ideal. On gender rights, some developing countries are witnessing divergent trends. On the one hand, technological advance has facilitated the old cultural preference for boy children, leading to a situation described as '10 million missing girls'; on the other hand, affirmative action in education, public sector jobs and government has increased the influence of women. In the *panchayats* or village councils of India, for instance, reservations for women have led to an increased emphasis on health care, education for girls, road building and connectivity.⁸⁵ India decriminalized homosexuality in the 1990s, and by 2010 was contemplating introducing same-sex marriages; elsewhere, however, the trend was in the other direction: Uganda's mix of vigorous heterosexuality and religiosity led in 2009 to a proposed new law against homosexuals, whose supporters claimed it was needed to shore up family values.⁸⁶

In a work context, Chiang and Birtch (2007) found empirical evidence to suggest both (national) cultural similarities and differences in employee reward preferences, but concluded that their study suggested that, although culture may impinge on reward preferences, its influence might be diminishing or giving way to a range of other contextual forces.⁸⁷ A study of how leaders from eight Central Eurasian countries perceived the work-related values of effective organizational leaders suggested that there is a cultural convergence of Central Eurasian values, norms, and practices toward those of Western cultures regarding how effective leadership in organizations ought to be executed.⁸⁸ However, data on the adoption of contingent employment practices in Europe suggested that convergence is limited by the institutional embeddedness of organizations. The data were drawn from organizations operating in Germany, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK in 1991.⁸⁹

In business, cultural difference has been expressed as 'cultural distance', which can be measured and compared. Characteristics such as dominant religion, business language, form of government, economic development and levels of emigration indicate two countries' cultural distance from one another. Cultural distance between countries

may be reduced by increased communication, geographical proximity (leading to more contact) and cultural attractiveness. For individuals, foreign experience and acculturation may also decrease cultural distance. For organizations, the presence of 'bicultural' individuals may have a bridging effect. A 1997 report on a study of international joint ventures found no decrease in the effect of cultural distance over the previous three decades and concluded that values are stable over time. The concept of cultural distance has been criticized, however, because 'distance' is symmetrical, so that 'a Dutch firm investing in China is faced with the same cultural distance as a Chinese firm investing in the Netherlands. There is no support for such an assumption.'⁹⁰

A study of multinational companies' (MNCs') decisions to standardize or customize (local) performance management systems found from a response sample of 97 Bulgarian and Romanian companies that overall cultural distance mattered less in customization decisions than specific cultural dimensions – power distance and masculinity – and global integration strategy.⁹¹ Similarly, national cultural distance was found from a survey of 131 managers of subsidiaries of foreign MNCs to have less influence than organizational cultural distance on international technology transfer.⁹²

In the context of international joint ventures, findings by Kaufmann and O'Neill (2007) suggested that greater cultural distance was associated with an increased probability that a marketing or supplier alliance would be formed and a lower probability that an innovation-oriented alliance would be formed.⁹³ In international acquisitions, Reus and Lamont (2009) found that cultural distance impeded the understandability of key capabilities that need to be transferred and also constrained communication between the acquirers and their acquired units. These factors resulted in a negative effect on acquisition performance. On the other hand, if these difficulties could be overcome, they found, acquisition performance was increased by cultural distance because, they postulated, it increased the range of learning opportunities available.⁹⁴ Finally, analysing a sample of 102 cross-border acquisitions by Dutch firms in 30 countries, Slangen (2006) found strong empirical support for the hypothesis that large differences in national culture reduced foreign acquisition performance if the acquired unit was tightly integrated into the acquirer, but that they enhanced acquisition performance if post-acquisition integration was limited.⁹⁵

Conceptual issues that are discussed in this section include the questions of whether 'culture' is a reification and whether intracultural behaviours can be generalized to intercultural contexts. Which behaviours to attribute to culture and which to other influences is often unclear; and many important societal groups do not exhibit the predominating characteristics of cultures. The term culture can usefully be applied in discussing ethnic and religious groups as well as nations; however, for other groups, such as those defined by gender, age, sexual orientation, social class, education and so on, the term 'subculture' may be more appropriate. Despite these and other limitations, cultural concepts are significant and understanding of cultural difference is important: cultural differences are brought to work and affect people's behaviour there. Cultures change, but deep cultures, unlike surface cultures, do not seem to be converging, and cultural and subcultural differences will continue to affect both the intra- and extra-organizational environments of people at work.

1.6 CULTURES, WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Culture has been credited with a strong influence on a society's economic prosperity.⁹⁶ Lee and Peterson (2000) argued that a society's propensity to generate independent, risk-taking, innovative, competitively aggressive and proactive entrepreneurs and firms

Box 1.11

'South Korea relies on manufacturing for 60 to 70% of its GDP. In manufacturing industry, a military culture is strongly embedded....How this culture reveals itself can be shown by the following example: a new product is to be developed; Japan is used as a benchmark; Japan took 12 months to develop it; a target is sent down to a team to develop it within 6 months; the team accepts it as a mission and works round the clock – sacrificing personal life if necessary.

This is because "the organisation's success is our own success."

When Sony aimed at emulating Korea's prowess at execution, they studied Samsung but concluded that they could not copy it because they lack the military culture.'

Source: interview with a South Korean executive, author's research

depended on its cultural foundation. Culture strongly influenced how entrepreneurial people are, although economic, political–legal and social factors (also influenced by culture) moderated the relationship.⁹⁷ Muzychenko (2006) asserted that culture influences the cognition and behaviour of international entrepreneurs in identifying cross-border opportunities, as well as their competence in making related decisions.⁹⁸ Cultural differences in risk assessment may lie behind the findings of a large-scale exploratory study that national business cultures within Europe affected acquirers' beliefs about how to proceed in cross-border mergers and acquisitions. Specifically, the study found that national cultural differences affected beliefs about the value of due diligence and professional advisers in the pre-acquisition phase. By influencing how an acquirer regards target companies, the researchers suggested, these differences may have important consequences for the negotiation of deals and the subsequent management of the acquired company.⁹⁹ In marketing, cultural influences on consumers have long been recognized. 'Products are not just products: they become what they are as the result of their integration into particular contexts, i.e. by being creolized by the local socio-cultural and economic contexts.'¹⁰⁰

Within organizations, culture affects behaviour at all levels. For instance, responses to Western management practices have shown that these practices can easily backfire in non-Western cultures.

'Some staff members grow cold and distant after receiving feedback on their work, and team members may clam up at meetings when asked for suggestions. A Western manager may view having subordinates participate in problem-solving to be a move towards making them feel valued, but an employee who has been taught deference to age, gender or title, might – out of respect – shy away from being honest or offering ideas, because offering suggestions to an elder or a boss might appear to them to be challenging authority. A time-conscious manager may wrongly see people whose cultures take a more relaxed view towards deadlines as being less committed to team goals, as well as less dependable, accountable and reliable. Another manager may be frustrated by an employee who nods in apparent understanding of a direction, then does not carry it out.'¹⁰¹

In addition to the above, corporate codes of ethics and corporate governance have been linked to culture. A comparison of the contents of 197 corporate codes of ethics (78 Australian, 80 Canadian and 39 Swedish) revealed that the contents of the

Australian and Canadian codes were similar but those of the Swedish codes were very different in some areas. In the view of the researchers, these differences reflected the cultural differences between Sweden and the other two countries.¹⁰²

For most countries, the behaviour of their corporations is a subject of vital concern. They are key institutions in the generation and allocation of society's resources. Therefore distinct, complex systems of corporate governance to regulate corporate behavior have evolved. Scholars have sought to explain the diversity of these systems on a variety of grounds: the quest for economic efficiency, the existence of political constraints on financial institutions, and the differing nature of legal systems. While each of these factors has certainly been important in shaping systems of corporate governance around the world, one other significant factor that has received relatively little attention is culture. Corporate regulatory systems in both law and practice have been shaped not only by national policies, but also by the cultures of the countries concerned. Differing systems for regulating corporations, [are] based... on strong cultural preferences.

In this way Salacuse (2003) argued that systems of corporate governance are strongly influenced by culture,¹⁰³ while Guirdham (2009) showed that the governance practices of businesses in five Asian countries were influenced by business culture.¹⁰⁴

National cultural differences have been linked to a range of economic, business and organizational concerns, including entrepreneurialism, pre-acquisition information seeking, consumer acceptance of new products, workers' responses to management approaches, corporate codes of ethics and systems of corporate governance.

1.7 THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AT WORK

Interpersonal communication, which, as Section 1.1 showed, is vital for modern work effectiveness, is also the aspect of work where the impact of cultural difference is arguably most direct and experienced by most people. In the words of Khoo (1994):

'It is simply not enough for us to know how and why people differ culturally. We also need to know to what extent such differences can be generalized across situations, and especially to interactions with culturally different individuals. The need for a more global understanding of people, organizations, attitudes, norms, group processes, values and ways of operating can be enhanced by examining how people interact and transact, both among themselves as well as with culturally different individuals.'¹⁰⁵

Although these remarks were addressed to intercultural researchers in particular, there seems no reason to doubt that they also apply to anyone concerned with cultural difference and its impact on work and organizations.

There is clear evidence that organizations should value skilled interpersonal communication. For instance, trust in both top management and an immediate supervisor is strongly related to the amount of information received by organizational members.¹⁰⁶ In turn, perceived organizational effectiveness is strongly related to trust in

management. This finding remains significant across diverse organizations, industries and geographic locations. Again, a 1996 literature search reported, 'Communicated knowledge is viewed as probably the single most important source of competitive advantage into the 21st Century.' Since competitive advantage yields above normal financial performance,¹⁰⁷ it follows that there is a strong positive relationship between effective and efficient communication and financial performance.¹⁰⁸

Parallel to, and as important as, the needs of managers for intercultural communication skills are the needs of the large numbers of service providers who interact directly with an increasingly diverse public. For example, health care organizations face demographic shifts in the patients served and their families. Ulrey and Amason (2001) found that cultural sensitivity and effective intercultural communication, besides helping patients, personally benefited health care providers by reducing their stress. Effective intercultural communication and cultural sensitivity were found to be related. Health care providers' levels of intercultural anxiety also were found to correlate inversely with effective intercultural communication.¹⁰⁹

Communication at work may, however, be one of the more problematic consequences of diversity. Although diversity is 'an asset to be valued rather than a problem to be solved, ... communication can be seen to work best when people are similar, or at least on a similar wavelength,'¹¹⁰ '... it should be clear that communication works better the more participants share assumptions and knowledge about the world.'¹¹¹ Research has indicated that people behave differently when they are interacting with others whom they perceive as culturally dissimilar: they ask more questions, but self-disclose less; they seek out information about dissimilarities instead of information about similarities. They are less willing to draw inferences about the attributes of people from other cultures. The researcher's conclusion was that 'people know how to get to know other people from the same culture but not from different cultures'.¹¹² The findings suggested that people experience intercultural contact as different, even difficult, and attempt to handle it differently. Grimes and Richard (2003) even argued that whether cultural diversity is advantageous or detrimental for organizations depends on how organization members communicate.¹¹³

For professionals, other service providers and interface workers, training in how to deal with people appropriately is gradually being introduced; similarly, equal opportunities awareness training is now widespread. However, most of the interpersonal skills training being provided gives little help in adjusting to the different values,

Box 1.12

A lawyer had three appointments with new clients in one morning. Judging from their names, he anticipated that the first would be a white Anglo-Saxon male, one a Bengali woman and one a French male. His prior expectations were that the communication with the first client would go most smoothly, that with the third the next most smoothly, while that with the second client, the Bengali woman, would be the most difficult.

However, these expectations were confounded. The white Anglo-Saxon male was aggressive from the beginning ('He had a chip on his shoulder against the law'), the French male was uncommunicative ('He seemed to be afraid of giving himself away'), while the Bengali woman, who was wearing a chador, was articulate, well educated and reasonable.

Source: author's research

attitudes and motives of different individuals; and most of the equal opportunities awareness training omits any serious treatment of communication. It is true that adaptation at the individual level can only be achieved through sensitivity, active listening and gaining feedback; nevertheless, awareness of cultural and subcultural difference and knowledge of how to communicate with different others is an important underpinning for such adaptation. This raises the question of how the work context affects intercultural communication. 'Work context' here refers to the fact that colleagues usually share an understanding of tasks and technical knowledge; also that their communication is influenced by their work roles and by the organizational culture. Does this work context obliterate or eliminate differences in communication and behaviour resulting from differences in backgrounds? Is it the case that: 'When social behaviour is regulated by other, less diffuse social roles, as it is in organizational settings, behaviour ... primarily reflect(s) the influence of these other roles and therefore lose(s) much of its... stereotypical character?' The author who posed this question answered it in the negative from her own research findings on leadership styles: 'Nevertheless, women's leadership styles were more democratic than men's even in organization settings. This sex difference may reflect underlying differences in female and male personality or skills (e.g. women's superior social skills) or subtle differences in the status of women and men who occupy the same organizational role.'¹¹⁴

While, clearly, there are task and organizational constraints on differences in behaviour at work, the evidence that will emerge in this book confirms that such differences still obtain, are significant and need to be taken into account more than they are currently. The core competencies required of both domestic and international managers in the twenty-first century have been identified as an 'ability to balance the conflicting demands of global integration versus local responsiveness; an ability to work in teams comprised of peoples from multiple functions/disciplines, different companies, and diverse industry backgrounds; an ability to manage and/or work with peoples from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds'.¹¹⁵ These three competencies all depend on intercultural communication skills and all assume that cultural differences remain potent despite the work setting.

This point is reinforced by a second: how people communicate at work generally reflects the preferred style of one cultural or subcultural group. In Western societies, with some exceptions (such as Body Shop), the dominant style in most business organizations is that of the individualist, monochronic, universalistic male. In other societies, other modes prevail: in Hong Kong Chinese businesses, for instance, people tend to express themselves less explicitly than is usual in Western businesses. There is evidence that work and organizational effectiveness can be enhanced if more diverse communication modes operate, allowing entry and influence to the diverse values, attitudes and ideas of the diverse populations now involved. Third, large numbers of people interface with the public in the course of their work. As the behaviour of their clients, patients, students or customers may not be greatly affected by the task setting, the social and cultural influences on their co-interactors' behaviour are still likely to be paramount and need to be understood.

The increasing diversity of domestic workforces, markets and populations, together with globalization, means that few organizations or individuals at work can afford to ignore cultural difference. For individuals to be effective at work in diverse organizations and societies or internationally, they need to be able to communicate intercultural. The work context does not suppress differences so far as to eliminate this need. Intercultural communication is difficult but achievable through awareness and skill development.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Communication can claim to be called the most important single work activity, and interpersonal communication has increased in importance with organizations' new emphasis on individuals and teams. In much of the world there has been a huge expansion in the demographic diversity of people typically met with through work in a range of roles, including as colleagues, customers, suppliers, advisers and many others. Increased demographic diversity implies increased cultural and subcultural diversity – diversity of values, identities, meanings and ways of communicating as well as beliefs, attitudes and ways of behaving. A number of conceptual issues are raised by discussions of culture, but, although there are limits to the concept's validity and scope, it seems clear that culture does influence, though it does not determine, work and communication behaviour. Culture has been linked to a range of economic, business and organizational concerns. Effectiveness in diverse organizations and societies, as well as internationally, depends, therefore, on effective intercultural communication.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What does 'diversity' mean to you?
2. Debate the contention from Section 1.1 that communication is the most important work activity in modern, service-oriented, team-based organizations. What other work activities might contend for this description and why?
3. Discuss the relative importance of the factors given in the text as contributing to the increased significance at work of (a) contact with different others, (b) intercultural communication.
4. The text gives two categories of benefits that diversity brings to organizations. What are they and are there others?
5. In as diverse a group of four or five people as is available, create a proforma for observing the effects of diversity on creativity in workgroups.
6. The dictionary definition of 'race' is 'group of persons or animals or plants connected by common descent'. How does this differ from the definitions of ethnicity given in this book?
7. In this text, the term 'ethnicity' is used rather than the term 'race'. What explanation may account for this?
8. Is it time to abolish the concept of ethnic minorities, as an article in *The Economist Online* argued on 22 October 2009?
9. What factors might account for the fact that women face 'harsh realities' in labour markets?
10. The text makes no distinction among the different types of diversity – national, ethnic, gender, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, educational level, social class – in terms of their importance for work and work communication. Should it? Give reasons.
11. Box 1.3 discusses the implications for organizations of population ageing in most developed nations. How are these changes likely to affect the careers of younger workers? What skills are younger workers likely to need to work alongside or manage older workers?
12. Discuss the contention that disability is 'context-dependent'. What kinds of beliefs do people have about disability? How do these beliefs influence communication with people who have disabilities?

13. Do you agree with Hofstede (1981) that religion is not a fundamental cultural value, or with Huntington (1997), who considered it a central element of any civilization? Give your reasons.
14. It has sometimes been pointed out that what is considered 'different' now can in future be seen as more or less similar, and vice versa. Give examples of these two kinds of change.
15. Give three examples of ways in which culture appears to influence consumer purchasing behaviour.
16. Identify situations in which intercultural contact is likely to occur in the following service industries: banking, tourism and healthcare.
17. Give an example to show the effects on communication of surface-level and deep-level culture.
18. List three discourses (not including medical discourse, given in the text).
19. Consider your own cultural identity in your relationship with a person from another culture (if possible a work colleague). How does your cultural identity impact on this relationship?
20. Is diversity valued in the organization in which you work or study? Give reasons for your answer.
21. 'People know how to get to know other people from the same culture but not from different cultures.' Does this statement explain why people behave differently when communicating with culturally different others? Give your reasons.
22. The text gives a number of indicators of the importance and growth of intercultural communication at work in Europe. What are these? What others might be used if data was available?
23. In the light of the material in this chapter on how cultural change is brought about, consider the following statement. Continue the discussion of how cultural change happens:
 - The traditional strong preference of Chinese people for boy children is being altered: 'After 15 years of state-managed family planning (supported by heavy fines and forced abortions for the rebels) many young people, male and female, now claim it does not matter to them whether their only child is a boy or a girl.' (*The Economist*, 10 January 1996)
 - 'Taiwan has become an industrialized economy. Social changes occur along with economic changes....People's attitudes have changed as well. The important traditional values – authoritarian attitude, filial piety (respect for ancestors and parents), fatalism, male superiority, and conservatism (self-restraint and control) – have made way for modern values such as democratic attitudes, independence and self-reliance, progressiveness and optimism, equality of males and females and respect for personal feelings. However, filial piety is still very important' (Matsu, B. and Yeh, R.-S. (1992)); 'Taiwan management communication practices: past, present and future', a summary of a presentation by Ryh-Song Yeh at the David Lam Centre for International Communication, Pacific Region Forum on Business and Management Communication, Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre on 23 January).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Throughout this book, the term 'Asia' refers to Eastern and South Asia rather than West or Central Asia.

2. It should not, however, be thought that culture is the only important influence on communication. Many other factors influence it and both hinder and facilitate intercultural communication. Equally, in this book, culture is not regarded as 'essential' or as having 'emblematic' features that influence every member of a social system.
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