

4

HOW CULTURE WORKS

Fundamentals of Cross-Cultural Interaction

“What kind of bird are you, if you can’t sing?” chirped the bird.

“What kind of bird are you, if you can’t swim?” quacked the duck.

Prokofiev in “Peter and the Wolf” (Prokofiev, 1936)

As described in Chapter 3, much of the written work about international management identifies variations in national culture and then describes the implications of this cultural variation for a wide range of behaviors and organizational issues. Identifying cultural variation is important, especially when making strategic plans and managing large groups. For example, it can help managers understand if large groups such as employees of a foreign manufacturing plant are likely to respond to a management practice, such as participative goal setting (Mezias, Chen & Murphy, 1999) or diversity training (Tatli et al., 2012), in the same way as employees in the country where the practice was developed. When working with other individuals, it also can help a manager anticipate what aspects of culture a foreign colleague is likely to take for granted and what aspects the manager himself or herself is likely to misunderstand when working abroad. To understand how best to work with other individuals, however, societal culture dimensions provide only a first step. This approach alone does not do justice to the influence of culture because it does not identify precisely how *awareness* of cultural differences and *knowledge* about another particular culture affect the interactions between people from different societies. In this book, we suggest that culture manifests its influence on managers through a number of intermediate psychological and interpersonal mechanisms. These mechanisms involve how managers think about, evaluate, and respond to people who are culturally different.

Sometimes societal culture characteristics are linked to individuals by analyzing the personal values that individuals endorse and suggesting that these personal values reflect societal cultures (as well as other personal experiences of the individual). This treats individual values as similar to personality traits or attitudes. Consistent with the discussion in Chapter 1 that roles and role relationships are at the core of a manager's job, the focus of the approach in this book is different. Rather than focus on the value characteristics of individuals, in this chapter we explore the mechanisms through which culture influences managers and their work relationships. We do so by examining how people think about their interactions, their *social cognition*, when they work with others from cultures different from their own. These mechanisms are then summarized in a general model of cultural influence on management behavior that can then be applied to a wide range of cross-cultural management issues. In addition, this chapter examines how culturally based self-concepts influence the motives of individuals from different societies.

SOCIAL COGNITION

Our understanding of how culture influences behavior in organizations is grounded in the idea of social cognition. Social cognition explains how we develop mental representations and how our mental representations influence the way we process information about people and social events. Stored in these mental representations are the specific features that define an object, event, or situation and the rules defining their interrelationships (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). These representations are called *schemas* when they define a category or *scripts* when they contain a behavioral sequence. These cognitive structures are derived from our past experiences and are simple representations of the complex concepts that they represent. They help us reduce the complexity of our environment to a manageable number of categories. For example, *fish* defines the category that contains *salmon*, but it does not perfectly describe a salmon. Once formed, these categories are used in future information processing. We *chunk* information in order to facilitate later recall (Miller, 1956). For example, we intuitively use our knowledge of the features of physical objects such as the category *fish* to infer information about all kinds of fish.

In international management, we are most concerned with schemas that influence how people categorize one another, particularly regarding their culture. The categorization of persons operates in the same way as the categorization of other aspects of the environment and occurs because of our inability to process all the complexity presented by our surroundings (Wilder, 1978). Box 4.1 provides an example of the basic categorization process.

Social cognition operates in two ways, often referred to as *Type 1* and *Type 2* cognition (Kahneman, 2011), which has implications for our intercultural relationships (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). Type 1 social cognition happens spontaneously with little or no conscious thought. For example, someone from the United States might meet a person with whom he or she has a friendly, casual relationship and shake the person's hand without giving it much

BOX 4.1

BASIC CATEGORIZATION PROCESS

People develop cognitive structures that help them organize and process information efficiently. These structures consist of categories (called schemas) that develop slowly over time through repeated experiences with objects, people, and situations. Schemas are like pigeonholes into which mail is sorted in a nonautomated post office. Each hole might be labeled with the last three digits of a postal code. As letters are sorted, the post office worker does not have to read the name or street address on the letter or even look at the city of the address. The sorter need only glance at the last three digits of the code, and the letter can be sorted into the appropriate pigeonhole. The information processing demands on the sorters are greatly reduced, and letters can be sorted more quickly. Letters that do not have postal codes or whose last three digits don't match any of the pigeonhole labels are likely to be thrown into the dead letter bin or placed into a special location, where they are dealt with later.

Source: Adapted from Shaw, J. B. (1990). A cognitive categorization model for the study of intercultural management. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(4), 626–645.

thought. Type 2 social cognition is less automatic and requires more conscious thought than does Type 1. For example, our hypothetical American might encounter someone with whom he or she has a tense relationship and need to think about whether or not to shake hands. In this second instance, the person might consciously consider what the consequences would be of different options like shaking hands, giving an oral greeting, nodding, or completely ignoring the other person. Importantly, most of our behavior is based on Type 1 cognition. Our capacity for engaging in Type 2 cognition is very limited and tiring.

In intercultural situations that are new to us, such as arriving in an unfamiliar country, we are distracted by things around us that require our attention and thus require Type 2 cognition. The extra demands of the more effortful Type 2 thinking make it especially challenging to deal with ordinary life and also to concentrate on whatever work (or fun) has brought us into the unfamiliar culture. As we develop cultural expertise in a new setting, we refine our Type 1 social cognition, so that eventually we relate to people in that setting in appropriate ways with less cognitive effort.

CULTURAL SCHEMAS

Although we rarely become aware of them, schemas shape what people associate with everything from simple everyday aspects of life, such as the image that the word fish brings to mind, to social groups, such as a family, and even to abstract ideas, such as quality music. These schemas are affected by culture. Continuing our fish example, the idea of a fish to people in a fishing society will be accompanied by a complex set of mental pictures of different kinds of fish and fishing situations.

One kind of schema that is particularly helpful for understanding intercultural interactions is the self-schema (Markus, 1977). Individuals have an inner or private self that consists of thoughts and feelings that cannot be directly known by others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The characteristics that people associate with the inner self can include personally significant personality traits like competent, attractive, irritable, or conscientious. Self-schemas also include memories associated with personal experiences that people see as having shaped who they are as individuals. Self-schemas are quite detailed, since all people have extensive experience with themselves. However, even self-schemas are simplifications, since we are only partially aware of everything about ourselves. Some aspects of the inner self are probably universal (e.g., I am hungry), but others can be specific to different cultures (e.g., my soul will be reincarnated), because of a culturally shared understanding of what it means to be human (Triandis, 1989).

People in all cultures develop an understanding of themselves as physically distinct and separate from others (Hallowell, 1955), but some characteristics of the inner self differ between societies in ways that influence cross-cultural interactions. Notable among these is the extent to which people regard themselves as independent or separate from others or as interdependent or connected with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). An *independent self-schema* is typical in Western cultures in which people are expected to think and act as autonomous individuals with unique attributes. In such societies, a person's behavior is expected to be organized and made meaningful based on the person's own internal thoughts and feelings. As noted in Chapter 3, this concept of self is typical of people who are brought up in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). In contrast, for people who have adopted an *interdependent self-schema*, their individuality is less differentiated and more connected to a particular group of other people. For such individuals, behavior is influenced by, contingent on, and to a large extent, organized by their perception of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in some larger social unit (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). An interdependent self-schema is typical of people raised in collectivist cultures. For example, the word for self in Japanese, *jibun*, refers to one's share of the life space (Hamaguchi, 1985).

A number of culturally specific conceptions of self can exist partly because interdependent self-schemas can be based on different reference groups (e.g., extended family, neighborhood, school friends, nation). As with definitions of the individualistic versus collectivistic orientations of societies, it is a convenient simplification to think of people as maintaining one of two types of self-schemas: independent and interdependent. Certainly, some people raised in individualistic societies wish for a sense of community, while some people in collectivist societies find themselves overwhelmed by their social obligations. Adopting an independent or interdependent self-schema, however, is not simply a matter of personal choice that is readily changed. Brain imaging research suggests that particular sections of the brain are activated differently by some tasks and social situations depending on whether a person has been socialized in a culture that supports independent or interdependent self-schemas (Kitayama & Uskul, 2011).

Cultural Identity

As in the post office example in Box 4.1, we often sort ourselves and others into groups that separate members from nonmembers (Turner, 1987). We categorize ourselves and others in terms of characteristics that group members share, such as physical appearance, religion,

political views, lifestyle, and country of origin. These schemas also include information about the attitudes and behaviors associated with their members. The total of the social categories that people use to describe themselves is their social identity. Individuals differ in the relative importance of the different components of their social identity. As noted in Chapter 3, people from individualist and collectivist societies often differ in how firmly they distinguish between who is and who is not a member of their group. However, for all of us, one of the groups that forms part of who we are, our social identity, is our cultural group.

Through the assignment of a set of characteristics to a particular national culture label, we create a schema for people who share that nationality. To the extent that culture is consistent with these more directly observable characteristics, we are also categorizing individuals according to their cultural group. The systematic description of national cultures described in Chapter 3 is one such form of categorization. However, the most important aspect of categorizing others can be whether or not they belong to our own cultural group. This categorization of others and ourselves results in a sense of who we are and how we should act toward others (Tajfel, 1981). It is this categorization of our social environment into *them* and *us* that underlies much of the discussion in this chapter.

CULTURAL SCRIPTS AND NORMS

Scripts are largely unconscious mental representations that shape how we think and act in a given situation (Abelson, 1981; Gioia & Poole, 1984). Unlike schemas, scripts are concerned with how a sequence of events will unfold and how we can adjust our actions appropriately (Lord & Kernan, 1987; Markus & Zajonc, 1985). People rely on scripts to guide behavior when some new situation matches similar situations with which they have had extensive prior experience. Each person's scripts are based on the experiences that they have had in the cultures with which they have been most involved. Consequently, scripts can create confusion in cross-cultural interactions, because people often take for granted the scripts that they have formed from experience with their home culture(s).

Evidence for the influence of culturally based scripts has been found in work group interactions (Thomas, Ravlin, & Wallace, 1996) and negotiator behavior (Brett, 2007) but also likely exist for the numerous business situations with which managers have extensive experience. For example, managers from the U.S. culture might have a script for attending a business meeting that includes arriving on time (or a little early), engaging in brief pleasantries with others before rapidly getting down to business, pressing one's point of view during the meeting, and arriving at a decision. For U.S. people, attending a business meeting invokes the behavioral sequence just described so that they can switch from one phase to the next without much active thought. For members of other cultures, attending a business meeting might evoke a very different sequence of behaviors, in which people might arrive quite late (Brazil) or begin and end with a round of hand-shaking (Germany).

When individuals find themselves in these familiar situations, they follow an action plan or behavioral sequence more or less automatically (Type 1 cognition). For example, this means that they can focus their attention on the task at hand in the meeting rather than needing to figure out the flow the meeting. However, careful attention is needed when something interferes with scripted behavior. In the meeting example, when people having different cultural backgrounds work together, differences in their scripts about meetings can

create confusion about the sequence of events, the duration of each phase of the meeting, and the cues about switching from one stage of the meeting to the next. Cultural differences in scripts mean that unexpected events will occur when people from one culture behave in ways that are surprising to another culture. These events will require all those attending the meeting to make thoughtful (Type 2 cognition) rather than spontaneous adjustments.

Schemas and scripts influence each another. The categorization of one's self and others into groups and identifying with a group influences the scripts that are applied. One result of identifying with a particular cultural group is consciously seeking to adopt its norms. *Cultural norms*, like other norms, are acceptable standards of behavior that are shared by members of our cultural group. Norms tell us what to expect from others and what is expected of us in certain situations. Although individuals can vary in the extent to which they adopt them, the norms of groups with which we identify have a powerful influence on our behavior (Asch, 1951). In fact, continued acceptance as a member in our cultural group often requires that we exhibit socially acceptable or at least politically correct behavior. For example, the somewhat derogatory terms *Oreo*¹ or *banana* are sometimes used by blacks or Asians to describe a person as black or yellow on the outside but white on the inside. This reflects a belief that these people hold attitudes or exhibit behavior inconsistent with the norms of their ethnic group and therefore do not really belong.

As discussed in Chapter 3, cultures vary along identifiable dimensions that reflect the value orientations of society. These cultural value orientations provide a generalized way of thinking about a much larger number of specific societal norms that are helpful for knowing what to expect and how to behave in a given society. Just understanding the norms of a society, however, is insufficient to explain and predict cross-cultural interactions. Not all societal norms are enforced in all situations, and part of a manager's role is to judge when different norms are most relevant for their actions. Social groups only enforce norms if and when they perform one of the following functions:

- Facilitate the group's survival, for example, by protecting them from other groups
- Increase the predictability of group member's behavior
- Reduce embarrassment for group members
- Express the central values of the group—that is, clarify the group's identity (Goodman, Ravlin, & Schminke, 1987)

Therefore, an individual's behavior is influenced by the cultural norms of society, but only to the extent that a norm exists for a particular situation and for which societal sanctions for noncompliance exist. Also, societal norms having different historical origins can be applied in different situations within the same society. For example, the very high level of charitable giving that is characteristic of people in the United States seems inconsistent with their norm for self-reliance. Although self-reliance might be a central value, the cultural history of the United States as a pioneer society also suggests a norm for helping others in community projects and emergencies (see Osland & Bird, 2000). In addition, as noted previously and discussed ahead in more detail, norms can be more important predictors of behavior in collectivist than in individualist cultures.

We should expect cultural differences in the content of behavioral scripts for a particular situation, because they can be guided by culturally differing norms (Miller, 1994). Because scripts are learned, members of one's cultural group can pass them on and reinforce them. An example of a culturally based normative script is that most Chinese are strongly influenced to

be respectful and obedient to superiors *when* they are present or even indirectly involved in a work situation (Liu, 1986). The situational cue of the involvement of superiors automatically invokes respectful and obedient behavior. Therefore, much of our behavior and the behavior that we observe in others is a semireflexive response to the situation influenced by cultural norms. How we respond to this behavior depends, in part, on our ability to perceive it.

SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

Perception is the process by which individuals interpret the messages received from their senses and thereby give meaning to their environment. As suggested previously, at any one time the environment presents us with much more information than we can effectively deal with. Therefore, relying on Type 1 cognition, we screen out much of what is presented to us by our senses. What is perceived and what is screened out are influenced by the characteristics of the perceiver, the person (or object) being perceived, and the situation. A perceiver has goals that focus attention on information that will help meet those goals. For example, subordinates awaiting instructions attend to the words of their superior. A perceiver also can be distracted by cues to which they are not attending. For example, fire alarms (at least momentarily) catch everyone's attention. Objects that are in some sense extreme or distracting receive attention. Being in the workplace prepares people for work-related information that they might disregard in the home setting. Those aspects of the environment that a person perceives are shaped by the schemas and scripts that they habitually use.

Research on perception has consistently found that different people can be presented with the same stimulus and perceive it differently (e.g., Dearborn & Simon, 1958). Of particular importance to international management are differences in the way people from different cultures perceive events and each other. Different priorities for what stimuli we should attend to are formed by the gradual internalization of prevailing cultural patterns into our schemas and scripts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). As we are socialized into a particular cultural group, we learn how to perceive. We share certain expectations and understandings of situations. For example, Mexican and U.S. children, when presented simultaneously (using a tachioscope) with pictures of a bullfight and a baseball game, perceived the event differently. The Mexican children recalled only the bullfight, whereas the U.S. children recalled only the baseball game (Bagby, 1957). These two cultural groups had learned to attend to particular stimuli. Anyone observing an unfamiliar sporting event for the first time can attest to selective perception. Unless you are Australian, Aussie-rules football is probably a mystery to you, and people from other than the United States have more difficulty picking out the many subtleties of a baseball game. This selective perception also extends to social situations. For example, Forgas and Bond (1985) reported that Chinese and Australian participants were found to differ in their perceptions of 27 identical social episodes (a recurring interaction sequence about which people generally agree, such as meeting someone for lunch or visiting a doctor). The sense that a situation is mysterious and differences in perceptions of social episodes occur when people from one culture do not have the schemas to sort out important from unimportant aspects of what they are observing.

When we perceive people as opposed to objects or events, a key element of our perception is whether a person is categorized as a member of our in-group or an out-group member. A number of factors seem to influence the extent to which we categorize others as a member of our group or not (Smith et al., 2013):

- First, certain category indicators, such as race and gender, may be universal indicators of group membership.
- Second, the distinctiveness of the category indicator against the social field may be a primary categorization factor if, for example, the number of distinctively different others is small. For example, Anglo-Europeans are obvious in rural Japan.
- Third, the extent to which a person is prototypical of a particular group influences categorization into that group. Atypical persons are harder to categorize.
- Fourth, deviations from normal speech in terms of accent, syntax, or grammar are particularly salient cues for group membership. The most dramatic speech difference is, of course, the use of a foreign language.
- Finally, a history of interactions with another group will enhance the ability to categorize them. For example, our attention is heightened with groups with whom we have had a history of conflict.

An important effect of categorization of others as out-group members is that, once categorized, they are subsequently perceived as being more similar to each other than are in-group members (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989). We see the individual variation that occurs in our own cultural group but perceive other cultures as homogeneous. For example, to non-Japanese, all Japanese people might seem very similar in appearance and behavior.

Selective perception also depends on the characteristics of what is being perceived. We tend to pay more attention to information that is distinctive (Rubin, 1915) or somehow inconsistent with our expectations (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). Behavior somehow “out of place” or uncharacteristic of the other culture will be recalled more accurately. Still, another way in which information presented by our environment is filtered is through *selective avoidance*. When confronted with information contrary to our existing views, we “tune it out” by diverting our attention elsewhere (Kavanaugh, 1991).

Therefore, as discussed previously, cultural differences can influence perception in several ways. First, our cultural socialization produces schemas that lead us to perceive things in a particular way. Second, we tend to have better recall of information inconsistent with our culturally based expectations but also tend to filter out this information if it is incompatible with our views. Finally, we perceive members of other cultures to be more similar to each other than members of our own cultural group.

PERCEIVED SIMILARITY AND ATTRACTION

The perceptual bias about our own versus other cultural groups, noted previously, has an additional implication for cross-cultural interactions. Perceptions of similarity lead to interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971). Essentially, we are attracted to people whom we perceive to be similar to us, because this similarity validates our view of the world and the way it should be. We look to others to obtain what is called consensual validation (Festinger, 1957). When someone agrees with us, this agreement validates our view and provides *evidence* that we are correct. Disagreement has just the opposite effect. Several decades of research supports the idea that similarity, particularly attitude and status similarity, leads to interpersonal attraction.

Other aspects of similarity, such as communication style (Lee & Gudykunst, 2001), religion and race (Kandel, 1978), national culture (Thomas & Ravlin, 1995), age (Ellis,

Rogoff, & Cramer, 1981), and even the preference for particular activities (Lydon, Jamieson, & Zanna, 1988) can also predict interpersonal attraction. In fact, we might be biologically programmed to respond positively to similarity of all kinds (Rushton, 1989).

Similarity can also influence other aspects of interpersonal interaction. For example, demographic similarity is related to increased frequency of communication and friendship ties (Lincoln & Miller, 1979) and frequency of technical communication (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Therefore, regardless of our other perceptual biases, the extent to which other individuals are perceived as similar to us influences our attitudes and behavior toward them. Essentially, other things being equal, perceptions of similarity predict more positive interactions.

The mechanisms that lead to selectively perceiving others are based on learning to perceive in a certain way because of socialization in a culture. However, these mechanisms also rely on some expectation of how people outside our own culture will behave. As discussed in the following section, these expectations about culturally different others are often based on very limited information.

STEREOTYPIC EXPECTATIONS

Stereotypes are closely related to the idea of schemas and are a categorization of the characteristics and behavior of a set of individuals (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Stereotypic expectations of a cultural group are a result of the natural cognitive process of social categorization described earlier. These expectations are based on simplifying the plethora of information about individuals and societies that is provided by our environment. Stereotypes need not be negative or noxious, although the term *stereotype* often conjures up negative images because of its linkage to prejudice (Allport, 1954) and the fact that stereotypes invariably include feelings about the cultural group as well as expected behavior.

National Stereotypes

Early research on stereotypes indicated that people could hold intense stereotypes about other national cultures even though they had never met anyone from those cultures (Katz & Braly, 1933). However, these cultural stereotypes are often associated with other groups with which one's culture has had a long history (often a negative history) of association. One has only to observe the fans at a soccer match between England and Scotland or at a rugby game between New Zealand and Australia to get a sense of the intensity of feelings associated with national stereotypes. The rest of the world might see Australia and New Zealand or Scotland and England as similar to each other. However, nationals of those countries will be quick to point out significant differences. The suggestion, made in previous chapters, that we can categorize cultures based on a limited number of dimensions is a form of national stereotyping. This presents us with a simple, some would say overly simple, representation of a cultural group. However, as noted at the conclusion of Chapter 3, these *on average* cultural expectations can be useful if we are aware of both the helpful and the potentially destructive influences of stereotyping.

Stereotypes are based on very limited information about others. We use very basic physical or social evidence (i.e., skin tone or country of birth) to categorize people and to organize information about them (Taylor, 1981). Once this categorization has occurred,

we apply the stereotype to the same degree to each individual in the category (Allport, 1954). For example, if I have had little or no contact with Chinese people, my stereotype might consist almost entirely of information gained from secondary sources, such as films or television. And I would expect all Chinese people to behave like the characters in these sources. The opportunity for inaccuracy in my expectation of typical Chinese behavior, as shown in Figure 4.1, is obvious.

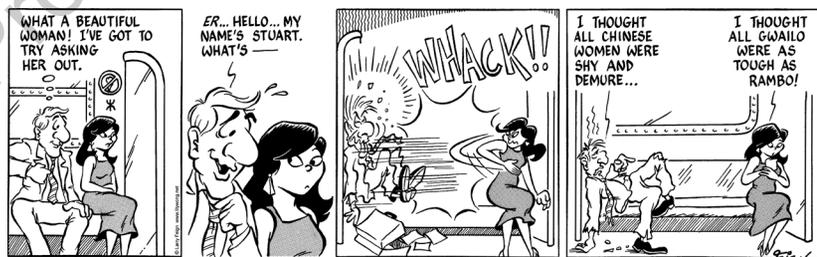
Resistance to New Information

As noted previously, once we categorize an individual as a member of a category, such as a culture, the associated information about the category is applied to them. And once formed, these stereotypic expectations of others tend to become self-perpetuating (Snyder, 1981). We reconstruct information about the social category (culture) to be consistent with our stereotype and behave toward members of the culture in ways that confirm our expectations. We may simply not notice information that is inconsistent with our stereotypes, but even when noticed, new information about a member of the culture is often discounted as not representative, thereby maintaining the stereotype (Hamilton, 1979). For example, when confronted with a Japanese businessperson who exhibits a very Western behavior of using an informal greeting, we discount this individual as being atypical and still maintain our stereotypic expectation that Japanese businesspeople are formal.

Stereotype Complexity and Evaluation

Because stereotypes are learned, we tend to have more complex (more and better-organized information) stereotypes about social categories with which we have more familiarity (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Therefore, because we have the most familiarity with our own culture, we have more complex mental pictures (schemas) of that culture than we do for other cultures (Peterson & Wood, 2008). This complexity explains our expectation for more variability among people in our own culture than in others, as previously noted. However, it also results in differences in our evaluation of new information about an unfamiliar culture. New information about a social group for which we have a very simple stereotype (e.g., another culture) is evaluated more extremely (more positively if the information is positive and more negatively if the information is negative) than for groups

FIGURE 4.1 ■ Stereotypic Expectations



Source: Larry Feign. Copyright © 1985. Used with permission.

for which we have a more complex picture. For example, in a study of identically qualified law students of two different ethnic groups, members of the evaluator's own ethnic group were evaluated less extremely (Linville & Jones, 1980). Therefore, the more information we have about a cultural group, the more likely we are to accept (evaluate accurately) new information about them. Interestingly, bicultural individuals (see Chapters 2 and 11) seem to have more complex cultural representations (schema) of both their cultures, as compared to monocultural individuals in each (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006). This suggests that significant exposure to another culture may increase an individual's ability to detect, process, and organize cultural information in general (Thomas, 2016).

Social Dominance

National stereotypes might also be ascribed to *social dominance theory* (Sidanius, 1993; Smith et al., 2013). Social dominance theory suggests that, within every complex society, certain groups are dominant over others and enjoy a disproportionate amount of privilege. Similarly at a global level, there might be a generally accepted hierarchy of nationalities based on status. High status can be attached to a particular nation because of economic dominance or other desirable characteristics. According to this idea, the extent to which my national group has high or low status will influence the attitude of others toward it and my attachment to it. For example, nationals of less developed countries might hold U.S. nationals in high esteem because of the level of economic development of the United States, or people from countries plagued by ethnic violence might accord high status to Canadians because of Canada's reputation for tolerance.

As discussed previously, the usefulness of stereotypic expectations about members of another culture is thus limited by the following:

- The extent to which these mental pictures contain accurate information
- Our recognition that either positive or negative feelings about the cultural group are invariably attached to the stereotype
- Our ability to adjust our expectations based on new information about the group

An example of an effective use of a stereotype in international business is presented in Box 4.2.

BOX 4.2

USE OF CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

In meetings between U.S. and Mexican businessmen, each had an accurate stereotypic expectation about the other's orientation toward time. Both agreed that Mexicans were *polychronic* or had a *mañana* orientation, with a flexible perspective on time. Both also agreed that Americans were *monochronic* (take time constraints and deadlines seriously). This agreement allowed the groups to reach a compromise on how to manage time, but only after they understood why each group held the expectation that they did.

Source: Lee & Duenas, "Stereotype Accuracy in Multicultural Business," in *Stereotype Accuracy: Toward Appreciating Group Differences*. Copyright © 1995, American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission of the American Psychological Association.

In this example, accurate stereotypes were helpful but not sufficient to achieve an effective intercultural interaction. It was also important to understand why the cultural groups behaved as they did. They needed to make a judgment as to the cause of the behavior. As discussed ahead, social categorization of cultural groups also influences the way in which the causes of behavior are evaluated.

DIFFERENTIAL ATTRIBUTIONS

Attribution helps us to understand and react to our environment by linking the observation of an event to its causes. The search for and assignment of cause for behavior seems to be a mental process that operates in much the same way across cultures (Schuster, Fosterlung, & Weiner, 1989). Any number of causes might be assigned to behavior we observe. However, the central distinction is between factors that are internal to the individual (personality, cultural values) and factors external to the individual (Trope, 1986). Internally caused behaviors are those under the control of the individual, and externally controlled behaviors are forced on the person by the situation. In order to attribute causes for behavior, we rely on cues from the situation that indicate the extent to which individuals are in control, such as whether or not the behavior is distinctive to a situation, consistent over time, and if the same behavior is displayed in similar situations (Kelley, 1972).

Inconclusive Information

Often, however, the situational cues that we rely on to make attributions are inconclusive. In cases in which our observations do not clearly indicate the cause of behavior, we rely on information we already have about the individual to make a judgment (Darley & Fazio, 1980). In cross-cultural interactions, we might rely on our stereotypic expectations of another culture to fill in the gaps (e.g., people from the United States will behave in their own self-interest). In other cases, we can project our own behavior on the situation (e.g., what would cause *me* to behave that way). In either case, cultural differences influence the attribution process. In the first case, our cultural-based expectations of an out-group member influence our attribution. In the second, our own culturally based behavioral norms or scripts influence our judgment of causality. Box 4.3 provides an example of making an inappropriate attribution for the behavior of a member of another culture.

BOX 4.3

ATTRIBUTION TO INTERNAL CAUSE

Helen Conner had been working in a Japanese company involved in marketing cameras for two years and was well respected by her colleagues. In fact, she was so respected that she was often asked to work with new employees of the firm, as these younger employees learned the ropes. Recently, one young employee, Hideo Tanaka, was assigned to develop a marketing scheme for a new model camera. He worked quite hard on it,

(Continued)

BOX 4.3 (Continued)

but the scheme was not accepted by his superiors because of industry-wide economic conditions. Helen and Hideo happened to be working at desks near each other when the company executive transmitted the news of the scheme's nonacceptance. Hideo said very little at that point. That evening, however, Helen and Hideo happened to be at the same bar. Hideo had been drinking, and he vigorously criticized his superiors at work. Helen concluded that Hideo was a very aggressive Japanese male and that she would have difficulty working with him again in the future.

Source: Cushner & Brislin (1996). Reprinted with permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

In this case, Helen has made an attribution (to his character) for Hideo's behavior based on information she held in memory (the projection of her own society's norms for behavior under the same circumstances), because the situation did not clearly indicate to her the cause of his behavior.

Attribution Error

Attribution of the cause of behavior is also influenced by whether or not the behavior is being exhibited by a member of our own cultural group. Again, the social categorization of our environment is at work. Because we derive part of our self-identity from our association with our cultural group, we are favorably biased toward that group. Therefore, we are more likely to attribute desirable behaviors by members of our in-group to internal causes but more likely to attribute desirable behaviors of out-group members to transient external causes (Hewstone, 1990). If members of our cultural group exhibit positive behavior (perform well on a task for example), we are more likely to attribute that behavior to their ability or effort. In contrast, when we observe the same behavior by members of another cultural group, we are more likely to attribute it to luck or other favorable circumstances. Research with several different cultural groups has supported this group-serving bias in attributions (e.g., Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993; Taylor & Jaggi, 1974), which is called "the ultimate attribution error" (Pettigrew, 1979). Biased belief systems about members of one's own national culture are pervasive and extend, for example, to favoritism for products coming from one's own country, the so-called country-of-origin effect (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995) mentioned in Chapter 2.

Cultural Differences in Attribution Bias

Until recently, psychologists thought that the general tendency of people to attribute any behavior to characteristics about the individual and underestimate the effects of the situation, the so-called *fundamental attribution error* (Ross, 1977), was consistent across cultures. However, this effect is much more difficult to find in Asian as compared to North American or European populations (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). For example, Miller (1984) found that Indians preferred to explain life events in terms of the situational context while Americans were more likely to explain the same events in terms of individual

characteristics. And Chinese people have been found to be more likely to explain murders in terms of situational or societal factors, whereas Americans were more likely to explain murders in terms of characteristics of the perpetrators (Morris & Peng, 1994). This is not to say that Asians do not attribute behavior to individuals, but they may be less likely to be biased in that regard.

Also, despite the strong evidence in support of a universal in-group bias effect discussed previously, some variation across cultures may exist. For example, in some cases, it might not be possible for a group to find a positive basis on which to compare itself with others (Tajfel, 1981). Also, in cultures characterized by vertical collectivism, disadvantaged groups might accept as legitimate the higher status of other groups (Smith & Bond, 1999). In addition, people from individualist and collectivist societies may not engage in inter-group comparisons to the same degree (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Collectivists might not be as interested in comparing themselves with out-groups and instead focus on their in-group (Triandis, 1994). Individualists, by contrast, might make more comparisons but also make a distinction between groups with which they do and do not compare themselves (Smith et al., 2013).

As outlined previously, our interactions with culturally different others depend, in part, on how we attribute the cause of their behavior. Cultural differences influence this attribution through the meaning that we give to the situational cues presented and the expectations that we have for behavior in the other culture. In most cases, we can expect differences in the attributions for the behavior of members of our own culture versus members of other cultures.

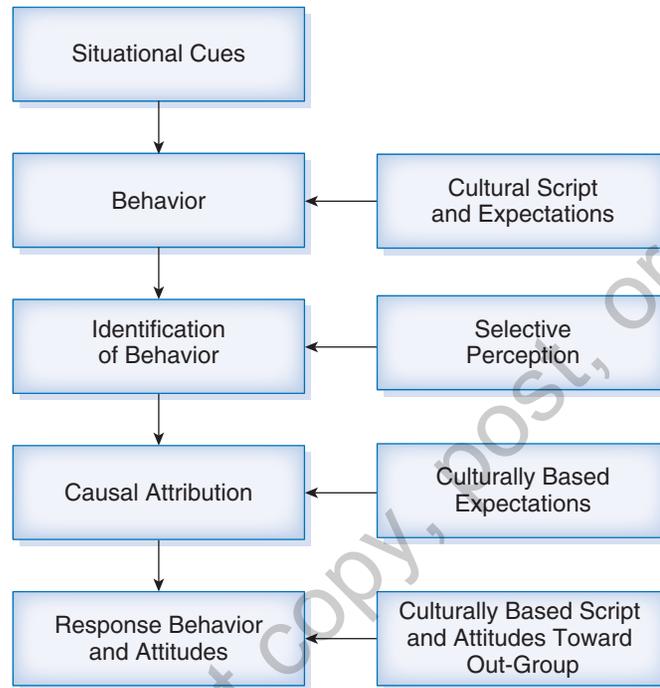
CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION MODEL

In the preceding section, several mechanisms through which culture influences behavior were identified. To suggest more specifically how this influence occurs, it is helpful to examine the actions and reactions that might comprise a cross-cultural encounter. The following interaction sequence is typical of those that occur regularly in international management contexts. It highlights the effect of cultural differences on an interpersonal interaction. Inferences about the processes through which culture influences behavior can be made at each step of the interaction sequence.

The interaction presented in Figure 4.2 assumes as a starting point some behavior of a person from another culture. The person might behave according to some culturally based script for the situation or, because of some expectation about how their behavior will be perceived, adjusts their behavior. There are an almost infinite number of situations in which a cross-cultural interaction might take place. However, many situations in business settings will be familiar. Situational cues determine the extent to which the situation evokes a preexisting behavioral sequence, a script (Type 1 cognition). If a script does not exist for the situation, the individual will give more thought (Type 2 cognition) as to how to behave and how such behavior might be perceived.

Next, the person perceiving the behavior interprets the meaning of these actions. This interpretation consists of two stages. The first is the identification of the behavior. This identification can, as discussed in this chapter, be influenced by culturally biased selective perception. An important part of the identification of behavior is categorizing the other

FIGURE 4.2 ■ Cross-Cultural Interaction



Sources: Based on Shaw (1990) and Thomas (1992).

person as a member of another culture (out-group). This categorization is influenced by the extent to which the behavior being exhibited matches a preexisting expectation. Behavior consistent with expectations will result in an automatic categorization (Type 1 cognition), whereas inconsistent information must be processed more thoroughly (Type 2 cognition).

The second part of the function is attributing the behavior to a cause. This attribution is influenced by the culturally based expectations that the perceiver has for members of the other culture. The extent to which situational cues about the cause of the behavior exist and the relative development of the perceiver's mental representation of the other culture both influence the accuracy of the attribution. Individuals with very well-developed prior conceptions of another culture are likely to be less extreme and more accurate in their evaluation of behavior. In situations where the cues are ambiguous or provide little information, individuals will rely more heavily on information they already have to make a judgment. They must rely on stereotypic expectations of the other culture or gather additional information by talking with people around them or referring to other sources.

Finally, the perceiver's attitudes and behavioral response depend on attributions about the causes of the behavior. To the extent that the behavior is attributed to a familiar cause, the response behavior itself can be scripted. If, however, the behavior does not fit an existing category, the person might be unable to use an existing script to guide behavior and will

then need to invent a new one. Inventing a new one includes drawing from other sources of information to anticipate possible reactions to their behavior (Achim et al., 2013). The reactive behavior starts another interaction sequence. The ability of people to adjust old scripts or create new ones is a significant part of having a successful cross-cultural encounter (Shaw, 1990) and becoming more competent in future cross-cultural interactions (Thomas, 2006; Thomas et al., 2016).

This behavioral sequence plays itself out day after day in international organizations between coworkers, between managers and subordinates, between negotiators, and among work-group members. The situational context and the status of the participants vary, but the fundamentals of the interaction remain the same. Box 4.4 provides an example of how such a cross-cultural interaction sequence might proceed in an encounter between a manager and subordinate.

The interaction in Box 4.4 is an example of misattributions by both parties and a subsequent escalation of the problem as one behavior sequence builds on the previous one. Todd's first mistake was in relying on a U.S.-based behavioral script for dealing with a Korean employee. Chungmin considered being reprimanded in public very rude and attributed this behavior to Todd's thoughtlessness. She responds by relying on a Korean script for expressing her displeasure through subtle cues. Todd fails to perceive these cues

BOX 4.4

CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION SEQUENCE

Todd works for an U.S. company in Korea. Sometimes he wonders why he ever accepted a position overseas—there seems to be so much that he just doesn't understand. One incident in particular occurred the previous Friday when his secretary, Chungmin, made a mistake and forgot to type a letter. Todd considered this a small error but made sure to mention it when he saw her during lunch in the company cafeteria. Ever since then, Chungmin has been acting a bit strange and distant. When she walks out of his office, she closes the door more loudly than usual. She will not even look him in the eye, and she has been acting very moody. She even took a few days of sick leave, which she has not done in many years. Todd has no idea how to understand her behavior. Perhaps she really is ill or feels a bit overworked.

When Chungmin returns to work the following Wednesday, Todd calls her into his office. "Is there a problem?" he asks. "Because if there is, we need to talk about it. It's affecting your performance. Is something wrong? Why don't you tell me, it's okay."

At this, Chungmin looks quite distressed. She admits the problem has something to do with her mistake the previous Friday, and Todd explains that it was no big deal. "Forget it," he says, feeling satisfied with himself for working this out. "In the future, just make sure to tell me if something is wrong." But over the next few weeks, Chungmin takes six more sick days and does not speak to Todd once.

Source: Cushner & Brislin (1996). Reprinted with permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

accurately (because he lacks a well-developed schema for Korean culture) and has difficulty making an attribution for Chungmin's behavior. He tries to solve the problem by having an open and frank discussion with Chungmin, another Western script that is not well received. Chungmin responds with more subtle cues.

The model presented in Figure 4.2 is, of course, a simplification that does not take into account other important aspects of an interpersonal interaction, such as the motives of the participants involved and other information-processing demands of the situation. This simplification allows the effect of culture through social cognition to be demonstrated.

SELF-SCHEMAS AND MOTIVATION

Motivation involves the reasons that people take or persist in a particular action as described in more detail in Chapter 7. Culture guides choices by giving meaning and ascribing value to motivational variables. Cultural values influence an individual's needs and prescribe the behavior required to satisfy those needs (Erez & Earley, 1993). The distinction between independent and interdependent self-schemas described at the beginning of the chapter has several motivational implications. First, those people with independent self-schemas will be motivated to express internal needs, rights, and the capacity to withstand undue social pressure (Janis & Mann, 1977). In contrast, those with interdependent self-schemas will be motivated to be receptive to others, to adjust to their needs, and to restrain their inner needs or desires (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, people with interdependent (compared to those with independent self-schemas) report that their behavior is more influenced by contextual factors including norms (Singelis & Brown, 1995; Trafimow & Finlay, 1996). Consistent with this finding, social norms are found to be a more important determinant of behavior for people from collectivistic than from individualistic societies (Gelfand et al., 2011; Triandis, 1995).

One study of the motives of Chinese people (from collectivist societies) found high levels for the need to comply, socially oriented achievement, change, endurance, nurturance, and order; moderate levels for autonomy, deference, and dominance; and low levels of individually oriented achievement, aggression, exhibition, and power (Bond & Hwang, 1986). The interdependent self-schemas of the Chinese were reflected in the average level of needs that people in these societies expressed. It can also be argued that differences in the self-schema lead to differences in the extent to which the reduction of cognitive conflict or dissonance is a motivator. Dissonance occurs when one says or acts one way in public but feels quite differently in private (Festinger, 1957). Such dissonance is often disturbing enough to people that they may reconsider their values to resolve it (Rokeach, 1968). If, as is the case for people with an interdependent self, one's internal attitudes and opinions are not a significant defining aspect of the self, there is little need to make these internal attitudes consistent with external behavior. For example, Americans have been found to be much more concerned with consistency between feelings and behavior than are Japanese (Doi, 1986). Furthermore, as noted previously, these internal feelings should be regulated as required by the situation.

Finally, motives linked to the self, such as self-enhancement or self-verification, can assume a different form depending on the concept of self being enhanced or verified (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The motive to maintain a positive self-image is probably

universal. However, what constitutes a positive view of self depends on how the self is construed. For those with independent selves, feeling good about oneself means being unique and expressing one's inner attributes. For those with an interdependent self, a positive self-image is derived from belonging, fitting in, occupying one's proper place, engaging in appropriate action, and maintaining harmony.

In summary, cultural differences might be expected in motivation based on an individual's internal representation of self. Although all people might be motivated by self-interest, a fundamental difference is the role that others play in how people define themselves. Individuals are differentially motivated depending on whether they view themselves as independent of or interdependent with others. In intercultural interactions, this motivational difference influences behavior throughout the interaction sequence previously described.

Summary

This chapter presented a more sophisticated approach to specifying the effects of culture on the behavior of individual managers that extends beyond the simple projection of cultural stereotypes. The basics of social cognition were applied to the context of cross-cultural interactions that are fundamental to management across cultures. By doing this, a number of mechanisms or conduits through which culture manifests its influence were identified. In addition to the effect that variations in national culture have on the normative behavior of individuals in that culture, several other influence mechanisms exist. These include the development of scripts for particular situations, culturally based selective perception of the behavior of others, and differential attributions for behavior founded in

culturally based expectations. These mechanisms can be seen to operate in a basic interaction sequence that underlies the interpersonal interaction between culturally different individuals in a variety of organizational settings. This sequence of behavior-perception-attribution-reaction is central to our understanding of intercultural interactions. However, it is important to recognize that motivational differences based on differing conceptualizations of the self can influence behavior throughout the interaction sequence. By understanding the basic mechanisms presented in this chapter, it is possible to develop a deeper understanding of the possible effect of culture on the wide variety of interpersonal interactions in which managers may be involved.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is social cognition? How are its main components affected by culture?
2. How do culturally stereotypic expectations affect other aspects of thought and behavior?
3. How do attribution differences associated with culture affect the way people draw conclusions?
4. How does culture affect each of the steps between noticing an event and responding to it?
5. Why are cultural differences in self-concept so important to motivation?

Note

1. An *Oreo* is a type of cookie (biscuit) with a white confectionary center sandwiched between two chocolate layers.