

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WARRIORS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS TRILOGY

THE CAUSE LIVES

1. Have you ever been subjected to harassment or discrimination on the job? If so, how did you handle it? Would you do anything differently now?
2. What stereotypes can you name for older people, younger people, overweight people, and disabled people? When did you become aware of these stereotypes? Where did you learn them? At home? Through media such as broadcast and print? On social media?
3. Throughout the book, the characters reveal their own biases and prejudices. What are Alice's biases? Inman's? Jorge's? How do you think their biases evolved?
4. We all have biases and prejudices. Being aware of them is the first step. What can you do to control your own biases?
5. Many things that happen at work are unfair but do not meet the legal definition of discrimination. For instance, a supervisor calling all employees stupid is not illegal since the treatment is equal. Is it time to have a Fair Employment Opportunity Commission instead of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission?
6. JJ has a difficult time adjusting to life outside of prison. Does the U.S. do enough to assist convicts in preparing for repatriation?
7. If someone like JJ joined your church, social club, or workgroup, how would you react?
8. Immigrants who settle in the U.S. are known as the *first generation*. How does Gaye's outlook as the *second generation* differ from her parents? How much of the Indian culture do you believe would remain for the *third generation* if Gaye married Tommy and had children?
9. Were you aware of the EEOC before reading this book? If so, how did you learn about its existence? Does the federal government have an obligation to actively promote the use of agencies that protect employees from discrimination, workplace accidents, or not being paid appropriately for work performed? Are you aware of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration and the Department of Labor?
10. Do you believe in a cause? If so, what are you willing to do for it?

Learn more about the EEOC at <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

ONLY A PAWN

1. Alice cut corners by sending three investigators on money allotted for two and failing to properly report sick leave. Have you ever cut corners? What was the outcome? Does the end ever justify the means?
2. Royce protected himself from being hurt by staying on the offensive and keeping others at arm's length. How effective was it? Have you, or someone you know, ever used this defense mechanism? What was the outcome?
3. Throughout the book, the characters reveal their own biases and prejudices. What are Alice's biases? Inman's? Jorge's? Royce's? JJ's? Why do you think their biases evolved?
4. Gaye chose not to tell Espy what she should do. When a friend is faced with a life-changing decision, what should our role be? Should we give advice? If so, when? If our friend ignores our advice, how should we handle it?
5. Alice continually failed to reveal her true feelings to Art because she feared rejection. Have you ever been in a situation where you have not spoken for similar reasons? What were the consequences? If you were rejected, how did you handle it?
6. JJ stopped trying to succeed in his job because he thought no one would believe his side of the story. Why do you think he caved in so quickly? Is our tendency to judge a person by his/her past useful or fair? If not, what can we do to ensure this does not happen?
7. If someone like Royce joined your church, social club, or workgroup, how would you react?
8. Inman openly accepted his daughter. However, not everyone reacts in the same way. What would you do if you suddenly found you had a sibling or relative you were unaware of?
9. Have you ever been pressured by a boss to do something you thought was not the right thing to do? If so, how did you handle it?
10. Were you aware of the EEOC before reading this book? If so, how did you learn about its existence? Does the federal government have an obligation to actively promote the use of agencies that protect employees from discrimination, workplace accidents, or not being paid appropriately for work performed? Are you aware of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration and the Department of Labor?

RAPTURE BY REVENGE

1. Alice found it difficult to put the past behind her and move forward. Have you ever been in a situation like this? If so, what did you do to turn yourself around?
2. Alice mentors her subordinates by dispensing thoughtful advice. Have you ever had a mentor who changed your life? If so, how did it alter you? Do you—or have you—acted as a mentor to others?
3. Have you ever exacted revenge? If so, were you satisfied with the outcome? If you could do it all over again, how would you proceed?
4. Frequently we develop close friends in a workplace setting. Often, however, we lose track of them. Why do you believe this happens?
5. Stereotyping people based on their political affiliation or religion is easy to do. What harm occurs when we take this route? What action can we take to avoid painting too simplistic a picture of others?
6. Doing the *same old-same old* is comfortable while stepping into the unknown can be fraught with stress. How did Royce's life change because he decided to take a risk? Is there a recent occasion when you took a chance? Was the reward worth it?
7. JJ chose not to depend on others to navigate the changes thrown at him. Do you believe he would have been fulfilled by remaining dependent? Is there ever a time when you should lean on others?
8. About forty percent of job applicants lie on their resumes. Maria Mendoza, the admin assistant, found herself backed into a corner because she could not perform at the level she claimed. How, as a country, should we handle this phenomenon?
8. Inman handled retirement gracefully, but many others do not. Some have difficulty with losing their career identity, the loss of support networks developed at work, and finding activities to fill their days. What is your view on retirement?

Jump Start

The Johns Hopkins Health System received a national equal opportunity employment award from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2008, marking the first time a hospital has been honored. The Department of Labor award is made to a federal contractor or non-profit organization that has established and instituted comprehensive workforce strategies to ensure equal employment opportunity and that exemplifies best corporate practices of nondiscrimination. The efforts of the system's Bayview unit were cited.

To achieve this recognition, programs to assist females, minorities, and people with disabilities were implemented, including providing training to its staff to enhance their skills and prepare them for advancement within the organization. Additionally, Bayview formed a diversity counsel, bringing staff together to develop and implement programs

that successfully recruit, engage, and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organization. "Team Bayview has worked diligently to implement practices and create a culture where our diverse workforce is celebrated," said Gregory F. Schaffer, president of Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. "We are committed to equal opportunity and affirmative action. We believe in our strong plans to recruit, attract, and retain female and minority candidates as well as veterans and people with disabilities."¹

- Why do you think Johns Hopkins Health System is so committed to developing an inclusive work culture?
- Would you want to work at a company that is committed to including employees who are different? Why, or why not?

11.1 INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND DIVERSITY

Diversity refers to differences. In people, these differences can be thought of in four layers, as shown in Figure 11.1. The sum of your individual differences affects how you view others and how others view you. **Intercultural competence** is the measure of your effectiveness when you interact with people who are different from you. This includes not only people who live in different parts of the world but also those who work next to you.²

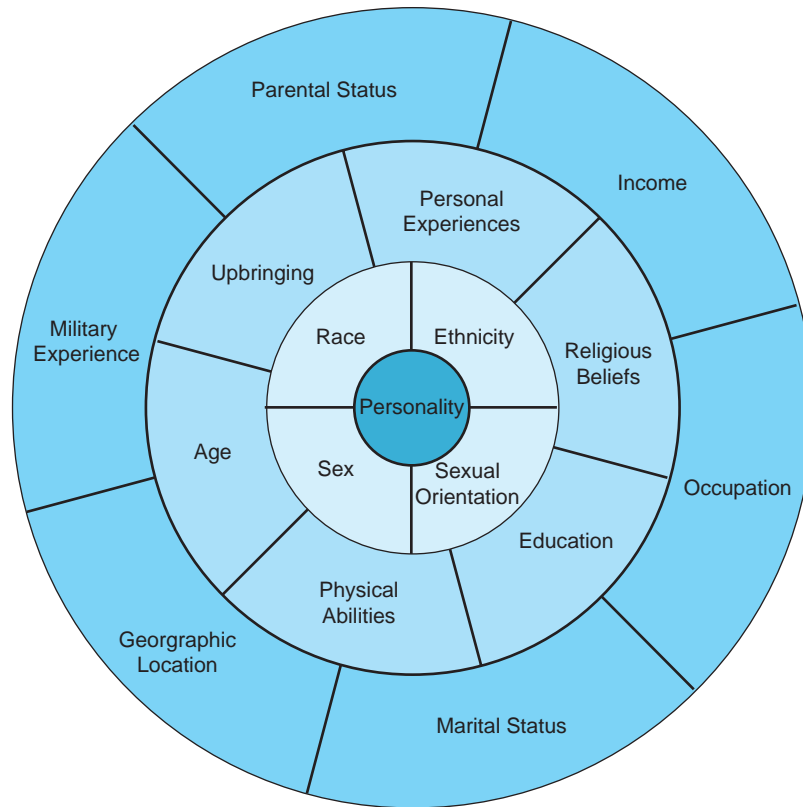
The business world is paying increased attention to the issue of intercultural competence. The global economy and the rapidly changing composition of our population have opened many markets to American businesses. To capitalize on these opportunities, organizations must understand the consumers and their needs. An interculturally competent workforce is now a competitive necessity—it can help a business create new and more innovative products as well as better meet the needs of customers and clients.

Without input from an interculturally competent staff that understands the consumers and their needs, some American companies have made major mistakes. American Motors, for instance, tried to sell an automobile named "Matador" in Puerto Rico. However, it did not sell well because "matador" carries the connotation of "killer." Pepsodent's efforts to sell teeth-whitening toothpaste in Southeast Asia was disappointing because many cultures in

KeyPoint

Strong intercultural competence is the key to a successful career.

Figure 11.1

Dimensions of diversity.³

Each employee brings many dimensions of diversity to the workplace.

that area value the habit of chewing betel nuts, which darken the teeth. Some believe this habit strengthens teeth, sweetens breath, aids digestion, and even cures tapeworms. Historically, stained teeth were desirable as a sign of marriageability or “coming of age.”⁴

Additionally, the pool from which organizations draw employees has become ever more diverse. The percentage of white non-Hispanic-Americans, who accounted for nearly 75 percent of the U.S. labor market in 1996, is expected to fall to nearly 65 percent by 2016. African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans are projected to increase their labor force participation at faster rates than white non-Hispanic-Americans and constitute a larger share of the labor force in 2016. By that year Hispanic-Americans will make up 16 percent of the workforce, African-Americans 12 percent, and Asian-Americans 5.3 percent.⁵

Lastly, the nature of work is changing. The need for a highly skilled workforce will make diverse groups an increasingly important source of labor. Organizations that fail to utilize the best and brightest from the talent available run the risk of falling behind their competitors. Michael Lewis, the author of *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*, says that the

inability to envision a certain kind of person doing a certain kind of thing because you've never seen someone who looks like him do it before is not just a vice—it's a luxury. What begins as a failure of imagination ends as market inefficiency. When you rule out an entire class of people from doing a job simply because of their appearance, you are less likely to find the best person for the job.⁶

Given these changes, it is not surprising that employers across the United States view strong intercultural competence—your ability to communicate and collaborate with teams of people across cultural, geographic, and language boundaries—as essential.⁷ You can increase your skill at interacting competently and respectfully with others by understanding what is driving diversity, recognizing factors that cause conflict, being attuned to different linguistic styles, and developing skills that will help you thrive in a diverse environment.

Changing Makeup of the Workforce

Employers are increasingly expected to accommodate the needs of a complex and diverse workforce that is changing. Women in the workforce have unique needs. More minorities and people with disabilities are entering the workforce while older workers are staying longer or returning in increasing numbers. Also, more employees are revealing their sexual orientation.

Women Women now make up approximately half of the workforce and more than half of college enrollments.^{8,9} Despite gains, a woman's salary is, on average, 76 percent of a man's across all industries.¹⁰ Women are more likely than men to have family care responsibilities, which significantly impact women's employment choices, security, and advancement.¹¹

Despite comprising about half of the workforce, in 2008 women held just 15.2 percent of director positions at Fortune 500 companies. Only 92 of the companies had three or more women board members while 159 of these companies had just one woman. Women of color fared poorly, holding only 3.2 percent of the board of director positions. Additionally, only 15.7 percent of women held corporate officer positions in 2008, and just 6.2 percent held top earner positions.¹²

Older Workers Baby boomers are those Americans born between 1946 and 1964, during the “baby boom” that followed World War II. For decades, whatever boomers were doing became the most significant factor in demographic studies of U.S. trends. Today, the boomers are getting older. The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that by 2016, 22.7 percent of the nation's workforce will be comprised of adults aged 55 and older. Of these older workers, 16.6 percent will be 55 to 64, 4.9 percent will be 65 to 74, and 1.2 percent will be 75 and older.¹³

A survey by the American Association of Retired People polled Americans between 45 and 74 who were working or looking for work and found that, of those interviewed, 70 percent planned to work for pay during their retirement. Roughly half planned to work on a part-time basis. Not only did those surveyed need extra money, but they also wanted to work for enjoyment, to have something interesting and challenging to do, and to stay physically active.¹⁴

“Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.

—Rene Dubos,
French-American
microbiologist and
humanist

KeyPoint

Developing intercultural competencies in dealing with others who are decades older or younger than you is a reality in today's workforce.



In The News¹⁵

Mildred Heath, 100, was America's Oldest Worker for 2008. She began her career in the newspaper business 85 years ago at the age of 15, where she worked alongside her sweetheart, Blair Heath. Eventually the two married and continued to work in journalism. In 1938 they founded the *Overton Observer* in Overton, Nebraska. Today the newspaper is owned by Heath's daughter and son-in-law, employing three generations. Heath works 30 hours a week. She files, takes classified ads and photographs, and seeks local news. Even at her 100th birthday party, she kept a notepad and pen handy to gather news for the week's paper. Heath has seen dramatic changes in technology during her career. She first taught herself to operate a Linotype, a machine that turned hot lead into lines of type for the printing press. When the computer came along, she sat down and taught herself how to use it.

1. Does Heath fit your concept of an older worker? Why, or why not?
2. What conflicts have you seen arise as different age groups attempt to coexist in organizations?
3. What can you do to relate to workers who are significantly older or younger than yourself?

Race and Ethnicity The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that the workforce will become increasingly diverse racially and ethnically. Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54 percent minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children.¹⁶

International migration has played a vital role in the composition and size of the U.S. population. By 2007, 12.6 percent of the U.S. population was foreign born. In fact, almost 20 percent of the U.S. population aged 5 and over spoke a language other than English at home in 2007.¹⁷

Workers with Disabilities People with disabilities are the nation's largest minority and cross all racial, gender, educational, socioeconomic, and generational lines. As of 2006, almost one-eighth of all working-age Americans had at least one disability. They are only half as likely as Americans without disabilities to be employed (38 percent compared with 78 percent), and only 17 percent of those with more severe disabilities are employed. The disabled who are employed earn less—median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers is \$30,000 for those with disabilities, compared with \$36,000 for those without disabilities.¹⁸

As the growth in the traditional labor pool slows, the workforce ages, and disability rates rise, more organizations will be forced to hire from this

KeyPoint

All employees have the potential to be a member of the nation's largest minority group—workers with disabilities.

group.¹⁹ The good news is that technology (such as screen readers and voice recognition systems) is helping compensate for disabilities. Additionally, telecommuting and flex time arrangements are easing the pressure on the disabled who have transportation difficulties or need to stay close to home because of treatment issues.²⁰

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Estimates of the LGBT population in the United States vary but are projected to be anywhere from 3 to 10 percent of the total population.²¹ While federal law does not protect LGBTs from being terminated from their jobs because of their sexual preference, many state and local governments are moving to give this population civil rights, and many companies are including them in their diversity initiatives. Nine of the Fortune 10 Companies, for instance, prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, five prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, and eight provide benefits to same-sex couples.²²

“*Let us put
our minds
together and see
what life we can
make for our
children.*
—Sitting Bull,
Sioux chief

Understanding Diverse Needs

While the diverse groups discussed in this section offer many advantages for organizations, they can also be a source of conflict and loss of productivity. Disagreement can evolve from internal factors such as biases and prejudices as well as differences in values. Linguistic styles also contribute to misunderstandings. In order to thrive in a diverse environment, workers must understand these issues.

Ask Yourself...

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, rate your intercultural competence. Identify areas in which you feel uncomfortable.
2. Have you ever been in a situation where intercultural differences caused friction? Describe your experience.

“*Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired.*
—Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. senator and civil rights advocate”

11.2 FACTORS CAUSING CONFLICT

Biases, prejudices, and value systems are ingrained in all of us, and we base our daily actions on them, often unconsciously. The more diverse a group, the more diverse the internal factors are, thus increasing the likelihood for conflict. By understanding these factors, you can improve your understanding of others and yourself and work to reduce conflict.

A **bias** is an inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment. We begin developing biases early in life, influenced by our family, personal and educational experiences, the media, and peers. Often, preferences are not spoken but rather are learned by watching and viewing what happens in the world around us. By the age of five, many children have definite and entrenched stereotypes about people of other races, women, and other social groups. They have acquired these beliefs from various sources well before they have the ability or experiences to form their own beliefs.²³

Prejudice is prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed or distorted generalization made about members of a particular group. When stereotyping is used, individual differences are not taken into account. Because people tend to grow up with people like themselves, they may develop prejudices about people they do not know—views that are full of inaccuracies and distortions. The goal of diversity is to increase trust among groups who do not know enough about each other. You will benefit from knowing how to control biases and prejudices and not letting them interfere with your ability to interact with others. Use the quiz on the next page to explore your biases.

Once you have explored your biases, you need to deal with them. In *Workforce America!* Marilyn

Loden and Judy B. Rosener offer these tips:²⁴

- Acknowledge the existence of bias and prejudice and accept responsibility for it.
- Identify problem behaviors and assess the impact of behaviors on others.
- Modify your behavior.
- Obtain feedback on changes.
- Repeat steps when necessary.

Values, according to *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*²⁵ are those things (such as a principle or quality) that are intrinsically valuable or desirable. All individuals develop a set of values, or **value systems**, which provide a road map for their behavior in a variety of situations. Your values evolve from the influences of your family, society, religious training, and personal experiences. Not only do individuals have their own value systems, but organizations do as well. Underlying every decision made at work is a corresponding value. Because these values may be so ingrained in you, you are usually not aware of them as you make decisions. In diverse groups, many more value systems are at work, which can cause conflict in decision making.



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KeyPoint

Differing value systems can cause conflict at work.

Rating Your Behavior²⁶

Directions

Answer the following questions by rating your behavior on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). Circle the appropriate answer.

How often do you:	never			always	
Interrupt someone who is telling a racial or ethnic joke?	1	2	3	4	5
Read about the achievements of people with physical or mental disabilities?	1	2	3	4	5
Challenge friends expressing a gender stereotype?	1	2	3	4	5
Send e-mails to TV or radio stations that broadcast news stories with cultural or racial biases?	1	2	3	4	5
Examine your own language for unconscious bias or stereotypes?	1	2	3	4	5
Ask exchange students questions about their countries of origin?	1	2	3	4	5
Recognize compulsory heterosexuality in the media?	1	2	3	4	5
Volunteer your time for a cause you support?	1	2	3	4	5
Donate goods or money to shelters for battered women or homeless people?	1	2	3	4	5
Intervene when a person or group is sexually harassing someone?	1	2	3	4	5
Think about the definition of rape?	1	2	3	4	5
Truly appreciate a friend's differences from you?	1	2	3	4	5
Take the lead in welcoming people of color to your class, club, job site, or living situation?	1	2	3	4	5
Challenge the cultural expectation of slimness in women?	1	2	3	4	5
Protest unfair or exclusionary practices in an organization?	1	2	3	4	5
Ask a member of an ethnic group different from yours how that person prefers to be referred to?	1	2	3	4	5
Think about ways you belong to oppressor and oppressed groups?	1	2	3	4	5
Identify and challenge "tokenism"?	1	2	3	4	5
Examine your own level of comfort around issues of sexual orientation and sexual practices?	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrate your uniqueness?	1	2	3	4	5

Variation

After you have rated your behaviors, examine your responses for patterns. Did you surprise yourself in any regard?

Are there any behaviors you would like to engage in less frequently? More frequently? How will you implement those changes?

Source: Janet Lockhart, M.A.I.S. and Susan M. Shaw, Ph.D. Used with permission.

As a society, for example, Americans tend to expect individuals to speak up for themselves. Americans value those who speak their minds and do not let themselves be taken advantage of. Have you heard the expression, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”? On the other hand, the Turks, who tend to value harmony over individuality, have a saying that “one who speaks truth would be expelled from nine villages.”

Differing Generational Values²⁷

Traditionalists (born before 1946)

Tend to value work before play, following the rules, loyalty, and patriotism.

Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964)

Tend to value working hard and playing hard, personal accomplishment, and a participative workplace.

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980)

Tend to value self-sufficiency, pragmatism, flexibility, and technology.

Generation Y (born after 1980)

Tend to value work-life balance, tolerance, and multi-tasking.

It's important to note that while certain groups may tend to value certain behaviors, not all members of that group necessarily hold those values. Also, no right or wrong value systems exist. Diverse value systems cause us to define problems and develop solutions to those problems differently. For example, generational values and national values can affect the way people work together in an organization.

Ask Yourself...

1. Think of three celebrities. Do they fit the stereotypes you grew up with regarding persons of color, older people, females, or persons from certain areas of the country? Why, or why not?
2. Identify some decisions you have made in the past week, such as whether to study, whether to go out to eat, or what television show to watch. What were the values behind those decisions?

11.3 LINGUISTIC STYLES AND INTERACTIONS

Linguistic styles refer to characteristic speaking patterns. Directness or indirectness, pacing and pausing, word choice, and the use of elements such as jokes, figures of speech, stories, questions, and apologies are also included.²⁸ Differing linguistic styles can cause conflict and misunderstandings.

Understanding your linguistic style and that of others is extremely important when dealing with a diverse group of individuals. By understanding style differences, you can focus on the message rather than letting the way the message is delivered influence the way you interpret it.

Important factors to consider when dealing with linguistic styles are that they are norms. Variations exist, and individuals do not always follow the linguistic norm of their group. Individual personality, culture, class, and sexual orientation can cause these variations. No style is right or wrong—they are just different ways of delivering communication. The more you understand your own style and the styles of others, the more comfortable you will be communicating in diverse groups.

Direct–Indirect Communication Styles

Direct and indirect communication styles can be a source of conflict in communication. A *direct communication style* reflects a goal orientation and a desire to get down to business and get to the point, while an *indirect communication style* reflects a focus on the relationship and is used to develop a rapport before getting down to business.

A supervisor who is an indirect communicator may say something like, “You might consider adding another paragraph to your report explaining the history behind the project.” To the supervisor, this is a nice way to say “do it” when he or she does not want to appear rude or abrupt. When two communicators have an indirect style, there is usually not a problem.

However, if the recipient operates in a direct manner, he or she may ignore an indirect message, much to the frustration of the supervisor. The supervisor will think the employee does not follow directions, and the employee will see the supervisor as “wishy-washy,” indecisive, or unclear.

On the other hand, a direct supervisor who hands a subordinate an assignment and simply says, “Get this back to me by 4:00 this afternoon,” without engaging in any additional conversation may be seen as cold, uncaring, and callous.

Listen to yourself and to those around you to identify styles. If you have a direct communication style and someone speaks indirectly, you may need to ask questions to ensure you understand exactly what he or she wants you to do. If you have an indirect style, you may need to speak more directly to ensure that your wishes are followed.

The important point to remember is that no one style is correct. Concentrate on the message and clarifying your understanding of the message rather than on the way it’s delivered. At times, you may need to adapt your style to match those with whom you are interacting.

High and Low Context Modes

Cultures and groups can operate in a low context or a high context communication mode. *Low context groups* value the written or spoken word. They are task oriented and results driven and generally adopt a direct linguistic style. In low context situations, knowledge is more transferable and available to the public. Examples of low context situations are in sports and activities

KeyPoint

Because linguistic styles differ, it is important to concentrate on the message rather than on the way it is delivered.

KeyPoint

You can improve your ability to communicate by altering your style to fit the individual receiving the message.

in which rules are clearly laid out and in restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and airports.²⁹ Overall, modes in the United States tend to be low context.

High context groups, however, are more difficult to penetrate. Long-term relationships are important, and communication is less verbally explicit. Strong boundaries define who is accepted and who is considered an outsider. Many times, decisions and activities focus on face-to-face relationships and often around one person who has authority. Some examples are small religious congregations, family events, small businesses, regular “pick-up” games, and groups of friends.³⁰ Modes in many cultures such as Saudi Arabia and Japan tend to be high context.

Entering low context groups is easier than entering high context groups. Many situations have both high and low context aspects. For example, membership in a nonprofit organization may be open to anyone, but the group may have a high context core group in charge of the organization.

Assess your circumstances and, if you find yourself in a high context situation, be patient. You may need to seek input from an established member of the group in order to learn the unwritten rules and the way the group functions. Lastly, make it a point to assist newcomers in assimilating into high context cultures in which you operate.

Conversational Rituals and Styles

Conversational rituals are things we say without considering the literal meaning of our words. The purpose is to make interactions as pleasant as possible.³¹ For instance, many of us say, “How are you?” and do not expect or want the other person to tell us about his or her aches and pains. This is just a way to be nice.

“

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.

—Anthony Robbins, self-help writer, entrepreneur,
and professional speaker

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However, if others do not understand conversational rituals and take them literally, problems can occur. For instance, some people may say, “I’m sorry,” but do not mean this literally. While the statement may be seen as an apology or taking blame, many times it’s intended as an expression of understanding and caring about the other person’s situation. Other conversational rituals include saying thanks as a conversational closer when there is nothing to thank, asking for input from many different individuals before making decisions, and giving praise.

Some individuals, on the other hand, use conversational rituals such as fighting. They may argue heatedly to explore ideas and not take the exchange personally. This group may also tend to engage in razzing, teasing, and mock-hostile attacks.

Ethics CONNECTIONS^{32, 33}

Do you ever feel the political correctness police are out to get you? Do you avoid interacting with others who are different because you are afraid you might say something that might embarrass or hurt them or get you in trouble? If so, you're not alone.

Fear of not being politically correct can paralyze the workplace. Valda Boyd Ford of the Center for Human Diversity defines this paralysis as the fear that keeps you from communicating in culturally or linguistically awkward situations.

Unfortunately, these feelings can make you avoid communicating honestly and can dampen work productivity and creativity. The right thing to do is to engage in open and honest communication.

You can improve your self-confidence in these situations by learning more about others, expanding your life experiences (including interacting with people who are different from you), and using effective communication skills.

1. Did you ever have a situation when you said something that offended another person? What happened?
2. How can you learn more about what might embarrass or hurt others?
3. Do you think an apology in awkward situations helps? Why or why not?

Learning to communicate openly and honestly in a culturally diverse situation can improve your effectiveness.



Digital Vision/Getty Images

KeyPoint

Regional conversational style differences can cause us to misread others.

Regional Differences

Regional differences in conversational styles also occur. According to social scientists, the number of U.S. dialects range from a basic three—New England, Southern America, and Western/General America—to 24 or more. Regional variations include differences in pacing, accents, pronunciations, tone of voice, loudness, when you start and stop talking, what you talk about and to whom. Variations are not only influenced by geographical location, but also by ethnicity, social class, and gender.³⁴

Regional differences can cause misinterpretations. For instance, someone from the southern part of the United States may view someone from the north who speaks rapidly and gets to the point without first conducting some small chat as rude, while a northerner may find a southerner’s attempt to say “Hi, how’ya doin?” to every stranger he passes on the street alarming.

Contrasting Linguistic Styles³⁵

Style A

- Direct
- Talk about things
- Convey facts
- Compete; one-up
- Solve problems
- Goal oriented
- Hierarchy, competition
- Conversation to give information
- Minimize doubts
- Razz, tease, mock-hostile attacks

Style B

- Indirect
- Talk about relationships
- Convey feelings and details
- Gain rapport; speak to save face; buffer comments to avoid insults
- Look for discussion
- Relationship oriented
- Level playing field
- Conversation to give information, connect, and compete
- Downplay certainty
- Self-mocking

Style A elements are often used by males while Style B elements are often used by females. Note, however, that linguistic styles are affected by a number of cultural and societal factors, and many individuals of either gender may use a mix of these elements.

To improve your communication in a diverse group, follow these tips from Marilyn Loden and Judy B. Rosener in *Workforce America!*³⁶

- Identify your own personal communication style.
- Recognize your own personal filters, and test assumptions you have with other, neutral parties.
- Acknowledge your own personal style of communication and how it might be perceived as threatening or confusing to others. Disclose personal styles to ease communication.
- Become aware of whether you are in a low context or high context culture to reduce your frustration.

KeyPoint

If you understand your own communication patterns you can adjust them to facilitate communication with others who are different.

Ask Yourself...

1. Do you currently work with anyone whose linguistic style is different from yours? What can you do to make your communication more effective?
2. Have you ever tried to enter high and low context situations? How did the experiences differ?

11.4 GLOBAL INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

In today's global organization you may find yourself working in a virtual global team or interacting face to face with workers from other countries, either here or abroad. In these situations, you will be expected to show a high degree of intercultural competence at the global level. In fact, Janet Reid of the consulting firm Global Lead predicts that by 2019 every leader will need to be competent at the global level.³⁷ This area of competency is not limited to learning other languages, but also includes understanding how cultural patterns and core values impact the communication process—even when everyone is speaking English.³⁸ By understanding how people from different cultures communicate with one another, you can raise your intercultural competency.

An important first step in sharpening your global intercultural competency is realizing that people from different cultures express their thoughts in different ways and words alone are not enough to discern meaning. Important but complex variables are time and space, fate and personal responsibility, face and face-saving, and nonverbal communication.³⁹

KeyPoint

Global intercultural competence includes understanding cultural patterns and core values.

Time and Space

The use of time and space is a key cultural difference. In the West, time is viewed as quantitative, measured in units that reflect the march of progress. Time is logical, sequential, and present-focused, moving incrementally toward a future. In the East, time is viewed as having unlimited continuity, endlessly moving through various cycles.⁴⁰

“

If you can speak three languages you're trilingual. If you can speak two languages you're bilingual. If you can speak only one language you're an American.

—Author unknown

”

These differing views of time can cause problems because those who see time as having unlimited continuity may not have the same sense of urgency as those who see it as logical and sequential. For instance, punctuality is not rigidly observed in many Middle Eastern and North African countries.⁴¹ In Latin America the concept of *mañana* (tomorrow) is prevalent. Work promised may not be completed as agreed.⁴²

Individual work styles also vary greatly along with perceptions of time and priorities. Some people work in a *monochronic* style. They do one thing at a time and follow plans closely. *Polychronic* workers may do many things at once, change plans easily, and tolerate interruptions.⁴³ Respect work style differences and concentrate on meeting goals. Focus on completing tasks in a timely fashion rather than dwelling on how tasks are completed.

The use of space, particularly in conversations and negotiations, varies greatly. North Americans tend to prefer a large amount of space, while Europeans tend to stand more closely when talking. To Europeans, the North Americans can seem cold or disinterested. To North Americans the Europeans can seem pushy and disrespectful.⁴⁴

The use of space also frequently shows itself in how people arrange their offices, particularly during negotiations, and how they wait in lines in group settings such as stores and offices. The English and Americans prefer that people respect the line, whereas some groups, such as the French and Armenians, believe that line jumping or saving places is acceptable.⁴⁵

Fate and Personal Responsibility

“Fate and personal responsibility” refers to the degree to which individuals and groups feel they are the masters of their lives as opposed to seeing themselves as subject to forces outside their control. Areas of the world with a relatively small territory, repeated conquests, and harsh struggles, such as Northern Ireland, Mexico, Israel, and Palestine, are more likely to see struggles as inevitable. When people with a more free will concept interact with someone who is more fatalistic in orientation, miscommunication is likely.⁴⁶

Suppose you are a project lead of a virtual global team. You have a completion deadline less than a week away when a natural disaster hits the island where your Filipino coworker lives, causing a project delay. While you still feel the deadline can be met with extensive overtime, your colleague sees no reason to worry. Fate has caused the project deadline to be missed.

Global CONNECTION⁴⁷

According to recent reports by the British Council, English is the first/native language of less than 10 percent of the world's population, but it's the most significant second language spoken worldwide. Non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers three-to-one, and within a decade, more than 2 billion people are expected to speak it.

Interestingly and importantly, however, International English is not the same language that is spoken in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where English is the first language. Cautions the British Council: People from English-speaking countries have the most to lose as the world adopts an international form of English. These speakers will need to replace local expressive terms, local metaphors, short cuts, sayings, and clichés such as "We can't miss," "It's a home run," and "What's up?"

The Society for Human Resource Management points out that to be an effective communicator in International English, you must use it correctly in dialog, phone conferencing, videoconferencing, written and verbal presentations, e-mails, reports, training, knowledge transfer, cross-functional team activities, business travel, relocation, and more.

1. In your interaction with people from other cultures, what kinds of communication challenges have you encountered?
2. Do you know anyone who has been trained in International English? If so, what benefits have they identified?

Face and Face-Saving

While face is important in all cultures, how a particular culture handles ideas of status, power, courtesy, outsider relations, humor, and respect may vary greatly. Face and face-saving are tied to the concepts of fate and personal responsibility; that is, if you see yourself as a self-determining individual, then you are more likely to work to preserve your image with others and yourself. If, however, you see yourself as a group member, then considerations about face involve your group, and you would attempt to avoid potential damage to your relationships by avoiding direct confrontation and problem solving.⁴⁸

As an example, a Malaysian team member received a performance appraisal in an e-mail from his American boss that contained constructive criticism. The Malaysian team member immediately asked for a transfer. The American boss had drawn from his American culture when giving the performance appraisal, emphasizing individual responsibility. For the Malaysian employee,

the individual criticism caused him to suffer a loss of face for his team. Had the supervisor had stronger intercultural competence, he would have given feedback in an indirect, subtle, and nonconfrontational manner.⁴⁹

Nonverbal Communication

As discussed in Chapter 4, nonverbal communication is important in any interaction with others. Its importance is multiplied across cultures with their different systems of understanding and using gestures, postures, silence, spatial relations, emotional expressions, touch, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues.⁵⁰ People in the United States and Canada place more importance on the meaning of words, while those in Japan and Colombia consider nonverbal communication more important in the total meaning of a message.

Some elements of nonverbal communication and how they are expressed are consistent across cultures, such as enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise.⁵¹ However, differences occur regarding which emotions may be displayed acceptably in various cultural settings and by whom, thus leading to miscommunication and even mistrust. For example, in China and Japan, where most people find it unacceptable to show anger or sadness, bad news may be delivered with a smile to hide those feelings.

Another problem is that the same verbal cue can convey different messages and social skills in different cultures. For example, pointing your finger in the air may summon a server at a restaurant in Austria but earn you an impolite image in Belgium. Nodding your head up and down means no in Bulgaria and side to side means yes.⁵²

The handshake is common in the United States between men, women, and men and women, while in many other countries customs differ about who shakes hands with whom. In Australia, for example, women do not usually shake hands with other women. In India, men and women do not usually shake hands with each other. And in South Korea, women usually do not shake hands at all. Even a seemingly innocuous act such as handing out business cards varies among cultures. For this reason, Americans who will work abroad are frequently given training in cultural differences, particularly if they will be working with people who may have had little previous interaction with Americans.

Because so many differences exist in intercultural competency, developing fluency and functioning effectively requires that you observe, study, and cultivate relationships across cultures. While the Internet and e-mail are beginning to change perceptions and erase communication barriers that have existed across different cultures worldwide,⁵³ the following general guidelines will help you:⁵⁴

- Be aware of settings and situations that are uncomfortable for those with whom you are communicating, and try to reduce power dynamics.
- Focus on understanding, and don't express disagreement or conflicting ideas immediately.
- Explore the possibility that what is presented may not be the main issue. Listen, work on trust, and be patient.

“ *The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.*

—Peter F. Drucker,
American educator
and writer

”

- Acknowledge differences and different experiences and avoid saying “I know how you feel.”
- Focus on similarities or common ground, such as work, families, leisure, and basic human concerns.
- Treat all people with dignity and respect regardless of diversity issues. Keep an open mind, and keep the discussion simple. Speak politely. Avoid making judgments and assumptions, and avoid ethnic, racial, and gender jokes.
- Respect all people as adults who have the right to make decisions freely. Avoid dictating, giving orders, giving commands, and using slang terms.
- Keep a sense of humor.

Ask Yourself...

1. Think of instances when you have interacted with persons from another culture. What were some of the communication differences you observed?
2. Do you think you will handle your next interaction with someone from another culture differently? If so, what will you do differently?
3. How difficult do you think it is to avoid local expressions? What expressions do you use frequently that might pose problems for non-native speakers of English?

11.5 THRIVING IN A DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT

To thrive in a diverse workforce, you must not only explore and deal with your own biases and prejudices and understand your own value systems, but you must also develop empathy, engage in positive self-talk, treat others with dignity and respect, be flexible and learn to deal with ambiguity, and use inclusive language.

Empathy

Empathy is detailed in Chapter 8. Cultural coach Linda Wallace suggests the following activities to increase your empathy and raise your comfort level with those who are different:⁵⁵

- Take advantage of cultural offerings at colleges.
- Shop in a new part of town.
- Volunteer for a community-based initiative that works with people who make you feel the most uncomfortable.

“
*It starts
with your heart
and radiates out.*
—Cesar Chavez,
American migrant
worker and labor
leader
”

- Seek others to act as advisors on cultural issues.
- Develop a learning plan using books and films.
- Talk to a child who has not yet learned to be judgmental.
- Learn a foreign language and experience the culture.
- Listen to a radio talk show of a host who angers you and try to understand his or her viewpoint.

Positive Self-Talk

The *Pygmalion effect* is a psychological phenomenon whose premise is “you get what you expect.” Make it a regular practice to tell yourself that you will get along with and understand others who are different—it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵⁶ If you train your “inner voice” to expect the best and avoid negativity, you will build self-esteem and be more likely to respect yourself and others.

Dignity and Respect

Most individuals want to have more authentic, honest, and respectful relationships with others. Remembering that others may see dignity and respect differently, try to find out what that means for each individual and act accordingly. This may involve being sensitive to physical needs, work/family needs, language barriers, and cultural taboos and customs. Remember, respecting others’ values and viewpoints doesn’t mean you must accept or adopt their way of thinking. You may simply need to respectfully agree to disagree.

You can communicate dignity and respect by encouraging open communication—share a part of yourself and be open to the differences in others. Listen actively and be other-oriented, showing interest in what other people have to say. Additionally, speak to others as you would speak to your peers to help create a sense of equality. Body language and tone can help create a genuine, sincere style.

Flexibility and Ambiguity

Expect ambiguity and learn to deal with it. What you think you see may not be reality to others if they have different viewpoints and perspectives. Observe and analyze situations carefully before taking actions. For example, your boss’s behavior may create ambiguity because it can be interpreted in two or more ways. Use the Rolling the D.I.E. suggestions in Figure 11.2 to help you evaluate your perceptions of a situation.

KeyPoint

Treating others with dignity and respect is the key in developing authentic and honest relationships.

“

Integrity is doing the right thing even if nobody is watching.

—Jim Stovall,
motivational speaker
and author

”

Figure 11.2

Checking your perceptions.

William Sonnenschein, author of *The Diversity Toolkit*, suggests using the Rolling the D.I.E. self-awareness tool to check your perceptions of a situation.⁵⁷

1. Describe the experience. (My supervisor snapped at me.)
2. Interpret it in as many different ways as you can. (She doesn't like me; she is having a bad day because her mother is in the hospital; she is frustrated because her boss has given her a difficult deadline.)
3. Evaluate the interpretations to determine which one is the most accurate.

You may need to think on your feet, be flexible, and adapt to the communication style of the individual with whom you are speaking in order to operate effectively.

Technology CONNECTION

Technology is now helping the disabled perform tasks at work that were once thought impossible. A hand-held device helps the blind identify the denomination of paper money. A variety of emergency alerting systems use flashing lights or vibrations to warn the hearing impaired of anything from telephone calls to fire alarms. Environmental control units enable users to easily turn off and on lights and appliances, adjust thermostats, or control switch-operated battery-powered devices. Many are operated by remote control, voice activation, touch buttons, or timers. Even alternatives to the traditional computer mouse have been developed for those with various fine motor limitations, spasticity, or other gripping limitation.

1. Have you been exposed to any assistive devices for the disabled? If so, describe them.
2. Do you ever use any assistive devices developed for the disabled? If so, which ones?

Inclusivity

Make a conscientious effort to use language and actions that include others. For example, when sending an invitation to a function, you might say that employees may bring significant others rather than husbands and wives. Because many religions and cultures have prohibitions on consuming certain food products, offer food that is acceptable for everyone. Additionally, make certain that entrances and facilities are accessible and comfortable to everyone. Deliver information in alternate formats if needed, such as braille or captioning.

Handling Offenses

If someone has said something to offend you, try the following techniques to resolve the issue:⁵⁸

- Be clear about your goals for challenging the individual.
- Try to assume goodwill—the other person did not realize what he or she said was offensive.
- Talk to the person privately.
- Be honest and direct when explaining how the comments made you feel.
- Use “I” phrases (see Chapter 4).
- Give examples of the comments and behaviors that offended you.

If you have been told you’ve offended someone, do the following:

- Listen carefully and reserve judgment.
- Ask questions to clarify the other person’s concerns.
- Apologize if you had no intention of offending that individual.
- Do not use the phrase or word that was offensive in the future out of respect for the individual.

If you are unable to resolve the issue yourself, seek assistance from your supervisor or the human resources department.

KeyPoint

You can handle many offenses yourself by assuming good will and listening actively.

Ask Yourself...

1. Have you ever been in an environment where you felt excluded? What could others have done to make you feel included?
2. Make a list of five things you can do in your daily life and work to show empathy and be more respectful of the needs of others.
3. Why is it important to recognize and analyze ambiguity? How should you deal with it?