

CHAPTER 2



Defining Communication as an Element of Culture

What You Can Learn From This Chapter

How definitions of communication reflect culture by comparing Western models to a Confucian understanding

What distinguishes intercultural communication from other forms of communication

Applications of ethical systems to intercultural interactions

The skills that make you competent in intercultural communication

You've probably heard many different definitions of the English word **communication**. If you look the word up in a dictionary such as the unabridged edition of the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, you'd find that communication is derived from the Latin *communicare*, meaning to share with or to make common, as in giving to another a part or share of your thoughts, hopes, and knowledge. In this chapter, you'll discover that even how communication is defined and used varies by culture.

In Chapter 1, you read how the definitions of the words *culture*, *race*, *sub-culture*, *ethnicity*, *co-culture*, and *subgroup* change through continuing social debate. In this chapter, you'll learn how communication itself is a cultural element by studying different models of communication. You'll also learn about the different ways communication and culture are studied and about the skills required to become more effective in intercultural communication.

Because communication is an element of culture, it has often been said that communication and culture are inseparable. As Alfred G. Smith (1966) wrote in his preface to *Communication and Culture*, culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. Communication requires coding and symbols that must be learned and shared. Godwin C. Chu (1977) observed that every cultural pattern and every single act of social behavior involve communication. To be understood, the two must be studied together. Culture cannot be known without a study of communication, and communication can only be understood with an understanding of the culture it supports.

WESTERN DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNICATION

Origins

The study of communication in Western culture has a recorded history of some 2,500 years and is said to have begun in Greece with Aristotle's *Rhetoric and Poetics*, which described the process of communication as involving a speaker, the speech act, an audience, and a purpose. Study has continued through Roman rhetorical theory, continental traditions, and two centuries in the United States.

Transmission Models

In the United States, the Aristotelian description of communication was adapted by the behavioral sciences to the study of communication in applied settings. Communication was studied as the means of transmitting ideas. For example, agricultural scientists wanted more effective ways of communicating new agricultural technologies to farmers, and the U.S. government wanted effective ways of communicating health information to the peoples of developing countries. The conceptualization of communication at this time could be labeled machinelike or mechanistic. Communication was conceptualized as one-way, top-down, and suited for the transmission media of print, telephones, radio, and television.

Western transmission models emphasized the instrumental function of communication; that is, effectiveness was evaluated in terms of success in the manipulation of others to achieve one's personal goal. One example of this approach is David Berlo's (1960) *The Process of Communication*. Berlo,

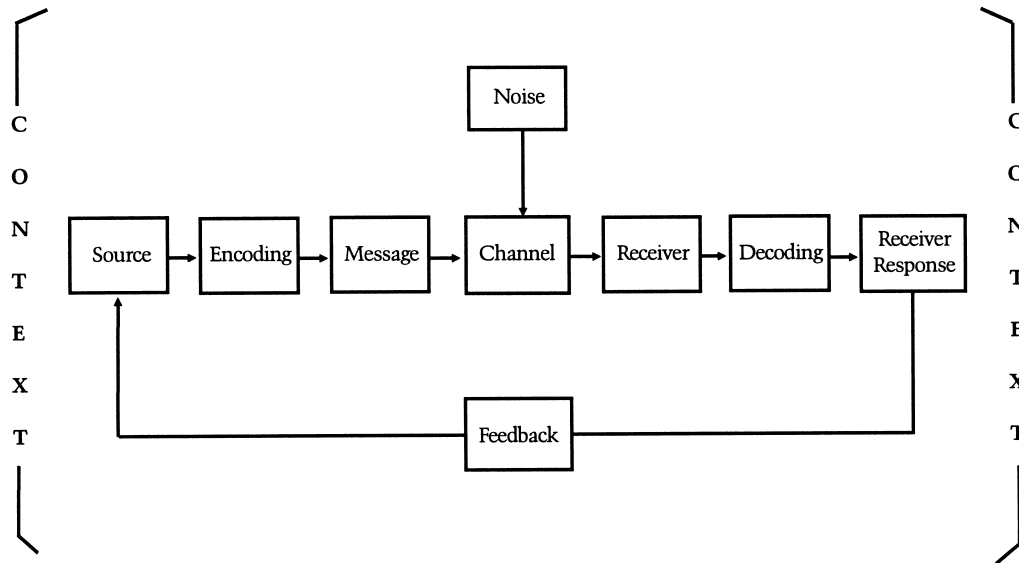


Figure 2.1 Ten components of communication.

though, emphasized that communication is a dynamic process, as the variables in the process are interrelated and influence each other. Berlo didn't see audiences as passive; their actions affected the process.

Components of Communication

Because the transmission models of communication clearly identified components in the communication process, they are particularly useful in beginning a study of communication. You are better able to understand communication when you understand the components of the process (DeVito, 1986). The components of communication, shown in Figure 2.1, are source, encoding, message, channel, noise, receiver, decoding, receiver response, feedback, and context.

Source. The **source** is the person with an idea he or she desires to communicate. Examples are CBS, the White House, your instructor, and your mother.

Encoding. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), humans are not able to share thoughts directly. Your communication is in the form of a symbol

representing the idea you desire to communicate. **Encoding** is the process of putting an idea into a symbol.

The symbols into which you encode your thoughts vary. You can encode thoughts into words, and you can also encode thoughts into nonspoken symbols. Tobin and Dobard (1999), for example, have shown how messages were encoded in quilts made by slaves.

Message. The term **message** identifies the encoded thought. Encoding is the process, the verb; the message is the resulting object.

Channel. The term **channel** is used technically to refer to the means by which the encoded message is transmitted. Today, you might feel more comfortable using the word *media*. The channel or medium, then, may be print, electronic, or the light and sound waves of face-to-face communication.

Noise. The term **noise** technically refers to anything that distorts the message the source encodes. Noise can be of many forms:

- External noise can be the sights, sounds, and other stimuli that draw your attention away from the message. Having a radio on while reading is external noise.
- Internal noise refers to your thoughts and feelings that can interfere with the message. For example, being tired or being hungry can distract you from paying complete attention to the message.
- “Semantic noise” refers to how alternative meanings of the source’s message symbols can be distracting. For example, a speaker’s use of uncalled-for profanity can cause us to wonder why the speaker used profanity and draw attention away from the message itself.



Series of French stamps commemorates *la communication*.

The uniqueness of men—the superiority of men in the world of animals—lies not in his ability to perceive ideas, but to perceive that he perceives, and to transfer his perceptions to others' minds through words.

—Albert Einstein

Receiver. The **receiver** is the person who attends to the message. Receivers may be intentional; that is, they may be the people the source desired to communicate with, or they may be any person who comes upon and attends to the message.

Decoding. **Decoding** is the opposite process of encoding and just as much an active process. The receiver is actively involved in the communication process by assigning meaning to the symbols received.

Receiver response. **Receiver response** refers to anything the receiver does after having attended to and decoded the message. That response can range from doing nothing to taking some action or actions that may or may not be the action desired by the source (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1

COMPONENTS IN ACTION

Let's use this textbook as an example of the first eight components of communication. As the author of the text, I am the source; I have ideas about intercultural communication I want to communicate. My selecting the words, figures, and pictures to communicate my ideas is encoding. The message is those words, figures, and pictures before you. The channel is the print medium of a book. You are the receiver who decodes as you read. Your decoding might be affected by the noise around you or competing thoughts and feelings. Your responses as the receiver might include highlighting sections for later study and discussing the material with classmates.

These eight components can be conceptualized as a linear model. Communication seems to start with the source and end with a receiver response. These eight components alone describe communication as a one-way process. And much of communication is a one-way process: Some communicators can have no knowledge of the receiver's response. The author of a text may not get information back from readers. A guest on a radio interview show may have no knowledge of audience response.

Feedback. **Feedback** refers to that portion of the receiver response of which the source has knowledge and to which the source attends and assigns meaning. A reader of this text may have many responses, but only when the reader responds to a survey or writes a letter to the author does feedback occur. When a radio interview show host receives enthusiastic telephone calls and invites a guest back, feedback has occurred.

Feedback makes communication a two-way or interactive process. Linear and interactive models seem to suggest that communication is an isolated single discrete act independent of events that preceded or might follow it.

Context. The final component of communication is **context**. Generally, context can be defined as the environment in which the communication takes place and which helps define the communication. If you know the physical context, you can predict with a high degree of accuracy much of the communication. For example, you have certain knowledge and expectations of the communication that occurs within synagogues, mosques, and churches. At times, you intentionally plan a certain physical environment for your communication: You may want to locate your romantic communications in a quiet, dimly lit restaurant or on a secluded beach. The choice of the environment, the context, helps assign the desired meaning to the communicated words.

In social relationships as well, the relationship between the source and receiver may help define much of the meaning of the communication. Again, if you know the context you can predict with a high degree of accuracy much of the communication. For example, knowing that a person is being stopped by a police officer for speeding is enough to predict much of the communication. Certain things are likely to be said and done; other things are very unlikely.

Culture is also context. Every culture has its own worldview; its own way of thinking of activity, time, and human nature; its own way of perceiving self; and its own system of social organization. Knowing each of these helps you assign meaning to the symbols.

The component of context helps you recognize that the extent to which the source and receiver have similar meanings for the communicated symbols and similar understandings of the culture in which the communication takes place are critical to the success of the communication.

Humanistic Models

Other models of communication emphasize a humanistic approach to understanding communication. A transactional model of communication, for example, shows that, in addition to sending and receiving messages

simultaneously, communicators take their relationship into account. Recognizing that communication is transactional allows us to understand, for example, that the source can know the intended receiver well enough to incorporate that personal knowledge into the encoding of the message. A transactional understanding of communication helps us recognize that the exact same words can be spoken to diverse people with different meanings.

You have probably had instructors who were one-way communicators, others who were two-way communicators, and others who were transactional communicators. A guest lecturer who reads a prepared text and accepts no questions is a one-way communicator. An instructor who uses information from examinations to adapt lessons and who responds to questions by elaborating on content is a two-way communicator. An instructor who refers to the experiences of specific members of the class to explain concepts is a transactional communicator.

Every textbook on communication, it seems, has its own definition. This seeming lack of agreement reflects the fact that many different approaches are taken to the study of communication (Fisher, 1978), and each approach emphasizes different aspects. If you desire one definition that emphasizes that communication is intentional, symbolic, and involves at least two people, you might say that communication occurs when symbols are manipulated by one person to stimulate meaning in another person (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993).

OTHER DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNICATION

Superior and Subordinate Roles

Some critics within the United States recognized that the way communication was defined reflected important cultural values. For example, semanticist S. I. Hayakawa (1978) noted that decoding—or listening—seems to give the receiver a subordinate role to the source. When someone speaks, others stop what they are doing to listen. Therefore, it would seem that the source is viewed as more active and as more important in the process. Hayakawa's observation makes it clear that cultural beliefs affect how the process of communication is defined.

The transmission models can lead you to think of communication as consisting of an active source and a passive receiver. Speaking may be considered a more noble activity and may demand that others cease other activities to listen. Indeed, in many cultures, listening does place one in a subordinate role to that of the source. In other cultures, where the group's history and knowledge

is told and retold verbally, the role of the listener who accurately remembers is critically important.

The story is told that the Puritans, believing to have been called to save heathens, preached to the American Indians. The Indians affirmed conversions to Christianity to the delight of the early settlers. Then the Indians told the Puritans the Indian story of creation and asked the settlers to affirm it. The Indian communication style was not to disagree but to listen and affirm. The Puritans were disappointed that communication, in the Western understanding of communication, had failed. In the American Indian understanding of communication, it had not.

That other cultures define communication in diverse ways demonstrates that communication is an element of culture (Krippendorff, 1993). For example, defining communication from a Confucian perspective emphasizes other uses.

Confucianism

Definitions of communication from many Asian countries stress harmony (Chen & Starosta, 1996). This is most notable in cultures with a Confucian tradition.

The Chinese scholar K'ung-Fu-tzu, a title the Jesuits later Latinized as Confucius (550-478 B.C.E.¹), lived in a time when the feudal system in China was collapsing. Confucius proposed a government based less on heredity than on morality and merit.

Societies heavily influenced today by Confucian history or tradition are China, North and South Korea, Singapore, and many East Asian countries with large Chinese communities.

Confucius set up an ethical-moral system intended ideally to govern all relationships in the family, community, and state. Confucius taught that society was made up of five relationships: those between ruler and subjects (the relation of righteousness), husband and wife (chaste conduct), father and son (love), elder brother and younger brother (order), and friend and friend (faithfulness).

Three of these five bases of relations occur within the family. The regulating factors in family relationships are extended to the whole community and state. The chief virtue is filial piety, a combination of loyalty and reverence, which demands that the son honor and respect his father and fulfill the demands of his elders.

Confucianism emphasizes virtue, selflessness, duty, patriotism, hard work, and respect for hierarchy, both familial and societal. Just as George Washington

and the story of the cherry tree is used in the United States to teach the value of honesty, Confucianism reinforces its lessons about people who represent particular virtues. For example, Chinese children learn about such heroes as Mu Lan, a woman of the 6th century who disguised herself as a man and served 12 years as a soldier so that her ill father would not be disgraced or punished because he could not report for military duty. Mu Lan teaches courage and filial devotion.

Confucianism guides social relationships: “To live in harmony with the universe and with your fellow man through proper behavior.” Confucianism considers balance and harmony in human relationships to be the basis of society. June Yum (1988) describes five effects that Confucianism has on interpersonal communication:

1. *Particularism*. There is no universal pattern of rules governing relationships: There are no rules governing interaction with someone whose status is unknown. Instead of applying the same rule to everyone, such factors as status, intimacy, and context create different communication rules for diverse people. In fact, there are several patterns guiding interaction with others whose status is known. In the Confucian country of Korea, it is quite common for strangers to find out each other’s age in the first few minutes of conversation and adjust their language to show respect. Koreans are friends (*chingu*) only with those whose age is within a few years of their own. If a male acquaintance is older than this “friendship age range,” he must be addressed as *adjussi* and if female as *adjumoni*—terms that equate roughly to “uncle” and “aunt,” respectively.

2. *Role of intermediaries*. Rituals should be followed in establishing relationships. In China, it is not unusual to use a third party to negotiate with future in-laws about wedding plans and, in general, to use a third party to avoid direct confrontations and resolve disputes (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

3. *Reciprocity*. Complementary obligations are the base of relationships. Gratitude and indebtedness are important parts of Chinese culture. For example, a person feels uneasy to be indebted to someone and payback is necessary to achieve balance in the relationship. Reciprocity is the basic rule of interpersonal relationships (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Obligations in relationships are contrary to Western ideas of individualism.

4. *Ingroup/outgroup distinction*. Scollon and Scollon (1991) argue that the distinction between inside and outside influences every aspect of Chinese culture. **Ingroup** members engage in freer and deeper talk and may find it difficult to develop personal relationships with outgroup members (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). There can even be different language codes for ingroup members.

5. *Overlap of personal and public relationships.* Business and pleasure are mixed. Frequent contacts lead to common experiences. This contrasts with Western patterns of keeping public and private lives separate. There are several Chinese terms for the English word *communication* including *jiao liu* (to exchange), *chuan bo* (to disseminate), and *gou tong* (to connect among people). The Chinese term *he* denotes harmony, peace, unity, and kindness. Seeking harmony with family and others is the goal of communication in Chinese culture (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

As a consequence of the value placed on balance and social harmony, Chang and Holt (1991) explain how the Chinese have developed many verbal strategies such as compliments, greeting rituals, and so on to maintain good interpersonal relations. Fong (2000), for example, has described the “luck talk” (speech acts related to luck) during the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Korea adopted Confucianism as a state religion for six centuries. Yum (1987) explains how the Korean language easily accommodates the Confucian rules of relationships. A grammatical form of direct address, called an **honorific**, for example, shows respect. English speakers might vary in how they ask a child, a friend, or a grandparent to sit by using a sentence, whereas Korean speakers would use different forms of the root *ahnta*, meaning to sit or to take a seat:

To a child, younger person, or person of lower rank (informal)	<i>ahnjo</i> or <i>ahnjara</i>
To a friend or person of equal rank (polite)	<i>ahnjuseyo</i>
To an elder, person of higher rank, or honored person (more polite)	<i>ahnjushipshio</i>

Korean has special vocabularies for each sex, for different degrees of social status and degrees of intimacy, and for formal occasions. When two people are introduced, they first engage in small talk to determine each other’s social position in order to know who should use common language and who should use honorific language. And ironically because Confucianism does not consider relationships with strangers, Koreans are said to ignore—often to the point that some would consider rude—anyone to whom they have not been introduced. In modern Korea, a generation gap exists: Junior business associates may address seniors with familiar rather than honorific language.

The collectivist values of Confucianism mandate a style of communication in which respecting the relationship through communication is more important

than the information exchanged. Group harmony, avoidance of loss of face to others and oneself, and a modest presentation of oneself are means of respecting the relationship. One does not say what one actually thinks when it might hurt others in the group.

In some sense, the same ethic can be found in business dealings. Much of commercial life in China is lubricated by *guanxi*, a concept best translated as “connections” or “personal relationships.” Guanxi is an alternative to the legal trappings of Western capitalism in that business is cemented by the informal relationships of trust and mutual obligation. Sometimes viewed as bribery, *guanxi* is less like using professional lobbyists than relying on mutual friends among whom trust can be maintained.

Earlier, you read how communication was defined in the United States in a mechanistic way by components. A Confucian understanding would define communication as an infinite interpretive process where all parties are searching to develop and maintain a social relationship. Carey (1989) describes this as a ritual model of communication that “is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (p. 18).

COMMUNICATION STUDIES APPROACHES

There are many different approaches to the study of communication and culture, among them international, global, cross-cultural, and intercultural.

International

International communication has been used to refer to the study of the flow of mediated communication between and among countries. It has also been used to refer to the study of comparative mass communication systems and to the study of communication between national governments.

Global

Global communication refers to the study of transborder transfer of information and data and opinions and values by groups, institutions, and governments and the issues that arise from the transfer (Frederick, 1993).

Cross-Cultural

Cross-cultural generally refers to comparing phenomena across cultures. Thus, a cross-cultural study of women's roles in society would compare what women actually do in diverse cultures.

Intercultural

Intercultural communication generally refers to face-to-face interactions among people of diverse cultures. Imagine how difficult communication can be if the source and receiver are in different contexts and share few symbols. That's one way of defining intercultural communication.

Origins

The formal study of intercultural communication in the United States originated in 1946 when Congress passed the Foreign Service Act, which established the Foreign Service Institute to provide language and anthropological cultural training for foreign diplomats. Outside the Foreign Service Institute, the study of intercultural communication is generally associated with the publication of Edward T. Hall's book *The Silent Language* in 1959. While associated with the Foreign Service Institute, Hall applied abstract anthropological concepts to the practical world of foreign service and extended the anthropological view of culture to include communication. Later in his popular book, Hall defined culture as basically a communication process (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). President John F. Kennedy's creation of the **Peace Corps** in the early 1960s increased interest in knowing more about how people of diverse cultures could communicate more effectively.

Applications of Communication Theories

The German sociologist Georg Simmel's (1858-1918) concepts of "the stranger" and "social distance" were precursors to Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (Rogers, 1999). This theory assumes that during the initial phase of interaction with another person your primary communication goal is to reduce your uncertainty about that person. Thus you are attempting to discover information about the other person and to share information about yourself. Gudykunst and his colleagues (see, e.g., Gudykunst, 1985) have applied this theory to intercultural communication.

Another communication approach focuses on the bipolarizing tendencies of language and research. Much of it focused on the concept of “the other.” **Othering** refers to the labeling and degrading of cultures and groups outside of one’s own (Riggins, 1997). Indigenous peoples, women, lesbians and gay men, and ethnic groups have been “othered” by other groups in language. One common way is to represent the Other as the binary opposite, for example, “Colonists were hard-working; natives were lazy” (Jandt & Tanno, 2001).

It seems as people create a category called “us,” another category of “not-us” or “them” is created. The collective pronouns “us” and “them” become powerful influences on perception. The names given to “them” can be used to justify suppression and even extermination. Bosmajian (1983) calls this “the language of oppression.” The Nazis labeled Jews “bacilli,” “parasites,” “disease,” “demon,” and “plague.” Why do the words used to refer to “them” matter? It’s because although killing another human being may be unthinkable, “exterminating a disease” is not. Segregation was justified when Blacks were considered “chattel” or property. The subjugation of American Indians was defensible when the word “savage” was used. And the words “chicks” and “babes” labeled women as inferior.

In this book you will find no reference to any group as “they” or “them,” for it is my belief that doing so encourages you to continue thinking of “them” as different from, and in some way not as good as, “we.”

We and They

Father, Mother, and Me,
Sister and Auntie say
All the people like us are We,
And everyone else is They.
And They live over the sea
While we live over the way,
But—would you believe it?
— They look upon We
As only a sort of They!

We eat pork and beef
With cow-horn-handled knives.
They who gobble Their rice off a leaf

Are horrified out of Their lives;
While They who live up a tree,
Feast on grubs and clay,
(Isn’t it scandalous?)
look upon We
As a simple disgusting They!

We eat kitcheny food.
We have doors that latch.
They drink milk and blood
Under an open thatch. We have
doctors to fee.
They have wizards to pay.

And (impudent heathen!) They look
upon We
As a quite impossible They!

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like us, are We

And everyone else is They:
But if you cross over
the sea,
Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!)
looking on We
As only a sort of They!

—Rudyard Kipling

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS

As a branch of philosophy, ethics addresses the question of how we ought to lead our lives. Andersen (1991) makes clear that ethical theories tend to reflect the culture in which they were produced.

Major Ethical Theories

Western

May and Sharratt (1994) identify four values fundamental to Western ethics:

- *Autonomy*. Being free to act consistent with one's own principles
- *Justice*. Impartiality; giving each person his or her legitimate due or portion of the whole
- *Responsibility*. Accountability for the consequences of one's actions, including a failure to act
- *Care*. Partiality to those who cannot protect themselves and to whom we are in special relationships

Other ethical perspectives stress other values.

African

African ethics stress the well-being of the community and economic considerations over political rights. The well-being of the individual derives from the well-being of the community. As Menkiti (1984) wrote,

Rather, man is defined by reference to the environing community. . . . [T]he reality of the community takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be. . . . [P]ersons become persons only after a process of incorporation. Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere dangles, to whom the description “person” does not fully apply. (pp. 171-172)

Buddhist

The Buddhist ethical perspective is individualistic: “The ultimate responsibility for any act rests with the individual” (Beyer, 1974, p. 10). Value is placed on patience, compassion, self-sacrifice, kindness, and love, which are to be pursued for the betterment of the person if not in this life, then in the next. The emphasis on the next life and the rejection of the world as an illusion isolate the individual from family and society (Kim, 1975).

Hindu

Central to Indian Hindu perspectives is ending human suffering through active intervention in this world to make it better. Whereas Buddhism values patience and a passive approach, for Indian philosophers the path to take in ending suffering is as important as the ending of suffering (Sharma, 1965). Hinduism strives for the oneness of reality, for the obliteration of all distinctions including individualism, to merge with the absolute (Dissanayake, 1987).

Islamic

Traditional Islamic perspectives on ethics are based in its religious concepts. There are different rules of ethical conduct for women and for men. Non-Muslims are to be treated differently than Muslims. Islamic ethics, like some Hindu ethics, are highly activist and interventionist.

Ethics Across Cultures

What, though, guides the interactions of people from cultures with diverse ethical perspectives? Are there global values to guide intercultural interactions?

Kale (1997) argues that peace is the fundamental human value. The use of peace applies not only to relationships among countries but to “the right of all people to live at peace with themselves and their surroundings” (p. 450).

From this fundamental value, he developed four ethical principles to guide intercultural interactions:

- Ethical communicators address people of other cultures with the same respect that they would like to receive themselves. Intercultural communicators should not demean or belittle the cultural identity of others through verbal or nonverbal communication.
- Ethical communicators seek to describe the world as they perceive it as accurately as possible. What is perceived to be the truth may vary from one culture to another; truth is socially constructed. This principle means that ethical communicators do not deliberately mislead or deceive.
- Ethical communicators encourage people of other cultures to express themselves in their uniqueness. This principle respects the right of people to expression regardless of how popular or unpopular their ideas may be.
- Ethical communicators strive for identification with people of other cultures. Intercultural communicators should emphasize the commonalities of cultural beliefs and values rather than their differences.

Developing ethical principles to guide intercultural interactions is a difficult task. Even though Kale's principles may be more acceptable in some cultures than in others, they are certainly a beginning step.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Effective intercultural communication involves more than understanding a group's norms. There have been many attempts to identify the skills needed to be more effective in intercultural communication.

Business Approach

One group concerned with the success of individuals abroad is international business. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), for example, identify three skill areas:

- Skills related to the maintenance of self (mental health, psychological well-being, stress reduction, feelings of self-confidence)

- Skills related to the fostering of relationships with host nationals
- Cognitive skills that promote a correct perception of the host environment and its social systems

Military Approach

Another group concerned with the success of individuals overseas is the military. The United States Navy (“Overseas Diplomacy,” 1979), for example, attempted to assess readiness to serve overseas. The Navy identified eight skills needed for success:

1. *Self-awareness.* Ability to use information about yourself in puzzling situations, to understand how others see you and use that information to cope with difficult situations
2. *Self-respect.* Self-confidence or due respect for yourself, your character, and your conduct
3. *Interaction.* How effectively you communicate with people
4. *Empathy.* Viewing things through another person’s eyes or of being aware of other people’s feelings
5. *Adaptability.* How fast you adjust to unfamiliar environments or to norms other than your own
6. *Certainty.* Ability to deal with situations that demand that you act in one way even though your feelings tell you something else; the greater your capacity to accept contradictory situations, the more you are able to deal with them
7. *Initiative.* Being open to new experiences
8. *Acceptance.* Tolerance or a willingness to accept things that vary from what you are familiar with

Communication Approach

Definitions of intercultural competence more grounded in communication have tended to stress the development of skills that transform one from a monocultural person into a multicultural person. The multicultural person is

one who respects cultures and has tolerance for differences (Belay, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Chen (1989, 1990), for example, identifies four skill areas: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness.

Personality Strength

The main personal traits that affect intercultural communication are self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and social relaxation. Self-concept refers to the way in which a person views the self. Self-disclosure refers to willingness of individuals to openly and appropriately reveal information about themselves to their counterparts. Self-monitoring refers to using social comparison information to control and modify your self-presentation and expressive behavior. Social relaxation is the ability to reveal little anxiety in communication. Effective communicators must know themselves well and, through their self-awareness, initiate positive attitudes. Individuals must express a friendly personality to be competent in intercultural communication.

Communication Skills

Individuals must be competent in verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Intercultural communication skills require message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Message skills refer to the ability to understand and use the language and feedback. Behavioral flexibility is the ability to select an appropriate behavior in diverse contexts. Interaction management means handling the procedural aspects of conversation, such as the ability to initiate a conversation. Interaction management emphasizes a person's other-oriented ability to interaction, such as attentiveness and responsiveness. Social skills are empathy and identity maintenance. Empathy is the ability to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person. Identity maintenance is the ability to maintain a counterpart's identity by communicating back an accurate understanding of that person's identity. In other words, a competent communicator must be able to deal with diverse people in different situations.

Psychological Adjustment

Effective communicators must be able to acclimate to new environments. They must be able to handle the feelings of "culture shock," such as frustration, stress, and alienation in ambiguous situations caused by new environments.

Cultural Awareness

To be competent in intercultural communication, individuals must understand the social customs and social system of the host culture. Understanding how a people think and behave is essential for effective communication with them.

FROM THE INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

When communicating with people from different cultures, it is important to remember that culture and communication are strongly connected. The way that people view communication—what it is, how to do it, and reasons for doing it—is part of their culture. The chance of misunderstanding between members of different cultures increases when this important connection is forgotten.

In general, people from Western and Asian cultures have the greatest chance of misunderstanding each other. Much of this misunderstanding comes from the fact that Western and Asian cultures have two very different views of communication. Western cultures, especially the United States, give higher status to the speaker or “source” of information than to the “receiver,” the person who pays attention to the information. The source encodes a message (information that the source wants to share with other people) by putting it into symbols (usually words or nonverbal gestures) and then sending it through a channel. A channel can be print media such as magazines and newspapers; electronic media such as television, radio, and the Internet; or sounds traveling through the air when two people speak face-to-face. Sometimes, things make it difficult for the message to reach the receiver. These things are called “noise.” Noise can be physical (e.g., loud sound), emotional (e.g., strong feelings like sadness or anxiety), or biological (e.g., being hungry or sick). When receivers get the message, they must “decode” or try to understand it. For example, if the source encodes a message using English, the receivers must use their knowledge of the English language to understand it. Often, the source pays attention to the reactions of the receivers. This information or feedback from the receiver is called “receiver response.”

Asian cultures view communication as communicators cooperating to make meaning. This model of communication reflects Confucian collectivist values because respecting the relationship through communication can be more important than the information exchanged.

In intercultural communication situations, it is natural for people to be aware of the potential for various misunderstandings and to want to avoid them. However, despite the best intentions, serious misunderstanding and even



At a bazaar in Iran you can find food, clothing, jewelry, electronics, currency exchange, and more. The experienced bargainer with effective use of spoken language and nonverbal communication can purchase items for half the original price.

SOURCE: Rasheed Irani. Used by permission.

conflicts can occur. One reason for this is that even though people are consciously attempting to avoid problems, they still are making ethical judgments as they are communicating. The values that people hold affect both their communication decisions and interpretation of what others communicate.

Western and Asian cultures often have the greatest misunderstandings when ethics are considered. For example, an Asian who had a Confucian view of communication would think it perfectly acceptable to give gifts to business associates and to hire one's own relatives. Both of these actions help maintain social relationships. However, people in the United States would consider these actions bribery and nepotism, both of which are against the law in the United States. So differing ethics can cause conflicts, especially when what one culture

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may consider morally wrong, another may actually encourage. When such conflicts occur, people who want to be ethical intercultural communicators should try to understand, respect, and accept each individual's ethical perspective.

Good intercultural communicators have personality strength (strong sense of self and are socially relaxed), communication skills (verbal and nonverbal), psychological adjustment (ability to adapt to new situations), and cultural awareness (understanding how people of different cultures think and act). These areas can be divided into eight different skills: self-awareness (using knowledge about yourself to deal with difficult situations), self-respect (confidence in what you think, feel, and do), interaction (how effectively you communicate with people), empathy (being able to see and feel things from other people's points of view), adaptability (how fast you can adjust to new situations and norms), certainty (the ability to do things opposite to what you feel), initiative (being open to new situations), and acceptance (being tolerant or accepting of unfamiliar things).

NOTE

1. Recently, B.C.E. (before the common era) and C.E. (common era) have been used to avoid the more culturally limited B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord).

KEY TERMS

channel	global communication	noise
communication	honorific	othering
Confucianism	ingroup	Peace Corps
context	intercultural	receiver
cross-cultural	communication	receiver response
decoding	international	source
encoding	communication	
feedback	message	