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INTRODUCTION: CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

Culture is central to *what* we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we *express ourselves*

Culture is seen as a collection of customs, beliefs, values and institutions that create a general identity and ways of behaving for a given people. Culture provides a history that describes who we are and, for each person, it reflects his or her own unique form of identity. Our behaviours and interactions with others are generally seen as forms of expressing culture.

The idea of cultural awareness is indeed an interesting one. On some level, some may say that we are consistently surrounded by culture and therefore aware of cultures other than our own. On a deeper level, cultural awareness is the act of recognising, learning and understanding the similarities and differences that make up cultures. The act of cultural awareness allows us to move from a place of ethnocentric values (judging peoples' actions by your own cultural standards, rather than their own) to a more ethnorelative perspective (integrating an understanding of your culture with others).

Culture awareness is by no means an easy journey. It assumes that we have an understanding of our own cultural identity before seeking to understand the cultural identities of others.

The refugee/sponsor relationship provides a number of challenges to gaining cultural understanding of each other. The relationship can also provide many opportunities for mutual learning, growth and personal development.

This manual will explore the process that leads to cultural awareness and highlight the ways in which it can enhance relationships between refugees and sponsors.

IN THIS WORKSHOP, PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

1. Learn the importance of understanding the role of culture, understanding our own culture, and addressing factors that impact cultural understanding.
2. Develop a deeper understanding of the refugee experience, the impact sponsors have on the refugee experience, and learn strategies for successful navigation through the cultural adjustment process.
3. Learn, develop and practice key communication skills essential to creating a successful refugee/sponsor relationship.

N O T E S

OBJECTIVES

IN THIS SECTION, PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

- 1.1 develop an understanding of the role and aspects that make up culture
- 1.2 identify causes and forms of prejudice, behaviours of stereotyping and discrimination, and discuss how they are perpetuated
- 1.3 examine how personal biases and attitudes impact cultural diversity
- 1.4 examine the relationship between culture and our own values and behaviours
- 1.5 recognize the importance of being culturally self-aware, and how it plays a factor in successful intercultural relations
- 1.6 examine positive outcomes that can develop from discussing cultural differences

WHAT IS CULTURE?

The job of culture is to help us make sense of our reality; it gives us a rationale for our norms, behaviours and actions. Differences in our norms affect how we communicate with each other.

To have real communication we need to understand what motivates people to behave the way they do. We need to consider how they are different from us. An often-asked concern is “why focus on differences... are we not all human?”

An answer to this question is that “while people do share the same basic human needs, ...experience similar life events, our differences do matter. They influence both our assumptions about others and our opportunities in life... without understanding our filters [that is, our cultural differences] we are apt to make unconscious assumptions and encounter unexplained and frustrating barriers.”¹

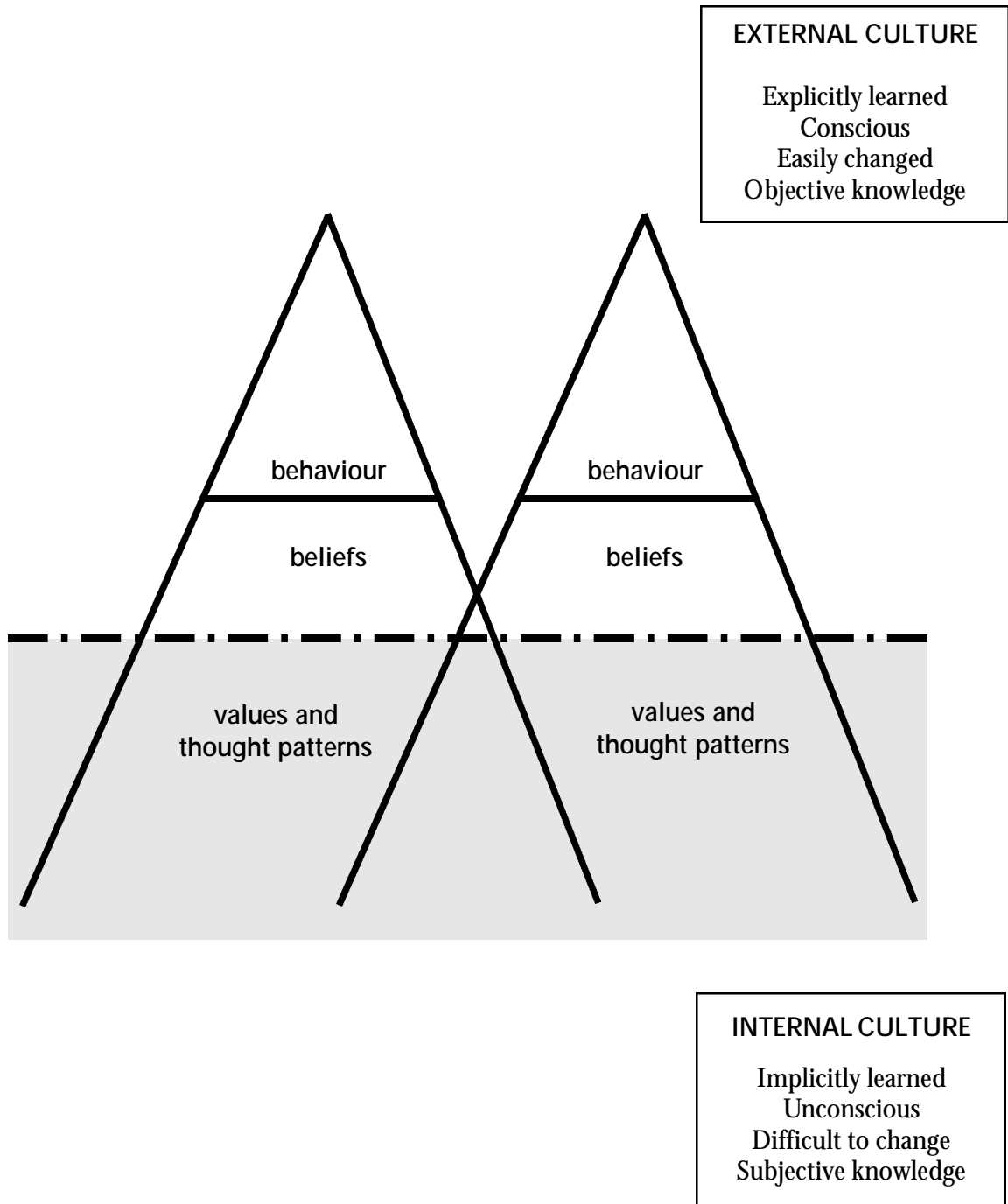
Cultural generalizations can be helpful in that they enable us to make predictions about people and situations and cope with every day decision making in our lives. We can generalize about the tendency of a majority of people in a cultural group to hold certain values and beliefs and to engage in certain patterns of behaviour.

However, cultural stereotyping causes us to overlook individual characteristics which do not match our pre-conceived ideas. We must be ready to revise and change these generalizations when dealing with individuals from a particular cultural group, as we gain more information about them. Keeping standardized pictures of people from other cultures will lead us to over-simplified opinions, attitudes or judgements. The pictures may be based upon real cultural differences. However, many individuals from these cultures may not fit these standard generalizations. Making assumptions can interfere with communications and prevent us from knowing the real person who is unique as a human being.

¹ Gargenswartz, Lee, and Rowe, Anita, *Diverse Teams at Work*, Irwin, 1994

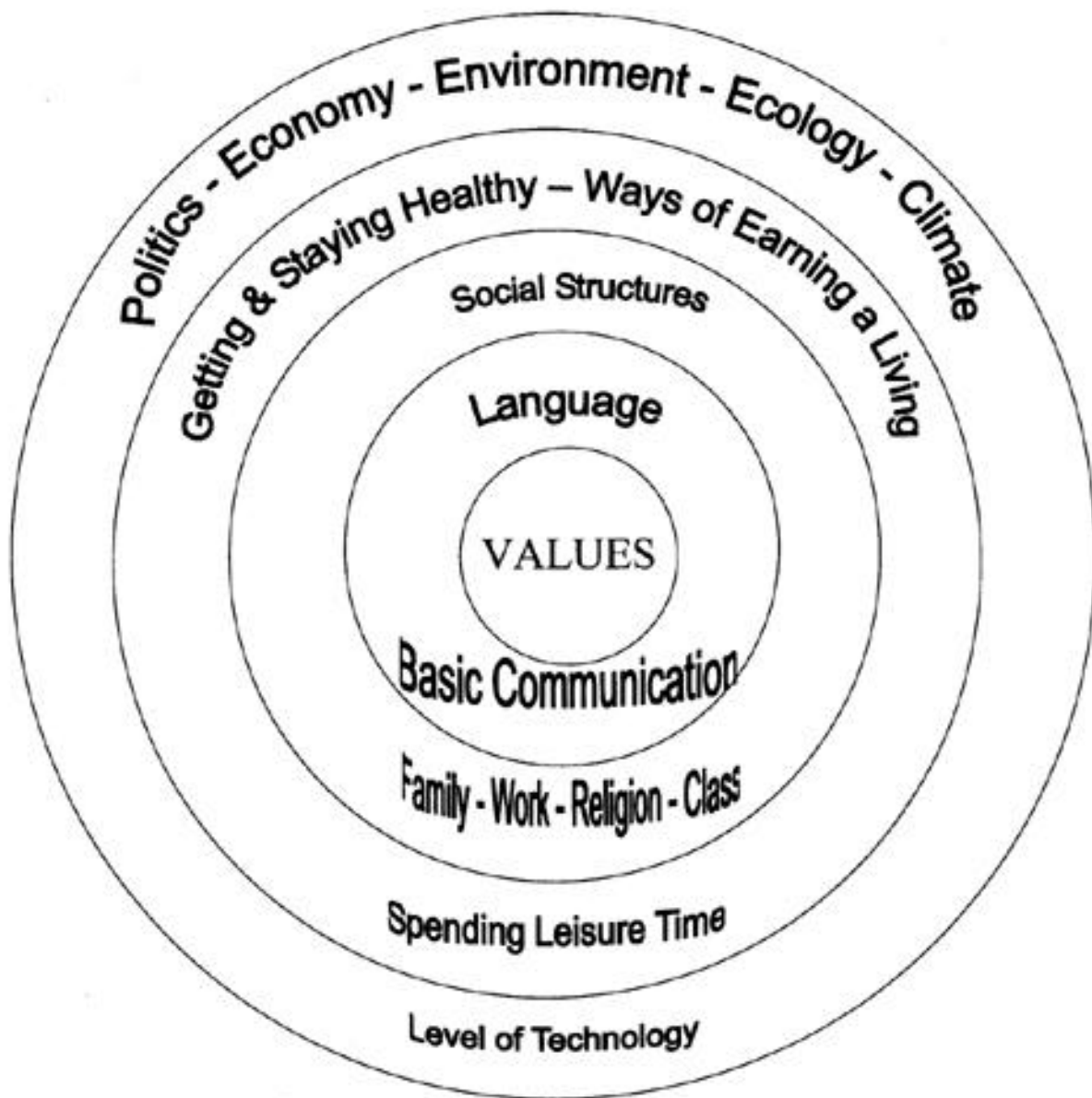
OVERHEAD: THE "ICEBERG ANALOGY" OF CULTURE²

Like the tips of the iceberg, we only see a small part of a person's culture. It is easier to recognize the external component of culture, seen in the actions and behaviours of a person. It is critical, then, that we look deeper, under the surface to really begin to understand the beliefs, values and interests that are the most important aspects of a person's culture and make up the largest part of the iceberg.



² From: Paige, Michael R., ed. *Cross Cultural Orientation: New Conceptualizations and Applications*. Landham, MD: Gary R. Weaver, 1986, p. 135

**OVERHEAD: CULTURE IS THE
SUM TOTAL OF THE WAY PEOPLE LIVE³**



All cultures are alive and changing.
They are not fixed.

³ Developed by Jim Potts, RCMP Training

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

It is useful to consider core dimensions when comparing cultural similarities or differences. The questions raise just some of the examples that define a culture.

TIME AND TIME CONSCIOUSNESS

- What value is put on use of time and punctuality?

SENSE OF SELF AND SPACE

- Is it appropriate to touch someone during a conversation? How close should you stand?

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

- What are appropriate topics of discussion?
- How do you use body language and hand gestures?

DRESS AND APPEARANCE

- What type of clothing is appropriate? How important is appearance?

FOOD AND EATING HABITS

- Are there rules and rituals around food, and mealtimes?

RELATIONSHIPS

- How important is your nuclear or extended family? What value is placed on titles, age?

VALUES AND NORMS

- Is conformity or individualism more important?

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- What is the role of religion or spirituality? How are gender roles defined?

MENTAL PROCESSES AND LEARNING

- Is thinking logical and linear, or holistic and lateral? What role does fate play?

WORK HABITS AND PRACTICES

- What value is placed on work? How are rewards based?

ASPECTS OF CULTURE

What do we mean when we speak about culture? We all exist inside a culture. In fact, we may participate in several different cultures simultaneously, e.g., work culture, family culture, and ethnic culture. Each of us will have a different experience and understanding of what culture means for us as individuals and as communities. It is important to understand some critical aspects about culture.

CULTURE IS LEARNED

Learning can take the form of:

- role modeling (behaviours, attitudes)
- rewards & punishments (compete vs. co-operate)
- media
- legislation (rules governing behaviour)

CULTURE IS SHARED

Shared patterns of behaviour, attitudes, communication and values make it possible for people to have meaningful interaction.

- social norms and rituals (e.g. social roles at weddings/funerals)
- terminology
- spoken and unspoken language
- organization

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES VARY WITHIN A CULTURAL GROUP

Each individual will identify with some combination of values, beliefs and roles that make up culture for them.

CULTURE CHANGES CONTINUOUSLY

Some cultures change rapidly, while others experience very slow change. Certain aspects of a culture may change at a faster pace than others (fashion vs. customs). As certain aspects of a culture change, accommodations will often be made by other elements of that culture.

EVERY EXCHANGE WITH OTHERS IS INTERCULTURAL

Once we understand that culture is learned, shared, individual, and changing continuously, we can begin to see the potential of every exchange as an opportunity to share cultures.

UNDERSTANDING MY CULTURE

Describe yourself under each of these sources of your cultural programming. Include the most important rules, norms and values you have acquired from these sources.

FAMILY STRUCTURE	GENDER	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION
ETHNIC BACKGROUND	YOU	MOTHER TONGUE
RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND		ABILITY
CLASS		GROUP INFLUENCES

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON UNDERSTANDING MY OWN CULTURE

1. Did you find any challenges when trying to reflect on your own culture?

2. Why were the most important sources of your cultural programming?

3. Where do they come into conflict with each other?

4. Under what circumstances does one source take priority over another?

5. Why is it important for us to understand our own culture?

•Recognize

•Articulate

•Appreciate

our own cultural identity and background

**Cultural self awareness is the
single most important factor for
successful intercultural relations.**

STORY OF ADANAC⁴

You and some colleagues are visiting a new society called Adanac. Upon arrival you find yourself in a large room. At one end of the room are a male and a female, both wearing robes. The male is seated and the female is kneeling beside him.

There are chairs around the room. Some of you sit on them; others sit on the floor. A period of silence follows.

Then the robed man touches the back of the head of the female kneeling beside him, and she bows touching the floor with her forehead.

Quietly they rise and move through the group uttering “hms,” “clicks,” “hisses” moving the females from the chairs to the floor, and the males in the group to the chairs.

They return to the front of the room, repeat the bowing routine and then circulate once again. This time the robed male, with the female beside him, gestures to each male to rise. He then gently places his forehead against each of theirs, moving from side to side.

Again the pair circle the group. This time the robed female takes the initiative: kneeling beside each female in the group, removing her shoes, and caressing her feet and lower leg.

Upon returning to the front of the room, the male again puts his hand behind his partner’s head and she bows low again, touching the floor with her forehead.

After a while, she offers a bowl of water (apparently for cleansing fingers) to her partner, and then to all the other males. She returns to her place, kneels and bows again. She next passes the male a bowl of food, and a bowl containing a strange, bitter drink. In each case, the routine is the same; she bows, and then serves her partner. Then, she serves the rest of the males in the room, and finally the females.

Finally, the man places his hands behind the head of the kneeling woman and, both bow to the floor. The central figures then leave the room.

⁴ From Employment Equity—Cross Cultural Awareness Workshop

ADANAC VISUALISATION

1. What did you see (senses)?

2. What is your interpretation of what was happening (interpretation)?

3. How do you feel? And/or how do you think the Adanacan male/female felt?

CHARACTERISTIC AND SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURALISTS

Every exchange with others is intercultural. The intercultural exchange between a refugee and a sponsor is significant in its complexity. In order to be effective in communicating with others interculturally, there are several skills and characteristics that will be important to highlight.

SELF UNDERSTANDING

- a) to be aware of one's own culture
- b) to be aware of one's own limitations

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

- a) to practise empathy
- b) to respect the other culture
- c) to learn from interactions
- d) to avoid attributions
- e) to be non-judgemental
- f) to avoid stereotypes

INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

- a) to be able to communicate
- b) to relate to people
- c) to listen and observe
- d) to be flexible
- e) to adjust according to people's reactions

GENERAL SKILLS

- a) to tolerate ambiguity
- b) to be persistent

WORKING DEFINITIONS⁵

VALUES

Values are the core of one's beliefs and are manifested in all behaviours. Everyone has biases and prejudices based on their values.

Values impact on:

- attitudes
- judgement of behaviour
- codes of conduct

BIAS

Bias is a tendency to affiliate with one side, showing a preference or choice. Factors influencing our biases are:

- cultural background
- values
- learned behaviour
- socialization
- experience

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Cultural identity defines who we are. Various factors contribute to an individual's cultural identity. For example, socialization, cultural background, personal factors and psychological factors.

⁵ Adapted by S. Hemphill and B. Bruce

WORKING DEFINITIONS⁶

Prejudice can be defined as pertaining to:

- A preconceived opinion, thought or feeling (to pre-judge).
- The tendency to hold on to an attitude, idea or feeling despite the availability of contrary information, experience or without any valid proof or supporting evidence.
- An unfavourable opinion or feeling about an individual, group or thing formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason.
- The tendency to dislike or be hostile to individuals and groups that are identifiably different from one's own reference group (nationality, language, religion, etc.).
- The tendency to negatively perceive and define individuals on the basis of narrow group characteristics (stereotype).
- Personal attitudes towards other individuals that are not inborn but are learned from the family, media, peer groups, schools, etc.

When our prejudices are “acted out” resulting in some form of negative treatment of disliked groups and their members or preferential treatment for one's own reference group, discrimination occurs. Discrimination, unlike prejudice, is more than an attitude or feeling. Discrimination is action and therefore is intimately connected to power.

Prejudice & Power = Discrimination

Discrimination can be described as follows:

- It is not always the result of a conscious decision or intention. However, regardless whether or not the action is wilful or intentional, the impact on the individuals or groups experiencing discrimination is the same.
- Discrimination is the ACTION that arises out of prejudice.
- Systemic discrimination, which is often unintentional, refers to discrimination which results from long standing practices, which have not been re-evaluated for their ramifications.

⁶ Adapted by S. Hemphill and B. Bruce

Stereotypes can be defined as the following:

- clusters of preconceived notions regarding various groups. Unfortunately, such stereotypes often include strong tendencies to overgeneralise about individuals solely on the basis of their membership in particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups, and an unwillingness to consider new information which might lead to alterations or revisions in one's opinions. In short, all members of a particular group are perceived in very much the same manner, regardless of their unique traits and characteristics. (Baron and Byrne, 1977)
- a fixed and distorted generalisation made about all members of a particular group.
- Stereotypes ignore individual differences and do not take into account the here and now specifics of the person or the situation.
- Stereotypes support underlying prejudice or fundamental bias about others.
- Stereotypes support a superiority/inferiority belief system.
- Stereotypes are used to justify unfair differential treatment.

We learn stereotypes through socialisation and they are often reinforced or perpetuated by the media.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING⁷

There are several factors that will have an impact on how we understand culture. Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are dynamics that, whether consciously or subconsciously, will influence how we perceive and in turn what we come to believe and understand about another culture.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF STEREOTYPING?

- to negate people's individuality and their value
- to minimize individual talents, potentials and accomplishments
- to set narrow, inflexible expectations
- to act as filters on our perceptions of others
- to have the effect of anger and hurt
- to marginalize a person or a group
- to inhibit the development of authentic relationships
- to transform prejudice into destructive "isms" – ageism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, etc.
- to adversely affect performance in the workplace

Systemic Discrimination

unintentional
appears neutral
universally applied
entrenched
screens out groups
hidden

⁷ Adapted by S. Hemphill

FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Omission

Some groups are not actively participating or are not well represented or seen as important in society. Unconsciously or consciously certain “others” and their experiences are left out.

Superiority

Of one group over another. “Difference” is seen as a deficit.

Production and Reproduction of Discriminatory Behaviours

Through images, values, language and other cultural patterns. This also includes the following:

- distortion and marginalization of groups through media, groups are represented as objects or as animals
- infantilism or paternalism (viewing others as helpless)
- stereotyping – superficial and partial representations of a group or culture that may be negative or positive
- victim blaming; what is happening to a group is their fault and they must change

Reproduction of Skills

Discrimination is perpetuated in ideas and also through who gets what skills and status in society. Schools and the workplace reflect patterns of who gets what. Discrimination occurs when a valued skill and position systematically allows members of some groups to acquire them, while others cannot.

CAUSES OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION⁸

1. Ignorance Theory

Prejudice is the result of ignorance or a lack of information about the hated group or as a result of limited, incomplete or inaccurate information.

2. Negative Experiences

Prejudice results from negative experiences with members of the group and overgeneralization extends the negative experience as characteristic of the group as a whole.

3. Frustration-Aggression or Scapegoat Theory

Prejudice and discrimination are the result of frustration in achieving specific goals. Whether other people, natural forces, their own limitations or unrealistic expectations hamper the individual, it is a frustrating experience that can create hostile responses. In many cases the hostility cannot be directed at the primary source of the frustration because it may be too powerful or difficult to identify. When this happens, the individual may direct the hostility at a convenient target or scapegoat.

4. Authoritarian Personality

The authoritarian personality needs someone to dominate and control. So-called “inferior” groups become a focus of attention.

5. Inter-Group Competition

Groups that perceive themselves to be in competition for scarce resources (land, money, status, power, etc) will tend to develop prejudices and hostility. Hostility may increase in times of crisis (e.g. times of severe economic recession).

6. Inter-Group Exploitation

When equal groups come into contact as a result of migration and other factors, the dominant group attempts to keep the “inferior” group in its place so that the superior group can retain various privileges and power. The dominant power develops various reasons to rationalize the inequality.

7. Learned Prejudice

Prejudice and discrimination is seen as being reproduced through the socialisation process; in other words, it is learned. Prejudice or bias is an inherent aspect of culture. Prejudice is acquired through contact with parents, the community, schools and the media.

⁸ Certificate Program for Intercultural Trainers. Red River Community College

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N O T E S

OBJECTIVES

IN THIS SECTION, PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

- 2.1 discuss and gain insight into the challenges faced by refugees when adjusting to a new culture
- 2.2 identify potential systemic factors that act as barriers for refugees adjusting to a new culture
- 2.3 become familiar with the four stages of Cross-Cultural Adjustment (aka culture shock)
- 2.4 identify strategies and coping mechanisms to successfully navigate through each stage

WHO IS A REFUGEE?⁹

No one is a refugee by choice. All kinds of people are refugees. Refugees are forced to flee out of fear for their lives and liberty. The United Nations defines a refugee as a person who “*owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.*”

This definition was established in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

But a refugee, first and foremost, is a person with rights and dignity. *A refugee has the right to safe asylum...International protection comprises more than physical safety. Refugees should receive at least the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including certain fundamental entitlements of every individual.*¹⁰

WHO IS A SPONSORED REFUGEE?

A Convention Refugee is any person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality and membership in a particular social group or political opinion:

- a. is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, by reason of that fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or
- b. not having a country of nationality, is outside the country of his or her former habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of that fear, is unwilling to return to that country.

A Convention Refugee Seeking Resettlement is any person

- a. who is a Convention Refugee
- b. who is outside Canada
- c. who is seeking admission to Canada for the purpose of resettling in Canada
- d. in respect of whom there is no possibility, within a reasonable period of time, of a durable solution

Please note: People who are not considered under this class are people whose cases have been rejected in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan of Action adopted by the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees on June 14, 1989.

⁹ Reproduced from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada web site:<http://www.cic.gc.ca>

¹⁰ United Nations, “1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees,” as quoted in UNHCR, *Protecting Refugees: Questions and Answers*, (Geneva: Public Information, 1996).

Members of the Country of Asylum Class include those persons

- a. who are outside of their country of citizenship or permanent residence
- b. who have been or continue to be seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict or
- c. have suffered massive violations of human rights and
- d. for whom there is no possibility, within a reasonable period of time, of a durable solution

Individuals selected under this class must be privately sponsored or have adequate financial means to support themselves and their dependents.

Members of the Source Country Class include those persons

- a. who are residing in their country of citizenship or habitual residence
- b. who have been and continue to be seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict
- c. who have suffered serious deprivation of their right of freedom of expression, right of dissent or right to engage in trade union activity and have been detained or imprisoned as a consequence
- d. who fear persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion
- e. for whom there is no possibility, within a reasonable period of time, of a durable solution
- f. who reside in a country which appears on the Source Country Schedule.

Individuals selected under this class may be government-assisted, privately sponsored or have adequate means of supporting themselves.

VALUING THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

As individuals who are entering into a refugee/sponsor relationship it is important to recognise that there are some key differences between refugees and other immigrants. There are many layers to the refugee experience that make their journey to a new country unique and different. It is critical for you, as a supporter to the new refugee, to work at gaining an awareness of the many challenges that this newcomer may have faced and may still have to face as they resettle in a new country.

In Section I: Understanding Culture, we discussed various aspects of culture and explained how culture is the sum total of who we are. Most of us have the ability to identify and reflect on our experiences and values in order to better understand what culture means to us. We therefore assume that every person has a “starting place” from which to understand what culture means to them. However it is incorrect and often dangerous to assume that refugees have the same “starting place” as others do. Every aspect of culture for refugees has been disrupted and displaced before they have entered the resettlement country. To add to this experience, refugees will continue to face many more difficult challenges during the resettlement process.

The life experience for a refugee is hard and at times very frightening. Exploring the multiple layers that exist within that context will be an important step for not only building your own awareness of that experience but also for building the refugee/sponsor relationship.

THE REFUGEE JOURNEY

	Home Country	Transition	New Country
Name the factors and challenges for refugees along their journey to resettlement.			
What's going on for the individual?			
What's going on for the family?			

THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL INTEGRATION PROCESS¹¹

It is important for both the refugee and sponsor to realise and have awareness about those things that each brings into the new refugee/sponsor relationship. It is imperative for sponsors to understand that refugees are coming from a place where their culture has been severely disrupted or lost. By beginning at a place that reflects on what has been disrupted or lost, a new, third culture is being created through the interaction and integration of the refugee and sponsor. The refugee and the sponsor are encouraged to, separately, ask themselves these questions about the Cross-Cultural Integration Process and spend some time together examining each dimension.

Related to the Refugee's Culture	Related to the New Culture the Refugee is Joining	Related to the Construction of a Third Culture
What cultural traits will the refugee keep from his or her own culture?	What cultural traits of the new culture must the refugee know and understand?	Create new cultural traits, building upon the differences
What traits will the refugee modify according to the new environment?	To which cultural traits of the new culture must the refugee adjust?	Create new traits from the similarities
What traits will the refugee give up?	What cultural traits of the new culture will the refugee reject?	Cultural Synergy: Innovation and bringing cultures together to form new ones

¹¹ From: Pierre Casse, 1981. *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind*, Washington, DC: SIETAR, P. 91.

CASE STUDY

CROSS-CULTURAL INTEGRATION CASE STUDY

Ten years ago, Fatima, a 30-year-old Afghan woman, arrived in Canada with her 5 young children. They were forced to flee their home country as a result of the violence and civil war that had ravaged the communities there. It was terribly difficult for Fatima to leave her brothers and sisters behind. Upon their arrival, they moved into an apartment set up by their sponsors.

Fatima and her family faced many challenges. Her husband had gone missing back in Afghanistan and she did not know whether he was even alive. The children were confused and frightened. Communication was difficult—Fatima and her children did not speak any English and needed to use the services of an interpreter to communicate with their sponsoring group.

The day that Fatima's eldest son, Moustafa, was to start school in Canada, Judy, a member of the sponsor group, took Fatima aside and explained to her that in English the first part of his name sounds like "Moose" a kind of animal. Judy was concerned that Moustafa would be ridiculed and made fun of by his classmates. After thinking about this carefully, Fatima decided to rename her son, Ahmed, meaning "most praised".

One day Judy picked up Ahmed from school and when they got home he asked Judy why she could drive a car. Women did not drive cars in Afghanistan, he said. When Judy told him that lots of women drove cars in Canada, he replied that he was going to grow up and make lots of money so he could buy a car for his mother so she could drive too.

Several years later, Ahmed, reflecting on the changes he has gone through within Canadian culture decides to change his name back to Moustafa, "the chosen one".

Question:

Think about this family and their experiences. Where do their experiences fit within the dimensions of the Cross-Cultural Integration Process (see previous page)?

UNDERSTANDING THE REFUGEE/SPONSOR RELATIONSHIP

Entering into a refugee/sponsor relationship is a significant decision. It is important to understand that entering into this relationship is not always a decision for the refugee family. The refugee/sponsor relationship is a very unique kind of relationship.

Sponsors are a key connection to a new culture for the refugee family. How they foster a relationship with that family may deeply impact how that family understands their new home. It is also important to understand this relationship as a mutual and reciprocal relationship in which both the sponsoring group and the refugee have made significant investments.

With the refugee/sponsor relationship come many responsibilities and many rewards for both the refugee family and the sponsoring group. There are, however, many challenges for the sponsor and the refugee family as they work at building a relationship with one another. There are issues of power that will be extremely critical to address. Sponsors need to be aware of the various forms and degrees of power that they have within the refugee/sponsor relationship. Recognising that power can corrode relationships, power can also be used as a tool to build and foster productive and collaborative relationships. When thinking about the refugee/sponsor relationship in regards to power issues, ask the question, *“Will the sponsor’s power be used as a way to control (power over) or as a way to balance power differences and initiate mutual responsibility (power with).”*

Questions of family dynamics, both within the sponsoring group and the refugee family will be important to understand. Defining the relationship and respective obligations will also be important for you and the refugee family to work at.

There are also questions related to the individual members of the sponsor group and the impact they will have on the refugee/sponsor relationship. Some sponsor groups are made up of members who are relatives of the refugee family. Sometimes the member may be a sister or younger brother of the refugee who now has greater influence and power on topics that impact the refugee in the new country. This could present cultural adaptation challenges for both the refugee and sponsor members.

There are many questions and challenges that will arise along the road of this relationship. How each person responds will be unique to them. You and your group may not agree in terms of how to address some of these challenges. What will be important, however, is that you proactively work at these issues within the context of the refugee/sponsor relationship. Be open, transparent and talk about these issues. Name the challenges and then work at addressing them in a collaborative manner.

CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS IN THE REFUGEE/SPONSOR RELATIONSHIP

POWER-BASED QUESTIONS

- Who has power in this relationship?
- What kinds of power?
- Does power change over the length of the relationship?
- When do you want to attempt to shift/share the power? Why?
- How would you share power?
- What does empowerment mean to you?
- How can refugees be empowered? By whom?

FAMILY DYNAMIC QUESTIONS

- What are the *sponsors' expectations* of the refugee family and responsibilities?
- What are the *refugees' expectations* of the sponsor group?
- How do you intervene if you have concerns about the refugee family situation?
- How do you know if your concerns are valid?
- What makes your concerns valid vs. a cross-cultural difference?

SPONSOR GROUP?

- How will the individual members of the sponsoring group impact the refugee/sponsor relationship?
- Some sponsor groups include members who are related to the refugee family. How will this dynamic impact the refugee/sponsor relationship?

WHERE DOES THE RELATIONSHIP END?

- What is your commitment to the refugee's family after your formal agreement is finished?
- How will you determine that? Whose decision is it?

PITFALLS

- What do you think are some of the pitfalls of the relationship?
- What kinds of obligations might the refugee family perceive they need to accept in order to be accepted and supported?
- Can you think of any ethical dilemmas that might arise in the sponsor/refugee relationship?

CULTURAL SHOCK¹²

Most people are familiar with the term “culture shock.” As the name suggests, it refers to the period of disorientation experienced when encountering a new culture, and is a normal part of cultural adjustment. While culture shock is extremely painful, it should not be viewed negatively, for the end result is profound learning. **Cultural adjustment** is typified by the stages shown below. As you read about them, keep in mind that the pace at which people are able to progress through the stages is highly individual; as well, family members may progress at quite different rates. This process may last three to five years.

STAGE	CHARACTERISED BY
Honeymoon Stage	An initial reaction of enthusiasm, fascination, admiration & cordial, friendly, superficial relationships with hosts. (<i>Note: Refugees have not come to Canada by choice and may be less enthusiastic.</i>) The Refugee may have very high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of the life in the country. (Ex. The refugee may have expectations that the new country will return him/her to the position and status that they previously enjoyed in the home country before civil war.)
Challenge and Crisis	Differences in language, concepts, values and symbols lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety, anger and loss of identity. During this time studies show that most people find the most difficult situations to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •making friends your own age •dealing with someone who is cross •approaching others •appearing in front of an audience •taking employment unrelated to skills •getting to know people in-depth, intimately •understanding jokes, humour, sarcasm •dealing with people staring at you •being with people that you don't know very well •complaining in public/dealing with unsatisfactory service
Recovery	The crisis is resolved as the person learns the language and culture of the host country. Life factors known to reduce stress and aid recovery include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •time •having a sense of purpose •being socially or politically involved •having opportunities (esp. re: career) •maturity •having strong social support •having structure in one's life •equal or greater status than before
Adjustment	The newcomer begins to work in and enjoy the new culture, though there may be some instances of anxiety and strain.

¹² Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, *Sponsoring Group Handbook*, 2000.

STAGE	SUPPORT TO PROVIDE DURING THIS STAGE
Honeymoon Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provide orientation and information •Focus on the practical aspects of becoming competent in the new situation (i.e., getting around, looking for a job, language training)
Challenge and Crisis	<p>Give empathy, friendship & support; accept that anger & frustration are normal & legitimate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Share information about culture shock •Help newcomer to see his/her competencies •Provide opportunities for the newcomer to talk about his/her culture •Provide opportunities to learn together about cross-cultural communications •Talk about the 10 most difficult situations. Share how these things are dealt with in both your cultures •Share jokes from your different cultures; talk about why they translate (or not) •Set up a fun time for role plays or role reversals •Help newcomer understand legal norms in the new country (ex. Legal and illegal forms of discipline of children in new country) •If the newcomer is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological problems, help them to find appropriate help
Recovery	<p>You will notice that in a number of these areas, neither you nor the newcomer has any control. In fact, in some areas such as “status” the newcomer is very likely to be worse off than before. However, there are things you can do to enhance a sense of purpose, belonging and structure. During this time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work with the newcomer to find employment and to map out an employment strategy that will lead to a fulfilling job •Help the newcomer to see the positive contribution s/he is making to your community •As the newcomer’s English abilities increase, set aside more time for storytelling—this is both an opportunity for the newcomer to teach you about his/her situation and a way for him/her to structure/make sense of events
Adjustment	<p>Continue to provide friendship and support and continue to expect to learn as you walk alongside the newcomer.</p>

CASE STUDY

Lucy

Lucy Koroma and her five children arrived in Canada 6 months ago as refugees from Sierra Leone. Experiencing “western” culture for the first time was very overwhelming for them all. They were astounded at the riches and the wealth that they saw all around them. It felt like they had arrived in paradise. It was a land of peace and harmony as well as a land of plenty.

They were drawn to this new place. They wanted to learn all they could about their new home and their new community. The children were glued to the television set. They were enthralled with video games. Lucy stood in awe as she watched big machines wash and dry her clothes. She flipped through fashion magazines and made plans to get a good job so she could buy all the things she and her family needed to fit in.

Since arriving in Canada, Lucy has grown despondent. She began to get angry that her children spent all their time watching TV. The shows they watched on TV were violent and they were learning bad things from it. She felt that they liked it in Canada too much. She was afraid that they were forgetting their homeland.

She was realising that she didn't fit in here in this new place and was beginning to wonder whether she ever would. She was even wondering whether she wanted to fit in anymore. Everything important to her was being stripped away and she didn't know what to do.

Questions:

Think about this family's experience.

Where do their experiences fit into the cultural adjustment process?

What kinds of supports can the sponsor provide to this family?

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS, TORTURE AND HEALING

Because of the terrible situations that create refugees, newcomers are likely to have experienced very traumatic situations of deprivation and violence. They may even have survived torture.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition that affects people who “have been exposed to violent events such as rape, domestic violence, child abuse, war, accidents, natural disasters and political torture.” It can result in ongoing symptoms such as depression, flashbacks, nightmares, experiences of overwhelming emotions of grief and fear, numbness, avoidance of intimacy, irritability, trouble concentrating and remembering, dizziness, nausea and panic attacks, to name just a few.¹³

Torture is one kind of event that can lead to PTSD. The dictionary defines torture as “the act of inflicting severe pain.”¹⁴ We generally use the term to refer to government-sanctioned violence against individuals. Torture affects every part of the person and inflicts deep psychological, emotional and spiritual wounds. In addition to physical injuries, Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture notes that, “While torture may be used to obtain information or signed confessions, this is not its primary purpose. *Torture is directed towards instilling and reinforcing a sense of powerlessness and terror in victims and the societies in which they live. It is a process which generates a situation designed to destroy the physical and psychological capabilities of survivors to function as viable individuals.*” As a supporter of someone who has survived torture, this is important for you to know. Gaining a sense of control over one’s own life is critical to a survivor. Therefore, your support should never “take over” the newcomer’s life; it must always result in empowerment.

While sufferers of PTSD may experience the symptoms noted above, victims of torture face additional repercussions. They may be unwilling to disclose information about their experiences and may feel suspicious, frightened or anxious to forget about what has happened. These feelings may discourage them from seeking the help they need. In addition, what to most people are everyday situations may throw them into a state of terror. Officials in uniform, signing forms, visiting doctors’ offices, being admitted to hospitals or even encountering staff of government agencies may adversely affect them. (for further information, see the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture web site at <http://www.icomm.ca/ccvt>)

Many treatment methods are used to aid recovery from PTSD and torture; whatever treatment is recommended, they all have in common an emphasis on restoring a sense of control and safety.

¹³ American Psychological Association (APA) Web site, <http://www.psych.org>.

¹⁴ Random House Dictionary

For your group, there are several important things to be aware of and act on:

- Trained professionals must deal with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Love and support are critical for healing to take place. Your group can have a very important role here.
- Each person's healing proceeds at its own pace. You have no way of knowing how long it may take for an individual to heal, nor can you judge whether the individual has made "enough" progress. Your role is to support and encourage, not to judge.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries. Empathy is appropriate, but taking on the emotions as if they were your own, is not. Only the individual him/herself can heal—you cannot heal for him/her. There is a delicate balance here, which you'll need to examine often. If you're providing support for someone in therapy, it may be appropriate at some point to speak with the therapist to find out how to be most supportive and how to maintain appropriate boundaries.
- Healing is hard work. Don't be surprised if the individual often seems exhausted, distant or overwhelmed.
- If you are providing support, it's appropriate to find ways to celebrate together the individual's progress and acknowledge his/her strengths and successes.

NINE QUALITIES NEEDED BY REFUGEE SPONSORS FOR ASSISTING REFUGEES THROUGH CULTURAL INTEGRATION¹⁵

PERSONS SHOULD BE:

1. Approachable

Willing and interested in meeting new people.

2. Curious

Interested in learning more about people and different ways of life.

3. Positive

Expecting that one can succeed in living and working with others.

4. Forthright

Able to act and speak out readily in a polite way.

5. Socially Open

Inclined to interact with people regardless of their differences.

6. Enterprising

Tending to approach tasks and activities in new and creative ways.

7. Open-Minded

Tolerant of differences and ambiguity.

8. Sensitive

Show respect and awareness of the importance of politeness and the willingness to treat others in ways that make them feel valued.

9. Persevering

Tend to remain in a situation and feel positive about it even in the face of some difficulties.

¹⁵ Adapted from International Education, Red River Community College

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OBJECTIVES

IN THIS SECTION, PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO:

- 3.1 recognize the impact culture has on the communication process
- 3.2 identify seven key assumptions (guidelines) for effective intercultural communication
- 3.3 gain insight into the importance of culturally-appropriate communication as a key in successful intercultural communication
- 3.4 learn and practise key skills for improving intercultural communication

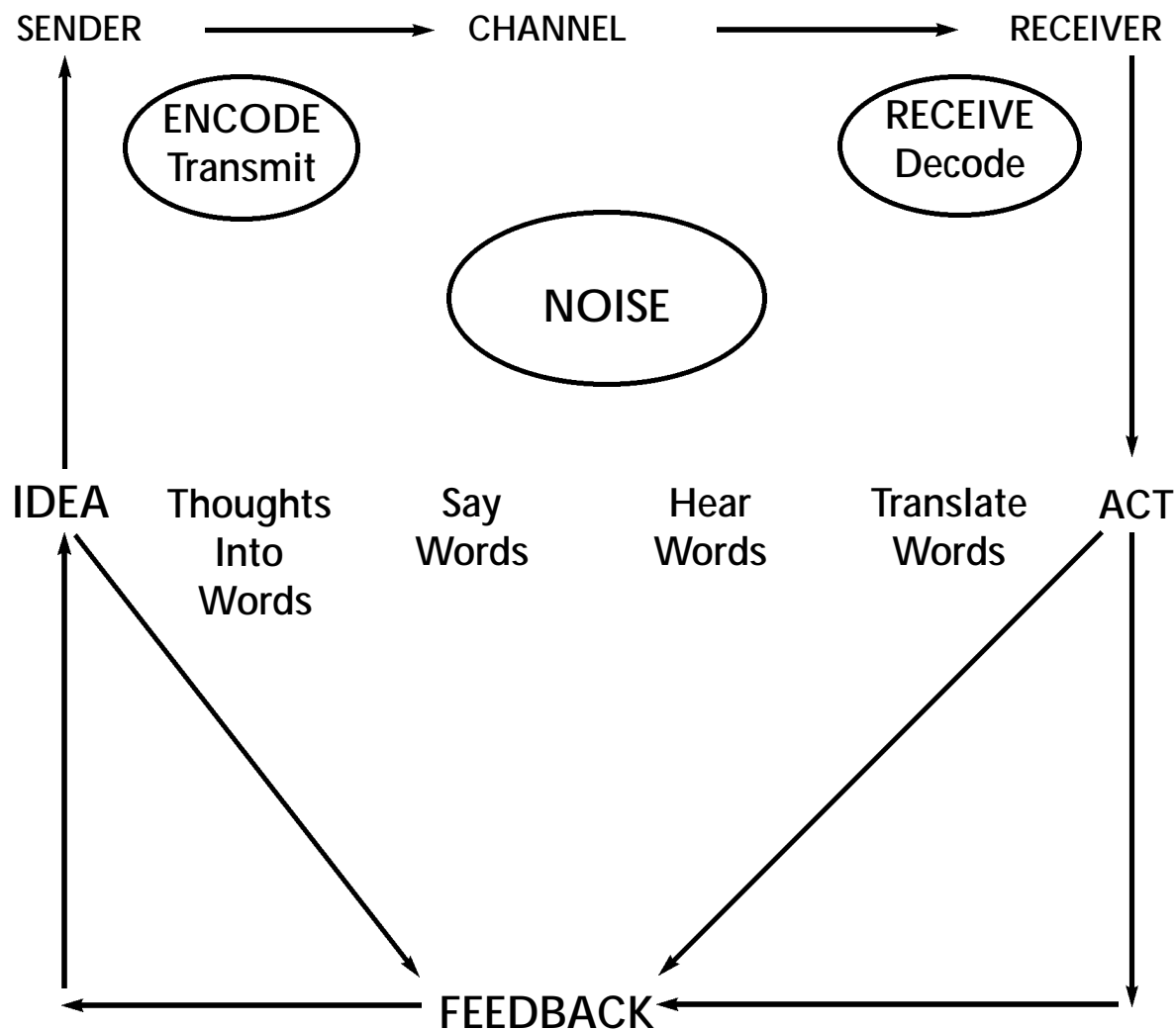
THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

An interaction between two or more people expressing ideas, opinions and/or information to achieve organizational results.

Communication is the exchange of information between two or more people. At its basic level it is a process that includes a sender and a receiver.

Communication takes more time than any other activity in our work or daily lives. Studies show that the average person in an organization spends between 70-80% of their day as either a sender or receiver of information. Communication is essential to our existence because it enables us to organize and work in groups.

When the communication process is not effective, misunderstandings can occur. A lack of mutual understanding is a major source of stress in relationships. Frequently, both parties feel angry, frustrated and hurt because the other individual cannot understand their own point of view. Effective communication is key to healthy relationships.



SEVEN ASSUMPTIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION¹⁶

1. Communication is symbolic. We attribute meaning to symbols like words, pictures or gestures. Symbols gain their meaning from group agreement; they do not have inherent meanings.
2. Communication involves the encoding and decoding of messages. Encoding is the process of putting our thoughts, feelings, emotions, opinions or attitudes in a form recognizable to another. Decoding is the process of perceiving and interpreting or making sense of the incoming stimuli. We are continually encoding and decoding information simultaneously when we communicate. Communication is a process; it is irreversible and it is filtered through all of the experiences of our lives.
3. Communication is transactional (the product of and influenced by both internal and external states).
4. Communication takes place at varying levels of awareness. We learned much of our communication behaviour unconsciously, through our socialization; we are usually not aware of our behaviour when we communicate. Change can happen when unawareness is brought to a conscious level.
5. Communicators make predictions about the outcomes of their communication behaviour or message. Prediction can be conscious or unconscious. Misunderstandings occur when our expectations are not met.
6. Intention is not a necessary condition for communication. One cannot “not communicate.” Any behaviour or the absence of any behaviour communicates something if there is someone in the environment to notice the behaviour or its absence.
7. Every communication has both a content dimension and a *relationship dimension*. The message can be interpreted at two levels; what is said (content) and how it is said (relationship). Cultures vary with respect to the amount of emphasis they place on these two levels.

¹⁶Red River Community College, Certificate Program for Intercultural Trainers

FIVE FACTS ABOUT INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND THEIR IMPACT ON CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION¹⁷

1. We perceive differently.
2. We do not see things that exist.
3. We see things that do not exist.
4. We communicate all the time.
5. Pure communication is impossible.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

1. Intercultural Communication is the process by which two people who do not belong to the same culture “try” to communicate. This may be more difficult than we think because the idea implies that they may not share the same values, beliefs, behaviours and ways of thinking.

(Adapted from P. Casse, *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind*.)

2. In Intercultural Communication, we should assume differences until similarities are proven.

(*International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour*, N. Adler.)

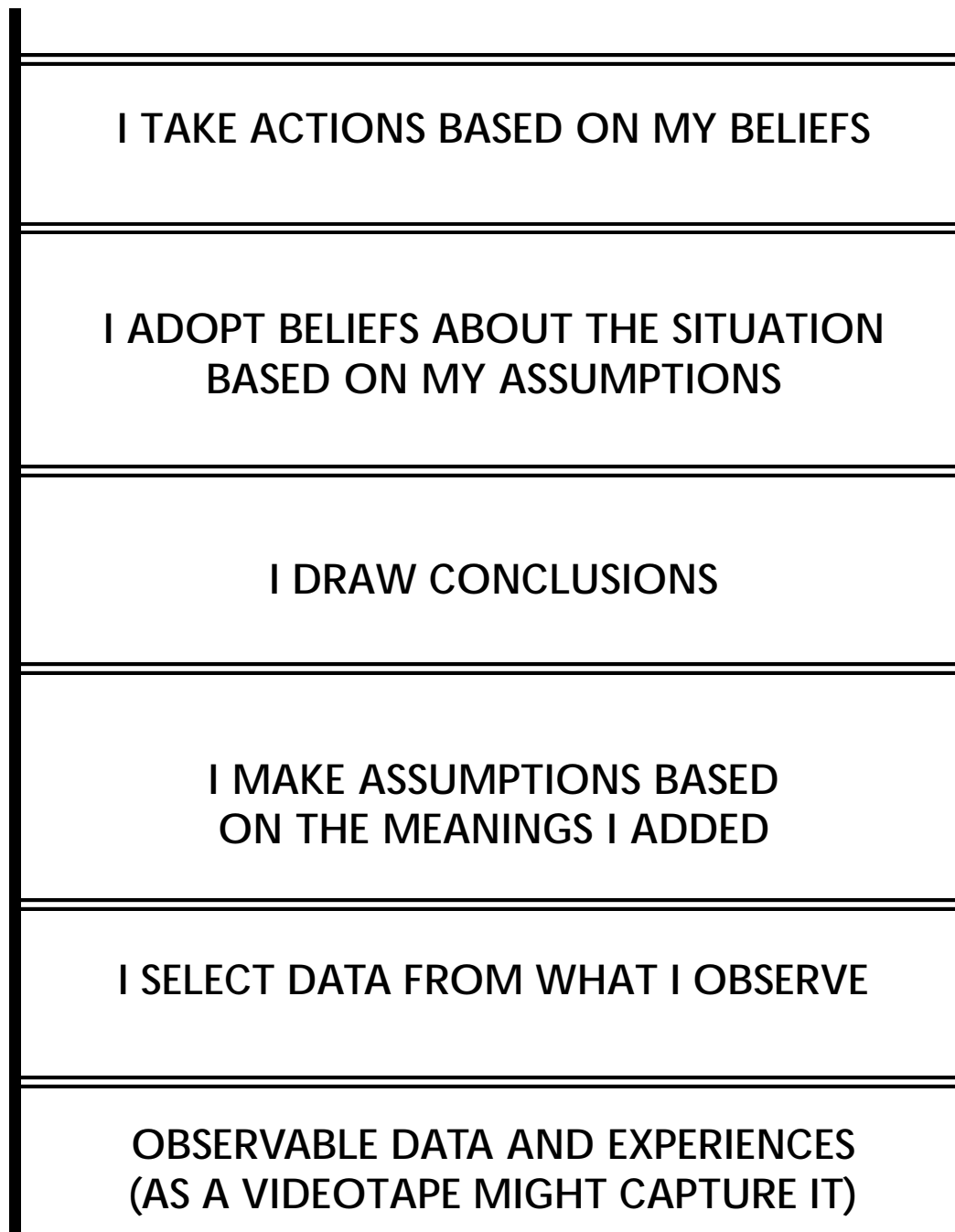
3. Intercultural Communication is communication between members of different cultures. This definition is simple, but the process is complex. Intercultural Communication involves differing perceptions, attitudes and interpretations. We know that even two people from the same culture have communication problems. Some misunderstandings are insignificant in that they can be easily remedied or ignored. Other conflicts are more serious in that they can cause misinterpretations and create persistent negative attitudes towards others.

(*Beyond Language*, D. Levine and M. Adelman.)

¹⁷P. Casse

THE LADDER OF INFERENCE¹⁸

In our daily interactions we often misinterpret the behaviour of others. The assumptions we make are a major factor in the breakdown of communication. When people are under stress, the tendency to misinterpret each other is greatly increased. It is critical to be aware of what assumptions we hold. To communicate effectively, we must not only make our intentions clear but check out our assumptions of one another as well. The Ladder of Inference is a tool that we can use to examine how we come to perceive certain things about others.



¹⁸Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*. 1990.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Listening is an essential ingredient of effective communication. Your goal as a listener is to fully understand the speaker's experience and point of view. To do this, you must convey that you are interested in understanding the speaker's situation, and that you respect her/his feelings and/or point of view.

With the tools of effective listening, you can encourage a speaker to express his or her perspective and you can help to identify the feeling that often lies underneath his or her words. Through both verbal and non-verbal messages, you can express your interest in understanding the speaker's point of view and help the person to feel more comfortable.

There are a number of ways to be a good listener.¹⁹

WHEN YOU LISTEN:

- Use non-verbal communication—be aware of what you communicate with your body.
- Recognize your own prejudices—be aware of the way in which your feelings or reactions to a person influence your interpretation of what is being said.
- Listen to understand the underlying feelings—use your heart as well as your mind.

TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LISTENER:

- Empathize—put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand how s/he feels.
- Validate—let the other person know that her/his experience is valid.
- Clarify—ask questions to get more information about the problem.
- Paraphrase—in your own words, restate both the main elements and the emotional content in what you have heard.

BEHAVIOUR TO AVOID AS A LISTENER:

- Interrupting.
- Judging—shift judgement to curiosity and focus on understanding rather than on who is right or wrong.
- Arguing mentally—stay attuned to the speaker rather than planning your next move.
- Giving advice—the best resolutions come from within the individual.

¹⁹*Conciliation Forums of Oakland*, used by permission.

ACTIVE LISTENING STEPS

Active listening skills are important for both the refugee and the sponsor. Using these skills help to communicate interest in what is being said, help the speaker to feel heard, help to clarify what is being said and help to acknowledge respect.

The following steps guide the active listener:

1. Put yourself in the other person's place to understand what the person is saying and how s/he feels (try to empathize).
2. Make a conscious decision to "shift judgement to curiosity."
3. Show understanding and acceptance, utilising non-verbal behaviour.
 - tone of voice
 - facial expressions
 - gestures
 - eye contact
 - posture (sit facing the person and lean forward with arms unfolded)
4. Restate the person's most important thoughts and feelings.
5. Do not interrupt, offer advice or give suggestions. Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
6. Ask open-ended questions to better understand the other person's issues and concerns.

The active listening cues listed above tend to be specific to a Western European cultural context. They are not always effective or appropriate and may, in fact, be offensive to people of other cultures. In some aboriginal communities, for instance, the lack of direct and ongoing eye contact does not indicate a lack of listening. Instead, it can be a sign of respect. Only when someone turns his/her back to you or begins to walk away do you know that the person is no longer interested in listening. Or, within some Asian cultures, "ear" contact can be more important than "eye" contact.

This, however, does not mean that one should not use these skills, nor does it diminish their capacity for being effective. It is, though, an important awareness to have as one is communicating interculturally.

ACTIVE LISTENING²⁰

STATEMENT	PURPOSE	TO DO THIS...	EXAMPLES
Encouraging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to convey interest • to encourage the other person to keep talking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...don't agree or disagree ...use neutral words ...use varying voice intonations 	"Can you tell me more about..."
Clarifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help clarify what is said • to get more information • to help the listener understand the other's point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...ask questions ...check out assumptions ...check out word interpretation 	"What does respect mean for you?"
Restating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to show that you are listening and understanding what is being said • to check your meaning and interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...restate the basic ideas and facts 	"So, you would like your parents to trust you more, is that right?"
Reflecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to show that you understand what is being said • to check your meaning and interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...reflect the speaker's basic feelings 	"You seem upset."
Summarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to review progress • to pull together important ideas and facts • to establish a basis for further discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...restate major ideas expressed, including feelings 	"These seem to be the key ideas you've expressed..."
Validating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to acknowledge the worthiness of the other person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...acknowledge the values of their issues and feelings ...show appreciation for their efforts and actions 	"I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter."

²⁰Excerpted from The Community Boards Program, Inc. San Francisco, CA. 1987.

CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNICATING WITH SPEAKERS FOR WHOM ENGLISH IS A SECOND LANGUAGE²¹

When talking to people who are learning English, or to people who do not have a good command of the English language, follow these simple guidelines:

1. Speak simply, slowly and clearly.
2. Pause more frequently and longer, but only at natural junctures.
3. Avoid slang, jargon and/or idioms.
4. Speak directly, for example: *“Please fill out this form.”* rather than *“This form needs to be filled out.”*
5. Check on specific vocabulary, for example: *“Are you familiar with the word ‘allergy?’”* rather than *“Do you understand?”*
6. Use your face and hands. Be aware that gestures do not have the same meaning in all cultures.
7. Keep the dialogue open. Ask them if they want you to speak more slowly.
8. Use positives where possible, for example: *“It is common.”* rather than *“It is uncommon.”*
9. Use open-ended questions. Check understanding by asking a question that requires more than a “yes-no” answer, for example: *“Can you explain how to take this medication?”* rather than *“Do you understand how to take your medication?”*
10. Don’t alter the rhythm of your speech.
11. Don’t ‘talk down’ to the person(s).
12. Don’t raise your voice or shout.
13. Never laugh at mistakes in verbal communication or interpretation.
14. Don’t assume that a momentary pause or lack of an immediate response means they did not understand or do not know the answer.
15. Be careful not to unconsciously judge intelligence based on English language facility.

²¹Source: Linda Plenart & Anna Ling of the Sexuality Education Resource Centre, 1998.

PARAPHRASING

To paraphrase is to use your own words to state back what you think a person has said. It is important to be brief and include both the feelings and the facts in your statement. The key to effective paraphrasing is to try to capture the **nugget** or **essence** of what a person says.

Paraphrasing is a way of showing **empathy**, genuinely trying to understand how another person experiences a situation, even when you don't agree.

Too often we get caught trying to convince others to understand us and fail to try to understand their perspective. This can often seem like two people talking and no one listening. By paraphrasing, you:

- create a collaborative approach to communication
- clarify information
- catch potential misunderstandings early
- check to make sure you understand the speaker's intent
- allow the speaker to correct you if you have misunderstood something
- avoid thinking of your own response while another person is talking
- convey to the speaker that you are interested in him/her and what s/he has to say

SOME PARAPHRASING PITFALLS:

Reading too much into what the person says

Statement:

"Sometimes I'm not really clear on what your phone messages say."

Paraphrase:

"You think that I don't know how to take phone messages."

Improved Paraphrase:

"Sounds like some of my phone messages have been confusing."

Stating back word for word what the person says—"parroting"

Statement:

"You can't shovel your snow all over my walkway anymore, one of these days I am going to slip and break my neck!"

Paraphrase:

"So, you're saying I can't shovel my snow over your walkway anymore because one of these days you're going to slip and break your neck?"

Improved Paraphrase:

"So, you're frustrated about my snow shovelling."

Stating the paraphrase as a solution

Statement:

“Every time I go to work I hear about a new problem. Everyone complains about the work they do, but no one wants to do anything about it. What happened to the days when people took care of their own problems before it affected everyone else.”

Paraphrase:

“Sounds like you think people should stop whining and complaining about their jobs.”

Improved Paraphrase:

“Sounds like you would like people to take more ownership of solving their own problems.”

Repetitive paraphrasing

Stating back what the person says over and over again without asking questions or sharing your own perspective. Remember, paraphrasing is only one part of healthy communication.

PARAPHRASING EXERCISE

WRITE AN EFFECTIVE PARAPHRASE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.
REMEMBER TO INCLUDE THE FACTS AND THE FEELINGS.

1. Several months ago, I agreed to be a sponsor to a new refugee family that is coming to Canada from Iraq. I have spent lots of my time in the last few weeks getting ready for their arrival. I really hope that the arrangements I've made will work for them. I have looked for a suitable apartment for them, found some furniture for the family and have created a small support network for them when they arrive. I hope that they will feel comfortable here.

2. We have arrived in Canada eight months ago from Burundi and have had a difficult time adjusting to the new culture. One of the most significant things that we are dealing with is regarding our children. They are having a very difficult time in school, particularly adjusting to making new friends. I know that you cannot give them some of the things that other parents give their kids. I wish I could.

3. I am a new refugee to Canada. I just arrived here a few days ago. I speak very broken English am feeling very afraid. I know that the situation at home is very violent and destructive and I could not stay there any longer or I may have been killed. But here I am in a new country and everything is different and new. I don't understand what is going on around me.

4. I have been involved with a refugee family for a year as part of a sponsor group. Initially there were eight of us that agreed to take on this responsibility. Over the past months, several in our group have not been very involved and it is putting quite a strain on the rest of us. I am very frustrated with the situation. I feel like I am giving all that I can and that the others are not carrying their share of the load.

5. Mohamed came to me yesterday to discuss his frustration with not finding employment. I mentioned to him on two occasions that we could help him see a career counsellor to find out what type of jobs would be best for him. Unfortunately, he refuses to look at this option. I don't know what else to do?

QUESTIONING

“MOVING FROM JUDGEMENT TO CURIOSITY”

As a communication skill, questioning is used to probe for information and is *not* used in the sense of cross-examination—to prove a point, to demolish an argument, or to get compliance. As with any technique, there are helpful and unhelpful ways to use questions.

Many of us have a tendency in conversations to assume that we understand what the speaker means, so we often take the statement at face value and move on without checking for accuracy. Questioning can help clarify your assumptions.

QUESTIONS MAY BE DIVIDED INTO SIX TYPES:

WHY—draws out information but can have the impact of challenging, blaming and calling upon the other person to justify or defend their actions or position. Many questions are intended to prove wrongdoing. For example, “*Why did you do that?*”

LEADING—is really a disguised statement. The speaker attempts to express his/her opinion through a question. For example, “*Don’t you think it would be better to call first, rather than just to drop in?*”

MULTIPLE—is defined as when two or more questions are asked immediately following one another without adequate time for response. This is often confusing for the respondent because they have trouble focusing on what is being asked. For example, “*Where were you last night? When did you get home? Were you drinking? What about your homework? What’s the matter with you?*”

CLOSE-ENDED—invites a one- or two-word answer, “*Were you out last night?*” The possible responses are often limited to yes or no. Closed questions narrow the amount of information that is given in return.

ASSUMPTIVE CLOSURE—gives the expected answer in the question. “*I bet that made you angry.*” or “*This is a pretty basic question, isn’t it?*”

OPEN-ENDED—invites a long response. It gives the respondent a choice of how to respond. Two key operating words to open-ended questions are **What** and **How**.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS CAN BE USED IN SEVERAL WAYS:

Clarification—to pull out specifics

“Would you please explain what you mean by...?”
“I’m not sure I understand how that affects you...?”

Information Seeking—to get more information

“Can you tell me more about your expectations of Canada?”
“What was going on for you when you first came here?”

Explaining—to look at underlying motives

“How does that tie in to the issue of sponsorship?”
“In what way would that make the situation better for you?”

Reality Checking—to examine options realistically

“What will happen if we do not deal with this issue between you and your son today?”
“Who else has to be involved in the decision?”

Interests—to move from positions to interests

“What do you need to feel safe?”
“What is important to you about that?”

Brainstorming—to look for possible solutions

“What are possible solutions?”
“What are some ways that this situation can be handled?”

QUESTIONING PRACTICE

Respond to the following statements with an open-ended question that would help you gain more understanding of the situation.

1. *"I don't like that sort of thing..."*
2. *"You never take my suggestions seriously."*
3. *"That's just the kind of person she is."*
4. *"All Canadians are like that."*
5. *"You always come in late!"*
6. *"Everyone has trouble working with you."*

CULTURALLY-APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

Even though you can learn a number of tools to be effective in communication, there are times when certain tools are more culturally appropriate than others. Two concepts that can help qualify what tools are most appropriate are based on understanding communication styles as high context/low context or individualist/collectivist.

The following tables identify some general characteristics and differences within each continuum.

No one person or group is fixed to one place on the continuum. Both individualist/collectivist and the high context/low context continuums are simply tools for gaining understanding. You can use this tool to make guesses, read cues and to check out understanding.

Generally, the more industrialised the group/community the more individualistic; the less industrialised, the more collectivist. There will be greater challenges to relating to people who find themselves at opposite ends of the spectrum.

A key to using these tools is to first reflect on where you fit in response to the various statements and then reflect on how that impacts your communication.



Individualist Society

Collectivist Society

Emphasis on individual goals

Group goals have precedence over individual goals

Societal values promote self-realisation

Individual must fit the group

Each person has a unique set of talents and potentials. The highest purpose to which one can devote one's life is the translation of these potentials into actuality. This is accompanied by a subjective sense of rightness and personal well being.

Emphasis is on collectivity and harmony and co-operation among the group tends to be emphasised more than individual function and responsibility. This is accomplished by a subjective sense of rightness and personal well-being.

People are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family

People belong to in-groups or Collectives which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty

The "I" identity has precedence

The "WE" identity has precedence

There is emphasis on initiative and achievement

There is emphasis on belonging to groups

People apply the same value standards to all

People apply different value standards for members of their in-groups and out-groups

Emphasis on goals, needs and views of the individual

Emphasis on goals, needs and views of the in-group

Emphasis on individual pleasure

Emphasis on social norms of the in-group

Individuals allowed to have unique beliefs

Emphasis on shared in-group beliefs

Value on maximising individual outcomes

Value on co-operation with in-group members





Low Context (Specialist)

High Context (Generalist)

Emphasis is on the worth and fulfilment of the individual. Decisions made by individuals.

Emphasis is on the group. Individuals fill roles in the group. Resistance to outsiders may sometimes exist. Decisions made by group.

Secular – religion is compartmentalised and not usually part of everyday life.

Religious – everything has a spiritual dimension or aspect.

Fragmented (e.g. separation of physical and emotional health).

Holistic – people see themselves as related to everything else.

Egalitarian (by belief but often a myth)

Hierarchical — often male-dominated.

Gender integrated – fewer norms and formal rules about sex roles and relationships between men and women.

Gender separated – strict rules about male and female roles and relationships.

Independence is highly valued.

Interdependence is valued. Everyone has clear expectations for their relationships with others.

Beliefs are questioned (most values are open to question).

Traditional beliefs and ways are unquestioned and unchallenged.

Rigid beliefs and behaviours related to time. Time is monochronic – tasks done sequentially. Punctuality is important.

Relaxed and more functional beliefs and behaviours related to time. Time is polychronic – many tasks done at the same time. Relationships are more than punctuality.

Sense of isolation and loneliness is frequently found

Most people have a clear sense of purpose and place.

Great need for lots of space (physical and psychological).

Little felt need for much space

More reliance on words to carry a message. Message directly and explicitly.

More reliance on context and non-verbal cues to carry given messages. One talks around and embellishes the point.

Priorities

These dimensions or aspects of culture are *polarities*. Most cultures are somewhere on the continuum or dotted line between each extreme and within cultures, *individuals* will be on their own dotted lines vis-à-vis these cultural patterns.

(This is an adaptation of material developed by Monica Armour of Transcultural Consultant Services and Staff Sgt. Jim Potts of the Training Division of the Canadian RCMP, based on the work of Edward T. Hall.)

CASE STUDY

REFUGEE/SPONSOR COMMUNICATION ROLE PLAY

Peter is a refugee from Sudan. He was forced to come to Canada with his wife and four children as a result of the violence in his home country. The last few years in Sudan were hell. Peter saw and experienced much pain and suffering. After fleeing, he and his family spent three years in Kenya and during that time they were hopeful that they would be able to return home. That was impossible. Their home had been burned to the ground and their village was destroyed. They would have surely been killed if they had returned to their homeland.

Ron is part of a group of the group that sponsored Peter's family to come to Canada as refugees from Sudan almost a year ago. At this point the children seem to be adjusting fairly well, but things have been very difficult for Peter and his wife. Ron has tried to be supportive and feels that he and Peter have a solid relationship.

Yesterday, David, Peter's oldest son, called Ron about some problems he is having with his dad. David has asked Ron if he could talk to Peter for him.

RON

Using your communication microskills, such as active listening, paraphrasing and questioning, probe into what is really going on for David. Try to get at what is at the heart of the issue.

PETER

Respond to Ron as is appropriate. You are feeling very vulnerable about this issue and disclose only as much as you feel comfortable with.

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