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Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation

Basics and Areas of Application

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht



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Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation

Volume 1: Basics and Areas of Application

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Translator's note: I have tried to include the pronouns for both genders (he/she) as far as possible. However, in translating longer passages and for purposes of clarity, I have used only the "he" form.

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■ Introduction

Internationalization and globalization have become an integral part of our society and continue to increase in importance. Our contact with culturally diverse individuals whether in the workplace, educational institutions or in our daily lives, is increasing steadily. For many, job-related international cooperation at home or abroad has become the norm. The international media covers events worldwide and easily accesses geographically and culturally distant countries.

In today's world, a sound basic knowledge of international affairs is a prerequisite to operating in a global network. The ability to contribute qualified and informed opinions is central to international business and constitutes an integral part of a person's self image. In order to be taken seriously in the global arena, a person must have a well-founded understanding of environmental issues, European, transatlantic and transcontinental security, rankings in global economic competition and the worldwide struggle against poverty. Business leaders can no longer afford to lag behind in their grasp of international politics and global developments, regardless of their position in the corporate hierarchy or whether they are themselves only indirectly involved in international business. A minimum of international competence is required in either case.

The challenges faced by many echelons of society with regard to internationalization, globalization and the strategies required for dealing with these issues are central to the 21st century.

Seen from a historical perspective, these developments are certainly not new. History has shown that there have always been times when transcontinental movement for political, economic, expansionist, religious and other reasons was on the rise. Diverse intercultural encounters were a natural outcome.

It was always a question of one dominant power exerting influence over another and securing strategic power bases, countries, cultures and continents. The most recent research into the significance of overland trade routes (e.g., Silk Road, incense, spice, and salt caravan routes) or sea routes

(e.g., The Northwest Passage, Straits of Malacca, the Transatlantic Routes, Bering Strait) has shown that religious beliefs were disseminated in the wake of trade and conquests (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam). This development continued on into modern times with the spread of political and ideological systems (colonialism, Marxism, capitalism). Trade and the exchange of ideas throughout the world used to progress steadily over decades or even centuries. It was not until much later that historical research uncovered the global networking processes involved in the movement of people, goods and ideas. The people themselves remained largely oblivious of events outside their immediate sphere of influence, having no information network through which they could grasp the extent of transcontinental developments.

The rate at which the age of technology has progressed over the last century has lead to readily accessible sources of transportation and information, and contributed to a qualitative increase in internationalization processes. As a result of modern scientific and technological know-how, information can be instantaneously sent and retrieved from around the world and is available to everyone at a relatively low cost. International cooperation and travel, as well as access to information gathering, is no longer a privilege of the well-to-do, but long since available to the general public as well, at least in First World countries. The Information Age is here to stay, offering undreamt-of international and global mobility. The question arises, however, if individuals directly or indirectly involved in these developments have the necessary psychological makeup to absorb and process (perception) information adequately. Given this ability, are they able to analyze and evaluate (thought patterns, judgment) newly gained insights, manage emotions (feelings and sensations), plan and implement (application) these in a way that satisfies individual needs and leads to mastering the given challenges? Social and technological developments in a number of areas offer a range of choices for accessing individual potential and lifestyle preferences. However, just as many people who might benefit from such a wide range of choices do not, simply because they are unable to for reasons of heritage and/or personal background. This is a common phenomenon where sophisticated technology is used. An example is in the construction sector, where highly developed machinery and technical components are designed for multi-functional use, but only operate at 50% of their capacity. The reason for this is that persons operating the equipment are either not aware of the full scope of available options or choose not to change the problem-solving strategies they have developed over the years or which have traditionally served them. While users rely on the equipment as such, its full potential is not fully exploited.

In the technical field, the realization that multi-functional operating

equipment is not fully exploited often leads to an initiative to train and qualify the users. The result is an overall improvement in the problem-solving process, requiring all those involved to reorient and reassess their original approach. The problems and possible problem-solving strategies discussed in relation to the handling and use of development potential inherent in increasing internationalization on the macro-social (societal level) and on the micro-social level (individual life planning and career development) are similar.

The following examples from different centuries and cultural regions shed some light on the gradual development of intercultural competence through the ages.

Assessing Intercultural Experiences

In the introduction to his book “Chinese Characteristics”, published in 1900 in Germany, Arthur H. Smith mentions the enormous difficulties confronting Westerners in their dealings with the Chinese: “Sir Robert Hart, the inspector general for Chinese maritime customs who lived in the Middle Empire for forty years, speaks of the exact same phenomenon. ‘China is a difficult country to understand. A few years ago, I thought I had finally reached that point and grasped something about its inner workings, which I attempted to bring to paper. Today, I feel like an absolute beginner again. If I were asked to write three or four pages about China, I would not know where to start. One thing sticks in my mind, however. Where I come from, we tend to say: do not bend, even if you should break apart in the process. In the West, it is considered a virtue to adhere to one’s convictions and value concepts, even at the risk of becoming socially alienated. The Chinese, on the other hand, as Sir Robert Hart noted, believe the opposite to be true: bend freely but do not break’”. Adhering to individual convictions, values and norms might be important, but only as long as they do not lead to a break with the closely-knit family and social network. The ability to intuitively grasp cultural differences and adapt behavior accordingly in an intercultural encounter with Chinese business partners may very well have a positive, long-term effect on the business relationship in terms of communication and sustainable cooperation. The opposite is true if business partners remain largely oblivious to cultural differences and insist on pursuing their own agenda from the perspective of their own cultural orientation system.

Other-culture Experiences

The CEO of a large German industrial corporation with business operations worldwide recounts his experiences in East Asia and the US: “After having worked in East Asia for three years, I was sent to the U. S. In Asia, I was struck by the cultural difference from day one. It takes months to discover anything vaguely familiar behind the foreignness. My experience in the U. S. was quite different. At first some aspects seemed foreign to me, such as urban planning. However, the differences were nowhere near as striking as in Asia. I always tended to see things in relation to Germany. I used to ask myself, sometimes hopefully, but more often with trepidation: When will we be seeing this sort of thing in Germany? The question in itself points to certain similarities between Germany and the US! I got along quite well with the Americans at first: ‘People like you and me’, I thought. The longer I stayed, however, the more dissimilarity I discovered. From today’s perspective, I would still say that I experienced far more difficulties in communicating with my Asian partners. Nevertheless, there were moments in the U. S. when nothing seemed familiar. Things simply did not proceed as I expected them to. A significant difference was certainly my approach to both the American and Chinese cultures: In Asia I expected otherness and was surprised to find similarities. In the U. S., I expected familiarity and experienced much that was foreign to me”.

According to an American trainer who prepares executives for international assignments to Germany: “Most Germans underestimate the differences between the U. S. and Germany. Americans, on the other hand, have little information about Germany through the media and often fall back on a number of clichés. We are not entirely free of feelings of mistrust due to events surrounding WWII and post-war history, current developments in right-wing radicalism and xenophobia. U. S. executives sent to Germany on overseas assignments frequently miss the point when dealing with their German business partners. They believe they are superior, from a technical and especially from a moral standpoint. It is no secret that a number of well-known German firms have experienced difficulties on the U. S. market over the past years. This was largely believed to be a result of the fluctuating exchange rate and similar unpredictable events. Meanwhile, it has become evident that much of the misfortune on the U. S. market was due to the approach in dealing with American business partners. Since then, there has been some reassessment of appropriate and effective behavior in doing business with Americans”. Expectations of the other person and the personal assessment of a given situation inevitably shape other-culture perception, which include experiences of similarity and dissimilarity, cultural distance and conclusions drawn from these. A certain degree of willingness

and the ability to reflect on everyday encounters with dissimilar others is necessary for developing an awareness of intercultural learning and ultimately understanding the factors underlying appropriate and effective behavior in an intercultural encounter (applied intercultural ability). This constitutes intercultural competence.

Intercultural Incompetence

A German engineer received the following mail from his Nigerian client: “Dear Mr. X! Thank you very much for your support. We have decided that Mr. Y will leave Nigeria tomorrow. We feel that there is little sense in continuing his assignment. Regarding his return to complete the assignment, we feel that we need another specialist from Germany, one who is more tolerant and cooperative and is better able to communicate with people from a different culture. Such a person should not only be expertly versed in mechanical processes but also be able to get the job done. In case you do not have a replacement for Mr. Y, we prefer that you do not ask Mr. Y to return. We are prepared to begin production with our own crew. Please send me the contractual conditions for Mr. Y’s replacement. Thank you very much”.

Know-how and technical specialization alone are apparently not enough to ensure success in global business. Customers are demanding intercultural sensitivity, understanding and the willingness to adapt to other-culture customs, rules and general social norms. Those who are unwilling or unable to meet this challenge are likely to forfeit their long-term competitive edge in the international market place. Terminating an international assignment prematurely and finding a replacement is costly and likely to damage the company’s image in the long run in terms of trust, as personal failure can cast doubts on professional competence.

There is convincing evidence that there is a dire need for more awareness of culture-specific differences and the ability to deal appropriately and effectively with dissimilar others in international communication and cooperation. In spite of this observation, underlying cultural influences are regarded as academic hypothesizing rather than a factor worthy of serious consideration. An encounter with cultural otherness does not automatically lead to an analysis of culturally-based causes of unexpected or contrary behavior and the desire to understand intrinsic cultural factors.

In contrast, with increasing internationalization, countries tend to converge and adopt other-culture characteristics more readily (e.g., McDonaldization) and downplay the significance of cultural diversity. A certain

degree of convergence is certainly due to modernization, assimilation and adaptation and is reflected in consumer habits, the workplace and in management styles. A closer look, however, shows that forced adaptation is not evenly distributed. More influential nations, societies and internationally active groups impose adaptation on less influential players. The more pressure there is to adapt, however, the greater the tendency toward cultural divergence, e.g., the (re-)discovery of and emphasis on cultural differentiation and self-determination. Along with the awareness and acknowledgment of cultural diversity, such tendencies stand in contrast to mass standardization. Thus, the convergence theory can hardly qualify as an argument against culturally-based differences and the necessity of training relevant specialists and leaders.

Regardless of whether perceived cultural differences are considered a burden or an enrichment, and dealt with accordingly, it does not change the fact that they exist and that they influence our perception, thinking, feeling and behavior and that ultimately, they impact communication and cooperation between individuals from different cultures. Individuals who intuitively grasp what is going on in an interaction between themselves and the dissimilar other and who understand why events unfold one way and not another, are able to synergize cultural dissonance in a way that leads to achieving a mutual goal. Understanding the dynamics involved in a mutually satisfying cooperation in the international/intercultural arena leads to a more sustainable approach to dealing with cultural otherness. Needless to say, intercultural competence enhances the competitive edge. This reference guide is designed to support and promote the success of such relationship-maintaining, human and materialistic interests.

The credo underlying this guide relative to successful interaction and co-operation between culturally diverse individuals is taken from a three thousand-year-old Chinese proverb: “Only he who knows the dissimilar other and himself well, can succeed in situations involving communication and co-operation”.

It is not enough to grasp, study and understand other-culture values, norms, customs, rules of conduct and world views, in short, their unique system of orientation. Moreover, it requires a conscious grasp of, reflection on, comparison and understanding of one's own cultural system of orientation on the basic level of daily work and private life. Most often, this is taken for granted and only the rare individual is consciously aware of his daily routine. This aspect is key to developing “intercultural competence in action”. The standard of quality worth striving for, however, is not reached until both partners, with their respective systems of orientation, manage to pool their potential in a manner that leads to goal attainment (effectiveness) and improved quality of life (satisfaction). This work of reference

combines a practical approach, underlying theory and methodological tools for dealing with problem analysis and solution processes.

The first chapter deals with the basic theoretical concepts of intercultural communication and cooperation. This includes a discussion of the definition and description of culture and cultural standards, upon which this book is based, as well as the relationship between national and organizational structures. We will take a look at the dynamic triangle of applied interculturalism, which concerns aspects of self, otherness and the intercultural element. The last chapter in this section deals with the basic building blocks of core concepts such as cultural dimensions, acculturation, intercultural perception, communication and cooperation, intercultural identity management, intercultural learning, applied intercultural competence and intercultural research.

In the second chapter, we will examine a number of relevant practical examples from the corporate world: intercultural management, intercultural human resource development and intercultural marketing.

The third chapter explores the complex connection between the concept of applied intercultural competence, the development of applied intercultural competence and the effect of intercultural training and coaching on applied competence, including the evaluation and assessment of such measures. Within this context, we will provide an overview of and insight into different forms of intercultural training, education and coaching. We will deal with the advantages and disadvantages as well as the possibilities and limitations of the development of intercultural competence from a professional standpoint.

The fourth chapter deals with central management themes in an intercultural context. Here, we will take a look at the following subject matter: debating (rhetoric), negotiating, conflict management, project management, leadership, team development and work groups. Further, we will shed light on the complexities involved in joint ventures and acquisitions in international management, forms of modern corporate communication, the challenges employees and their families face on international assignments and finally, the role of women in international management and job enhancement opportunities.

Chapter five concludes our discussion on a strategic plan for comprehensive interculturalism in corporations.

This guide may be of assistance for those wishing to learn more about themselves and the many different facets of intercultural communication and cooperation or for specialists in the field of human resource development with an interest in practical application. Scholars and scientists may also find it helpful for an in-depth study of the theoretical foundations and methods for analyzing and dealing with core aspects of interculturalism.

Trainers, coaches and consultants will find interesting approaches and ideas with regard to the development of culture-general and culture-specific trainings and workshops.

The second edition, co-authored by Alexander Thomas, Stefan Kamhuber and Sylvia Schroll-Machl, “Länder, Kulturen und interkulturelle Berufstätigkeit” (Countries, Cultures and Intercultural Careers), offers insight into a number of different intercultural fields of application apart from the strictly corporate context and explores culture-specific behavioral patterns among individuals from different countries (cultural standards). The series “Handlungskompetenz im Ausland” (Practical Application for the International Assignment) contains additional training material for self-study and serves as a basis for intercultural trainings.

Sylvia Schroll-Machl’s book “Die Deutschen – Wir Deutsche. Fremdwahrnehmung und Selbstsicht im Berufsleben” (2002) encourages reflection on the specifically German system of cultural orientation.

In closing, the authors sincerely hope that the information and recommended reading provided here will facilitate in-depth self-study and greatly enhance the reader’s insight into the subject matter.

I. Basics

■ 1. Theoretical Basis: Intercultural Communication and Cooperation

Alexander Thomas

1.1 Culture and Cultural Standards

1.1.1 A Private Conversation

“Say, Mark, what do you think of this? Last Friday, my boss gave me a book with the comment, ‘Have this read by Monday, will you, so you can be prepared!’”

“What kind of a book, I mean, what’s it about?”

“I’m supposed to lead a pretty high-ranking delegation of industrial engineers from Peking around the plant next Wednesday. The title of the book is ‘Dealing with Chinese Business People’. That’s ridiculous, what on earth for? I mean, I don’t intend to become a China expert.”

“But it can’t hurt, can it, to learn a few words of Chinese? Just imagine the impression you’ll make when you pick them up at the airport!”

“No, no, it’s not a language text book. It’s a sort of listing of do’s and don’ts, like a recipe for correct behavior. It was written by some guy who did a short stint in China. Perhaps that would be something for Henry. He’s the one who is going to China to join the joint venture for three years. This really isn’t my thing. After all, people are people and the Chinese can’t be that different from us!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that. I’m sure they have different work habits and other ways of doing things. For one, their eating habits are different from ours.”

“That’s fine with me! But if they fly over here to visit our plant, I expect them to adapt to our ways. We aren’t backward, you know! Anyway, friendliness and a warm smile should do the trick. Most importantly, I’m sure they’ll be impressed by our quality and the history of our plant, especially the multi-media part. Oh, by the way Mark, what I wanted to ask you: Do

you know our new corporate promotional film 'Mobility-Global 2000'? Let me tell you, it's great. The music and visuals are simply fantastic!"

"Is it suitable for our Chinese guests though? They might be used to totally different visuals."

"Oh, stop being difficult! People are the same all over the world. Anyone, anywhere can distinguish between quality and trash."

"Did it occur to you that no two individuals can ever be alike? There never was and there never will be an exact replica of you. You are unique!"

"I like the way you say that. How come I get along with you and others well enough if I am so unique? I spent my last holiday in Thailand. One day, I took a bike trip around the countryside. I can't speak Thai and the people there don't speak English but I was able to communicate with them all the same. I smiled constantly like they do and gesticulated a lot. They could tell that I wanted something to eat or drink or go shopping. They could even give me directions. So much for each person is different. You can't believe how many similarities there are!"

"Yeah, I guess you're right. So differences and similarities can exist side by side. 'All people are similar' and 'each one of us is unique'."

"Alright, so stop philosophizing and tell me what you think of my boss giving me this book. I'm not going to turn into an expert on China just because a few visitors from China will be running around the premises."

"Well, I'm afraid our opinions differ. I can understand your boss quite well. The Chinese not only have other customs and conventions, they have also developed a culture that is entirely different than ours."

"What do you mean culture? We're not interested in organizing some concert or art exhibit, nor is the Chinese state circus arriving with some sort of cultural agenda. All we are talking about here is a simple visit to our production facilities . . . something that happens on a daily basis around here. The only difference is that these visitors aren't German, but Chinese, and that they are not staying for one day, but for four. What does that have to do with culture? Even in the book I mentioned, they refer to cultural differences, comparisons between cultures, intercultural learning, understanding culture, cultural influences and so on in every other sentence. You know what? I'm not at all worried about this visit. I've actually been looking forward to it. It'll be a pleasant change from some of the American or European visitors we get with their persistent questions. I've heard that the Asians are very reserved yet really friendly. But since my boss showed up with that book and now with you going on about culture, I'm starting to feel a bit edgy. I'm not even interested in going through with this anymore. It just means more work. I'm tired of hearing about all this culture stuff. I think I'll go over my presentation again and make sure there's enough tea. That should do the job."

1.1.2 What is Culture?

In cultures that differ radically from each other, human interaction develops along the lines of entirely different rules of conduct and regulations. Not knowing the rules, or understanding how to apply them, inevitably leads to misunderstandings in a given country. The rules we are speaking of here are nonnegotiable. They constitute a generally accepted mode of behavior in a given culture, are respected and adhered to. Most importantly, they impart an intrinsic sense of belonging to members of that culture.

There are many definitions of culture. By 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had found over 150 and began comparing them.

The American psychologist Harry Triandis, for example, defines culture as “the human-made part of the environment” (1989, p. 306). The Dutch cultural psychologist Hofstede (1991) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind”. All researchers dealing with the concept of culture on a theoretical basis agree that culture covers a very broad field. The scope reaches from man-made objects, tools, etc. to values, ideas, worldviews, languages and philosophies, including the way in which animate and inanimate things, subjects and objects are treated.

A more practical, albeit narrower, definition of culture as applied, for instance, in the case of optimizing the conditions for cooperation between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds postulates:

Culture is a universal phenomenon. All human beings live within a specific culture and contribute to its development. Culture creates a structured environment within which a population can function. It encompasses objects we created and use in our daily lives, as well as our institutions, ideas and values. Culture is always manifested in a system of orientation typical to a country, society, organization or group. This system of orientation consists of specific symbols such as language, body language, mimicry, clothing and greeting rituals and is passed on to future generations from the respective society, organization or group. This system of orientation provides all members with a sense of belonging and inclusion within a society or group and creates an environment in which individuals can develop a unique sense of self and function effectively. Culture has an influence on the perception, thought patterns, judgment and action of all members of a given society. The culture-specific system of orientation creates possibilities and motivation for action, but also determines the conditions and limits of the action (Thomas 2003).

The ability to orient in the world and to be able to rely on one's sense of orientation is a basic human need and central to a *system of orientation*. The need for orientation is met when an individual is equipped with an adequate amount of reliable knowledge about the material artifices and rit-

uals of social interaction that define the particular environment and has the experience and ability to implement this knowledge efficiently and effectively. In an effort to obtain orientation, “culture”, as defined here, allows us to find meaning in the things, people and objects that surround us, as well as in complex processes and the consequences of our behavior.

Under normal circumstances, we are not conscious of what “makes sense” to us, thus we perceive and process relevant information automatically. It is a uniquely individual experience that does not occur spontaneously or by coincidence, but is directed by collective, culturally relevant and binding social norms and rules.

Under “normal” everyday conditions, a person living in a culturally familiar setting is likely to be understood and accepted by other members of the collective who share the same cultural background. In special cases, clarification may be required to create rapport and understanding. However, the common culture-specific background knowledge is generally enough to facilitate mutual understanding without further clarification. In the course of each person’s socialization process or the “absorption” into the society of a given culture, one is faced with the task of developing individual as well as socially relevant behavioral patterns and experiences in interactions with others. In this sense, the individual does indeed grow into the social network. This socialization process is not limited to early childhood nor to certain life phases, but continues to develop throughout life. Specific, socially relevant behavior must be learned during each developmental phase in order to deal effectively with difficulties in a given societal setting. The success of this socialization process or *inculturation* becomes evident when an individual acts in accordance with his worldview and this behavior is shared, understood and accepted by other individuals within a given social network. In this sense, culture provides a common frame of reference.

Once a person has passed through such a socialization process, he knows the ropes and is aware of what is acceptable and what is not. Appropriate behavior is acknowledged by society when the person acts according to existing norms and rules. Inappropriate behavior, on the other hand, results in direct or indirect disapproval and a sense of failure because efforts did not lead to success. If the socialization process in a particular field proves successful, then perception, thought, judgment and behavioral patterns are internalized to the point where general cognizance of the function, dynamics and consequences of these processes is no longer required. They have become part of the individual’s operating behavior. Awareness of the processes sets in when unexpected and repeated events or reactions occur within the familiar social setting or in similar situations. Such a re-evaluation may occur on its own under favorable circumstances or through out-

side help. The situation is “reviewed” and subjected to critical censorship. This may result in a transformation of the familiar thought/action pattern and require a new system of socially relevant information processing. The individual learns new coping skills or “tools” (theories, methods, norms, rules etc.) with which to survive and reorient. These tools help in adapting to existing conditions in a natural social setting as well as to changes in existing situations. The benefits are twofold: on the one hand, individuals are able to adapt and on the other, to innovate.

The culture-specific system of orientation with its sense-giving function and the tools required for adaptation that have been acquired during the course of an individual’s socialization process do not apply if the interaction partner comes from another country, organization or group. The other-culture partner has developed a different culture whose members adhere to a different system of orientation, apply other adaptation and innovation tools and have internalized other norms, values and rules of behavior. This condition leads to a so-called critical interaction, in which either one of the partners, but most often both partners, are confronted by unexpected behavior and reactions, the meaning of which is not clear to them and which cannot be deciphered on the basis of their respective and familiar cultural system of orientation.

1.1.3 Cultural Standards

If culture is defined as a national and linguistic entity, which provides its members with a sense-giving system of orientation, then the question arises which culture-specific orientation signals come into play for persons of different cultures when the encounter takes place under particular circumstances such as conflict resolution or managing specific, work-related tasks. Observation and relevant research of German-American work groups (Zeuschel 1999) came up with the following results: During the product development phase, Americans tend to consider the potential customer and how the product can best serve them. Next, they determine effectiveness and customer advantage. After much discussion and mutual feedback, they get to work on the technical details involved in production. German technical experts, on the other hand, indulge in in-depth discussion about technical details and how to develop a near-perfect product according to the status of state-of-the-art technology. The goal, after long and detailed discussions on this topic, is to get a clear idea of the “problem” involved before getting to work on production. These different approaches are not

coincidental, but rather a result of different culture-specific systems of orientation. On the one hand there is the effectiveness and customer orientation, and on the other, the emphasis on facts in connection with technical perfection. No doubt, both the German and the American project teams are equally goal and performance oriented. However, each is convinced that their problem-solving strategy is the more successful: a “trial and error” approach together with much feedback from the consumer and mutual support as opposed to “a search for meaning” and the central question of “what holds the world together”, coupled with clearly assigned tasks and a high degree of initiative and responsibility.

Since these different behavioral patterns are not limited to specific project teams involved in a specific task under specific work conditions, but can be observed in typical American and German patterns of orientation related to complex problem solving, it can be assumed that different cultural standards apply in this situation.

In general, cultural standards can be defined on the basis of the following five indicators:

- Cultural standards are forms of perception, thought patterns, judgment and interaction that are shared by a majority of the members of a specific culture who regard their behavior as normal, typical and binding.
- Own and other unfamiliar behavior is directed, regulated and judged on the basis of this cultural standard.
- Cultural standards provide a regulatory function for mastering a given situation and dealing with people.
- The individual and group-specific way of applying cultural standards to adjust behavior can fluctuate within a range of tolerance.
- Forms of behavior that exceed this specific range are not accepted or sanctioned by the respective collective.

One can ask individuals from other countries what, in particular, they notice about their encounters with Germans and what difficulties they encounter repeatedly. For example, they find it difficult to understand their behavior and their reactions under certain circumstances and what factors seemed to contribute to complicated interaction? The information gleaned from these *critical interactions* lends itself to comparisons between countries and can be evaluated and analyzed on the basis of cause-and-effect in such difficult situations. The results point to a large consensus on a number of behaviorally relevant indicators, which can be defined as German cultural standards. Other indications of a German culture-specific worldview can differ depending on the perspective of dissimilar others. From the perspective of such culturally different countries as France, England, Spain, the Czech Republic, the U. S., China, Japan, Korea and Indonesia, German be-

behavioral patterns in all areas of life are determined by its cultural standards (Thomas 2000a).

Seven German cultural standards and orientation patterns become evident on the basis of this research and emphasize:

- task orientation (tasks are more important than people)
- rules and regulations (structures and rules are held in high esteem, adhered to and expected)
- directness/truth (low-context communication style. There is right and wrong and very little in between. The most direct path is always the most goal oriented and efficient.)
- interpersonal distance (don't get involved in the business of others: keep your distance and be discrete!)
- internalized control
- time management (time is a valuable commodity and may not be squandered. Planning and scheduling are essential.)
- separation of the personal and public domains

If such culture-specific, in this case German, cultural standards are validated by other scientific disciplines such as literature, philosophy, sociology, ethnology and religion, in addition to studies in comparative culture, then it can be assumed that these are core cultural standards. Core cultural standards can be defined as such because they come into play not only in specific problem situations or a narrowly defined scope of action, but tend to mirror overall culture-specific orientation patterns. These standards become the unmistakable and characteristic behavioral patterns of individuals of a specific country or cultural environment.

In the example of the visiting Chinese delegation at the beginning of the chapter, the German host refuses to deal with the Chinese culture and his guests' cultural characteristics. After arguing with his colleague, he decides to concentrate on improving his presentation slides and "getting the job done". Again, the emphasis is on the task rather than the people involved. In this scenario, the German cultural standard of "task orientation" kicks into gear since the German expects to be successful if he behaves "normally", that is he welcomes his guests in a friendly manner, focuses on the facts and his task of hosting the delegation and presents highly sophisticated information. The Chinese guests, on the other hand, expect their German hosts to go out of their way to organize, facilitate and direct procedures in order to create an atmosphere of utmost social harmony and build a basis for mutual respect, trust and acknowledgment, especially since this is the delegation's first visit. The Chinese themselves are accustomed to such formalities and, as guests, will attempt to support their hosts in achieving this goal. Thus it is extremely important that social standing be emphasized in

public, at meetings and dinner engagements. The social hierarchy becomes evident when high-ranking individuals are addressed first, receive sufficient praise and acknowledgment and are seated according to their rank. According to their specific cultural standard of “maintaining and giving face”, the Chinese will attempt to simplify matters for the host by appearing modest to the point of self-effacement. They will compliment their host frequently, bring appropriate gifts upon their arrival and show profuse gratitude whenever possible. This show of modesty and discretion clearly does not indicate that they have nothing to say or do not have an opinion. Although they express gratitude at nearly every turn, it does not necessarily mean that they are overly impressed by their German partner’s organizational ability with regard to the management of the site visit. All these gestures have to do with giving face in an attempt to create harmony and build trust. From the Chinese point of view, this behavior is a part of their natural etiquette and is expected in the presence of high-ranking hosts. If they were to behave differently, they would feel guilty and socially incompetent. Most likely, the head of the German delegation will remain oblivious to this aspect of his guests’ behavior. From his purely task-oriented perspective, he will be aware of only a fraction of the efforts being made on the part of his Chinese partners to ensure an atmosphere of harmony. The behavioral aspects that he does notice, he will probably regard as unnecessary beating around the bush and irrelevant chitchat. His judgment and rejection of this behavior is based on his conviction that it has nothing to do with “the task” at hand and that there is no concrete reason for the exaggerated praise for task-related performance.

The example of comparisons between core cultural standards such as “task orientation” from the German perspective and “giving and maintaining face” on the part of the Chinese can also be observed in individuals from different national cultures in identical areas of task-related actions. Behavior can be documented and evaluated according to the differences and similarities observed, including the extent to which it differs. In the case of the previous example involving the different approaches to dealing with complex problem situations preferred by the German and American work teams, the domain or department-specific cultural standards become evident and can be defined. This makes it possible to predict and explain the observed individuals’ behavioral patterns. In contrast to core cultural standards, domain-specific cultural standards require a specific task framework in which to operate, such as in the example given above involving complex problem-solving strategies in workgroups. Thus, they are goal, task and context bound and, as such, are relied on for orientation and applied by individuals who operate within this context.

Relevant studies (Thomas and Schenk 1996) indicate that aside from

core and domain-specific cultural standards, something resembling contextual standards can also become operational. What is meant here is culture-specific basic orientation that obligates or even forces individuals of a given culture to act according to a very specific and narrowly defined basic behavioral pattern. This basic orientation operates holistically, that is, on all three psychologically relevant levels (cognitive, emotional and behavioral). According to Confucian teachings, the elderly are treated with reverence and special respect not only within the own family, but also in all aspects of public life, regardless of their social status, personal fame or personality (Thomas and Schenk, 2001). This form of “seniority orientation” is responsible for the profound transformation that takes place when a much older person joins a group of younger people of nearly the same age and begins to get involved in the social happening. The entire situation, the ambience and the social setting undergoes a shift. Everything changes. The operational frame of reference and the dynamic change as the focus shifts to the older person. Without having to speak or act in any particular way, all those present must reorient. Through activation of the contextual cultural standard “seniority orientation”, new action impulses and possibilities arise but also impose limitations. Much of what occurs in the group after the older person arrives is the cultural standard in action, which, upon closer analysis, can only be understood within the context of the entire social setting.

1.1.4 Identifying Cultural Standards

Much research has been done in an effort to identify cultural standards (Tiandis 1995; Brislin et al. 1986; Landis and Bhagat 1996; Thomas 2000b), all of which attempted to analyze the so-called critical incidents. The goal here was to identify those cultural differences and special characteristics that came into play during an intercultural encounter. The most practical and frequently used approach is to interview a large pool of candidates with experience in diverse encounter situations, for example within the context of student and youth exchange programs, field experts assigned overseas or international experts working on assignments in Germany. The questions asked relate to the difficulties and problems they experienced repeatedly in dealing with foreign partners, which different, unexpected and inexplicable reactions they typically encountered on a regular basis when dealing with their other-culture partners and what explanations they had for unfamiliar and unexpected behavior. For instance, German managers

Intercultural competence and cooperation with individuals from diverse national origins is becoming increasingly important, with international organizations calling for applied intercultural competence as a key qualification.

Volume 1 of the handbook explores the basics of intercultural interaction, namely:

- National and organizational cultures
- Cultural standards
- Foreign language competence
- Perception, communication, cooperation
- Learning and acculturation.

According to the Regensburg Concept, determining competency at different levels is clearly defined under the headings: diagnosis, training, evaluation and coaching.

In closing, we identify the following areas of practical application for intercultural competence:

- Management and negotiating
- Marketing
- HR development
- Conflict management and mediation
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Global corporate communication.

The areas of practical application mentioned here make up an overall strategic concept for interculturality in corporations.

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