Professional Communication (eTextbook)

Professional Communications OER

This project/resource was funded by the Alberta Open Educational Resources (ABOER) Initiative, which is made possible through an investment from the Alberta government

4. Interpersonal Communication in the Professional Environment

Developed by

JR Dingwall, Chuck Labrie, TK McLennon, and Laura Underwood for Olds College

MODULE OVERVIEW

Module Chapters

The chapters in this module include

- Communication and Diversity in Canadian Workplaces
- Your Interpersonal Communication Preferences
- Cross-Cultural Communication
- Conflict Resolution

Module Summary

In general, interpersonal communication is about how we respond to others in our environment. It is a core element of how we function in the workplace and in life. It is also about what others rightly or wrongly conclude about us or about what we say and do. The ability to communicate well in the workplace with people who are different is a core competency.

Interpersonal communication is a process that people use collectively to regulate and control social interactions. In these interactions, people with different communication experiences may see things in different ways. Our ability to consider these differences is vital to establishing a meaningful and productive communication exchange. This exchange requires having good interpersonal communication skills.

According to some experts and theorists, interpersonal communication can differ by its approach. A situational approach, for example, is one where communication focuses on, and is defined by, external quantitative factors such as the number of people involved in the process and their physical proximity. Another approach is developmental, which is based on qualitative factors. This approach views interpersonal communication affected by participant traits such as culture, sociological factors, and one's own psychological attributes.This developmental approach is the main focus of this module.

Interpersonal communication happens continually throughout life and takes on many forms. Each of these forms affect our personal communication style. The following are some examples:

- *What we say with words and how we say them:* the words we use to convey thoughts and meaning to others, along with utterances that impart this meaning.
- *What we say without words:* physical behaviours, expressions, body language, and movements that take the place of words.
- *Where we communicate:* the physical location—such as at home, on the street, at work, in social gatherings, and online.
- *Context*: the condition or situation that influences our communication, such as meetings, work groups, classrooms, parties, sad or traumatic events, happy and disappointing events.
- *With whom we communicate:* friends, family, authority figures, people who may be different in ethnicity, culture, race, nationality, or ability.

This module addresses several of these key forms of interpersonal communication to help prepare you for the working conditions of a modern, multicultural, and diverse workplace.

Diversity in the workplace in many ways mirrors Canada's diversity. The demographic of today's workforce in both the public and private sector is diverse in culture, religion, gender, ability, and generation.

The key to working in such diverse settings is to understand the idea of inclusion and how to adapt your communication style to it. In the chapter "Communication and Diversity in Canadian Workplaces," you will learn about some of the most important concepts related to diversity and inclusion, such as discrimination, stereotyping, and bias. You will discover how these concepts affect your perception and the way you choose to view others. Understanding the import of these concepts will help you recognize how they affect interpersonal communication and how you can avoid the pitfalls associated with them.

In the chapter "Your Interpersonal Communication Preferences" you will learn how self-perception and interpersonal awareness influence the behaviours you exhibit in communicating with others. This includes the ability to notice, interpret, and anticipate the concerns and feelings of others and to communicate this awareness empathetically.

Identifying your personal communication preferences is about understanding what comes naturally to you, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of different communication styles. Communication styles may also be affected by cultural attributes. For example, some cultures rely more on non-verbal than on verbal cues when communicating. Facial expressions, body language, and gestures also play an important part in interpersonal communication.

In today's workplace you will almost certainly work as a member of a team. So, you will learn about teamwork and collaboration and, in particular, how personal communication style affects group dynamics, roles, and decision making within a diverse and multicultural working group.

In the chapter "Cross-Cultural Communication" you will learn about the iceberg model of culture, which shows that what is easily visible of culture is usually just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface are many unseen but important elements, such as thought patterns, values, and assumptions. The chapter focuses on uncovering these hidden elements by examining theories that focus on cultural dimensions, explaining what happens during culture shock, and how to move from a monocultural to an intercultural mindset.

Because how we communicate is inherently influenced by our culture, the material in this chapter provides a foundation for a sought-after and somewhat rare communication skill set. The multicultural workplace can often become the lens through which we view culture and our situations within it. Appreciating multiculturalism and its imprint on the modern workplace is critical to creating positive and successful professional experiences.

Intercultural communication in or out of the workplace requires more than language skills. Adapting to intercultural working environments requires the development of attitudes appropriate to working with new cultures and expanding one's knowledge of the cultural profiles of people from specific countries and backgrounds.

In the chapters "Conflict Resolution" and "Interpersonal Communication Strategies" the focus is on addressing interpersonal conflicts occurring between two or more individuals. This is a common reality in today's diverse workplace. You will learn about conflict management styles such as the *competing style*, which emphasizes personal goals at the expense of relational goals with others; *avoiding style*, which avoids conflict as much as possible; *accommodating style*, which attempts to smooth over disagreements; *compromising style*, which tries to moderate concern for both personal and relational goals; and *collaborating style*, which finds ways to resolve conflict so that all sides feel they have achieved something positive.

Coping with conflicts in the workplace requires applying a variety of strategies, including informal conflict styles, as well as more formal negotiation techniques. Learning how to negotiate with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates to better cope with conflict situations is challenging and requires knowledge of your own response to conflict.

Relevance to Practice

Many businesses today have become global in an effort to reach new markets and remain competitive. In this process the human dimension of the modern workplace has changed both domestically and internationally. Where once a workplace consisted of people with similar backgrounds and characteristics, today workers in a company represent many different geographic regions and cultures. Your ability to adapt to this ever-changing environment is of paramount importance to employers.

Effective interpersonal communication within the context of human diversity and multiculturalism is a key skill for workers. More often than not, companies look for this skill when hiring and want to see it exhibited on the job.

Communicating is not just about language. Getting along well in the workplace is not only about having things in common. To succeed in the modern workplace, you will need to understand and accept the notion of inclusion. Doing so means putting the concept and practice of diversity into action where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed to create business value. Workers' interpersonal communication skills need to align well with this transition from diversity to inclusion.

Modern technologies allow workers to reach out and connect with colleagues in different regions of the world. These colleagues can be from varying backgrounds and cultures. In both local and global working environments, cross-cultural communication is quickly becoming the new working norm and brings new communication challenges to the workplace.

Learning Goals

Learning Goals

The aim of this module is for you to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to:

1. competently communicate in both a personally effective and socially appropriate manner within culturally diverse workplace settings, and
2. value interpersonal communication as integral to creating and fostering relationships.

Developmental Attributes

Upon successfully completing this module, you should:

Understand the following:

- That building effective communication skills is an ongoing process
- That people with different communication practices express themselves in different ways
- That we are often controlled by what we create through communication
- That cultural values, beliefs, and customs affect the communication process
- That communication can become complex as individuals from diverse cultures are added to the process

Know the following:

- How to translate knowledge of the communication process to actual interpersonal communication behaviours
- How to apply characteristics of cross-cultural relations such as acceptance, openness, and sensitivity
- Conflict resolution techniques that are particular to interpersonal communication in a culturally diverse workplace

Be able to do the following:

- Interpret conditions surrounding a cross-cultural communication interaction

- Present a desired self-image to influence reactions and impressions of others
- Recognize and decipher verbal and non-verbal coding in intercultural message exchanges
- Mediate conflict situations using empathy, appreciating disparate views, and forming rational arguments

Learning Outcomes for this Module

Upon successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. explain the benefits and challenges of diversity in Canadian workplaces;
2. apply cross-cultural communication best practices for a given context, and;
3. describe how characteristics of your conflict resolution style impact interpersonal communication within a diverse workplace.

Attribution Statement (Module Overview)

This Overview contains content from a the following source(s):

- Original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

LEARNING MATERIALS

Communication and Diversity in Canadian Workplaces

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- describe diversity within the context of a modern workplace,
- explain how language use influences communication in a diverse workplace,

- explain characteristics related to manifestations of diversity, and
- describe how diversity in the workplace can create challenges for effective interpersonal communication.

Topics

- Diversity communication essentials
- Demographics
- Diversity-related concepts and definitions
- Types of diversity
- Communication challenges

Introduction

Are you familiar with the term **diversity**? Perhaps you have encountered it at your school or heard about it in the media. A diverse group is one that consists of people with different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, and traits. Canadian workplaces are becoming more diverse as organizations realize what a diverse workforce can bring, from innovation and creativity to employee happiness and retention.

In this chapter we will explore some of the key types of diversity that you will likely encounter in your professional life. We begin with *diversity essentials*, reviewing the communications process with emphasis on encoding and decoding as the spots where communication problems can occur among people with different reference points. You'll then learn about why diversity matters in Canada and get a glimpse into our changing **demographics** along with concepts and definitions useful to demystifying diversity as well as inclusion.

There are more types of human diversity than we can possibly list, but we shine a spotlight on religion and culture, linguistic diversity, gender, sexual orientation, generation and age, socioeconomic, and ability in this chapter.

With the benefits that a diverse workforce brings come communication challenges like similarity-attraction phenomenon and fault lines, which we examine near the end of the chapter.

Working with people who are different from you can be complex. When you navigate this environment, you will learn new terminology. You will also experience behaviours, approaches, misunderstandings, and sources conflict that you may not have encountered before. By learning about the intricacies of interpersonal communication in a diverse workforce now, you will be prepared to develop mutually beneficial relationships in your future that can include anybody.

Diversity Communication Essentials
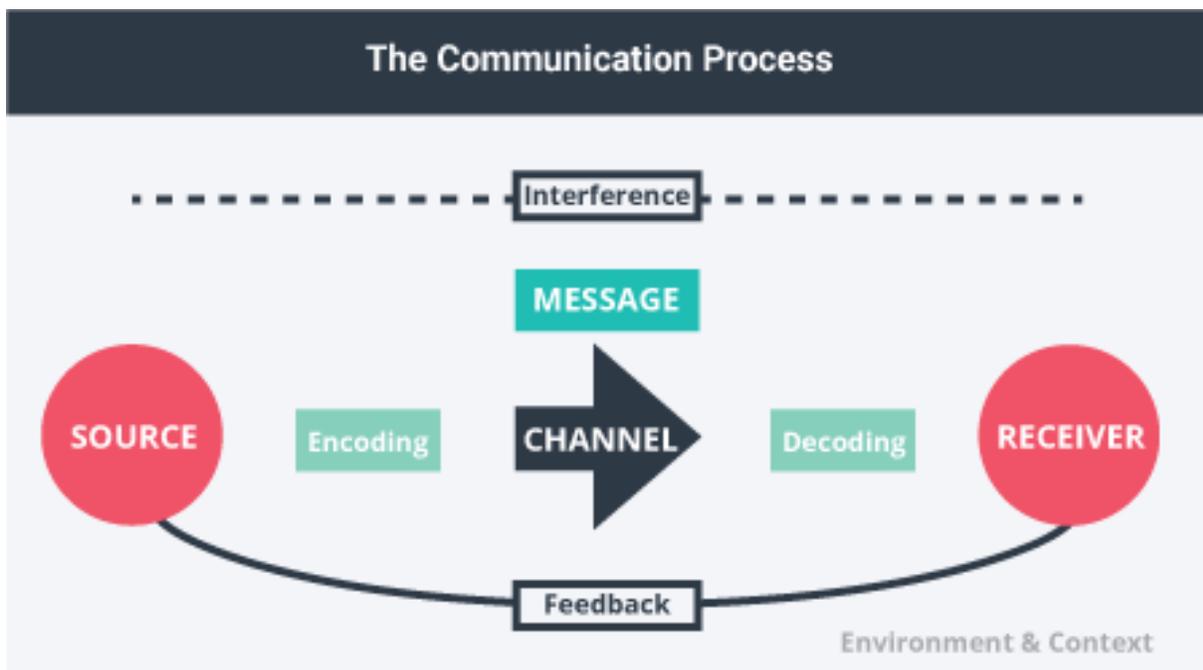
The Communication Process

Figure 1.1.1 The Communication Process by Laura Underwood

When we communicate interpersonally with someone who is similar to us in terms of thought patterns, language, gender, or peer group, for example, we **encode** a message using a given **channel**, and the receiver **decodes** the message in the way that we expect that they would. For example, you're on the soccer field with possession of the ball, and you hear your teammate who is behind you clap three times. You know this means your teammate is open. You turn and give a quick pass, and your teammate makes a goal. This is an example of good, effective communication. But what if you interpreted your teammate's clapping to mean that you should *not* pass the ball? You would have decoded this message in a way the sender had not intended, and you would have taken a different action. Your teammate might later question why you didn't pass the ball. You might react negatively to your teammate's accusations and demand to know why they didn't yell "ball!" to indicate being ready to receive the ball. You can see by this example that when good communication happens, the possibilities for high performance are endless. But when communication is poor, the likelihood for shared understanding and high performance decreases significantly.

When we examine communication and diversity in the Canadian workplace, we have to understand that miscommunication will usually reveal itself in the way the message is encoded or decoded. In order to understand how to communicate more effectively interpersonally, we need to develop our abilities in better understanding ourselves, the situation at hand, and others.

Interpersonal Miscommunication

While on a UK-based diverse team made up of people from Asia, Africa, Southern Europe, and India, a Canadian team member experienced a miscommunication with her teammates. The team felt she had taken over a project presentation without including their input, even though she had asked each team member if they were OK with the presentation before delivering it. The Canadian felt justified in her approach, since she had asked each person for their feedback and their OK. In other words, she encoded a message and assumed it would be decoded the way she expected, especially since she "checked." One of her teammates from Asia approached her to have a conversation. "I don't understand. I asked you if you were OK with everything before giving the presentation, and you said yes," said the Canadian.

"Yes, but you didn't ask again!" said the South Korean. The Canadian thought the South Korean was ridiculous. Exactly how many times did the South Korean expect her to ask?

The Canadian later discovered that the South Korean was expecting her to ask again a few more times to be sure that yes really meant yes. When the Canadian didn't do that, the South Korean decoded this as rude or insensitive. Years later, when the Canadian lived and worked in South Korea, she remembered this lesson and tried to be less judgemental in order to understand the norms of people who live and work in a South Korean context. She reflected and later understood that as a Canadian in the workplace, she was primarily focused on the task, or getting the work done. Her teammates were primarily focused on building good relationships. She learned that in some situations, no good work will get done unless a good relationship is present first.

Why Diversity Matters
Diversity is defined as "the variety of characteristics that all persons possess, that distinguish them as individuals, and that identify them as belonging to a group or groups. It is a term used to

encompass all the various differences among people commonly used in Canada and in the United States. Diversity programs and policies are aimed at reducing **discrimination** and promoting equality of opportunity and outcome for all groups. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, type of area (urban/rural), age, faith and/or beliefs" (mygsa.ca, 2015).

This means that diversity is not about those other folks over there; it's about you as well as them. It's about all of us.

When done right and applied to people in a work or professional context, having diversity provides a competitive advantage for businesses and increased satisfaction for employees who can put their full potential to work. According to Ryerson University's Diversity Institute (Ryerson University, 2015), the business case for diversity in Canada has several strong points.

First, diversity from more **immigrants** from non-traditional countries can stem the skills, talent, and population shortage.

Second, diverse people can have better understanding and connections to a bigger variety of **domestic** and **global** markets.

Third, studies have shown that diverse teams are more creative and innovative and thus deliver higher value.

Fourth, diversity can increase both employee and customer satisfaction while reducing lawsuits and increasing overall public reputation.

Finally, diversity has been shown to improve company performance and result in increased shareholder value.

Diversity matters because when we communicate with people who are different from us in a fundamental way, it can be difficult to go from miscommunication and misunderstanding to synergy and high performance in a business context. In an interpersonal context it is also difficult to make the leap from thinking the other person is "ridiculous" to challenging ourselves to develop our skills in listening and empathy before leaping to dismissive judgement. In order to get there, we must understand a bit more about our context in Canada.

Diversity in Canada

This land mass is called Turtle Island by many Aboriginal people. As the indigenous people of what is now called Canada, Aboriginal peoples—including Inuit, First Nations, and Métis— argue that they have collective entitlements that were never extinguished. This is to say that in some circles the very notion of "Canada" is a contentious issue.

When trading relationships between Aboriginals and Europeans led to mass immigration through imperial **colonialism**, the landscape was changed, and we became a treaty nation.

Settlers primarily from France and Britain, and former Loyalists—including some black people—from what is now the United States, have been in Canada for generations as have others (in comparatively smaller numbers) like the Japanese and Chinese people. France was the first dominant colonial group, and they were ultimately displaced by the British.

Canada is a constitutional **monarchy** that retains the Queen of Britain as the head of state; before confederation, Canada was a British colony. Overseas immigration to Canada used to exclude any non-Europeans as a matter of policy with institutional and societal support, with some exceptions. Over time, it can be argued that Canada is getting better at becoming a place where all residents and citizens can feel at home.

Since the 1970s, Canada has had an official policy of multiculturalism. This policy says people do not have to give up parts of their identity or their culture such as their religion, language, or customs, provided that they don't interfere with others' rights and freedoms as defined in Canada's Constitution or *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Canada's official multicultural policy lends itself nicely to the notion of diversity. Canada is often described as a **mosaic**, in contrast to the **melting pot** philosophy of the United States to the south. Where the melting pot expects people to blend in, assimilate, and become "American," the Canadian mosaic identity is arguably more fluid, enabling people to retain their cultures, customs, traditions, or other elements of their heritage. Not everyone is thrilled with this policy. Some people feel that too much difference creates too many divisions and too much confusion resulting in a national identity crisis. But in the famous words of Marshall McLuhan, "Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity."

Demographics

Editor's note: All statistical information and graphs in the following sections have been reproduced from Statistics Canada (statcan.gc.ca).

Throughout Canada's history, changes in population growth and age structure have had many repercussions for Canadian society, for example on infrastructure needs, social programs, and the political influence of the various regions of the country.

As demographic trends—some recent, such as negative natural increases or the significant contribution of international immigration to population growth of some regions—will continue to shape Canada in the coming years, it is important to shed light on how these changes will affect the various regions of the country if current trends continue. Certain recent trends will probably affect many other aspects of Canadian society, such as ethnocultural and linguistic diversity.
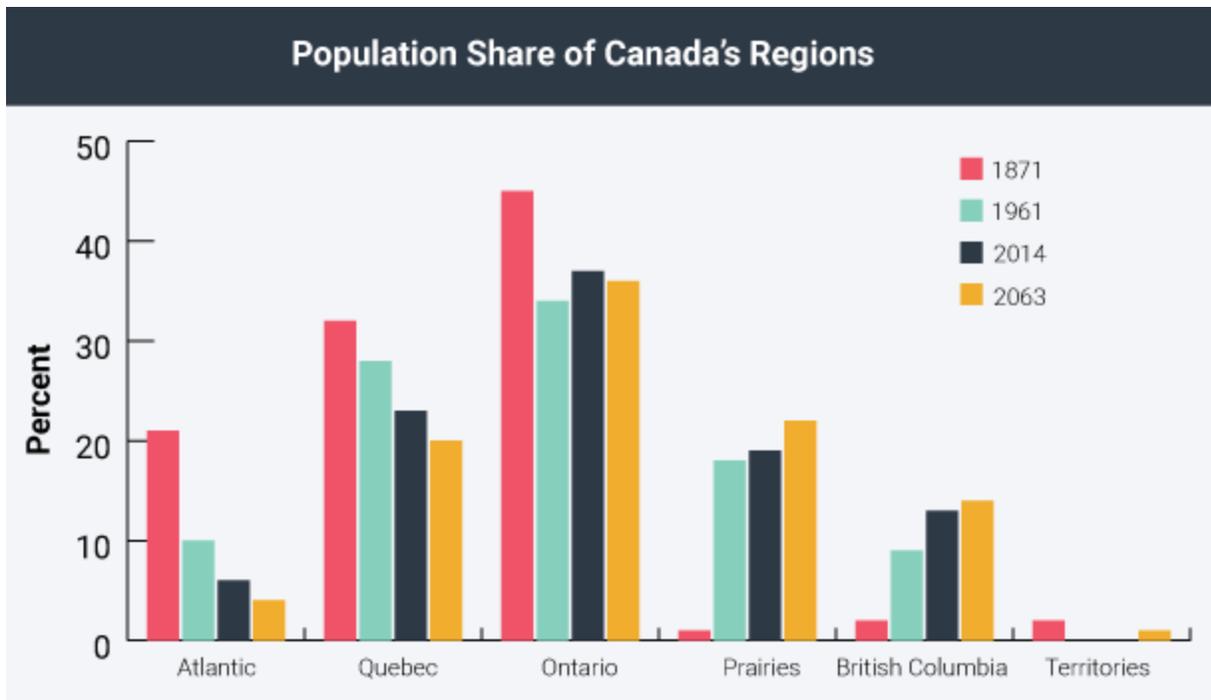
Figure 4.1.1 Population Share of Canada's Regions by Laura Underwood

Adapted from Statistics Canada (2015)

In 1961, the population share of the Atlantic provinces was higher than that of British Columbia (10 percent versus 9 percent), and only 5 percentage points separated the population shares of Quebec (29 percent) and Ontario (34 percent).

In 2014, the Atlantic provinces made up 7 percent of Canada's entire population. Nearly two in five Canadians lived in Ontario (39 percent), and the difference between this province and Quebec (23 percent) had increased to 16 percentage points. Lastly, in 2008, the population share of the provinces west of Ontario became higher (31 percent) than the share of the provinces east of Ontario (30 percent) for the first time in the history of the country.

If the recent demographic trends remain steady until 2063, or nearly 200 years after Confederation, the population share of the Prairie provinces (24 percent) could exceed that of

Quebec (21 percent). The Atlantic provinces' weight could represent less than 5 percent of Canada's population, while the population share of Ontario could decrease slightly.

Population Growth by Type
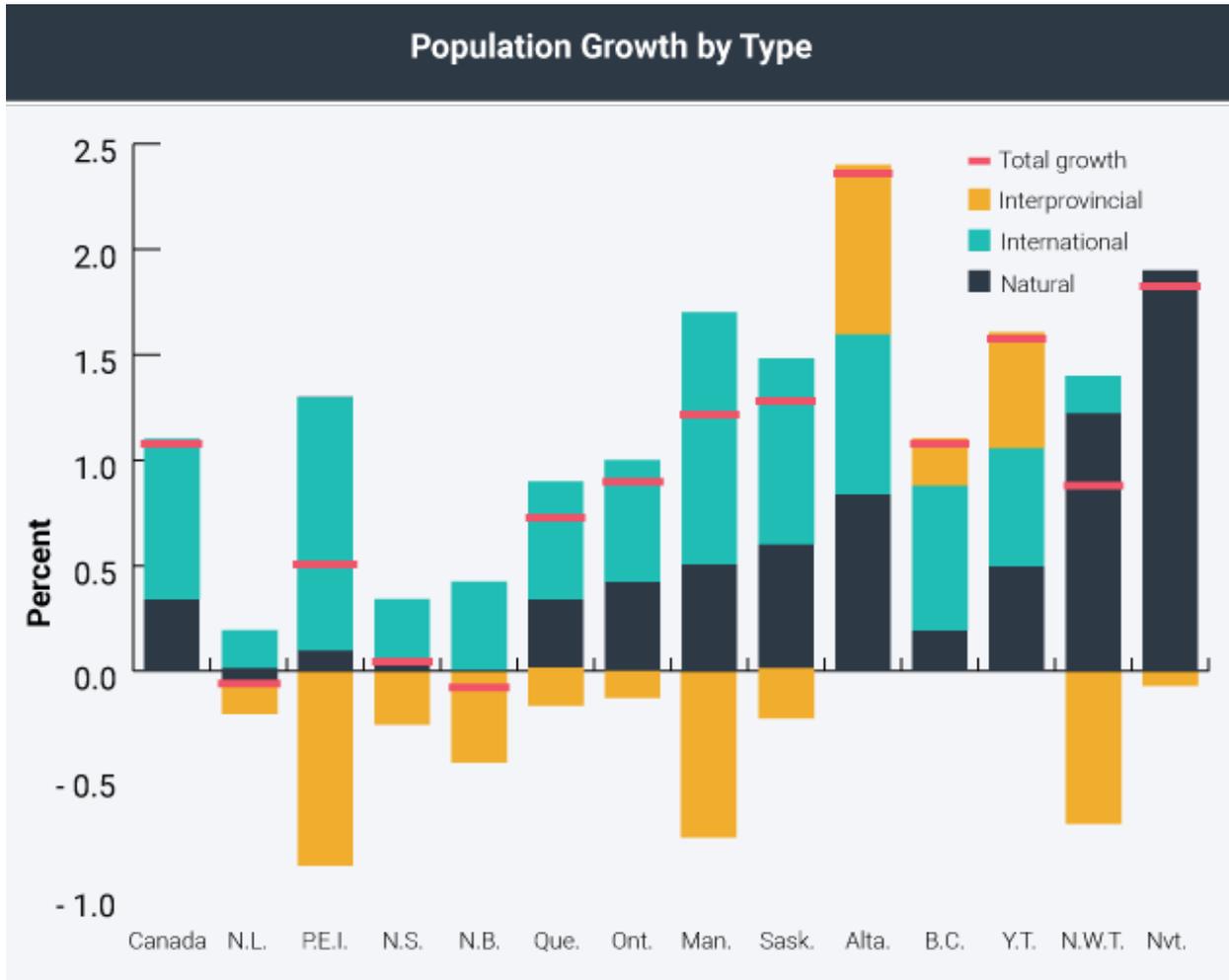
Figure 4.1.2 Canada's Population Growth by Province by Laura Underwood
Adapted from Statistics Canada (2015)

Population growth in the provinces and territories can be broken down into three factors: natural increase, international migratory increase, and interprovincial migratory increase.

At the national level, approximately two-thirds of population growth is currently the result of international migratory increase, while the other third is a result of natural increase—notably

because of a low fertility rate fluctuating around an annual average of approximately 1.6 children per woman.
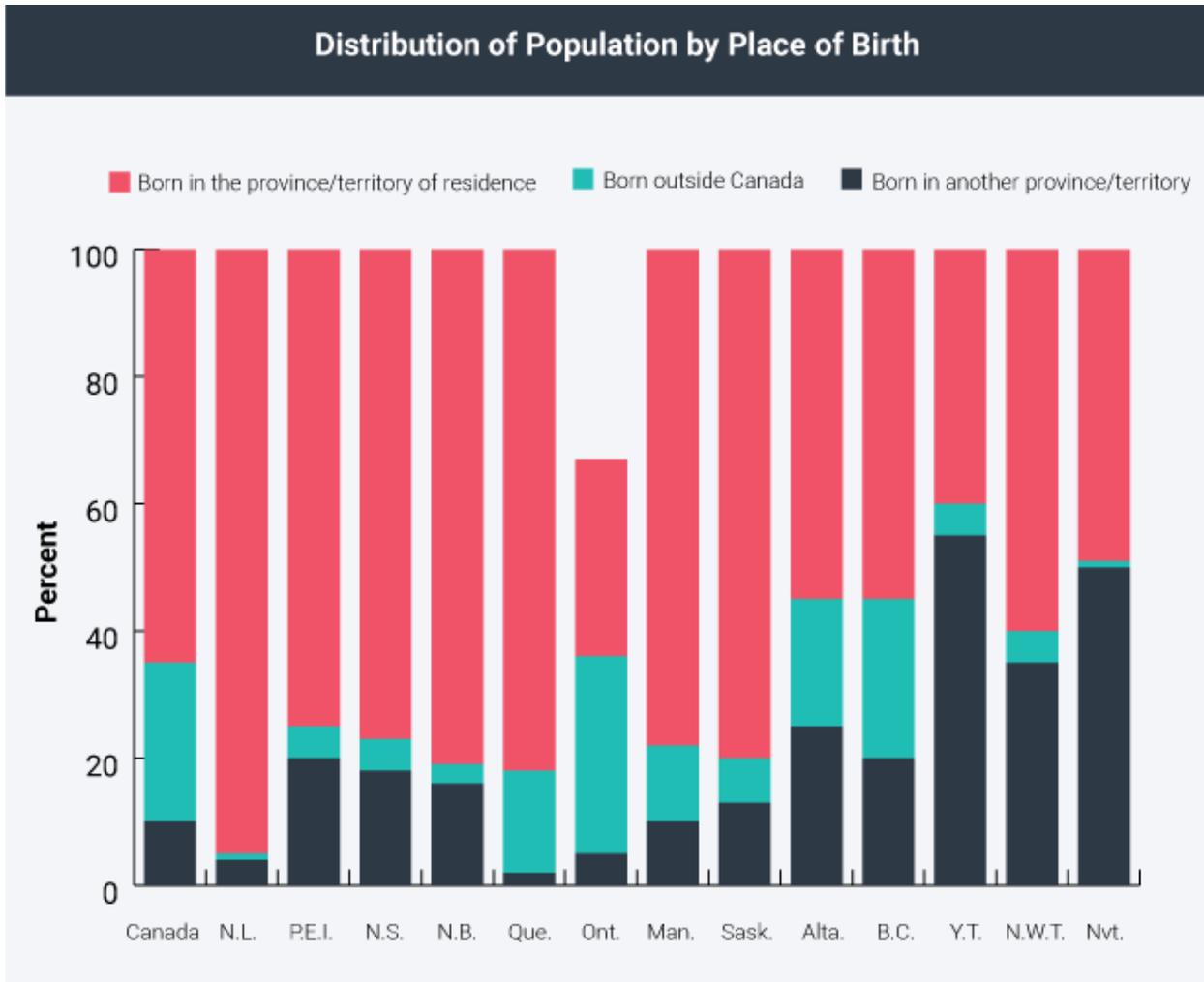

Figure 4.1.3 Canada's Distribution of Population by Place of Birth by Laura Underwood
Adapted from Statistics Canada (2011)

The disparity in the sources of population growth from one province or territory led to differences in the population profile of provinces and territories.

Population composition by birthplace, which depends on the magnitude of international and interprovincial migratory increases, is a case in point. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, approximately one in two individuals living in British Columbia (51 percent) and Alberta (46 percent) were born outside these provinces (i.e., abroad or in another Canadian province or territory).

While natural increase trends are mostly predictable (because they are partially linked to changes in the age structure of the population), the trends associated with international and interprovincial migratory increases are more difficult to predict because they are more likely to be associated with changes in the economy. Many studies have shown the links between migration and the labour market.

If the various components of population growth (fertility, mortality, immigration, emigration, and interprovincial migration) remained steady in the coming years, however, the age structure and ethnocultural diversity of the various provinces and territories could become increasingly different. In addition, the population share of the provinces and territories could change considerably in the next 50 years, making for a very different Canada than today's or at the time of Confederation.

This demographic and diversity information helps to underscore the amount of change that has happened and the amount of change that is likely to continue. Understanding the environment and context behind the increasing likelihood of having to work with diverse people from other provinces/territories, countries, as well as people with different languages, ages, or ethnicities is important for interpersonal communication skills development.

Key Diversity-Related Concepts and Definitions
When trying to understand how to more effectively encode and decode messages, it's important to understand that people's identities are diverse and complex, often shaped by their environment, history, and experience. We sometimes generalize in order to make sense of or

evaluate a situation, but being mindful and listening carefully will help us do a better job of responding to a situation case-by-case instead of falling back on **discriminatory** or **racist** attitudes, **bias**, or **stereotyping**. We'll look at each one of these in turn, but the first step is to understand what culture is.

Culture has more than one definition, but for our purposes it means the attitudes and behaviour characteristic of a particular social group (OxfordDictionaries.com, 2015). We are usually unaware of our patterns of behaviour and simply consider the way we approach things to be "normal" or common sense. When we encounter something or someone that/who does not fit with our notion of normal or correct, communicating interpersonally in that situation or with that person can become more difficult or complex. Some people belong to a **dominant cultural group**, defined as "a group that is considered the most powerful and privileged of all groups in a particular society or context and that exercises that power through a variety of means (economic, social, political etc)" (mygsa.ca, 2015). Other people may belong to a **non-dominant cultural** or minority group. "The concept 'minority group' does not refer to demographic numbers, but is used for any group [that] is disadvantaged, underprivileged, excluded, discriminated against, or exploited. As a collective group, a minority occupies a subordinate status in society" (mygsa.ca, 2015). These concepts about culture, particularly dominant versus non-dominant cultures, are important to our understanding that in the workplace, interpersonal communication takes place against a backdrop of these influences and affects the way people perceive, give, and receive messages.

Discrimination in the workplace can take many forms. Discrimination is defined as "the unequal treatment of groups or individuals with a history of **marginalization** either by a person or a group or an institution which, through the denial of certain rights, results in inequality, subordination and/or deprivation of political, education, social, economic, and cultural rights" (mygsa.ca, 2015). For example, a female board member once told the author that after board meetings in previous decades, all the other board members—all men—would go socialize

Interpersonal Communication in the Professional Environment
Professional Communications OER

afterwards, typically to play golf. When she tried to join them, they said, "These excursions are just 'for the boys' …. You understand, right?"

When you have a mix of prejudice and power leading one group (the dominant or majority group) to dominate over and exploit another (the non-dominant, minority or racialized group), you have racism, which asserts that the one group is supreme and superior while the other is inferior. **Racism** is any individual action, or institutional practice backed by institutional power that subordinates people because of their colour or ethnicity. **Race** is defined as a socially created category to classify humankind according to common ancestry or descent, and relies on differentiation by general physical or cultural characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair type, historical experience, and facial features. Race is often confused with **ethnicity** (a group of people who share a particular cultural heritage or background); there may be several ethnic groups within a racial group (mygsa.ca, 2015). Racism in the modern Canadian workplace can show up in many ways and be either intentional or unintentional, from screening out or prioritizing certain names on résumés to assuming the racialized person in the room is the server or assistant. For many people in Canada's dominant group, being called a racist is a tremendous insult that can immediately shut down communication. Ironically, the power to shut down or ignore communication related to racial discrimination is a racist act. People with good interpersonal communication skills can navigate their discomfort long enough to focus on listening, reflecting, and collaborating to find solutions.

Bias is subjective opinion, preference, prejudice, or inclination, either for or against an individual or group, formed without reasonable justification that influences an individual's or group's ability to evaluate a particular situation objectively or accurately (mygsa.ca, 2015). Many people in the workplace are unaware of the biases they may have, which is why self-reflection is such an important part of how to improve interpersonal communication through self-awareness.

Similarly, a **stereotype** is a false or generalized, and usually negative, conception of a group of people that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences (mygsa.ca, 2015). When we learn about other groups of people, it's easy to forget that individuals make up groups. For good interpersonal communication to occur, it is important to be open, to listen, and to recognize that person as a unique individual.

Understanding how culture, discrimination, stereotypes, and bias affect the workplace and how people communicate are essential to understanding the move toward inclusive practices. These days when you hear about diversity, you also hear about inclusion. **Inclusion** means acknowledging and respecting diversity. It is an approach based on the principles of accepting and including all people, honouring diversity, and respecting all individuals (mygsa.ca, 2015).

Types of Diversity

Religion and Culture

Scenario

Culture may well be the first type of diversity that comes to mind, and with good reason! As a resident of Canada, you live in one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, and you are probably already encountering people from different cultural and religious backgrounds every day. If you consider Canada's history, you'll recognize that, with the exception of the First Nations and Inuit populations, most modern-day Canadians come from families that came to the country from elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, historically, most Canadian settlers came from Europe, although the Middle East and Asia are now our largest source of newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Language

The English language has unfortunately developed many pejorative terms for people of various religions and ethnicities. When choosing a word to refer to a religious or ethnic group, your best choice is usually to use the term that the community uses to refer to itself. The table below will

help you find the preferred word for some of the more commonly confused cultural and religious labels, but please keep in mind that this is only a small sampling of possible terms and ethnicities.

Term	Description	Notes
Aboriginal	includes Inuit, First Nations (formerly called Indians), and Métis.	
Arab	a member of an Arabic-speaking people	not synonymous with Muslim, which designates a follower of the Islamic faith. Not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslim.
Asian	a broad term designating a person of Asian descent	There are many countries within Asia. Try to use a more specific term (Chinese, Indonesian) if you can.
Black	Designates any of various ethnic groups with black African ancestry.	Some people prefer African-Canadian.
Caucasian	a white person of European origin	
Hispanic	a broad term designating Spanish-speaking peoples	Not inclusive of people with non-Spanish language backgrounds (i.e., Portuguese

		speakers). Spanish refers only to Spain and its language and people.
Indian	designates a person from India or of Indian descent.	East Indian and South Asian are sometimes used to avoid confusion, though South Asian also includes people from Pakistan and Sri Lanka. West Indian means people from the Caribbean, regardless of descent.
Latino/Latina	geographical and cultural term referring to peoples of South and Central America as well as Mexico and some parts of the non-English speaking Caribbean.	
Member of a visible minority	a person, other than an Aboriginal person, who is non-Caucasian in race and non-white in colour.	Sometimes groups labelled as minority groups are actually the majority (e.g., French speakers in Quebec).

Table 4.1.1 Commonly Confused Cultural and Religious Labels

Source: Language Portal of Canada, n.d.

<u>Benefits</u>

Religious and cultural diversity can benefit an organization in a number of ways, including the following:

- Happier employees (when the organization shows respect for differences)
- Increased productivity, innovation, and profit (employees are able to bring what they have learned about other ways of doing things to their roles)
- A wider talent pool (if the organization hires internationally, they have more access to highly experienced people)
- The ability to represent and speak for the company's target audience(s) (and, therefore, develop products and services that will fit their needs)

<u>Challenges</u>

One of the main challenges you might experience in a diverse workplace, whether differences are cultural or otherwise, is resistance to change. There will always be a few people— particularly, longer-serving employees, though this is not always the case—who are not as open minded or flexible. For these people, it may be difficult, at first, to take advantage of all the benefits that diversity can bring. For example, consider the following scenario.

The Intercultural Workplace

Claire, from Canada, decides to take a year off between high school and university. She visits England for a year, to work and travel. During her time in England, Claire takes a temporary job at a large corporation in Manchester. As Administrative Assistant to the Vice-President, Claire spends a lot of time managing communication between her office and the offices of the other executives who are stationed around the country. She finds herself juggling hundreds of emails and phone calls per week, most of which are from colleagues with a question or two.

After experiencing this "communication overload" for a few months, Claire attends a meeting. One of the managers asks if anyone has anything to discuss. Claire mentions that there seem to be some communication problems, with a significant volume of email and phone calls leaving little time for productive work. She explains that at her previous workplace, staff used an online collaboration tool to exchange quick messages with one another. She says that once everyone got used to using the tool and keeping it open throughout their work day, the volume of emails and phone calls were significantly reduced, and workers were able to get more done in their day. Claire suggests that they try out this new tool for a one-month trial period to see if it can help with the problems they are experiencing.

Claire looks around as she is explaining this, and most of her colleagues are nodding and taking notes. However, when she finishes her explanation, one of the senior managers quickly jumps in to say, "No, I don't think that's for us. We've always done things by email, so I can't see us changing things now."

Claire is discouraged. Being the "new girl" and from a different country, she was nervous about speaking up, but, in her previous experience in Canada, employees have been encouraged to make suggestions when processes are not working, so she felt that she could

help out by doing so here. But even though she doesn't feel different from her British colleagues, Claire has some unfamiliar interpersonal challenges to navigate.

When discussing the incident with a co-worker later on, Claire realizes that in the UK employees are, generally, a little more reserved and not likely to suggest that managers are doing anything "wrong"—at least not directly. Politeness and subtlety is key in this culture, so Claire's direct communication style is something that British workers are not as accustomed to. Her co-worker also mentions that the manager who dismissed Claire's idea has been with the company for over 30 years and is probably "set in her ways." Here Claire's challenges are twofold: she is experiencing a combination of intercultural and intergenerational differences.

In this case, even though many members of staff were in favour of Claire's idea, it was not approved, as the manager in question did not support it.

Strategies

To communicate effectively in a culturally diverse workplace, adopt the following tips and techniques:

- Avoid jargon and slang in verbal and written communication, as these are often specific to a cultural group or location. Using these can alienate people and cause misunderstandings.
- Assign or become a mentor to new employees. This will help with integration and communication of the company's processes, vision, and values.
- Facilitate (and take part in) professional development opportunities. When people work together to solve a problem or learn something new, this creates bonds and allows sharing of ideas.
- Practise active listening.
- Be aware of your own biases and privileges, and be open to new points of view.

- Know your audience! As in all other communication practices, this key piece of advice is important here, too. Ask yourself, *What does my audience know or perceive about my topic?* By thinking about your audience ahead of time, you may be able to foresee and prevent misunderstandings or objections.

Linguistic

Scenario

English may be the most widely spoken language around the world, but there are more native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and Spanish than there are native English speakers. In the West, we take for granted the bias towards English-speaking people. English is commonly used as the default language in business sectors from science to the maritime industries and aeronautics. It is estimated that 53.8 percent of the Internet's top websites are written in English (W3 Techs, 2016).

But we cannot assume that everyone we work with will be a native English-speaker or will be able to speak English at all. In Canada, linguistic barriers can be particularly challenging because we have two official languages: English (56.9 percent of the population are native-speakers) and French (21.3 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2011). Our territories use various languages belonging to Aboriginal groups. Add to that the multitude of languages used by people from the many ethnicities that make up our cultural mosaic, and the likelihood of common interactions with non-native English speakers increases further.

In Quebec, 78.9 percent of the population have French as a mother tongue, while only 8.3 percent are native English speakers; however, 42.6 percent of the province's population have a knowledge of both official languages (Statistics Canada, 2011). French is legally the official language and must be used in the public sector and public relations. Nationally, signage and packaging display both English and French messaging. In New Brunswick, our only officially

bilingual province, 65.5 percent of the population are native English speakers, while 31.9 percent are French speakers (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Language

Have you ever casually mentioned, "He doesn't speak English," "She isn't from here," or "He won't understand," when referring to an English-language learner or speaker of a language other than English? Phrases like this are often said without malice, but they can come across as dismissive of the person's efforts to communicate. Be sensitive about the way that you refer to people who speak a language other than your own. Chances are they'd love to be able to speak English as well as you do and are making efforts to learn, but this doesn't happen overnight!

Benefits

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism is a major benefit to the Canadian workplace, because our country has two official languages. Knowing a second-language improves your ability to communicate with a wider range of people, enriching communication and collaboration in your workplace. Knowing a second language can also improve your career prospects. You'll have more opportunities to work internationally, and, if you want to work in the public sector in Canada, bilingualism is often a requirement.

Challenges

The key challenge in this situation is avoiding misunderstandings. These can occur in a few different ways. First, the non-native speaker may lack the vocabulary to explain to you what they need or want. But second, you might find yourself tempted to make assumptions or even to fill in words or finish their sentences for them, which, in most contexts, will demonstrate your impatience and come across as rude in most contexts.

Another challenge in the linguistically diverse workplace is that while those who share a language will enjoy speaking to one another in their native tongue, this can make other workers and customers feel excluded. If people are conversing in front of you in a language that you don't understand, you might worry that something negative is being said.

Before you find yourself thinking, *This person's English isn't very good*, consider, how well can you speak their native language, be it Japanese, Hungarian, or Bengali? In most cases, you will find that non-native English speakers around the world work hard to learn even a little bit of English—it is those of us in the West who are generally less competent with other languages, mostly because we don't have the same need to use them in our daily interactions. Because of the English language bias we mentioned earlier, speakers of other languages may perceive that opportunities will be greater if they can speak some English. So, show some appreciation that the person is making an effort to communicate with you! This goes a long way.

If you are struggling to communicate with someone who does not speak English, try having them write down what they need to say, as this may make it easier. If you are trying to explain a set of instructions, for example, you could try using gestures or even drawing a diagram or picture. It's amazing what you can communicate with a few stick people, if you need to! In this context, body language and tone are very important. The other person may not understand everything you are saying, but they can tell from your body language, expressions, and vocal tone what the mood of your message is. For this reason, do a quick self-check on your own frustration level, as you will want to keep any annoyance or frustration hidden. If you have access to a computer or mobile device, these can come in very handy, as you can type in what you need to say in a translation application (e.g., Google Translate). Though the translation may not be grammatically correct, you can usually get the essential meaning across.

Communicating Through Language Barriers

In many ways the world has become a lot smaller over the last few years. As technology increases our capacity to communicate with anyone at any time, our workplaces are becoming increasingly globalized. One of our authors works in digital technology and spends a lot of time working with computer programmers who are working from all over the world. She often has to instruct a non-native English speakers on highly technical details via text-based communication. When she does this, she is typically on the opposite side of the world and has never met the programmer face-to-face.

The following are some of the tips she has learned over time to help with this:

- Write down the steps to take, in order
- Give instructions in writing instead of (or in addition to) verbal instructions. It is easier for ESL speakers to follow written text as they can look up (or use a translation app) on any words they don't understand. They can also refer to the document later and are less likely to miss steps.
- Use plain language
- Ask the recipient to respond with a list of tasks they will undertake, and their expected completion
- If you are working on something visual, use a screen-sharing application or take screenshots—it's very difficult to collaborate on things like this unless you are both looking at the same thing, at the same time
- Take advantage of video chat tools like Skype and Google Hangouts. These provide more information richness so that misunderstandings are less likely
- Look for some common ground. For example, she says, "I worked with a programmer whose favourite television show was also one of mine. We shared quips and references that made us laugh, so our communication became friendlier and more relaxed."

Gender

<u>Scenario</u>

Men and women make up nearly equal proportions of working Canadians. In 2011, women comprised 48 percent of the labour force. When occupations were considered, men and women were noticeably involved in different types of roles, as you can see from the graph below (Statistics Canada, 2013). This split contributes to the challenges that both **genders** face when they choose to enter fields traditionally thought of as male- or female-dominated professions.

Distribution of the Employed Population by Occupational Groups
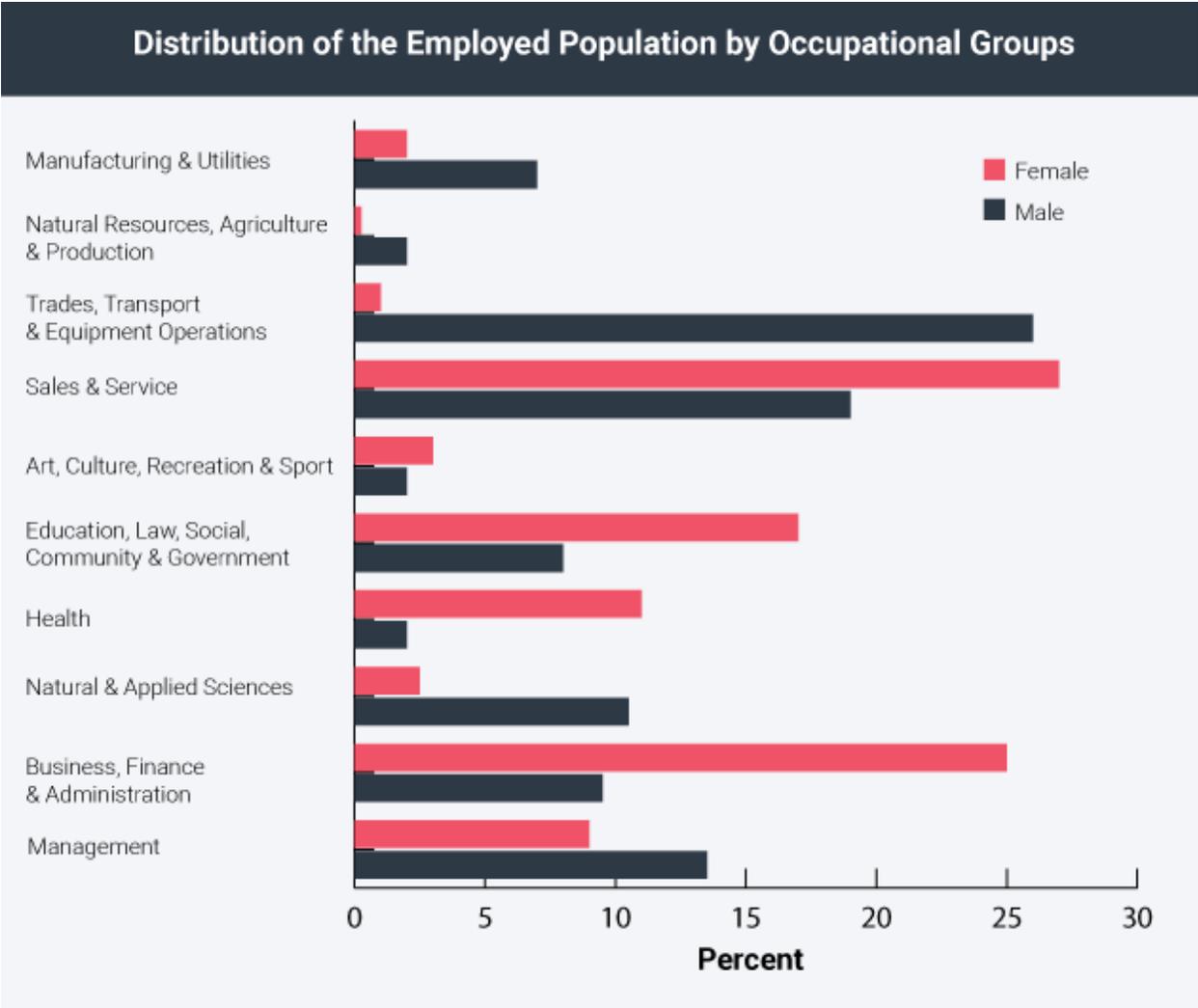
Figure 4.1.4 Distribution of Canadian Employees by Occupation by Laura Underwood
Adapted from Statistics Canada (2013)

Language

One key to avoiding gendered bias in language is to avoid the generic use of *he* when referring to something relevant to both males and females. Instead, you can informally use a gender-neutral pronoun like *they* or *their*, or you can use *his or her* (American Psychological Association, 2010). When giving a series of examples, you can alternate usage of masculine and feminine pronouns, switching with each example.

We have gendered associations with certain occupations or activities that tend to be male- or female-dominated. The following word pairs show the gender-biased term followed by an unbiased term:

- waitress → server
- chairman → chair or chairperson
- mankind → humankind or people
- cameraman →camera operator
- mailman → postal worker
- sportsmanship → fair play

Common language practices also tend to infantilize women but not men, when, for example, women are referred to as chicks, girls, or babes. In addition, titles of address that precede names are used to indicate women's marital status, whereas no such distinction exists for men (i.e., *Miss*/*Mrs.* versus only *Mr.*). Since there is no linguistic equivalent to indicate the marital status of men, using Ms.—which does not denote marital status—instead of *Miss* or *Mrs.* helps to reduce bias.

Benefits

A gender-diverse workforce has a number of benefits that not only improve working conditions for employees but also improve the bottom-line for the organization. Men and women have different views, strengths, and insights. By making the best use of these differences, companies can do a better job of problem solving and innovating. Equal representation of males and females inside the company also benefits those outside it—particularly the customers and clients, as the company can more accurately understand what the market wants and needs. Having a reputation for gender diversity also has positive benefits when it comes to public relations and recruitment. Increasingly, people want to work for companies that are making positive moves in this regard. It is not in an organization's best interest to ignore nearly half of its prospective talent pool when competition for the best and brightest employees is only increasing.

<u>Challenges</u>

Two issues that can cause conflict between men and women in the workplace are the **earnings gap** and the **glass ceiling**. According to the Pay Equity Commission, Ontario statistics show that men in full-time employment earn an average of 26 percent more than women do (Pay Equity Commission, 2011). The following are some potential explanations:

- Women are more likely to have gaps in their résumes as a result of taking time off to have children.
- Women are underrepresented in high-earning occupations like business and engineering.
- Traits more often associated with men, such as assertiveness and negotiating skills, are valued in higher-ranking roles, so women are less likely to be hired for these or promoted into them.

These explanations do not account for gender differences in pay when the roles and responsibilities are the same, however. Gender discrimination lawsuits are an unfortunate reality and, in these cases, discrimination against women does appear to be the primary factor.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. have had several incidences of alleged gender discrimination. One of the people who initiated a lawsuit against them in the early 2000s was a female assistant manager who found out that a male assistant manager with similar qualifications was making $10,000 more per year. When she approached the store manager, she was told that the male manager had a "wife and kids to support." She was then asked to submit a household budget to justify a raise (Daniels, 2003). Such discrimination contributes to an unfair work environment and results in conflict between men and women in the workplace.

The glass ceiling is another term that you may be familiar with. It refers to the idea that women are less likely to get promoted to higher management roles. Though women represent close to

one-half of the workforce, men are four times more likely to reach the highest levels of organizations (Umphress et. al, 2008).

Traditionally, men have been viewed as more assertive and confident than women, while women have been viewed as more passive and submissive, making them less likely to be considered a fit for a management role. Stereotypes also influence how employees' accomplishments are viewed. For example, when men and women work together in a team on a "masculine" task such as working on an investment portfolio and it is not clear which member has contributed what, managers are more likely to attribute successes to the male employees (Heilman et. al, 2005). In addition to contributing to the team, female employees must also work harder to communicate their contributions to superiors.

Strategies

The more that employees know about gender inequalities, the more likely they are to effect change. So, to create a more inclusive workplace, individuals would do well to set up, contribute to or attend opportunities for professional development (e.g., workshops and panel discussions) that focus on this area. Workplaces that establish and promote gender equality goals, such as an aim to have women in a certain percentage of management roles, will create interest and conversation between employees. As part of this, you can champion female leadership by holding talks and sharing success stories of female-led working groups within and external to the company. If your workplace doesn't already offer these, look for opportunities to run and attend social events that give male and female employees an opportunity to mix, such as book clubs, fitness groups, or fundraising events.

Sexual Orientation

Scenario

A forum research poll released in 2012 found that 5 percent of the Canadian population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The 2011 census recorded 64,575 same-sex couples. In

1999, Canada recognized same-sex couples as common-law partners, providing a legal status similar to that of heterosexual common-law couples. In 2005, Canada legalized same-sex marriage; however, only 33 percent of these couples were married. Over 90 percent did not have a child living with them (Carlson, 2012).

Language

Sexual orientation refers to a person's preference for sexual relationships with individuals of the other sex (*heterosexuality*), one's own sex (*homosexuality*), or both sexes (*bisexuality*). The term also refers to transgender individuals, those whose behaviour, appearance, and/or gender identity departs from conventional norms. Transgendered individuals include *transvestites* (those who dress in the clothing of the opposite sex) and *transsexuals* (those whose gender identity differs from their physiological sex and who sometimes undergo a sex change). A transgender woman is a person who was born biologically as a male and becomes a woman, while a transgender man is a person who was born biologically as a woman and becomes a man. *Gay* is the common term now used for any homosexual individual; *gay men* or *gays* is the common term used for homosexual men, while *lesbian* is the common term used for homosexual women. All the types of social orientation just outlined are often collectively referred to by the shorthand LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or LGBTQ (includes the term *queer*/*questioning*, and the *T* can also refer to twin-spirited as well as transgender). The term *straight* is used today as a synonym for *heterosexual*.

LGBTQ people are often the recipients of insensitive language. Much of this is the result of misunderstanding on the part of straight people, who may use the incorrect terminology simply because they are not familiar with the community's preferred definitions. However, there are occasions where language misuse can be hurtful or offensive. For example, the use of the word *gay* as a casual insult when speaking about someone or something bad or undesirable is offensive and should be avoided.

Another challenge here is to avoid heterosexual bias. For example, do not make assumptions about sexual orientation when addressing a colleague. Rather than saying, "Is your *wife* coming to the staff Christmas party?" you might ask, "Are you bringing a date to the staff Christmas party?" In communication about activities attributed more commonly to straight people, such as parenting, you should also avoid heterosexual bias. For example, rather than branding your event "The Annual Father–Daughter Picnic," you might instead create a more open and inclusive event by terming it "The Annual Parent–Child Picnic." This way, you can avoid unintentionally excluding LGBTQ people who may feel unwelcome if other terms were used.

Benefits

A diverse group of staff that includes LGBTQ people creates, within an organization, a more accurate representation of the public. In order to develop products and services for an increasingly diverse market, organizations can benefit from the insights that exist here. Inclusion of LGBTQ people also comes with an economic benefit. LGBTQ people make up a potentially high-value demographic. Cohabiting same-sex couples are statistically more likely to have a two-income household with no children than heterosexual couples are, so their purchasing power is increasingly one that companies selling consumer products and services want to target.

Challenges

In many parts of Canada, society has become increasingly liberal in recent years. Tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ people has generally increased, as the stigma associated with non-heterosexual orientations gradually fades. But people in this demographic still face a whole host of challenges. For example, it was not until 1992 that a law was changed to allow LGBTQ people to serve in the Canadian military without harassment or discrimination. In some professions, for example those that are traditionally male-dominated, LGBTQ people may still not feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation with work colleagues, a fact that implements an immediate communication barrier.

Much of the challenge of integration that LGBTQ people experience stems from the prejudice, misunderstanding, and discomfort on the part of heterosexual people. When you don't know someone well, you may not know how they will react to a great many things, from your value system and opinions, to something far more personal like your sexual orientation. For this reason, many LGBTQ people may choose to keep their orientation private at work, regardless of the industry they work in. Some religions have strong anti-LGBTQ biases, which may put LGBTQ people who work in religiously oriented organizations such as schools and charities backed by religious groups, in a difficult position. LGBTQ people remain vulnerable to bullying, depression, and other issues because of the outside pressures and stigmas that remain present in some segments of society.

Strategies

How can organizations show their respect for diversity in sexual orientation? It all starts with communication! Some companies start by creating a written statement that the organization will not tolerate discrimination based on sexual orientation. They may have workshops addressing issues relating to sexual orientation and facilitate and create networking opportunities for LGBTQ employees. Perhaps the most powerful way in which companies show respect for sexual orientation diversity is by extending benefits to the partners of same-sex couples. Research shows that in companies that have these types of programs, discrimination based on sexual orientation is less frequent, and the job satisfaction and commitment levels are higher (Button, 2001).

Generation and Age

Scenario

Until recently, workplaces had been managed and staffed mostly by **Baby Boomers** and those from **Generation X**. People from these generations tend to view diversity as an issue of fairness and equality. For them, a diverse workplace is important because it is legally required and the right thing to do but is not always truly supported or encouraged by management and staff.

Millennials—loosely defined as the generation born between the late 1970s and the early 2000s—will make up the largest proportion of the worldwide workforce by 2025. Their views on what makes a happy and productive workplace are vastly different than the views of the generations that came before them, as are their preferred working styles.

Language

Language that includes age bias can be directed toward older or younger people. Descriptions of younger people often presume recklessness or inexperience, while those of older people presume frailty or disconnection. The term *elderly* generally refers to people over 65, but it has connotations of weakness, which isn't accurate, because there are plenty of people over 65 who are stronger and more athletic than people in their 20s and 30s. Though it's generic, the term *older people* doesn't have the same negative implications. Additionally, referring to people over the age of 18 as boys or girls isn't typically viewed as appropriate.

Benefits

Research shows that age is correlated with a number of positive workplace behaviours, including higher levels of citizenship behaviours such as volunteering, higher compliance with safety rules, lower work injuries, lower counterproductive behaviours, and lower rates of tardiness or absenteeism (Ng and Feldman, 2008). Having representation from multiple generations on your team will also help you to avoid the dreaded **groupthink**, a term with which you may be familiar; it essentially means that in an attempt to avoid conflict, groups can agree on flawed decisions because they are trying so hard not to offend, criticize, or discredit members' ideas, or because they share biases, values, and ideas that do not leave room for alternative points of view.

Have you noticed that Western culture tends to value youth? This is to our detriment, particularly in the workplace, as the older people in our society can be great sources of information. When you have longer-serving employees on your team, you have the benefit of their experience—you can avoid repeating mistakes that the organization has made in the past. Generation X'ers can

help to bridge the gap between baby boomers and millennials, facilitating better communication on teams.

Challenges

Different generations have different preferences with respect to communication processes. For example, baby boomers prefer face-to-face communication, while millennials prefer short text-based communications (instant messaging, for example). Millennials tend to be more team-oriented and prefer a collaborative environment, whereas baby boomers prefer to work in a more solitary manner.

Strategies

The pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk Inc. noticed that baby boomers were competitive and preferred individual feedback on performance, while Generation Y workers were more team oriented. This difference led one regional manager to start each performance feedback e-mail with recognition of team performance, which was later followed by feedback on individual performance. Similarly, Lockheed Martin Corporation noticed that employees from different generations had different learning styles, with older employees preferring PowerPoint presentations and younger employees preferring more interactive learning (White, 2008). Paying attention to such differences and tailoring various aspects of communication to the particular employees in question may lead to more effective communication in an age-diverse workforce.

Socioeconomic

Scenario

In Canada, 8.8 percent of the population are considered to be in low-income, after tax (Statistics Canada, 2013). The low-income cut-off for a four-person family in Canada is relative and based on the percentage of income a family would need to spend on basic needs. As an example, in 2011, the after-tax cut-off for a family of four living in a community with a population between

x

30,000 and 99,999 people is $30,487 per annum (Statistics Canada, 2015). People on low incomes also tend to be more likely to suffer from other demographic disadvantages, such as low levels of education and poor health.

But even if you are not part of the low-income demographic, economic status differences are still likely to play a role in your professional life. Around the world, the gap between the wealthy and poor is widening, and the middle class is shrinking. The global markets have still not entirely recovered from the recession of the 2000s, and a steady drop in oil prices have made their mark, particularly in Canada. It does not take long to go from affluent to economically disadvantaged when global forces are in play. There are increasing tensions between the rich and the poor around the world, with social movements like Occupy gaining traction. Even within your own social group or workplace, this divide may be obvious—for example, between high-earning upper management and the relatively low-earning working classes.

Language

Derogatory terms are an unfortunate reality for low-income demographics. Use of terms like *ghetto* and *trailer trash* are offensive and should be avoided. As in all communication, consider your audience! Before you use words that have the potential to offend, recognize that a simple slip of the tongue, even if it is not meant with malice, can cause hurt feelings, discomfort, and embarrassment.

Benefits

As with most of the diversity types we have discussed, the more an organization resembles the makeup of the market it targets, the more likely it is to be able to respond to demands from this demographic. Mixing people with different worldviews provides an opportunity to learn from their experiences. It is tempting to think that solutions to big problems will come from the highly educated few at the top and trickle down, but this is often not the case. People who experience challenges in life often develop resourcefulness in order to overcome them—a desirable trait in any worker.

You may have heard stories of people who came from a disadvantaged background only to credit their later success to the life skills they learned in more trying times. Famous names, such as Oprah Winfrey, Leonardo DiCaprio, J. K. Rowling, and many others, experienced economic disadvantages that paved the way for the success they now have.

Challenges

People who struggle to meet their own basic needs, for example, food, clothing, and shelter, often miss out on the opportunities given to people in better economic situations. For example, a middle- or upper-class young person typically has an easier time getting into post-secondary education than their low-income counterparts because their primary and secondary education has been of a better quality. They have been able to access after-school programs and tutors, if ever they needed to. They most likely had access to books, the Internet, and educational experiences growing up, many of which may be out of reach for young people from low-income families. These advantages carry over into their working lives. While higher-income individuals have opportunities to go to university, network with people who can help them in their careers, and take on jobs and internships to build a high-quality résumé, the same cannot necessarily be said for those on a lower income.

Many people do not realize the prejudice they hold, when it comes to poverty. There is a widespread belief that poverty is equated with laziness, or that people of a lower socioeconomic status are entirely responsible for their circumstances. When considering another person's economic situation, remember that many people who are of lower incomes have experienced considerable challenges in life. For example, many people struggle financially because of relationship and family breakdowns, illness, lack of educational opportunities, or other misfortunes that you may not be able to see or understand.

Just because someone works in a similar role to you does not mean that their earnings or disposable income is the same as yours. In the workplace there can be a lot of pressure on people of lower economic status to spend money in order to be included in the social aspects of the workplace. For example, do your colleagues go out for drinks when it is someone's birthday? Does your office hold a holiday party where the staff go out for a meal? While those staff members who are financially successful may not give these events a second thought, those who have socioeconomic challenges may not be able to attend, or may stretch themselves in order to be there and be included, even though they cannot afford to.

Strategies

Your organization can begin to address these challenges by paying a living wage to all employees. Doing so has positive benefits for the organization; for example, the organization will have access to a wider talent pool, as prospective employees are attracted to organizations that have policies such as this. It is also a way to gain positive media attention. Even if you are not a member of management who has the necessary power required to make such a significant change to the organization, you can champion the concept collectively with colleagues who support the move. Employer-subsidized programs such as meals and childcare at the office can also make an impact on the standard of living of employees.

Ability

Scenario

According to Statistics Canada (2015), over 11 percent of Canadians experience pain, mobility, or flexibility challenges. These can be severe enough to require a wheelchair or other mobility aid, or they can be less severe but still make it difficult for people to do jobs that require some type of movement or labour.

The next most common disability among Canadians was mental or psychological disabilities (3.9 percent). These commonly include depression and anxiety; however, a great many others exist that are less familiar to the general public.

Dexterity problems is the next most common category, affecting 3.5 percent of Canadians. Dexterity limits can affect a person's motor function and can make moving around the worksite a challenge. It can also make it difficult for people to use computers and other digital devices.

About 5.9 percent of Canadians have some type of vision or hearing problem, be it total blindness or deafness, or partial use of these senses.

While other areas like memory, learning, and developmental disabilities can also pose barriers, specific tools and aids can be useful for employees with disabilities. For example, wheelchairs and arm supports can make movement possible, while hearing aids and magnifiers can make hearing or vision clearer. For people who are blind, interaction with computers is possible with the aid of screen readers and text-to-speech technology.

Language

People with disabilities are sometimes viewed as a cultural/social identity group. Those without disabilities are often referred to as **able-bodied**. As with sexual orientation, comparing people with disabilities to "normal" people implies that there is an agreed-upon definition of what "normal" is and, thus, that people with disabilities are "abnormal." *Disability* is preferred to the word *handicap*. By ignoring the environment as the source of a handicap and placing it on the person, we reduce people with disabilities to their disability—for example, calling someone "a paraplegic" instead of "a person with paraplegia." In many cases, verbally marking a person as disabled is unnecessary and potentially damaging. Language used in conjunction with disabilities

also tends to portray people as victims of their disability and paint pictures of their lives as gloomy, unpleasant, or painful. Such descriptors are often generalizations or completely inaccurate.

Another set of troubling terms include the casual use of words and phrases like "crazy," "He's off his meds," or "She's a little OCD." By using these terms, we are making light of serious mental health concerns. The casual way in which we use these for humorous effect is offensive to people who live with serious conditions, and can result in situations where you unknowingly "stick your foot in your mouth." Mental health issues are often invisible, so you have no way of knowing that the people around you aren't actually sufferers of these conditions. Perhaps they have a family member or friend who struggles with a mental illness and would be upset or offended by your comment.

Benefits

People with ability challenges can be a significant boost to the ability of an organization to reach its market. Those who experience these things on a daily basis have an insight that able-bodied people cannot have.

For example, one of our authors taught a blind student who used a screen reader and text-to-speech technology to interact with computers in a course about digital technology. The speed at which the student could operate these devices often exceeded the speed of able-bodied students and even the teacher herself. The student was eager to share her perception of the world with her fellow students and, therefore, invited a guest to demonstrate a variety of tools used to make the Internet more accessible. As a result, the class was able to gain insight into this demographic and adjust their practices accordingly. The blind student's goal was to become an accessibility consultant so that she could improve Internet access for people with challenges similar to hers. By undertaking this career path, the student will be able to develop user-friendly and inclusive

designs to help organizations develop more inclusive business practices—a level of insight missing from the organizations that she works for.

Challenges

Environmental factors can play a part in making the work day of a disabled person more of a challenge than it should be. For example, you have probably been in older buildings that do not have elevators installed either because of the age of the building or space constraints. To an able-bodied employee, working in a office building like this may not be a problem. But for someone who uses a wheelchair, lack of an elevator can make even the seemingly simple task of sitting at a desk on the second floor, impossible. The costs of refitting a building or purchasing equipment to accommodate people with disabilities can be prohibitive for organizations. In addition, the ability to accommodate in a way that does not demean or hide people with disabilities is a challenge for organizations. For example, buildings that do not have ramps at the front entrance may instead fit an accessible entrance at the rear of the building. While this may not seem like a problem for the able-bodied person, a wheelchair user will need to access the building differently than others, which may bring up feelings of exclusion.

A main communication challenge that arises here is misunderstanding on the part of able-bodied people. Individuals without impairments cannot know what everyday life is like for a disabled person. Sometimes able-bodied people go out of their way to be accommodating out of awkwardness or because they don't want to come across as prejudicial, but while most people will appreciate these efforts, most disabled persons have become accustomed to (and some have always lived with) their challenges and are capable of managing themselves as well as able-bodied people are. As such, a level of discomfort can arise because we are singling them out, even if our intentions are good. This is not to say that you should not be accommodating to a disabled person but simply that you should ask if there is anything you can do to help rather than taking over or micromanaging them.

Another factor to consider is that some disabilities are invisible. For example, perhaps you sit next to a person who suffers from a mental health issue or a learning disability or who experiences persistent pain, and you don't know it. This can make pulling their own weight on a team challenging. Perhaps the disability leads them to miss work or struggle to complete tasks. Therefore, it is far better to ask what you can do to help than to react with frustration or conflict. Let the person take their time and show or tell you what they need.

Strategies

Supportive communication with others seems to be the key for making employees feel at home. Because the visible differences between individuals may act as an initial barrier against developing rapport, employees with disabilities and their co-workers may benefit from being proactive in relationship development (Colella & Varma, 2001).

Another key way to make a people with different abilities feel confident in the workplace is to consider accessibility. As a communications professional, this may come to your attention particularly when you are communicating via digital channels. For example, let's assume that your workplace uses an intranet to deliver news, policy changes, employee education content, and other announcements. You'll need to consider employees with disabilities, here, particularly those who have visual, hearing, or motor impairments. The following are some things you can do to accommodate this demographic:

- Make sure the intranet is fully accessible to screen readers and avoid using images in place of text, as screen readers cannot "read" images.
- Test your web pages with a colour-blindness simulator to ensure that colour-blind users will have a good experience.
- Provide text transcripts for all audio content and alongside videos.
- Make it easy to navigate pages by avoiding the need for a lot of clicking or precise mouse movements.

These are just a few suggestions, of course. Depending on the demographics of your staff, there will be many more accommodations you can make. But this should get you started on thinking about **accessibility**. Most of all, remember that not everyone has the luxury of being able-bodied and that not all illnesses and challenges are visible.

Communication Challenges

If managing diversity effectively has the potential to increase company performance, increase creativity, and create a more satisfied workforce, why aren't all companies doing a better job of encouraging diversity? Despite all the potential advantages, there are also a number of challenges associated with increased levels of diversity in the workforce. Conflict can arise if staff members do not use some caution when working in this way. Here we will highlight two issues to watch out for.

Similarity-Attraction Phenomenon

Have you noticed that we tend to stick within groups of people who are similar to us? Naturally, we want to be around people who share our interests and values; we perceive safety and comfort in belonging. But this automatic, natural habit can mean that we miss out on many of the benefits that diversity can create. This pattern, the similarity-attraction phenomenon, begins at the door of organizations that hire individuals who are "similar" to the existing workforce.

For example, the technology sector is under increasing pressure to diversify its predominantly white-male workforce. This homogenous hiring habit not only results in fewer opportunities for women and minority groups but also means that the organization hires people with similar backgrounds, interests, and ideas. The workforce is less able to come up with new solutions to the problems they are trying to solve because their thought processes and points of reference are similar. This also limits their ability to authentically represent their audience. Consider a social networking technology startup, for example. How can a workforce consisting of highly educated white males accurately speak and develop services for growing audiences in South Asia or East

Asia, where the education levels, economic status, race, religion, language, and cultural practices are far removed from what the employees experience themselves? These issues demonstrate why having a diverse workforce is so important.

Research shows that individuals communicate less frequently with those they perceive as being different from themselves (Chatman et. al, 1998). They are also more likely to experience emotional conflict with people who differ with respect to race, age, and gender (Jehn et. al, 1999; Pelled et. al, 1999). Individuals who are different from their team members are more likely to report perceptions of unfairness and feel that their contributions are ignored (Price et. al, 2006).

There are some simple things you can do to prevent this from becoming a source of conflict in your workplace. First, be a friendly and welcoming face for newcomers! If a new starter joins your team, invite them for coffee or offer to show them around. Something as simple as this can help to break down the divide between new and long-serving staff members and can create groups of colleagues with different experiences and backgrounds. Mentorship programs are also helpful here. If you have an opportunity to become a mentor or to be mentored, seek out someone with a different background or set of experiences than your own. This will create an equally beneficial relationship that leads both of you to learn something new.

Fault Lines

Another challenge that is particularly common in team-working scenarios is that groups often split into subgroups based on some common trait. For example, in a group composed of three females and three males, gender may act as a **fault line**, dividing the team in two. Further, imagine that the female members of the group are all over 50 years old and the male members are all younger than 25. In this case, age and gender combine to further divide the group.

Teams that are divided by fault lines experience a number of difficulties. For example, members of the different subgroups may avoid communicating with each other, reducing the overall

cohesiveness of the team. These types of teams make less effective decisions and are less creative (Pearsall et. al, 2008; Sawyer et. al, 2006).

To prevent fault lines from becoming an issue in your workplace, look for ways to mix demographics within a team so that splitting into these obvious subgroupings is not easy. Going back to our example of a team composed of three male and three female members, let's consider an alternate age scenario: If two of the female members are older and one of the male members is also older, age could be a bridging characteristic that brings together people who might otherwise be divided across gender.

Conclusion

You will likely encounter many types of diversity in your professional life. You have learned that different people from different groups may encode and decode things in unexpected ways and that Canada's history, geography, and demographic trends show that we are becoming increasingly diverse.

Differences between people can include religion and culture, generation, linguistic, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. While a diverse workforce can offer significant benefits to an organization, some communication challenges may arise, including the similarity-attraction phenomenon and the development of fault lines in teams.

Workplaces in Canada and around the world are making an effort to be more inclusive—that is, to create an open, supportive environment where staff are free to express themselves and work in a collaborative way. The flow of ideas from different cultures, generations, genders, and religious backgrounds is actively encouraged because of the resulting positive effects on business goals. These positive effects often take the form of desired attributes like increased innovation, productivity, employee happiness and retention, and other such metrics. This shift toward diversity and inclusivity is sometimes credited to the increase of millennials in the workplace and the qualities that this growing demographic look for in a professional environment.

Understanding how to communicate in a diverse environment is a key skill for a twenty-first-century employee.

<table>
<tr><td>

Learning Highlights

- In a social context, diversity is about embracing things that make us different and focusing on how these differences enrich our lives. Workplace diversity is not so different. It is about recognizing key factors of what makes us different. It is about making the most of the talents of people from diverse backgrounds to provide a more adaptable, effective, and productive workplace.
- Perceptual, cultural, and linguistic barriers can give rise to ineffective communication in the workplace and need to be overcome.
- Resistance to change (in practices), which includes intolerance to cultural diversity, can be a significant barrier to successful practices of diversity in the workplace.
- Recognition of the complexities as well as the benefits of diversity is a good first step to creating an inclusive workplace.

</td></tr>
</table>

Check Your Understanding

Diversity within workplace teams can benefit projects by providing the potential for _____ _____ during problem solving.

    a) similar ideas

    b) better ideas

    c) similar outcomes

    d) conflict accommodation

In addition to the ethical and moral arguments to support diversity in the workplace, what is another argument in support of a more diverse workforce?

       a) Increased branding value by conforming to social norms

       b) Increased economic value from having different perspectives

       c) Increased profit margins from different labour rates

       d) Increased decision making power of leadership

Which of the following is NOT a significant barrier to successful inclusive practices in the workplace?

       a) Resistance to change

       b) Avoiding hiring people with strong accents

       c) Not being able to find diverse workers

       d) Cultural intolerance

Which of the following can be the root cause of ineffective interpersonal communication in diverse workplaces?

       a) Differences in perception

       b) Differences in cultural practices

       c) Differences in language use

       d) All of the above

Speedy Gonzales, of Warner Brothers Looney Tunes fame, is an example of:

       a) stereotyping

       b) culture of prejudice

       c) cross-cultural communication

       d) discrimination

Further Reading and Links

- Check out this MTV video on understanding more about the debate between free speech and diversity-related political correctness:
- See this article on how to explain white privilege to a broke white person.
- This *Atlantic* article, "A person can't be diverse," discusses misuses of and problems with the term *diversity* from the perspective of filmmaker Ava DuVernay.
- View this article on five ways to foster a discrimination-free workplace.

References

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Business Case for Diversity. (n.d.). Ryerson University Diversity Institute. Retrieved from http://www.ryerson.ca/diversity/about/businesscase.html.

Button, S. B. (2001). Organizational efforts to affirm sexual diversity: a cross-level examination. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 86(1), 17.

Carlson, K. (2012). *The true north LGBT: New Poll reveals landscape of gay Canada*. National Post. http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-true-north-lgbt-new-poll-reveals-landscape-of-gay-canada.

Chatman, J. A., Polzer, J. T., Barsade, S. G., & Neale, M. A. (1998). Being different yet feeling similar: The influence of demographic composition and organizational culture on work processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43, 749–780.

Colella, A., & Varma, A. (2001). The impact of subordinate disability on leader-member exchange relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2), 304–315.

Culture. (n.d.) In *OxfordDictionaries.com*. Retrieved from
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/culture

Daniels, C. (2003, July 21). Women vs. Wal-Mart. Fortune, 148, 78–82.

Heilman, M. E., & Haynes, M. C. (2005). No credit where credit is due: attributional rationalization of women's success in male-female teams. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(5), 905.

Jehn, K. A., Northcraft, G. B., & Neale, M. A. (1999). Why differences make a difference: A field study of diversity, conflict and performance in workgroups. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 741–763.

Language Portal of Canada. (n.d.). *Eliminating ethnic and racial stereotypes*. Government of Canada. Retrieved from https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/bien-well/fra-eng/style/ethnicracial-eng.html#.

Ng, T. W., & Feldman, D. C. (2008). The relationship of age to ten dimensions of job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), 392.

Pay Equity Commission. (2012). Government of Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/about/pubs/genderwage/wagegap.php.

Pelled, L. H., Eisenhardt, K. M., & Xin, K. R. (1999). Exploring the black box: An analysis of work group diversity, conflict and performance. *Administrative science quarterly*, 44(1), 1–28.

Pearsall, M. J., Ellis, A. P., & Evans, J. M. (2008). Unlocking the effects of gender faultlines on team creativity: Is activation the key? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(1), 225.

Price, K. H., Harrison, D. A., & Gavin, J. H. (2006). Withholding inputs in team contexts: member composition, interaction processes, evaluation structure, and social loafing. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(6), 1375.

Sawyer, J. E., Houlette, M. A., & Yeagley, E. L. (2006). Decision performance and diversity structure: Comparing faultlines in convergent, crosscut, and racially homogeneous groups. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 99(1), 1–15.

Statistics Canada. (2015). *Disability in Canada: Initial findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2013002-eng.htm.

Statistics Canada. (2015). *Low income cut-offs*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2012002/lico-sfr-eng.htm.

Statistics Canada. (2015) *Recent changes in demographic trends in Canada. Insights on Canadian Society*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14240-eng.htm#a6.

Statistics Canada. (2013) *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada. National Household Survey, 2011.* Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm.

Statistics Canada. (2013). *Portrait of Canada's Labour Force. National Household Survey, 2011*. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011002-eng.pdf.

Statistics Canada. (2013). *Persons in low income after tax.* Retrieved from
http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/famil19a-eng.htm?sdi=low%20income.

Statistics Canada. (2011). *Language Highlight Tables, 2011 Census*. Retrieved from
http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hlt-fst/lang/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=1&Lang=E&Asc=0&PRCode=01&OrderBy=2&View=1&tableID=401&queryID=1&Age=1#TableSummary.

Terms and Concepts. (n.d.). In mygsa.ca. Retrieved from http://mygsa.ca/content/terms-concepts#.

Umphress, E. E., Simmons, A. L., Boswell, W. R., & Triana, M. D. C. (2008). Managing discrimination in selection: the influence of directives from an authority and social dominance orientation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 982.

White, E. (2008, June 30). Age is as age does: Making the generation gap work for you. Wall Street Journal, p. B6

W^3Techs. (n.d.) *Usage of Content Languages for Websites*. Retrieved from
http://w3techs.com/technologies/overview/content_language/all

Attribution Statement (Communication and Diversity in Canadian Workplaces)

This chapter is a remix containing content from a variety of sources published under a variety of open licenses, including the following:

Chapter Content

- Original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

- The statistical information of Demographics in Canada was created by Laurent Martel of Statistics Canada for Insights on Canadian Society and published at http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14240-eng.htm#a6. This materials is copyrighted and has been used in accordance with the Statistics Canada Open License Agreement.

- The statistical information presented from the National Household Survey, 2011 was published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.pdf. This materials is copyrighted and has been used in accordance with the Statistics Canada Open License Agreement.

- Content created by Anonymous for *Understanding Sexual Orientation;* in *A Primer on Social Problems* shared previously at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-social-problems/s08-01-understanding-sexual-orientati.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license.

- Derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Managing Demographic and Cultural Diversity;* in *An Introduction to Organizational Behavior* shared previously at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/an-introduction-to-organizational-behavior-v1.1/s06-managing-demographic-and-cultu.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license.

- Derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Language, Society, and Culture;* in *A Primer on Communication Studies* shared previously at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s03-04-language-society-and-culture.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license.

Check Your Understandings

- Original assessment items contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

Your Interpersonal Communication Preferences

<table>
<tr><td colspan="1" align="center">

Learning Objectives

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- describe each of the three domains of identity as they relate to communication practice,
- explain the relationship between identity and perception, and their influence on achieving shared understanding through communication,
- describe your own communication and work habit preferences, and
- explain how key factors of diversity influence your workplace behaviours.

</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">

Topics

</td></tr>
<tr><td>

- Identity: personal, social, and cultural
- The five-factor personality model
- Ascribed and avowed identity
- Perception
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Preferences and work habits
- Communication channels
- Team roles

</td></tr>
</table>

Introduction

This chapter is all about helping you to uncover your interpersonal communication preferences. When we study interpersonal communication, we often focus on external things like the audience

or environment. Those things are important here as well, but they are important in the context of their impact on you.

The chapter begins with an overview of the three core elements that make up your identity. Personal identity elements are examined using the five-factor personality trait model, on which many personality tests are built. The second element is your social identity, which would include things like identifying socially as an animal rescue volunteer, an entrepreneur, or a marathon runner. The third is your cultural identity, which can include elements such as your race, ethnicity or gender.

The next section of the chapter takes a deeper look at other elements of your identity. Some elements of your identity are things you choose, known as avowed identity, and some are elements that are put upon you, known as ascribed identity.

The focus is then turned to perception, including how selective perception can often negatively affect interpersonal communication.

The chapter wraps up with information to help you determine your preferences and work habits, a review of communication channels, and a peek at Belbin's nine team roles that may help you understand and excel at communicating interpersonally while doing team work.

Having a better knowledge of your own interpersonal communication preferences will allow you to better understand yourself, your identity, and motivations. This awareness is a useful first step in developing your abilities to relate with and understand other people too.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identity

We develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media contribute to shaping our identities. This process begins

right after we are born, but most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence in which maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness lead them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum, 2009). Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identity.

Our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born and will continue after we are gone; therefore, our identities aren't something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels and Kotthoff, 2009). **Personal identities** include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I may consider myself a puzzle lover, and you may identify as a fan of hip-hop music. Our **social identities** are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups.

Personal	Social	Cultural
Antique Collector	Member of Historical Society	Irish Canadian
Dog Lover	Member of Humane Society	Male/Female
Cyclist	Fraternity/Sorority Member	Greek Canadian
Singer	High School Music Teacher	Multiracial
Shy	Book Club Member	Heterosexual
Athletic	Entrepreneurial Co-Working Member	Gay/Lesbian

Table 4.2.1 Example Identity Characteristics

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. A current interest in online video games may later give way to an interest in graphic

design. Social identities do not change as often, because they depend on our becoming interpersonally invested and, as such, take more time to develop. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of an online gaming community, that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched.

Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behaviour or ways of acting (Yep, 2002). Since we are often a part of them from birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The social expectations for behaviour within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (CollIer, 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed in America since the civil rights movement.

Common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be **acculturated**, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize (Collier, 1996). We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.

Personal Identity

We will use the Five-Factor Model to examine your personal identity. You can use the acronym **OCEAN** to remember the five traits, which are Openness, **Conscientiousness**, **Extroversion**, Agreeableness, and **Neuroticism**.Take a look at the following scale. Where would you position yourself on the continuum for each of the traits?
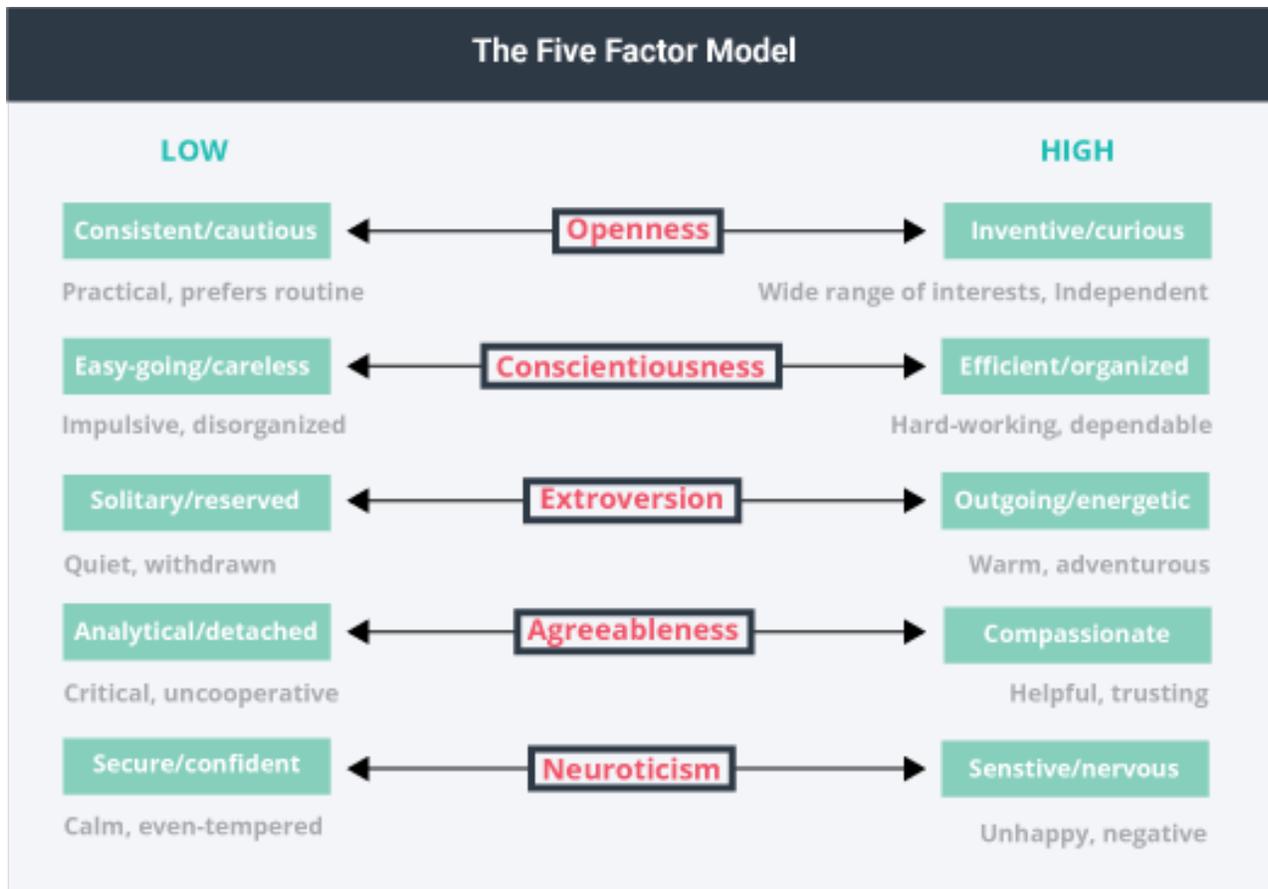
Figure 4.2.1 Five-Factor Personality Model by Laura Underwood

Adapted from OpenStax CNX. Download for free at http://cnx.org/contents/4abf04bf-93a0-45c3-9cbc-2cefd46e68cc@4.100

These traits have a high degree of influence over your working life. They will help you to decide which career path is right for you; for example, if you identify as highly extroverted and conscientious with low neuroticism, you would do well in a sales-oriented position, but someone who identifies on the opposite ends of these scales is unlikely to enjoy or excel at this type of work.

These traits will dictate the people you collaborate with successfully, your team-working ability, and the type of environment you prefer to work in. Your position on the conscientiousness scale can help to predict your job performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). For example, people who

are highly conscientious are more able to work within teams and are less likely to be absent from work. These traits are also connected to leadership ability (Neubert, 2004). Although it may seem counterintuitive at first, if you score low on the agreeableness scale, you are more likely to be a good leader. If you consider the division between leaders and followers on a team, those who make decisions and voice their opinions when they do not agree are promoted to higher ranks, while those who are happy to go along with the consensus remain followers.

These traits will also influence your overall enjoyment of the workplace experience. For example, agreeableness and extroversion are indicators that you will enjoy a social workplace where the environment is set up to foster collaboration through an open office concept and lots of team-working. Conversely, if you score low on these two traits, that doesn't mean that you will not be a good worker, just that you might not suit this type of environment. If you score low on these two traits but high on openness and conscientiousness, you might instead be an excellent entrepreneur or skilled in creative pursuits such as design or storytelling.

Social Identity

Your social identity gives a sense of who you are, based on your membership in social groups. Your social identity can also be connected to your cultural identity and ethnicity. For example, if you are **nationalistic** or have pride in belonging to a particular country or race, this is part of your social identity, as is your membership in religious groups. But your social identity can also result in discrimination or prejudice toward others if you perceive the other group as somehow inferior to your own. This can occur innocently enough, at first, for example, through your allegiance to a particular sports team. As part of your identity as a fan of this team, you might jokingly give fans of a rival team a hard time, but be cautious of instances where this could become derogatory or even dangerous. For example, if your fellow fans use an insensitive term for members of the rival group, this can cause insult and anger.

Cultural Identity

The identifiers that shape your cultural identity are conditions like location, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, history, and religion. Your understanding of the normal behaviour for each of these cultures is shaped by your family and upbringing, your social environment, and the media. Perhaps unconsciously, you mirror these **norms**, or rebel against them, depending on your environment and the personal traits outlined above.

Your **perception** of the world, and the way you communicate this, is shaped by your cultural identity. For example, one of our authors had a white South African colleague who, in casual conversation, used a racial term to refer to black South Africans. While the author was affronted by the colleague's use of the term, the author came to realize that this word choice had been a result of the colleague's upbringing. The colleague's parents, friends, and community had been using that term casually; as such, using that racial term in everyday speech was an ingrained behaviour that did not hold the level of offense for him that it did for the community that he was referring to. While the term has always been considered an ethnic slur, white Afrikaans-speaking people used it as a casual term to reinforce their perceived superiority during the country's history, particularly during apartheid. While offensive to those outside of his cultural and social group, the term was used within it habitually.

Depending on your environment, you may feel societal pressure to conform to certain cultural norms. For example, historically, immigrants to English-speaking countries adopted anglicized names so that their names would be easier to pronounce and so that they could more easily fit into the new culture. For example, Giovanni may have been renamed John (as was the case with Giovanni Caboto, the Italian explorer, more widely known as John Cabot). However, consider how important your own name is to your identity. For many of us, our names are a central piece of who we are. Thus, in changing their names, these people ended up changing an integral element of their self-perception.

The cultural constructs of gender and power often play a part in workplace communication, as certain behaviours become ingrained. For example, in Canada and the United States, male

leaders are typically applauded and thought of as forward-thinking when they adopt typically "feminine" traits like collaboration and caring. Those same traits in female leaders are often considered weak or wishy-washy. Similarly, women who are competitive or assertive are "female dogs" to be put down, whereas men exhibiting these traits are seen as self-starters or go-getters. It is difficult to be a female leader and be socially beyond reproach in the West.

Most of us are often totally unaware of how we enforce or reinforce these norms that prevent women from reaching their full potential in the workplace. Not to mention the implications on how a female leader might communicate effectively interpersonally. In some authoritarian cultures, it is considered inappropriate for subordinates to make eye contact with their superiors, as this would be disrespectful and impolite. In some other cultures, women are discouraged from making too much eye contact with men, as this could be misconstrued as romantic interest. These behaviours and interpretations may be involuntary for people who grew up as part of these cultures.

Ascribed and Avowed Identity

Any of these identity types can be **ascribed** or **avowed**. Ascribed identities are personal, social, or cultural identities that *others* place on us, while avowed identities are those that *we* claim for ourselves (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). Sometimes people ascribe an identity to someone else based on **stereotypes**. If you encounter a person who likes to read science-fiction books, watches documentaries, wears glasses, and collects Star Trek memorabilia, you may label him or her a nerd. But if the person doesn't avow that identity, using that label can create friction and may even hurt the other person's feelings. However, ascribed and avowed identities can match up. To extend the previous example, there has been a movement in recent years to reclaim the label **nerd** and turn it into something positive, and hence, a nerd **subculture** has been growing in popularity. For example, MC Frontalot, a leader in the nerdcore hip-hop movement, says that being branded a nerd in school was terrible, but now he raps about "nerdy" things like blogs to sold-out crowds (Shipman, 2007). We can see from this example that our ascribed and avowed

identities change over the course of our lives. Sometimes they match up, and sometimes they do not, but our personal, social, and cultural identities are key influencers on our perceptions of the world.

Perception

Perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information to represent and understand the environment. The selection, organization, and interpretation of perceptions can differ among people. When people react differently to the same situation, part of their behavior can be explained by examining how their perceptions are leading to their responses.

For example, how do you perceive the images below? What do you see? Ask a friend what they see in the images. Are your perceptions different?

Figure 4.2.2 Visual Perception by Laura Underwood
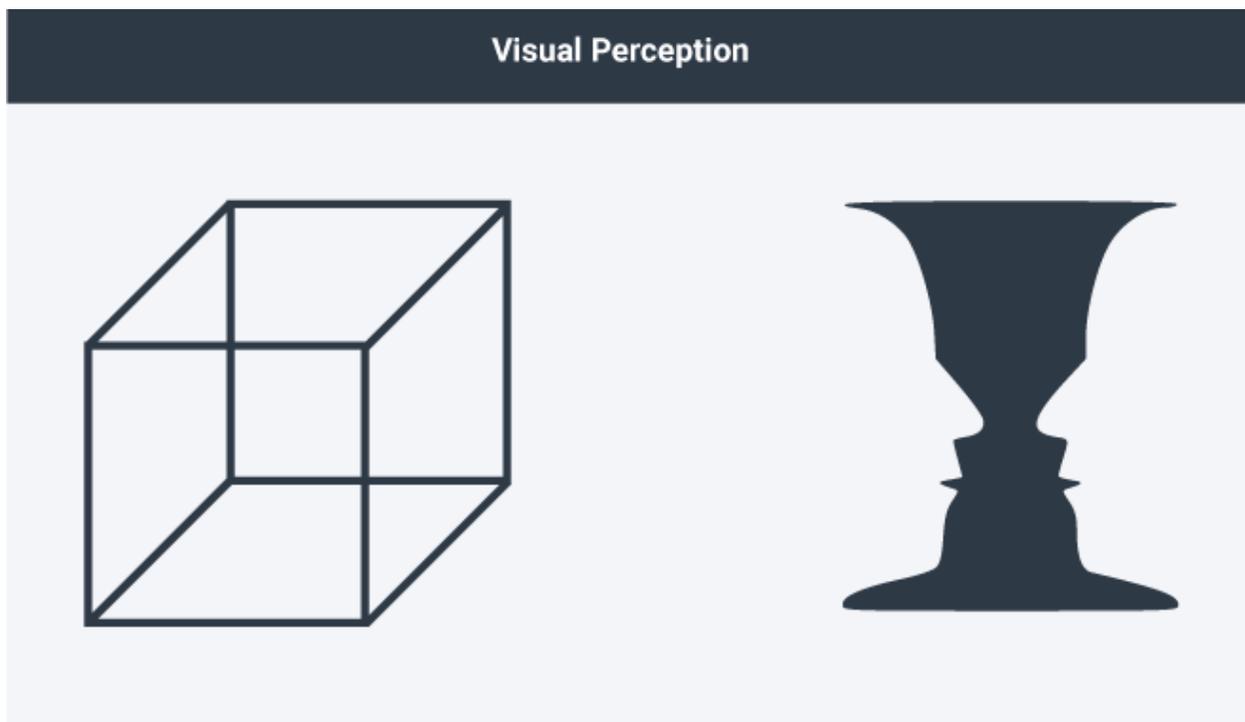
Naturally, our perception is about much more than simply how we see images. We perceive actions, behaviours, symbols, words, and ideas differently, too!

Selective Perception

Selective perception is driven by internal and external factors.

The following are some internal factors:

- **Personality**: Personality traits influence how a person selects perceptions. For instance, conscientious people tend to select details and external stimuli to a greater degree.
- **Motivation**: People will select perceptions according to what they need in the moment. They will favour selections they think will help them with their current needs and be more likely to ignore what is irrelevant to their needs. For example, a manager may perceive staying under budget as the top factor when ordering safety gear but miss or ignore the need for high quality.
- **Experience**: The patterns of occurrences or associations one has learned in the past affect current perceptions. For example, if you previously learned to associate men in business suits with clean-shaven faces or no discernable facial hair as ideal and trustworthy, you may dismiss the same man who shows up with a beard or moustache, perceiving he may have something to hide. Such a person will select perceptions in a way that fits with what they found in the past.

When you recognize the internal factors that affect perception selection, you also realize that all of these are subject to change. You can change or modify your personality, motivation, or experience. Being aware of this is helpful in interpersonal communication because we can use our perceptions as a catalyst for changing what we pay attention to (personality) in order to communicate better (motivation). Once we modify those, we can open ourselves to new patterns (experiences) and ways of understanding.

The following are some external factors of selective perception:

- **Size**: A larger size makes selection of an object more likely.
- **Intensity**: Greater intensity, in brightness, for example, also increases perceptual selection.
- **Contrast**: When a perception stands out clearly against a background, the likelihood of selection is greater.
- **Motion**: A moving perception is more likely to be selected.
- **Repetition**: Repetition increases perceptual selection.
- **Novelty and familiarity**: Both of these increase selection. When a perception is new, it stands out in a person's experience. When it is familiar, it is likely to be selected because of this familiarity.

External factors can be designed in such a way as to affect your perception. Marketers, advertisers, and politicians are extremely well-versed in using external factors to influence perceptual selection. Let's say you have a long cylinder of ice water in a beautiful glass container next to a short bowl of water in a plain, white ceramic container. Most people would choose the glass container because it looks bigger and the clarity may make it seem brighter, despite the fact that it contains less water than the bowl. Similarly, you may perceive that brand A is better than brand B because you've seen brand A in high-fashion magazines, while brand B is mostly available at discount stores in your local mall. You may pay more for brand A because you perceive you're getting quality when in actuality brands A and B are made from the same material at the same low-cost overseas factory.

Perception can influence how a person views any given situation or occurrence, so by taking other people's perceptions into account, we can develop insight into how to communicate more effectively with them. Similarly, by understanding more about our own perceptions, we begin to realize that there is more than one way to see something and that it is possible to have have an

incorrect or inaccurate perception about a person or group, which would hinder our ability to communicate effectively with them.

Examine the vignette below and determine which of the three types of internal selective perception most closely matches this situation:

Interpersonal Communication in the Professional Environment
Professional Communications OER

Culture and Perception

The author has taken two trips to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), landing at Dubai Airport. At the time of her visit, a visa was required for Canadians, and, as part of the visa requirements, travellers needed to be digitally fingerprinted and have an eye scan.

During her first trip there was no lineup. She went and was scanned and printed with no issues. On her second trip, she went to the familiar area, but there were two long lines nearly equal in length. There were no signs to indicate which line was designated for what, so she didn't know which line to stand in or what the respective lines were for.

She looked around and saw some official-looking gentlemen at a nearby booth. She went and said, "Excuse me, sorry to bother you, but I need to have my visa sorted out and I don't know which line I'm supposed to stand in."

The men looked at her, staring daggers at her. She was perplexed, as they looked somehow angry or ticked off. After a long, uncomfortable silence, one of the men piped up and said, "You can stand in any line you want, ma'am."

She felt frustrated that they seemed to be so unhelpful. She was mindful of her anger rising, tried to soften her tone, and said, "I'm not being funny here, but the last time I was here, there was no line. Now there are two, and I don't know what they're for because there are no signs, and so I don't know which line I'm supposed to be in. This is why I came here to ask for your help, so I can know which line to stand in."

Finally, the other man said, "Ma'am you can stand in that line there," pointing to the line that happened to be closest to her.

"Thank you," she said, walking away shaking her head. She was in line and still trying to figure out why those men at the booth had been so cross at her for asking a simple question. It made no sense.

She started looking at the people in her line. They seemed to come from a range of countries, and all looked travel worn. She looked at the other line. Same thing. She wondered, still, why there were two lines.

After doing some shuffling with her bags and passport, about 10 minutes after first standing in line, she had a huge realization. All the people in her line were women or children. All the people in the other line were men.

It took her over 10 minutes and an uncomfortable conversation to realize that in many Islamic countries, men and women mostly go about their day-to-day lives in separate ways. Her co-ed upbringing had completely blinded her to this reality in this context.

If it were a queue for a washroom, she would have noticed right away, but as a queue for a travel visa, it had genuinely not occurred to her—even after looking at these lines pretty intensely for several minutes—that the reason behind having two lines was that one was for men and the other for women and children.

Suddenly, she also understood that the two gentlemen at the booth had looked at her angrily because they might have thought she either was trying to make a point as a smug westerner or was totally dense. She laughed and laughed…

Perceiving Emotion

Part of perception in a communication context is about how we perceive another person's mood, needs, and emotional state. We don't always say what we really mean; therefore, some reading between the lines occurs when we are communicating with someone, particularly if their reaction is not what we expect.

For example, when a baby is crying, we, as adults, wonder, *Has the baby eaten? Could the baby be tired? Is she uncomfortable or unwell? Has he been startled?* Our first thoughts go to meeting the baby's basic needs. Conversely, when we have an encounter with an adult who reacts to us with a negative emotion, we often think, *This person is mad at me*, *He doesn't like me*, *She's not a nice person*, or *She's in a bad mood for no reason*. We take the adult's response personally, but yet we know instinctively that the baby's reaction is not about us. Why is it that we react so differently to the baby's behaviour in contrast to the adult's, even though the trigger may be very similar? We make **assumptions** based on our own perception, but we are not always right. If we, instead, considered whether or not the adult's basic needs had been met, relationships and emotions in the workplace could be managed more easily. The next time you have a disagreement with someone, consider whether or not their essential needs are currently being met, and you may find that the lack of fulfilment of these needs—not something you have said or done—is playing a part in the person's emotional response.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 4.2.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs by Laura Underwood

Adapted from Maslow (1943)

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943) described a series of need levels that humans experience. As Figure 4.2.3 shows, the more basic needs are at the bottom of the pyramid. The most basic needs must be met before humans will desire and focus their attention on the next level of the hierarchy. This plays a big part in communication—and miscommunication—with other people.

Let's take a look at each of these needs, beginning with the most basic:

- **Physiological**: These are the physical needs required for survival, including air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. Without these, the body cannot function.
- **Safety**: These needs are required for humans to feel secure, and include physical safety, health, and financial security.
- **Love and belonging:** These are our social needs and include family, friendship, love, and intimacy.
- **Esteem**: These are our needs to feel respected by others and to have self-respect. This level of needs explains why we study, take up occupations, volunteer, or strive to increase our social status.
- **Self-actualization**: This refers to our desire to fulfill our potential. Each person will approach this need in their own way. For example, you might aim to become achieve athletic goals, while your friend may work at developing her artistic skill.

Think about how your basic needs are met in your workplace environment. Do you respond to others differently, or have trouble regulating emotion and mood when your basic needs are not met? This can, unknowingly for some, be the source of conflict, frustration, and misunderstanding between colleagues.

In a professional context, Maslow's hierarchy is key to employee motivation, happiness, and productivity. We work to earn money so that our basic needs will be met. But some organizations extend their reach to further meet employee needs, for example, by providing food, social gatherings, professional development opportunities, career progression, and so on. These provisions make the organization more appealing to new applicants and encourages existing staff to stay with the company.

Preferences and Work Habits

The personality indicators described above have a significant impact on your working style and preferences. Your previous work experience, demographics, and strengths will also play a part.

You may not have spent much time considering your own preferences and habits, or the impact of these on the people you work with. So, let's take a few moments to look at this.

Ask yourself:

- Do you enjoy working in a sociable environment, or do you prefer to work in a more solitary environment?
- Do you feel more energized through meeting people and building relationships or from coming up with great ideas?
- Are you a big-picture person, or do you focus on the fine details?
- Is your decision-making process based more on logic or on feelings?
- At what time of day do you feel most productive?
- What practices help you stay organized?
- Do you prefer to take a planned, orderly approach to your work, or a more flexible and spontaneous approach?
- Which of your previous working environments did you find most enjoyable? Why?
- Which communication channels do you use, most commonly?
- What have previous colleagues and managers said about your skills and working process? Which elements have come up in performance reviews as things you excel at? What have you struggled with in the past?
- What are the demographics and traits of people you have worked best with in the past? With whom have you had conflicts and misunderstandings, and what do you think were the causes of these?

Channels of Communication

Do you recall the communication channels we discussed in the Foundations module? These have an impact on the way your message is received in any type of communication but are particularly important when you are communicating interpersonally. Your communication preferences are part of your interpersonal style, but when deciding which channel to use to communicate information to others, you will need to consider which channel is best for the situation.

For example, perhaps you are a millennial who prefers to communicate on-the-go using mobile devices and quick-response channels like text, social media, or instant message. But you might struggle to use these channels efficiently if your colleagues are primarily from the baby boomer generation, because your preferences might not align.

You may recall the term **communication richness,** first discussed in the Foundations module. The channels considered to be the most rich are those that transmit the most non-verbal information, such as, for example, face-to-face conversations or video conferencing. Channels that communicate verbal information, such as phone calls, for example, are less rich. The least rich channels use written communication, such as email or postal mail. Depending on the details of your message, you will identify the most effective channel to use. For example, if you need a response right away, if you anticipate an emotional response, or if your message needs to remain in strict confidence, you will need to use a highly information-rich channel. If your message is not urgent, intended for information only, and directed to a large group of people, you might choose a less rich channel. For a refresher on this concept, review the Choosing a Communications Channel Chapter of the Foundations module.

Team Roles

Belbin's (1981) team inventory is a model that helps people to identify what strengths and weaknesses they can bring to a group or team. Normally, people fill out a questionnaire that helps determine what their top three team strengths are out of nine possible categories. According to Belbin's research, these categories are stable across cultures. The nine categories are listed in the chart below:

Action-Oriented Roles	Shaper	Implementer	Completer/Finisher

People-Oriented Roles	Coordinator	Team Worker	Resource Investigator
Thinking-Oriented Roles	Plant	Monitor-Evaluator	Specialist

Table 4.2.2 Team Roles

Do some online research and use a search engine to find the definitions or profiles for each of the nine team roles. Which top three roles do you think you align most with? Do you have a mix of action, people, and thinking-oriented roles, or do your team strengths fall in one or two of those categories? Have you worked with others who seem to clearly match one or more of the definitions you've uncovered?

How you behave on a team and what strengths come to the surface usually depends on who else is on the team at least as much as your own personality traits and strengths. But because Belbin's team roles look at your top three strengths, you can usually find a role on a team that plays to your strengths and have others take the lead in areas where you either are weaker or have little interest.

These team roles are another aspect of a diversity that allows and encourages people to bring their strengths and experiences to the table to solve problems or innovate. Having this framework helps increase the likelihood of interpersonal communication and team synergy because team members understand one another's strengths and weaknesses and can determine their preferred team role(s).

Conclusion

In this chapter you learned about your own preferences and tendencies for communicating interpersonally as a foundation for understanding yourself and others better.

You examined several elements that make up your identity: these are the personal, social, and cultural aspects as well as ascribed and avowed identity.

Learning about perception and selective perception helped you to understand that there is more than one way to see something and that we sometimes choose to see only what we want to see. You learned that incorrect or inaccurate perception can get in the way of effective interpersonal communication.

Finally, you examined your work preferences and habits, reviewed your preferred communication channels, and researched where you might best lend your talent and experience to a team using Belbin's Team Role framework.

This better understanding of your interpersonal communication preferences is the grounding you should find useful in the next chapter on cross-cultural communication.

Learning Highlights

- Your identity consists of three main elements: personal, social, and cultural.
- An easy way to remember the five-factor personality model is by using the acronym OCEAN (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion/introversion, agreeableness, neuroticism).
- Ascribed identity is given to you, while avowed identity is what you choose for yourself.
- Perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information to represent and understand the environment.
- Belbin's team inventory is a nine-category model that helps people to identify the top

three categoric strengths they can bring to a group or team.

Check Your Understanding

Match each of the following premises on the right to the domain of identity it corresponds to on the left.

Answers: Premises:

_____ Personal   A. second-year college student

_____ Social   B. jazz saxophone player

_____ Cultural   C. French-speaking Canadian

                                 D. community-based arts café volunteer

                                 E. graphic artist

Further Reading and Links

- *BBC Future* article on optical illusions - How your Eyes Trick Your Mind

References

Belbin, M. (1981). Management Teams. London; Heinemann.

Collier, M. J. (1996). Communication competence problematics in ethnic friendships. Communications Monographs, 63(4), 314–336.

Hurtz, G. M., & Donovan, J. J. (2000). Personality and job performance: The Big Five revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, 869–879.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological review*, 50(4), 370.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2010). Intercultural communication in contexts.

Neubert, S. (2004). The Five-Factor Model of Personality in the Workplace. Retrieved from http://www.personalityresearch.org/papers/neubert.html.

Shipman, T. (2007, July 22). Nerds Get Their Revenge as at Last It's Hip to Be Square. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1558191/Nerds-get-revenge-now-its-hip-to-be-square.html.

Spreckels, J., and Kotthoff, H. (2009). Communicating Identity in Intercultural Communication. In Kotthoff, H., and Spencer-Oatey, H. (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Communication*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tatum, B. D. (2000). The complexity of identity: Who am I. Readings for diversity and social justice, 9–14.

Yep, G. (2002). My Three Cultures: Navigating the Multicultural Identity Landscape. In Martin, J., Flores, L., and Nakayama, T. (Eds.), *Intercultural Communication: Experiences and Contexts* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Attribution Statement (Your Interpersonal Communication Style)

This chapter is a remix containing content from a variety of sources published under a variety of open licenses, including the following:

Chapter Content

- Original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

- Content created by Anonymous for *Foundations of Culture and Identity;* in *A Primer on Communication Studies*, previously shared at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s08-01-foundations-of-culture-and-ide.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

- Content originally created by Boundless for *The Perceptual Process;* in *Boundless Management* published at https://www.boundless.com/management/textbooks/boundless-management-textbook/organizational-behavior-5/individual-perceptions-and-behavior-41/the-perceptual-process-217-3560/ under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license

- Figure X.X, *Multistability* by Alan De Smet published at https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Multistability.svg&page=1 in the public domain

- The Five Factor Model, adapted from: © Dec 9, 2014 OpenStax Psychology, originally published at http://cnx.org/contents/Sr8Ev5Og@4.100:Vqapzwst@2/Trait-Theorists. Textbook content produced by OpenStax Psychology is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

Check Your Understandings

- Original assessment items contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

Cross-Cultural Communication

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- distinguish between surface and deep culture in the context of the iceberg model,

- describe how cross-cultural communication is shaped by cultural diversity,

- explain how the encoding and decoding process takes shape in cross-cultural communication,

- describe circumstances that require effective cross-cultural communication, and
- describe approaches to enhance interpersonal communication in cross-cultural contexts.

Topics

- What is culture?
- Important terms to know
- Cross-cultural communication theories (Hofstede, Trompenaars, Ting-Toomey)
- Verbal and non-verbal elements in cross-cultural communication
- Comparing and contrasting your cultural communication style with another culture
- Moving from monocultural to intercultural worldviews

Introduction

We may be tempted to think of intercultural communication as interaction between two people from different countries. While two distinct national passports communicate a key part of our identity non-verbally, what happens when two people from two different parts of the *same* country communicate? Indeed, intercultural communication happens between subgroups of the same country. Whether it be the distinctions between high and low Germanic dialects, the differences in perspective between an Eastern Canadian and a Western Canadian, or the rural-versus-urban dynamic, our geographic, linguistic, educational, sociological, and psychological traits influence our communication.

Culture is part of the very fabric of our thought, and we cannot separate ourselves from it, even as we leave home and begin to define ourselves in new ways through work and achievements. Every business or organization has a culture, and within what may be considered a global culture, there are many subcultures or co-cultures. For example, consider the difference between the sales and accounting departments in a corporation. We can quickly see two distinct groups with their own symbols, vocabulary, and values. Within each group there may also be smaller

groups, and each member of each department comes from a distinct background that in itself influences behaviour and interaction.

Suppose we have a group of students who are all similar in age and educational level. Do gender and the societal expectations of roles influence interaction? Of course! There will be differences on multiple levels. Among these students not only do the boys and girls communicate in distinct ways, but there will also be differences among the boys as well as differences among the girls. Even within a group of sisters, common characteristics exist, but they will still have differences, and all these differences contribute to intercultural communication. Our upbringing shapes us. It influences our worldview, what we value, and how we interact with each other. We create culture, and it defines us.

Culture involves beliefs, attitudes, values, and traditions that are shared by a group of people. More than just the clothes we wear, the movies we watch, or the video games we play, all representations of our environment are part of our culture. Culture also involves the psychological aspects and behaviours that are expected of members of our group. For example, if we are raised in a culture where males speak while females are expected to remain silent, the context of the communication interaction governs behaviour. From the choice of words (message), to how we communicate (in person, or by e-mail), to how we acknowledge understanding with a nod or a glance (non-verbal feedback), to the internal and external interference, all aspects of communication are influenced by culture.

What is Culture?

What is Culture?
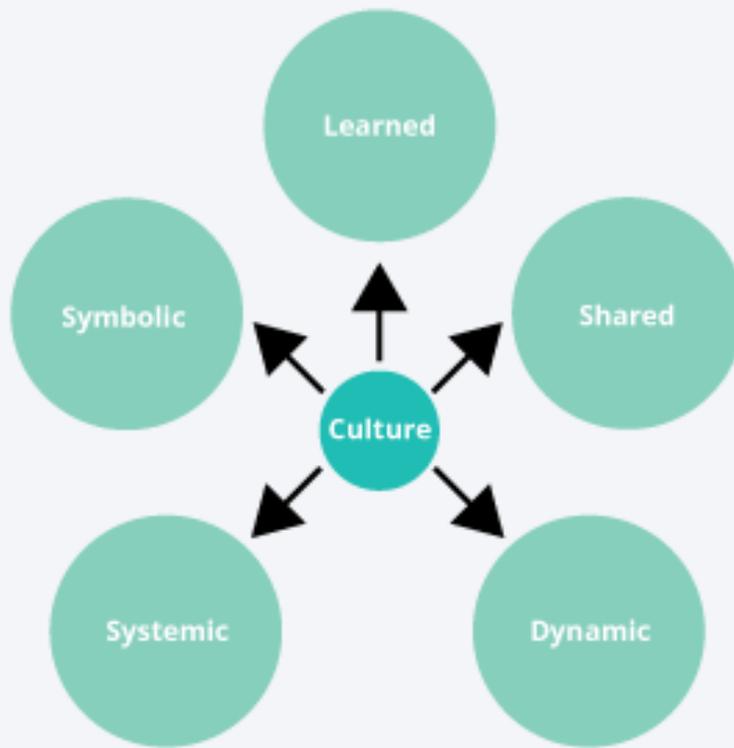
Figure 4.3.1 What Is Culture? by Laura Underwood

Adapted from *Understanding Culture; in Cultural Intelligence for Leaders* (n.d.)

Culture consists of the shared **beliefs**, **values**, and assumptions of a group of people who learn from one another and teach to others that their behaviours, **attitudes**, and perspectives are the correct ways to think, act, and feel.

It is helpful to think about culture in the following five ways:

- Culture is learned.

- Culture is shared.
- Culture is dynamic.
- Culture is systemic.
- Culture is symbolic.

The Cultural Iceberg

SURFACE CULTURE

Food
Flags
Fashion
Games   Dances
Performances   Music
Language   Festivals
Holidays   Arts & Crafts
Literature

DEEP CULTURE

COMMUNICATION STYLE
Facial Expressions Gestures Touching
Eye Contact Space Tone Body Language
Conversational Patterns Emotion

NOTIONS of:
Courtesy Manners
Friendship Leadership
Cleanliness Modesty
Beauty

CONCEPTS of:
Self Time Past & Future
Fairness Justice Roles

ATTITUDES towards:
Elders Adolescents Dependents
Rule Expectations Work Authority
Cooperation Competition Animals
Age Sin Death

APPROACHES to:
Religion Courtship
Raising Children Marriage
Decision-Making
Problem-Solving

Figure 4.3.2 The Cultural Iceberg by Laura Underwood

Adapted from Lindner (2013)

The **iceberg**, a commonly used metaphor to describe culture, is great for illustrating the tangible and the intangible. When talking about culture, most people focus on the "tip of the iceberg," which is visible but makes up just 10 percent of the object. The rest of the iceberg, 90 percent of it, is below the waterline. Many business leaders, when addressing intercultural situations, pick up on the things they can see—things on the "tip of the iceberg." Things like food, clothing, and language difference are easily and immediately obvious, but focusing only on these can mean missing or overlooking deeper cultural aspects such as thought patterns, values, and beliefs that are under the surface. Solutions to any interpersonal miscommunication that results become temporary bandages covering deeply rooted conflicts.

Cultural Membership

How do you become a member of a culture, and how do you know when you are full member? So much of communication relies on shared understanding, that is, shared meanings of words, symbols, gestures, and other communication elements. When we have a shared understanding, communication comes easily, but when we assign different meanings to these elements, we experience communication challenges.

What shared understandings do people from the same culture have? Researchers who study cultures around the world have identified certain characteristics that define a culture. These characteristics are expressed in different ways, but they tend to be present in nearly all cultures:

- rites of initiation
- common history and traditions
- values and principles
- purpose and mission
- symbols, boundaries, and status indicators
- rituals
- language

Terms to Know

Although they are often used interchangeably, it is important to note the distinctions among **multicultural**, **cross-cultural**, and i**ntercultural** communication.

Multiculturalism is a rather surface approach to the coexistence and tolerance of different cultures. It takes the perspective of "us and the others" and typically focuses on those tip-of-the-iceberg features of culture, thus highlighting and accepting some differences but maintaining a "safe" distance. If you have a multicultural day at work, for example, it usually will feature some food, dance, dress, or maybe learning about how to say a few words or greetings in a sampling of cultures.

Cross-cultural approaches typically go a bit deeper, the goal being to be more **diplomatic** or sensitive. They account for some interaction and recognition of difference through trade and cooperation, which builds some limited understanding—such as, for instance, bowing instead of shaking hands, or giving small but meaningful gifts. Even using tools like Hofstede, as you'll learn about in this chapter, gives us some overarching ideas about helpful things we can learn when we compare those deeper cultural elements across cultures. Sadly, they are not always nuanced comparisons; a common drawback of cross-cultural comparisons is that we can wade into stereotyping and **ethnocentric** attitudes—judging other cultures by our own cultural standards—if we aren't mindful.

Lastly, when we look at intercultural approaches, we are well beneath the surface of the iceberg, intentionally making efforts to better understand other cultures as well as ourselves. An intercultural approach is not easy, often messy, but when you get it right, it is usually far more rewarding than the other two approaches. The intercultural approach is difficult and effective for the same reasons; it acknowledges complexity and aims to work through it to a positive, inclusive, and equitable outcome.

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that contribute to communication troubles. We don't see similarities and differences only on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into **in-groups and out-groups** based on the similarities and differences we perceive. Recall what you read about social identity and discrimination in the last chapter—the division of people into in-groups and out-groups is where your social identity can result in prejudice or discrimination if you are not cautious about how you frame this.

We tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2010). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. This division of people into opposing groups has been the source of great conflict around the world, as with, for example, the division between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland; between Croats, Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims in the former Yugoslavia; and between males and females during women's suffrage. Divisions like these can still cause conflict on an individual level. Learning about difference and why it matters will help us be more competent communicators and help to prevent conflict.

Theories of Cross-Cultural Communication

Hofstede

Social psychologist Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1982, 2001, 2005) is one of the most well known researchers in cross-cultural communication and management. His website offers useful tools and explanations about a range of cultural dimensions that can be used to compare various dominant national cultures. Hofstede's theory places cultural dimensions on a continuum that range from high to low and really only make sense when the elements are compared to another culture. Hofstede's dimensions include the following:

- **Power Distance**: High-power distance means a culture accepts and expects a great deal of hierarchy; low-power distance means the president and janitor could be on the same level.
- **Individualism**: High individualism means that a culture tends to put individual needs ahead of group or collective needs.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance**: High uncertainty avoidance means a culture tends to go to some lengths to be able to predict and control the future. Low uncertainty avoidance means the culture is more relaxed about the future, which sometimes shows in being willing to take risks.
- **Masculinity**: High masculinity relates to a society valuing traits that were traditionally considered masculine, such as competition, aggressiveness, and achievement. A low masculinity score demonstrates traits that were traditionally considered feminine, such as cooperation, caring, and quality of life.
- **Long-term orientation**: High long-term orientation means a culture tends to take a long-term, sometimes multigenerational view when making decisions about the present and the future. Low long-term orientation is often demonstrated in cultures that want quick results and that tend to spend instead of save.
- **Indulgence**: High indulgence means cultures that are OK with people indulging their desires and impulses. Low indulgence or restraint-based cultures value people who control or suppress desires and impulses.

As mentioned previously, these tools can provide wonderful general insight into making sense of understanding differences and similarities across key below-the-surface cross-cultural elements. However, when you are working with people, they may or may not conform to what's listed in the tools. For example, if you are Canadian but grew up in a tight-knit Amish community, your value system may be far more collective than individualist. Or if you are Aboriginal, your long-term orientation may be far higher than that of mainstream Canada. It's also important to be mindful that in a Canadian workplace, someone who is non-white or wears clothes or religious symbols based on their ethnicity may be far more "mainstream" under the surface. The only way

you know for sure is to communicate interpersonally by using active listening, keeping an open mind, and avoiding jumping to conclusions.

Trompenaars

Fons Trompenaars is another researcher who came up with a different set of cross-cultural measures. A more detailed explanation of his seven dimensions of culture can be found at this website (The Seven Dimensions of Culture, n.d.), but we provide a brief overview below:

- **Universalism vs. Particularism**: the extent that a culture is more prone to apply rules and laws as a way of ensuring fairness, in contrast to a culture that looks at the specifics of context and looks at who is involved, to ensure fairness. The former puts the task first; the latter puts the relationship first.
- **Individualism vs. Communitarianism**: the extent that people prioritize individual interests versus the community's interest.
- **Specific vs. Diffuse**: the extent that a culture prioritizes a head-down, task-focused approach to doing work, versus an inclusive, overlapping relationship between life and work.
- **Neutral vs. Emotional**: the extent that a culture works to avoid showing emotion versus a culture that values a display or expression of emotions.
- **Achievement vs. Ascription**: the degree to which a culture values earned achievement in what you do versus ascribed qualities related to who you are based on elements like title, lineage, or position.
- **Sequential Time vs. Synchronous Time**: the degree to which a culture prefers doing things one at time in an orderly fashion versus preferring a more flexible approach to time with the ability to do many things at once.
- **Internal Direction vs. Outer Direction**: the degree to which members of a culture believe they have control over themselves and their environment versus being more conscious of how they need to conform to the external environment.

Like Hofstede's work, Trompenaars's dimensions help us understand some of those beneath-the-surface-of-the-iceberg elements of culture. It's equally important to understand our own cultures as it is to look at others, always being mindful that our cultures, as well as others, are made up of individuals.

Ting-Toomey

Stella Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory builds on some of the cross-cultural concepts you've already learned, such as, for example, individual versus collective cultures. When discussing face negotiation theory, **face** means your identity, your image, how you look or come off to yourself and others (communicationtheory.org, n.d.). The theory says that this concern for "face" is something that is common across every culture, but various cultures—especially Eastern versus Western cultures—approach this concern in different ways. Individualist cultures, for example tend to be more concerned with preserving their own face, while collective cultures tend to focus more on preserving others' faces. Loss of face leads to feelings of embarrassment or identity erosion, whereas gaining or maintaining face can mean improved status, relations, and general positivity. Actions to preserve or reduce face is called **facework**. **Power distance** is another concept you've already learned that is important to this this theory. Most **collective cultures** tend to have more hierarchy or a higher power distance when compared to individualist cultures. This means that maintaining the face of others at a higher level than yours is an important part of life. This is contrasted with individualist cultures, where society expects you to express yourself, make your opinion known, and look out for number one. This distinction becomes really important in interpersonal communication between people whose cultural backgrounds have different approaches to facework; it usually leads to conflict. Based on this dynamic, the following conflict styles typically occur:

- **Domination**: dominating or controlling the conflict (individualist approach)
- **Avoiding**: dodging the conflict altogether (collectivist approach)
- **Obliging**: yielding to the other person (collectivist approach)
- **Compromising**: a give-and-take negotiated approach to solving the conflict (individualist approach)

- **Integrating**: a collaborative negotiated approach to solving the conflict (individualist approach)

Another important facet of this theory involves **high-context** versus **low-context** cultures. High-context cultures are replete with implied meanings beyond the words on the surface and even body language that may not be obvious to people unfamiliar with the context. Low-context cultures are typically more direct and tend to use words to attempt to convey precise meaning. For example, an agreement in a high-context culture might be verbal because the parties know each other's families, histories, and social position. This knowledge is sufficient for the agreement to be enforced. No one actually has to say, "I know where you live. If you don't hold up your end of the bargain, …" because the shared understanding is implied and highly contextual. A low-context culture usually requires highly detailed, written agreements that are signed by both parties, sometimes mediated through specialists like lawyers, as a way to enforce the agreement. This is low context because the written agreement spells out all the details so that not much is left to the imagination or "context."

Verbal and Non-Verbal Differences

Cultures have different ways of verbally expressing themselves. For example, consider the people of the United Kingdom. Though English is spoken throughout the UK, the **accents** can be vastly different from one city or county to the next. If you were in conversation with people from each of the four countries that make up the UK—England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, you would find that each person pronounces words differently. Even though they all speak English, each has their own accent, **slang** terms, speaking volume, **metaphors**, and other differences. You would even find this within the countries themselves. A person who grew up in the south of England has a different accent than someone from the north, for example. This can mean that it is challenging for people to understand one another clearly, even when they are from the same country!

While we may not have such distinctive differences in verbal delivery within Canada, we do have two official languages, as well as many other languages in use within our borders. This inevitably means that you'll communicate with people who have different accents than you do, or those who use words and phrases that you don't recognize. For example, if you're Canadian, you're probably familiar with slang terms like *toque* (a knitted hat), *double-double* (as in, a coffee with two creams and two sugars—preferably from Tim Hortons), *parkade* (parking garage), and *toonie* (a two-dollar coin)*,* but your friends from other countries might respond with quizzical looks when you use these words in conversation!

When communicating with someone who has a different native language or accent than you do, avoid using slang terms and be conscious about speaking clearly. Slow down, and choose your words carefully. Ask questions to clarify anything that you don't understand, and close the conversation by checking that everything is clear to the other person.

Cultures also have different non-verbal ways of delivering and interpreting information. For example, some cultures may treat **personal space** differently than do people in North America, where we generally tend to stay as far away from one another as possible. For example, if you get on an empty bus or subway car and the next person who comes on sits in the seat right next to you, you might feel discomfort, suspicion, or even fear. In a different part of the world this behaviour might be considered perfectly normal. Consequently, when people from cultures with different approaches to space spend time in North America, they can feel puzzled at why people aim for so much distance. They may tend to stand closer to other people or feel perfectly comfortable in crowds, for example.

This tendency can also come across in the level of acceptable physical contact. For example, kissing someone on the cheek as a greeting is typical in France and Spain—and could even be a method of greeting in a job interview. In North America, however, we typically use a handshake during a formal occasion and apologize if we accidentally touch a stranger's shoulder as we

brush past. In contrast, Japanese culture uses a non-contact form of greeting—the bow—to demonstrate respect and honour.

Meaning and Mistranslation

Culturally influenced differences in language and meaning can lead to some interesting encounters, ranging from awkward to informative to disastrous. In terms of awkwardness, you have likely heard stories of companies that failed to exhibit communication competence in their naming and/or advertising of products in another language. For example, in Taiwan, Pepsi used the slogan "Come Alive With Pepsi," only to find out later that, when translated, it meant, "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the dead" (Kwintessential, 2012). Similarly, American Motors introduced a new car called the Matador to the Puerto Rican market, only to learn that Matador means "killer," which wasn't very comforting to potential buyers.

At a more informative level, the words we use to give positive reinforcement are culturally relative. In Canada and the United Kingdom, for example, parents commonly reinforce their child's behaviour by saying, "Good girl" or "Good boy." There isn't an equivalent for such a phrase in other European languages, so the usage in only these two countries has been traced back to the puritan influence on beliefs about good and bad behaviour (Wierzbicka, 2004).

One of the most publicized and deadliest cross-cultural business mistakes occurred in India in 1984. Union Carbide, an American company, controlled a plant used to make pesticides. The company underestimated the amount of cross-cultural training that would be needed to allow the local workers, many of whom were not familiar with the technology or language/jargon used in the instructions for plant operations, to do their jobs. This lack of competent communication led to a gas leak that killed more than 2,000 people and, over time, led to more than 500,000 injuries (Varma, 2012).

Language and Culture

Through living and working in five different countries, one of the authors notes that when you learn a language, you learn a culture. In fact, a language can tell you a lot about a culture if you look closely. Here's one example:

A native English speaker landed in South Korea and tried to learn the basics of saying hello in the Korean language. Well, it turned out that it wasn't as simple as saying hello! It depended on whom you are saying hello to. The Korean language has many levels and **honorifics** that dictate not only what you say but also how you say it and to whom. So, even a mere hello is not straightforward; the words change. For example, if you are saying hello to someone younger or in a lower position, you will use (*anyeong*); but for a peer at the same level, you will use a different term (*anyeoung ha seyo*); and a different one still for an elder, superior, or dignitary (*anyeong ha shim nikka*). As a result, the English speaker learned that in Korea people often ask personal questions upon meeting—questions such as, How old are you? Are you married? What do you do for a living? At first, she thought people were very nosy. Then she realized that it was not so much curiosity driving the questions but, rather, the need to understand how to speak to you in the appropriate way.

In Hofstede's terms, this adherence to hierarchy or accepted "levels" in society speak to the notion of moving from her home country (Canada) with a comparatively low power distance to a country with a higher power distance. These contrasting norms show that what's considered normal in a culture is also typically reflected to some degree in the language.

What are the implications of this for interpersonal communication? What are the implications of this for body language (bowing) in the South Korean context? What are the ways to be respectful or formal in your verbal and non-verbal language?

Comparing and Contrasting

How can you prepare to work with people from cultures different than your own? Start by doing your homework. Let's assume that you have a group of Japanese colleagues visiting your office next week. How could you prepare for their visit? If you're not already familiar with the history and culture of Japan, this is a good time to do some reading or a little bit of research online. If you can find a few English-language publications from Japan (such as newspapers and magazines), you may wish to read through them to become familiar with current events and gain some insight into the written communication style used.

Preparing this way will help you to avoid mentioning sensitive topics and to show correct etiquette to your guests. For example, Japanese culture values modesty, politeness, and punctuality, so with this information, you can make sure you are early for appointments and do not monopolize conversations by talking about yourself and your achievements. You should also find out what faux pas to avoid. For example, in company of Japanese people, it is customary to pour others' drinks (another person at the table will pour yours). Also, make sure you do not put your chopsticks vertically in a bowl of rice, as this is considered rude. If you have not used chopsticks before and you expect to eat Japanese food with your colleagues, it would be a nice gesture to make an effort to learn. Similarly, learning a few words of the language (e.g., hello, nice to meet you, thank you, and goodbye) will show your guests that you are interested in their culture and are willing to make the effort to communicate.

If you have a colleague who has travelled to Japan or has spent time in the company of Japanese colleagues before, ask them about their experience so that you can prepare. What mistakes should you avoid? How should you address and greet your colleagues? Knowing the answers to these questions will make you feel more confident when the time comes. But most of all, remember that a little goes a long way. Your guests will appreciate your efforts to make them feel welcome and comfortable. People are, for the most part, kind and understanding, so if you

make some mistakes along the way, don't worry too much. Most people are keen to share their culture with others, so your guests will be happy to explain various practices to you.
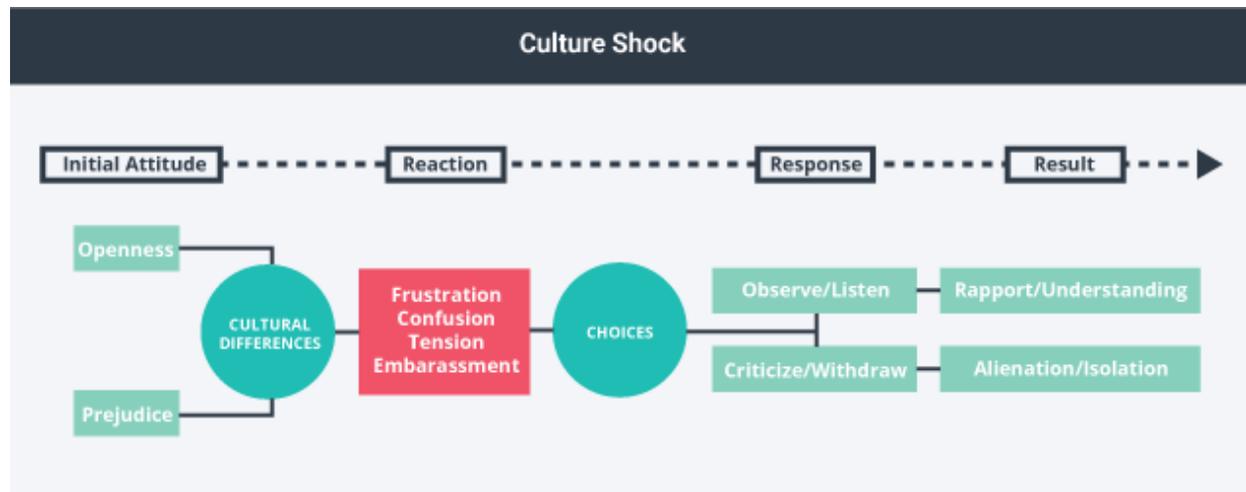

Figure 4.3.3 Culture Shock by Laura Underwood

You might find that, in your line of work, you are expected to travel internationally. When you visit a country that is different from your own, you might experience **culture shock.** Defined as "the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes" (OxfordDictionaries.com, 2015), it can disorient us and make us feel uncertain when we are in an unfamiliar cultural climate. Have you ever visited a new country and felt overwhelmed by the volume of sensory information coming at you? From new sights and smells to a new language and unfamiliarity with the location, the onset of culture shock is not entirely surprising. To mitigate this, it helps to read as much as you can about the new culture before your visit. Learn some of the language and customs, watch media programs from that culture to familiarize yourself, and do what you can to prepare. But remember not to hold the information you gather too closely. In doing so, you risk going in with stereotypes. As shown in the figure above, going in with an open attitude and choosing to respond to difficulties with active listening and non-judgmental observation typically leads to building rapport, understanding, and positive outcomes over time.

Culture Shock

Experiencing culture shock does not require you to leave Canada. Moving from a rural to an urban centre (or vice versa), from an English-speaking to a French-speaking area, or moving to or from an ethnic enclave can challenge your notion of what it is to be a Canadian.

In one example, one of the authors participated in a language-based homestay in rural Quebec the summer before her first year of university. Prior to this, she had attended an urban high school in Toronto where the majority of her classmates were non-white and into urban music. When she went to take the train and saw that all the other kids were white, listening to alternative music, and playing hackey sack, she began to worry.

When she met her house mother upon arrival, the house mom looked displeased. Out of four students to stay in her home, two were non-white. The students discovered quickly that the house dad was a hunter, evident by the glass cabinet full of shotguns and the mounted moose heads on the wall. To add to all these changes, the students were forbidden to speak English as a way to help make the most of the French language immersion program. About two weeks into the program, the student from Toronto, a black girl, overheard the house mom talking with her roommate, a white girl from London, Ontario. She said, "You know, I was really concerned when I saw that we had a black and an Asian student, because we never had any people like that in our house before, so I didn't know what to expect. But now, you know especially with your roommate from Toronto, I can see that they're just like normal people!"

The urban to rural transition was stark, the language immersion was a challenge, and the culture of the other students as well as that of the host family was also a big change. With so many changes happening, one outcome that is consistent with what we know about one aspect of culture shock, is that most of the students on this immersion program reported sleeping way

longer hours than usual. It's but one way for your mind and body to cope with the rigours of culture shock!

Despite all the challenges, however, the benefit for the author was a 30 percent improvement in French language skills—skills that later came in handy during bilingual jobs, trips to France, and the ability to communicate with the global French-speaking community.

A Changing Worldview

One helpful way to develop your intercultural communication competence is to develop sensitivity to intercultural communication issues and best practices. From everything we have learned so far, it may feel complex and overwhelming. The Intercultural Development Continuum is a theory created by Mitchell Hammer (2012) that helps demystify the process of moving from monocultural approaches to intercultural approaches. There are five steps in this transition, and we will give a brief overview of each one below.

1. **Denial**: Denial is the problem-denying stage. For example, a well-meaning person might say that they pay no attention to race issues because they themselves are "colour blind" and treat everyone the same, irrespective of race. While on the surface this attitude seems fair-minded, it can mean willfully blinding oneself to very real cultural differences. Essentially, not much sensitivity or empathy can be present if one denies that cultural differences actually exist. This is a monocultural mindset. When there's denial in organizations, diversity feels *ignored*.

2. **Polarization**: Polarization is the stage where one accepts and acknowledges that there is such a thing as cultural difference, but the difference is framed as a negative "us versus them" proposition. This usually means "we" are the good guys, and "they" are the bad guys. Sometimes a person will reverse this approach and say their own culture is bad or otherwise deficient and see a different culture as superior or very good. Either way,

polarization reinforces already-existing biases and stereotypes and misses out on nuanced understanding and empathy. It is thus considered more of a monocultural mindset. When polarization exists in organizations, diversity usually feels *uncomfortable*.

3. **Minimization**: Minimization is a hybrid category that is really neither monocultural nor intercultural. Minimization recognizes that there are cultural differences, even significant ones, but tends to focus on universal commonalities that can mask or paper over other important cultural distinctions. This is typically characterized by limited cultural self-awareness in the case of a person belonging to a dominant culture, or as a strategy by members of non-dominant groups to "go along to get along" in an organization. When dominant culture minimization exists in organizations, diversity feels *not heard*.

4. **Acceptance**: Acceptance demonstrates a recognition and deeper appreciation of both their own and others' cultural differences and commonalities and is the first dimension that exhibits a more intercultural mindset. At this level people are better able to detect cultural patterns and able to see how those patterns make sense in their own and other cultural contexts. There is the capacity to accept others as being different and at the same time being fully human. When there is acceptance in organizations, diversity feels *understood*.

5. **Adaptation**: Adaptation is characterized by an ability not only to recognize different cultural patterns in oneself and other cultures but also to effectively adapt one's mindset or behaviour to suit the cultural context in an authentic way. When there is adaptation in organizations, diversity feels *valued and involved*.

The first two steps out of five reflect monocultural mindsets, which are ethnocentric. As you recall, ethnocentrism means evaluating other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture (OxfordDictionaries.com, 2015).

People who belong to dominant cultural groups in a given society or people who have had very little exposure to other cultures may be more likely to have a worldview that's more **monocultural** according to Hammer (2009). But how does this cause problems in interpersonal communication? For one, being blind to the cultural differences of the person you want to communicate with (denial) increases the likelihood that you will encode a message that they won't decode the way you anticipate, or vice versa.

For example, let's say culture A considers the head a special and sacred part of the body that others should never touch, certainly not strangers or mere acquaintances. But let's say in your culture people sometimes pat each other on the head as a sign of respect and caring. So you pat your culture A colleague on the head, and this act sets off a huge conflict.

It would take a great deal of careful communication to sort out such a misunderstanding, but if each party keeps judging the other by their own cultural standards, it's likely that additional misunderstanding, conflict, and poor communication will transpire.

Using this example, polarization can come into play because now there's a basis of experience for selective perception of the other culture. Culture A might say that your culture is disrespectful, lacks proper morals, and values, and it might support these claims with anecdotal evidence of people from your culture patting one another on the sacred head!

Meanwhile, your culture will say that culture A is bad-tempered, unintelligent, and angry by nature and that there would be no point in even trying to respect or explain things them.

It's a simple example, but over time and history, situations like this have mounted and thus led to violence, even war and genocide.

According to Hammer (2009) the majority of people who have taken the IDI inventory, a 50-question questionnaire to determine where they are on the monocultural–intercultural continuum,

fall in the category of minimization, which is neither monocultural nor intercultural. It's the middle-of-the-road category that on one hand recognizes cultural difference but on the other hand simultaneously downplays it. While not as extreme as the first two situations, interpersonal communication with someone of a different culture can also be difficult here because of the same encoding/decoding issues that can lead to inaccurate perceptions. On the positive side, the recognition of cultural differences provides a foundation on which to build and a point from which to move toward acceptance, which is an intercultural mindset.

There are fewer people in the acceptance category than there are in the minimization category, and only a small percentage of people fall into the adaptation category. This means most of us have our work cut out for us if we recognize the value—considering our increasingly global societies and economies—of developing an intercultural mindset as a way to improve our interpersonal communication skill.

Conclusion

In this chapter on cross-cultural communication you learned about culture and how it can complicate interpersonal communication. Culture is learned, shared, dynamic, systemic, and symbolic. You uncovered the distinction between multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural approaches and discovered several new terms such as *diplomatic*, *ethnocentric*, and *in-/out-groups*.

From there you went on to examine the work three different cross-cultural theorists including Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Ting-Toomey. After reviewing verbal and non-verbal differences, you went on to compare and contrast by doing your homework on what it might be like to communicate interpersonally with members of another culture and taking a deeper look into culture shock.

Finally, you learned about the stages on the intercultural development continuum that move from an ethnocentric, monocultural worldview to a more intercultural worldview.

The ability to communicate well between cultures is an increasingly sought-after skill that takes time, practice, reflection, and a great deal of work and patience. This chapter has introduced you to several concepts and tools that can put you on the path to further developing your interpersonal skills to give you an edge and better insight in cross-cultural situations.

Learning Highlights

- The iceberg model helps to show us that a few easily visible elements of culture are above the surface but that below the surface lie the invisible and numerous elements that make up culture.
- *Ethnocentrism* is an important word to know; it indicates a mindset that your own culture is superior while others are inferior.
- Whether a culture values individualism or the collective community is a recurring dimension in many cross-cultural communication theories, including those developed by Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Ting-Toomey.
- Language can tell you a great deal about a culture.
- The intercultural development model helps demystify the change from monocultural mindsets to intercultural mindsets.

Check Your Understanding

The intercultural approach is defined as a combination of three critical attributes, which allow an individual to optimize intercultural communication. Which of the following is NOT one of these attributes?

a) extroversion

b) language proficiency

c) cross-cultural competence

d) regional expertise

When reflecting on one's own ability to localize and immerse in a new culture, the idea of being capable of putting oneself in the shoes of another is a critical success factor. This is called:

a) cultural identity

b) sympathy

c) empathy

d) knowledge

The concept of multiculturalism is often contrasted with:

a) assimilation

b) none of these answers

c) cultural uniqueness

d) cultural diversity

According to Hofstede, what cultural dimension deals with the level of comfort toward risks or other unknown elements in a given culture?

a) Individualism/collectivism

b) Masculinity/femininity

c) Uncertainty avoidance

d) Power distance

How much attention should one pay to non-verbal communication (NVC) when attempting to interact with someone from a different culture?

a) NVC is critically important and may carry much more meaning than the actual words used.

b) NVC is of minimal importance and should be an afterthought.

c) NVC should be used to rectify confusion between the two individuals.

d) NVC can be very misleading and should be attended to with great skepticism.

Further Reading and Links

- A student's reflection on experiencing culture shock.
- Stella Ting-Toomey discusses face negotiation theory in this YouTube video.

References

Allen, B. (2010). *Difference matters: Communicating social identity*. Waveland Press.

culture shock. (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionaries*. Retrieved from
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/culture-shock

ethnocentric. (n.d.). In *Oxford Dictionaries*. Retrieved from
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ethnocentric.

Face-Negotiation Theory. (n.d.). Communication Theory. Retrieved from
http://communicationtheory.org/face-negotiation-theory/.

Hammer, M.R. (2009). The Intercultural Development Inventory. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.).
Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (1982). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and
organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind* (Revised and expanded 2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Lindner, M. (2013). Edward T. Hall's Cultural Iceberg. Prezi presentation retrieved from https://prezi.com/y4biykjasxhw/edward-t-halls-cultural-iceberg/?utm_source=prezi-view&utm_medium=ending-bar&utm_content=Title-link&utm_campaign=ending-bar-tryout.

Results of Poor Cross Cultural Awareness. (n.d.) Kwintessential Ltd. Retrieved from http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/cultural-services/articles/results-of-poor-cross-cultural-awareness.html.

The Seven Dimensions of Culture: Understanding and Managing Cultural Differences. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/seven-dimensions.htm.

Varma, S. (2010, June 20). Arbitrary? 92% of All Injuries Termed Minor. *The Times of India*. Retrieved from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-06-20/india/28309628_1_injuries-gases-cases.

Wierzbicka, A. (2004). The English expressions good boy and good girl and cultural models of child rearing. *Culture & Psychology*, 10(3), 251–278.

Attribution Statement (Cross-Cultural Communication)

This chapter is a remix containing content from a variety of sources published under a variety of open licenses, including the following:

Chapter Content

- Original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

- Content created by Anonymous for *Understanding Culture;* in *Cultural Intelligence for Leaders*, previously shared at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/cultural-intelligence-for-leaders/s04-understanding-culture.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

- Derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Intercultural and International Group Communication;* in *An Introduction to Group Communication*, previously shared at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/an-introduction-to-group-communication/s07-intercultural-and-internationa.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

- Content created by Anonymous for *Language, Society, and Culture;* in *A Primer on Communication Studies*, previously shared at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s03-04-language-society-and-culture.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

Check Your Understandings

- Original assessment items contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

- Assessment items created by Boundless, for *Boundless Managing Diversity Quiz*, previously shared at https://www.boundless.com/quizzes/managing-diversity-quiz-2584/ under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license

- Assessment items adapted from The Saylor Foundation for the saylor.org course *Comm 311: Intercultural Communication*, previously shared at http://saylordotorg.github.io/LegacyExams/COMM/COMM311/COMM311-FinalExam-Answers.html under a CC BY 3.0 US license

Conflict Resolution

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this chapter, you should be able to

- describe a number of general types of conflict;
- identify sources of misunderstanding, differences, and conflict in the workplace;
- explain how communication in different cases escalates misunderstanding, differences, and conflict in the workplace;
- describe your conflict resolution style; and
- describe ground rules for communication and strategies to resolve conflict.

Topics

- What is conflict?
- Types of conflict
- Five phases of conflict
- Reactions to conflict
- Conflict management styles
- Conflict resolution strategies
- Active listening
- Preventing conflict with good business etiquette

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of what conflict is, in this case, the struggle that happens when people feel they have incompatible goals, wants, demands, or needs. The focus then moves

to types of conflict you are likely to experience—such as structural, relationship, or interactional—as you try to communicate interpersonally in modern work settings.

You will learn about the five phases of conflict, including prelude, triggering event, initiation differentiation, and resolution. This knowledge allows you to take a step back from a conflict situation to understand where you are so you can make better choices that enhance interpersonal communication instead of further fuel conflict.

Similarly, you will learn about common reactions to conflict. Some of these reactions help to diffuse the situation, for example, postponing, fogging, or coalition formation. You'll also gain knowledge about approaches like gunnysacking, backstabbing, or threats that can escalate or worsen the conflict.

Competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating are the categories of styles or approaches people typically use to manage conflict.

Finally, the chapter winds down with a review of group conflict resolution strategies, with a detailed section on the usefulness of active listening.

For the interpersonal communicator, this chapter provides an opportunity to develop knowledge and skill in how to use conflict to clarify and improve communication, instead of having conflict lead to stalemates and further communication breakdown.

What is Conflict?

The word "conflict" produces a sense of anxiety for many people, but it is part of the human experience. Conflict is inevitable, but we can improve our handling of disagreements, misunderstandings, and struggles in the workplace to make it easier to manage when it does

occur. Hocker and Wilmot (1991) offer us several principles on conflict that have been adapted here for our discussion:

- Conflict is universal.
- Conflict is associated with incompatible goals.
- Conflict is associated with scarce resources.
- Conflict is associated with interference.
- Conflict is not a sign of a poor relationship.
- Conflict cannot be avoided.
- Conflict cannot always be resolved.
- Conflict is not always bad.

McLean (2005) defines **conflict** as the physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs. When incompatible goals, scarce resources, or interference are present, conflict often results, but it doesn't mean the relationship is poor or failing. All relationships progress through times of conflict and collaboration. The way we navigate and negotiate these challenges influences, reinforces, or destroys the relationship. Rather than viewing conflict negatively, view it as an opportunity for clarification and growth.

Types of Conflict

Conflict can arise for a variety of reasons. Usually, the conflicts you encounter in the workplace are one of these seven types:

- **Structural**: Problems with the way a situation is set up (i.e., who is involved, geographical and physical relationships, unequal power and authority, impact of underlying processes, impact of external events).

For example, structural reasons for conflict could be things such as difficulty setting times to meet with colleagues who are in different time zones, one person thinks they are "in charge" but other members of the group don't agree, the business processes take a lot of time to implement so it is is hard to get things done on time, etc.

- **Relationship**: Often a cause of conflict, relationship conflict may arise from poor communication, stereotyping, misconceptions, and time constraints.

For example, relationship triggers for a conflict could resemble the following scenarios: a couple of group members do not answer emails in a timely way, holding up progress for others; someone assumes that a certain person's disability will prevent them from participating in a project, without asking the person what they feel confident in doing; a supervisor moves up a deadline so that the group is under increasing time pressure, etc.

- **Interaction**: Some people have not developed their skills in interacting with others.This can be a source of conflict, particularly when one's needs are not met by others. Interaction challenges can lead to negative responses such as avoidance and attack.

For example, interaction triggers can occur when a solitary worker is required to work in a team-oriented culture or when a worker doesn't realize that their poor time-management skills are affecting the team's ability to complete a project on time.

- **Values and Identity**: We all have different values and perceptions. When these do not align within a working group, or when they are challenged, they can cause conflict.

For example, values-and-identity triggers can occur when a colleague tells another that their method is "wrong" or when a worker refuses to work on a project because it doesn't align with their personal beliefs (i.e., there is misalignment with the person's political or religious views).

- **Data**: Lack of information, or conflicting information, causes considerable conflict in the workplace.

For example, data triggers can occur in an instance where a manager has told a subordinate what the deliverables of a project are, but another team member has been instructed by a different manager with a different set of goals.

- **Cultural**: Cultural conflict arises when there is misunderstanding of group norms, confusion over language and communication styles, or underlying trust is missing.

For example, cultural triggers can occur when a new employee joins a workplace where the business culture is different from the one she left, or when people from different cultural backgrounds work on the same team but misunderstand meanings because of language barriers.

The Five Phases of Conflict

When you experience conflict at work, you may notice that there are five distinct stages, as follows:

1. Prelude
2. Triggering Event
3. Initiation
4. Differentiation
5. Resolution

To give you some context, we'll examine a workplace conflict scenario.

Conflict at Work

Adam and Connor work for a large financial firm, advising clients on the financial services the company sells. Their job titles are the same, and their desks are opposite from each other within an open office environment. Adam has been with the firm for 15 years but likes to keep to himself, as he is quite introverted. Still a relatively new employee, Connor puts in many hours trying to build up his client base. He has done the training that Human Resources asked him to do, and he tries to follow the company rules and procedures. He is quite extroverted and social and seems to be getting along well with his colleagues. Their line manager, Eva, is pleased with Connor's work, so far.

The line manager has assigned Adam to be Connor's "buddy" and to assist in helping Connor settle in. Much of their day is spent working on the computer, meeting with clients, and communicating with stakeholders at various levels.

Connor has noticed that Adam is not as time-sensitive as he is; Adam arrives late on most days, but Connor doesn't know that Adam works late most nights because he prefers to work after others have gone home for the day. Connor has tried to schedule a check-in meeting with Adam a few times, but each time he does, Adam says, "Don't worry. We'll catch up when I get in tomorrow." By the time Adam arrives late for work, Connor has clients coming in to meet with him.

This morning the men had a meeting scheduled for 9 a.m. It is now 9:30, and Adam has just arrived and is taking off his coat. "Morning, Adam," Connor says, "I was hoping we could catch up at 9 this morning, and we keep missing each other. I have a few questions. Are you still able to fit me in?"

> Adam rolls his eyes. "Honestly, the gig's not that complicated," he replies. "I really don't have time to babysit you!" Then he storms off to get a coffee.

First, we need to identify the **prelude** to the conflict. What is the scene, and who is involved? Here we know that we have two male colleagues working at the same level within the organization. We have no third parties involved, but the setting is relatively public. The two men sit at desks in an open office, so it is likely that others in the environment overheard the exchange.

Second, we need to identify the **triggering event**. The following variables are some examples of triggering events:

- **a rebuff**—asking for an action that is not met
- **an illegitimate demand**—imposing wants and needs on another person
- **criticism**—finding fault with others' action
- **non-cumulative annoyance**—realizing differences in attitude and opinions
- **cumulative annoyance**—realizing recurring differences
- **mutual cumulative annoyance**—mutually involved in creating recurring annoyances

On this occasion the main triggering event is a rebuff. Connor tried to line up a meeting with Adam several times, but Adam did not follow through. However, some of these other triggers are also playing a part here. Management has imposed needs on Adam, an an introverted person who prefers to work in a solitary way and, thus, doesn't really want to comply with being Connor's "buddy." There are also recurring differences between the two men's working styles. But these are secondary to the primary event.

Third, we need to consider the **initiation phase**. Now that Connor has perceived the triggering event, he has three options. He can either

1. confront Adam,

2. avoid the issue, or
3. take another action.

Conflict is needed to clarify the issue, but, naturally, Connor feels a bit angry and anxious about the situation. He is unaware of the anxiety and frustration that Adam is also feeling. His perception is that Adam doesn't like him or doesn't want to be helpful, but the reality is that Adam is not comfortable being a work buddy, because of his solitary nature—and he is struggling to express this in a productive way. Connor's anxiety about the situation could lead him to avoid the issue altogether, depending on his personality.

Fourth, we need to consider the **differentiation phase.** This is the phase where the conflict is contained, agreed, or escalated. The conflict could be
- **passed**—in the sense that the issue is ignored or dropped (for example, Connor could decide not to say anything and forget about the problem);
- **refocused**—whereby a complaint is made but the responsibility for it is put onto an external party (for example, Connor could ask his line manager, Eve, to sort out the problem); or
- **mitigated**—in the sense that a complaint is made but worked out (for example, Connor and Adam could discuss the issues, perhaps with a third-party such as Eve, to come to an agreement). If this is to work, both parties need to be **responsive** during the conversation, using active listening techniques and validating each other's points of view during interactions.

Lastly, we need to look at the **resolution phase.** In this step the conflict is resolved. There are two possible outcomes:
1. **Resolution**: This is the best-case scenario, a win–win. In this outcome, both parties are satisfied and will not need to deal with the situation again. For example, in this situation, a resolution might be found by matching up Connor with a "buddy" whose working style is more closely aligned with his own.

2. **Management**: This is a less preferred scenario, in that a solution has been found but one party is unsatisfied with it. It is likely that, with this outcome, the issue will arise again. For example, in Adam and Connor's conflict, their line manager might tell Adam that mentoring Connor is part of his job and that he will be disciplined if he does not comply. Perhaps she will sit in on their first meeting to make sure this happens. In this case, Adam will be unsatisfied and is likely to cause some discomfort between the two men.

Figure 4.4.1 Stages of Conflict by Laura Underwood

Reactions to Conflict

We all react to conflict in our own way, depending on aspects of our personality, our culture, and our previous experiences. Some reactions to conflict can make the issues worse. It is important to

check your own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others when you are experiencing conflict. Here are some ways that people react to conflict:

Reactions That Can Diffuse Conflict

- **Fogging**: This offers an agreement to a person acting aggressively. The aggressor is expecting an aggressive response, so by returning a response that shows a small level of agreement with them, you can reduce the tension. For example, if someone says to you, "You never work late. You don't care about this team!" you might respond with "Yes, I rarely work late. I'm a morning person, so prefer to come in early to get work done before colleagues arrive for the day."

- **Postponing**: Postponing a conflict discussion may make sense, particularly if the situation is new and parties are feeling emotional about it. Putting off the conversation for a few days until everyone calms down can mean that the discussion is more productive. But be cautious that postponing doesn't turn into avoidance. If the conflict is not addressed at all, it is very likely to become a problem again.

- **Coalition Formation**: Smaller or weaker parties in a negotiation can join together and form coalitions to become a larger presence in the discussion. We see this sometimes with political parties, for example. This can work well to build the influence of these smaller groups, provided that their aims are in alignment.

- **Tackling**: Do you prefer to sort things out quickly rather than allow conflict and bad feelings to build? Tackling a conflict head-on is sometimes the best way to move forward. While many people will use avoidance strategies, those with more confident personalities may prefer to sit things down and talk it out quickly to prevent the buildup of negativity. This works well in many situations, as long as the conflict is not highly emotional.

Reactions That Can Make Conflict Worse

- **Gunnysacking**: Bach and Wyden (1968) discuss gunnysacking as the imaginary bag we all carry, a bag where we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. When you are in a conflict, focus on the issue at hand, not the unresolved argument from last year. Bringing up problems from the past only serves to complicate matters and distance you further from a resolution.

- **Refusal to Acknowledge**: Some people are very uncomfortable with confrontation and so refuse to get into conversations that may result in conflict. This might be OK for a while, but if you approach conflict this way, others may take advantage of this. You'll also find that the source of the conflict resurges repeatedly, as it is never resolved.

- **Backstabbing**: This is a particularly unpleasant way of reacting to conflict, but unfortunately, it happens more times than it should, even in the workplace. Some people tend to blame others when presented with a problem. For example, let's assume you are leading team that was working to meet a deadline but missed it. When your manager confronts you about the deadline, instead of taking responsibility yourself, you blame the problem on a colleague and friend in the group, who was not really responsible. This reaction is not only unfair to your friend, who would not expect you to throw him "under the bus," but also makes you look bad when the truth finally comes out.

- **Threats**: Making threats during a conflict will make a conflict escalate. For example, if someone says to you, "If you don't complete the task today, you won't have a job to come back to tomorrow," the idea of losing your job will only increase your level of stress and defensiveness.

- **Blocking**: Have you ever tried to stop a person from getting what they want? This is called blocking and can be a vindictive conflict response. Let's assume you and a few colleagues have been competing for a promotion and are feeling quite tense with each

other. If you were reacting with a blocking mindset, you might go to your manager and outline the specific reasons why these other people do not deserve the role and why it should be given to you. There is a fine line, here, between promoting your own strengths and badmouthing the other people. You should be cautious not to cross it.

Conflict Management Styles

As professional communicators, we can acknowledge and anticipate that conflict will be present in every context or environment where communication occurs. To that end, we can predict, anticipate, and formulate strategies to address conflict successfully.

Figure 4.4.2 Conflict Management Styles by Laura Underwood
adapted from Thomas, K., & Kilmann, R. (1974)

In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the following scenario:

Conflict Management Styles

Rachel and Simon have been running a restaurant business together for 15 years. Rachel manages front-of-house operations and staffing, while Simon is a trained chef who looks after the kitchen. Rachel is growing frustrated because Simon has decided to spend a large portion of the profits on redecorating the restaurant, while Rachel wants to save most of the profits but spend a little on advertising. Conflicts regarding money are very common. Let's see the numerous ways that Rachel and Simon could address this problem.

Competing

The competing style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if Simon pays the decorators to get started right away, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him by simply getting his way.

The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be non-coercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980). **Non-coercive strategies** include requesting and persuading. When we request, we suggest that our conflict partner change a behaviour. Requesting doesn't require a high level of information exchange. When we persuade, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting.

Rachel could try to persuade Simon to spend on advertising by showing him the positive **return on investment** (ROI) that the restaurant received on their last advertising campaign, or by showing him that customer numbers are steadily falling, and arguing that they need to advertise for continued viability of the business.

Coercive strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner's emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rachel works more hours than Simon, she could use that power to threaten to not come in for her shifts if Simon doesn't do what she wants. In these scenarios, the "win" that could result is only short term and can lead to conflict escalation.

Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. Simon's behind-the-scenes spending or Rachel's missed shifts could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their partnership.

Competing has been linked to aggression, although the two are not always paired. If assertiveness does not work, there is a chance it could escalate to hostility. There is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse (Johnson and Roloff, 2000).

The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn't always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person's goals. But in the workplace, competition can be a challenge. For example, if an opportunity for a promotion presents itself, you may find that you and your colleagues are all competing for the position. This may result in improved efficiency for the department, but it could also result in negative feelings towards one another, if only one person is selected for the promotion.

Avoiding
The avoiding style of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low

concern for others. In some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for others. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, it is impossible *not* to communicate. Even if you don't verbalize your point of view, your actions will show others something about how you are feeling. Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may be giving our feelings away through our verbal and non-verbal communication. Rachel's sarcastic tone as she tells Simon that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is a higher chance of the listener inaccurately decoding the speaker's intended message, which may make this strategy less effective than others. You may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the topic, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, thus resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend houseguest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it, when faced with a situation like Rachel and Simon's, avoidance would just make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, to even ending the partnership.

Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a

little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint, we drop clues for our partner will identify, hoping that they will change their behaviour, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. But in doing this, make sure you don't overestimate your partner's detective abilities. For example, when Rachel leaves the account statement on the desk in hopes that Simon will realize the impact he would make on the restaurant's finances if he spent a lot of money on redecoration, Simon may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rachel for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner's ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will feel provoked or insulted than find humour in your joke, if tension between you two already exists. So more frustration may develop when the hints and jokes are not decoded, which often leads to passive-aggressive behaviour.

Passive-aggressive behaviour is a way of dealing with conflict in which one person indirectly communicates their negative thoughts or feelings through non-verbal behaviours, such as not completing a task. For example, Rachel may wait a few days to deposit money into the bank so Simon can't withdraw it to purchase decorating supplies, or Simon may cancel plans for a staff party because he feels that Rachel is questioning his responsibility with money. Although passive-aggressive behaviour can feel rewarding in the moment, it is one of the most unproductive ways to deal with conflict. These behaviours may create additional conflicts and may lead to a cycle of passive-aggressiveness in which the other partner begins to exhibit these behaviours as well, while never actually addressing the conflict that started it all. In most avoidance situations, both parties lose. However, avoidance can be the most appropriate strategy in some situations—for example, when the conflict is temporary, when the stakes are low, when there is little personal investment, or when there is the potential for violence or retaliation.

Accommodating

The accommodating conflict management style indicates a low concern for self and a high

concern for others and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that one person obliges another without providing personal input. The motivation behind accommodating plays an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Generally, we accommodate because we are being generous, we are obeying, or we are yielding (Bobot, 2010). If we are being generous, we accommodate because we genuinely want to; if we are obeying, we don't have a choice but to accommodate (perhaps because of the potential for negative consequences or punishment); and if we yield, we may have our own views or goals but give up on them because of fatigue, time constraints, or because a better solution has been offered. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved, when we don't have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000).

The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship. For example, Rachel may say, "It's OK that you want to spend the money on redecorating this time." However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which will not work in your favour in the long term. If Rachel keeps telling Simon, "It's OK this time," their business may be short on profit at the end of the year. At that point, Rachel and Simon's conflict may escalate as they question each other's motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at other staff members.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you're standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, "Let's see the movie you wanted to see," so you don't miss the beginning. But if you're a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective

(cc) BY
Unless otherwise noted this material is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

Interpersonal Communication in the Professional Environment
Professional Communications OER

strategy.

Compromising

The compromising style shows a moderate concern for self and others and may indicate low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship. Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn't a win–win solution; it is a partial win–lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It's true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked (Macintosh and Stevens, 2008).

Compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rachel and Simon could decide to paint the restaurant but work with the furnishings they have, take out an advertisement in the local newspaper and keep the remainder of the funds in the bank. They are both giving up something, but getting part of what they each wanted. If the pair agrees that the advertising funds should come out of Simon's food budget, however, the compromise isn't as equitable, and Simon, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment.

Collaborating

The collaborating style involves a high degree of concern for self and others, and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win–win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall

relationship. For example, Rachel and Simon may agree to do the redecorating themselves rather than paying a decorator, and to advertise using social media because they can manage this themselves for minimal cost. This way, they can bank the profits minus the small expenditures incurred. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and potentially only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win–win outcome (Hargie, 2011):

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and non-verbal feedback.

Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Groups

Since we know that conflict will happen and that it can strengthen relationships when handled correctly, we would do well to set up ground rules for handling it when it does, inevitably, arise. When people believe strongly about the outcomes they are trying to reach, conflict is more likely to arise, so, conflict can sometimes be an indicator of an engaged and passionate group that will ultimately be successful.

- Outline conflict management strategies when the group first comes together.
- Establish good communication from the start.
- Take notes and/or have someone create meeting minutes for the record.
- Focus on timely issues rather than bringing problems from the past or worries for the future into the conversation.
- On topics of conflict, clarify each member's position.
- Acknowledge emotional topics and establish the root of a person's emotional response.
- Have each member outline the facts and assumptions on which their position is based.
- At the end of conversations and meetings, establish next actions and responsibilities.
- Organize smaller discussions among subsets of members and then bring suggestions to the larger group.
- To reach consensus in the large group, take a vote.

Dealing with Challenging People

We all have to work with challenging people from time to time. Someone's negative attitude or unwillingness to co-operate can cause stress and friction for colleagues and teams. Though it's much easier said than done, try not to let these people get to you. Sometimes the adage that your parents might have told you, "Kill them with kindness," really is the best way to handle this! However you choose to handle this, it is imperative that you remain professional at all times. If you don't, you'll be risking your reputation, too. Here are some tips for dealing with difficult people at work:

- **Consider why the person is behaving this way**. Think back to what you learned about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Often, when a person directs anger towards you, it is not about you at all, but about some other problem in their day or an unmet need. When people lash out, they do so, frequently, because they feel threatened or perceive that they

are not being heard. Can you change your approach to remove these barriers? You may be able to improve communication by doing so.

- **Check your own behaviour.** Did you wake up "on the wrong side of the bed" this morning? Sometimes we give off negative feelings without really meaning to. Think about how your tone and language might have provoked a response. If you do realize that you were responsible for a negative interaction, apologize and ask if you can start over. This can reduce bad feelings and get communication back on track.

- **Speak in private**: It will be uncomfortable for you and the person you are struggling to communicate with to have a difficult conversation when the whole office can hear you. Ask the person politely if you can have a chat in private to see if you can resolve the issue. Importantly, when you sit down together, be cautious about the language you use. Use "I" rather than "you"-focused wording. For example, "I feel like there might be some tension between us…" rather than "You were so rude to me this morning!"

- **Focus on the actionable items**. Also, when you speak, make sure not to blame, accuse, or dredge up past experiences. Attend to the current issue only.

- **Find common ground.** One of the best ways to build rapport with someone is to find out what you have in common. Sharing a laugh over a favourite movie that you share or a tip for a hobby that you have in common can break the ice and get the conversation flowing more naturally.

- **Get reinforcements or support**. If you don't feel able to resolve the negativity on your own, get some help. You can either speak to a colleague that you trust, or to a superior. Do make sure you approach this in a way that does not look like gossiping or complaining, though. The goal here is to find a resolution to a problem, not to badmouth another person. Ask for advice from someone you trust, privately, about how they would

handle the situation. Or if things have become so uncomfortable that you need someone else to speak to the person who you are in conflict with, you may need to ask a superior to intervene.

- **Minimize encounters.** If you are unable to resolve the matter with the person privately and you're not sure how else to handle the problem, sometimes the simplest way to handle this is to minimize the amount of time that you need to spend together. Be cordial and do not make a point to avoid the person, but try to work on different projects to minimize opportunities for conflict. This isn't the ideal solution, though!

Active Listening

Active listening starts before you receive a message. Active listeners make strategic choices to set up ideal listening conditions. You can manage physical and environmental noises by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture, for example. Avoid scheduling important listening activities during times (or in conditions/environments) when you anticipate psychological or physiological noise that would pose a distraction. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious; planning in advance can prevent the presence of these barriers.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are my goals for listening to this message?
2. How does this message relate to me?
3. What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?

Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades (Wolvin and Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message,

then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could leave an impression on your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. As we ponder such implications, we can overcome our tendency toward selective attention.

Listening techniques can help with concentration and memory. **Mental bracketing** refers to the process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening (McCornack, 2007). This requires that we monitor our concentration and attention and be prepared to let thoughts that aren't related to a speaker's message pass through our minds without our giving them much attention. **Mnemonic devices** are techniques that can aid in information recall (Hargie, 2011). Starting in ancient Greece and Rome, educators used these devices to help people remember information. They work by imposing order and organization on information. Three main mnemonic devices are acronyms, rhymes, and visualization, and examples of each follow:

- **Acronyms.** HOMES—to help remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).
- **Rhyme.** "Righty tighty, lefty loosey"—to remember which way most light bulbs, screws, and other coupling devices turn to make them go in or out.
- **Visualization.** Imagine seeing a glass of port wine (which is red) and the red navigation light on a boat to help remember that the red light on a boat is always on the port side, which will also help you remember that the blue light must be on the starboard side.

Active Listening Behaviours

We can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviours as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it

unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your non-verbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn.

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would be fairly awkward to take notes

during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

Active listening is exhibited through verbal and non-verbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; non-verbal cues such as head nods; verbal cues such as "OK," "mmhmm," or "oh"; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

Preventing Conflict with Good Business Etiquette

There are certain expectations and unwritten rules for presenting yourself in a business context, known as **business etiquette**. These vary depending on the culture and the level of formality of the environment, but overlooking them can cause conflict and misunderstanding. For example, in some cultures the handshake is seen as overly formal, but in North America it is the standard professional greeting. Keeping the following tips in mind when navigating the professional environment in North America will help you to maintain positive, conflict-free relationships.

- **Be on time**. Tardiness is frowned-upon in our time-conscious culture.
- **Don't interrupt.** When people are speaking, make eye contact and show that you are listening. If you have something to add, don't interject. Rather, wait until the person has finished speaking to add your comments.
- **Dress professionally.** Make sure your clothes are clean and pressed, and dress at or slightly above the level of formality that your colleagues do.
- **Unplug during meetings.** There are few faux pas worse than being that person in a meeting who is so busy texting or reading emails that he doesn't look up when someone

speaks to him. This is not only impolite but will also cause you to miss key information because your focus is elsewhere.

- **Watch your language.** Never raise your voice in the workplace, and make sure not to use foul language in a professional environment.
- **Show gratitude.** It is surprising how often people neglect to say please and thank you, or to send a thank-you note or email when someone does something to help you. This will make them feel appreciated and more inclined to help you out in future.
- **Remember names.** A trick to help you remember the name of a person you just met is to use their name three times in the first conversation you have. Make a note of someone's name or get their business card.
- **Leave your habits at home.** Nail biting or trimming, smoking, chewing tobacco, chewing gum loudly, talking with your mouth full, spitting, wiping your hands on your clothes, blowing your nose loudly in an open office—these are all unpleasant habits that your colleagues don't want to witness. Please keep your professional hat on at all times in a workplace and avoid these!

Conclusion

This chapter introduced you to the definition, types, and five phases of conflict. You learned that some reactions to conflict can diffuse conflict, while others can escalate it.

You learned about the various conflict management styles and had an opportunity to uncover which style most closely matches your conflict management preference. You also learned about group conflict resolution strategies as well as how active listening and etiquette can be an effective conflict management and interpersonal communication tool.

Learning Highlights

- The nature of conflict indicates a perception of incompatible goals, needs, wants, etc., between individuals or groups.
- Several types and sources of conflict exist.
- The five phases of conflict are *prelude*, *triggering event*, *initiation*, *differentiation*, and *resolution*.
- Conflict management styles include competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodation.
- Active listing is a powerful tool in conflict resolution.

Check Your Understanding

Scenario:

Jane is the new power tools department manager for a large national home improvement store. She came into the position from another company directly into this managerial role and has been working at this home improvement store for about six months. At one of the weekly team meetings, after Jane announces a major decision about the strategic direction for the department, Dennis—who has worked at this store for 10 years—exclaims that he thinks this decision was the wrong one. Jane is flustered but decides, rather than risking the potential for an argument in front of the whole department, to acknowledge Dennis's comment but move on with the meeting. After the meeting Jane asks Dennis to meet her in her office the next day.

Dennis believes he is going to be reprimanded for speaking his mind. He wonders why he is being singled out. After all, he is committed to the department but feels his experience has been completely overlooked in Jane's planning. He is skeptical that someone who has not been

with the company for very long could possibly know how to improve things.

During the private meeting Dennis asks Jane why she wanted to meet. Jane expresses her disappointment in his response to the announcement the day before. Dennis crosses his arms and says, "I'm sorry you feel that way, but if you knew what you were doing, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Jane's voice increases in volume, and she tells Dennis that his behaviour and disrespect will not be tolerated. She tells him that he can either shape up and work with the team, or find another job. When faced with the possibility that it could mean losing his job, Dennis replies, "Fine. We will go with your plan."

Jane's initial decision to have a private meeting with Dennis at a later time is an example of:

      a) fogging

      b) postponing

      c) refusal to acknowledge

      d) blocking

In the scenario with Jane and Dennis, what type of conflict is present during the weekly meeting?

      a) structural

      b) relationship

      c) interaction

      d) values and identity

      e) data

      f) cultural

During the private meeting, which path does the differentiation phase take?

a) prelude

b) triggering event

c) refocusing

d) passing

e) mitigating

During the large group meeting which conflict style does Jane use?

a) competing

b) collaborating

c) compromising

d) avoiding

e) accommodating

During the private meeting, which conflict style does Jane use?

a) competing

b) collaborating

c) compromising

d) avoiding

e) accommodating

During the private meeting, which conflict style does Dennis use to end the conflict?

a) competing

b) collaborating

c) compromising

d) avoiding

e) accommodating

Further Reading and Links

- The Boston Globe's [Boston.com](#) site offers tips on handling conflict in the workplace from management consultant Sue Lankton-Rivas

References

Bach, G., & Wyden, P. (1968). *The intimate enemy: How to fight fair in love and marriage*. New York, NY: Avon.

Bobot, L. (2010). Conflict management in buyer-seller relationships. *Conflict resolution quarterly*, 27(3), 291–319.

Cai, D., & Fink, E. (2002). Conflict style differences between individualists and collectivists. *Communication Monographs*, 69(1), 67–87.

Hargie, O. (2011). Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice. London: Routledge.

Hocker, J., & Wilmot, W. (1991). *Interpersonal conflict*. Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

Isenhart, M., & Spangle, M. (2000). Collaborative approaches to resolving conflict. Sage.

Johnson, K. L., & Roloff, M. E. (2000). Correlates of the perceived resolvability and relational consequences of serial arguing in dating relationships: Argumentative features and the use of coping strategies. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 17(4-5), 676–686.

Macintosh, G., & Stevens, C. (2008). Personality, motives, and conflict strategies in everyday service encounters. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 19(2), 112–131.

McCornack, S. (2010). Reflect and relate: An introduction to interpersonal communication. Boston: Bedford.

McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Sillars, A. L. (1980). Attributions and communication in roommate conflicts. *Communications Monographs*, 47(3), 180–200.

Thomas, K. W. (1974). *Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument*. Tuxedo, NY: Xicom.

Wolvin, A. D., & Coakley, C. G. (1993). A listening taxonomy. *Perspectives on listening*, 15–22.

Attribution Statement (Conflict Resolution)

This chapter is a remix containing content from a variety of sources published under a variety of open licenses, including the following:

Chapter Content

- Original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license
- derivative work created by Anonymous for *Conflict in the Work Environment;* in *Communication for Business Success (Canadian Edition)*, published at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/communication-for-business-success-canadian-edition/s20-06-conflict-in-the-work-environme.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license
- derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Conflict and Interpersonal Communication;* in *A Primer on Communication Studies*, published at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s06-02-conflict-and-interpersonal-com.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

- derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Managing Conflict;* in *An Introduction to Group Communication*, published at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/an-introduction-to-group-communication/s12-managing-conflict.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license
- derivative work of content created by Anonymous for *Improving Listening Competence;* in *A Primer in Communication Studies*, published at http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/a-primer-on-communication-studies/s05-03-improving-listening-competence.html under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license

Check Your Understandings

- Original assessment items contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license

Interpersonal Module Conclusion

This module on interpersonal communication contains a significant focus on some of the challenges and opportunities that happen when we communicate with people who may have different worldviews, understandings, and approaches.

We began with discussion about diversity in Canada and how demographic, business, and social evidence indicate great value in inclusive workplace practices. You further learned about several manifestations of diversity Canadian society, such as religion, generation, and ability. Learning the terms and concepts related with diversity and inclusion—such as bias, discrimination and dominant culture—gave you a good foundation to understand concepts in the rest of the module.

The second chapter on Your Interpersonal Communication Preferences built on this foundation by helping you uncover more about you. It's easy to take for granted or have blind spots about ourselves unless we focus some attention on articulating who we are and the things we like. You

learned about the various dimensions of your identity, including parts of it you choose yourself and parts that are ascribed by others. You worked through OCEAN, the five-factor model of personality dimensions to better understand your own personality, and then you learned about perception and how significantly it influences our communication with others. Similarly, you examined Maslow's hierarchy of needs, your preferred communication channels, and Belbin's team roles all to learn more about your nature and what assumptions you bring to interpersonal communication.

Cross-cultural communication gave you the opportunity to take what you learned in the previous chapters about diversity and yourself and examine yourself and others' interpersonal communication approaches through the lens of culture. You learned that culture involves the beliefs, attitudes, values, and traditions shared by a group of people. You examined the cultural iceberg as a metaphor for some elements of culture at the tip that are easily seen, contrasted with the majority of elements that lie in the larger mass below the surface. You had the chance to examine these hidden elements of culture in theories by Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Ting-Toomey, as well as the concept known as culture shock. Finally, you examined the intercultural development model and the associated monocultural to intercultural mindset continuum that can assist in more effectively communicating interculturally.

The chapter on conflict resolution gave you the framework and tools to understand the nature of conflict, its phases, people's typical reactions to conflict, and approaches for managing and resolving conflict. One of the challenges of interpersonal communication is communicating in the face of conflict. Understanding people's differences, knowing your own conflict resolution and communication style, and having some understanding of the cultural context go a long way in helping you not only manage but also resolve conflict. The chapter winds down with a focus on active listening as an important tool, as well as how business etiquette in the North American context creates a base of shared understanding and behaviour to guide our interpersonal communication efforts in the workplace.

By focusing on the challenges and opportunities around diversity, self-reflection, culture, and conflict, this module has provided you with opportunities for the necessary knowledge of yourself and others that has become a competitive advantage in communicating interpersonally in professional contexts in the 21st century.

Attribution Statement (Conclusion)

This chapter is original content contributed by the Olds College OER Development Team, of Olds College to Professional Communications Open Curriculum under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

Glossary

Diversity in the Canadian Workplace

Able-bodied
Fit and healthy; not physically disabled.

Accessibility
The quality of being easily reached, entered, or used by people who have a disability.

Baby Boomer
A person born in the years following the Second World War, when there was a temporary marked increase in the birth rate.

Bias
Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.

Channel

A method or system for communication or distribution.

Colonialism

The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Decode

Analyze and interpret (a communication or image).

Demographics

Statistical data relating to the population and particular groups within it.

Dexterity

Skill in performing tasks, especially with the hands.

Discrimination

The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Diversity

The variety of characteristics that all persons possess that distinguish them as individuals and that identify them as belonging to a group or groups. It is a term used to encompass all the various differences among people commonly used in Canada and in the United States.

Domestic

Existing or occurring inside a particular country; not foreign or international.

Dominant Culture

A group that is considered the most powerful and privileged of all groups in a particular society or context and that exercises that power through a variety of means (economic, social, political, etc).

Earnings Gap (Pay Gap)

The difference in average pay between two different groups of people, for example men and women.

Encode

Convert (information or an instruction) into a particular form.

Ethnicity

A group of people who share a particular cultural heritage or background.

Fault Line

A divisive issue or difference of opinion that is likely to have serious consequences.

Gender

The state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones).

Generation X

The generation born after that of the baby boomers (roughly from the early 1960s to mid-1970s).

Glass Ceiling

An unacknowledged barrier to advancement in a profession, especially affecting women and members of minorities.

Global

Relating to the whole world; worldwide.

Groupthink

The practice of thinking or making decisions as a group, resulting typically in unchallenged, poor-quality decision-making.

Immigrant

A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.

Inclusion

The action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure.

Marginalization

Treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral.

Melting Pot

A place where different people, styles, theories, etc., are mixed together.

Millennials

Denoting people reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century.

Monarchy

A form of government with a monarch (i.e., king, queen, or emperor) at the head.

Mosaic

A combination of diverse elements forming a more or less coherent whole.

Non-Dominant Culture

Not a member of a dominant culture.

Race

A socially created category to classify humankind according to common ancestry or descent, and relies on differentiation by general physical or cultural characteristics like colour of skin and eyes, hair type, historical experience, and facial features.

Racism

Any individual action or institutional practice backed by institutional power that subordinates people because of their colour or ethnicity.

Sexual Orientation

A person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

Stereotype

A false or generalized, and usually negative, conception of a group of people that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences.

Your Interpersonal Communication Preferences

Acculturated

Assimilated to a different culture, typically the dominant one.

Ascribed Identity

Personal, social, or cultural identities that are placed on us by others.

Assumptions

A thing that is accepted as true or as certain to happen, without proof.

Avowed Identity

Identities that we claim for ourselves.

Communication Richness

Channels that transmit the most non-verbal information.

Conscientiousness

Wishing to do one's work or duty well and thoroughly.

Cultural Identity

Based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behaviour or ways of acting.

Esteem Needs

The need for respect and admiration.

Extroversion

(The quality of being) an outgoing, socially confident person.

Nationalistic

Having strong patriotic feelings, especially a belief in the superiority of one's own country over others.

Nerd

A foolish or contemptible person who lacks social skills or is boringly studious.

Neuroticism

Abnormally sensitive, obsessive, or anxious.

Norms

Something that is usual, typical, or standard.

OCEAN

Stands for Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism as part of the five-factor model of personality.

Perception

The way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted.

Personal Identity

Includes the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences.

Physiological Needs

The physical needs required for survival, including air, water, food, clothing, and shelter.

Selective Perception (Selective Attention)

Selecting only the parts of a message that relate to one's needs or interests.

Self-Actualization Needs

The realization or fulfilment of one's talents and potentialities, especially considered as a drive or need present in everyone.

Social Identity

A sense of who you are based on the social groups you belong to.

Subculture

A cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Accent

A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class.

Attitude

A settled way of thinking or feeling about something.

Beliefs

An acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof.

Cross-Cultural

Relating to different cultures or comparison between them.

Cultural Iceberg

Shows an analogy between an iceberg and culture illustrating that obvious cultural differences are the tip of the iceberg, whereas a huge mass of unseen differences lies below the surface.

Culture Shock

The feeling of disorientation experienced by someone when they are suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes.

Diplomatic

Having or showing an ability to deal with people in a sensitive and tactful way.

Ethnocentric

Evaluating other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture.

Face

(In terms of face negotiating theory) your identity, your image, how you look or come off to yourself and others.

Facework

Actions to preserve or reduce face.

High-Context Culture

(A culture that mostly uses) implied meanings beyond words and even body language that may not be obvious to people unfamiliar with the context.

Honorifics

A title or word implying or expressing respect.

In-Group

An exclusive, typically small group of people with a shared interest or identity.

Intercultural

Taking place between cultures or derived from different cultures.

Low-Context Culture

A culture that mostly relies on precise wording and values, saying what they mean and meaning what they say.

Metaphor

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

Monocultural

The policy or process of supporting, advocating, or allowing the expression of the culture of a single social or ethnic group.

Multicultural

Relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society; takes the perspective of us and the others and typically focuses on those tip-of-the-iceberg features of culture.

Out-Group

Those people who do not belong to a specific in-group.

Personal Space

The physical space immediately surrounding someone, into which encroachment can feel threatening or uncomfortable.

Power Distance

The degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally; how a society handles inequalities among people.

Slang

A type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people.

Values

Principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life.

Conflict Resolution

Business Etiquette

The customary code of polite behaviour in business or among members of a particular profession or group.

Conflict

The physical or psychological struggle associated with the perception of opposing or incompatible goals, desires, demands, wants, or needs.

Differentiation Phase

The phase where the conflict is contained, agreed or escalated.

Initiation Phase

Phase of conflict where one decides to confront, avoid, or take some other action related to the conflict.

Mental Bracketing

The process of intentionally separating out intrusive or irrelevant thoughts that may distract you from listening.

Mnemonic Devices

Techniques that can aid in information recall.

Non-Coercive Strategies

Conflict management strategies that include requesting and persuading.

Prelude

First phase of the five-phase conflict management model that helps to identify elements of the conflict situation and who is involved.

Resolution Phase

Fifth and final phase of conflict where the conflict is resolved or managed.

Responsive

Responding readily and with interest.

Return On Investment (ROI)

The payoff for putting time, money, or other resources into something.

Triggering Event

A variable such as a criticism or a rebuff that sparks a conflict.