

able to find reliable and competent cultural translators in easing the initial and developmental phases of their adaptation.

6. Newcomers should realize that culture shock is a transitional affective phase of stress that ebbs and flows from high to low intensity. New arrivals need to hang onto a resilient sense of humor and emphasize the positive aspects of the environment rather than engaging in prolonged concentration on its negative aspects, realizing that these “growing pains” may lead to long-term personal and professional growth and development.

7. From the identity negotiation theory, the fundamental need for newcomers in an unfamiliar culture is addressing the sense of insecurity and vulnerability. The more competent newcomers are at managing their identity threat level, the more they are able to induce effective adaptation outcomes. New arrivals can defuse their identity threats by (a) increasing their motivations to learn about the new culture; (b) keeping their expectations realistic and increasing their familiarity concerning the diverse facets of the new culture (e.g., conducting culture-specific research through readings and diverse accurate sources, including talking with people who have spent some time in that culture); (c) increasing their linguistic fluency and learning why, how, and under what situations certain phrases or gestures are appropriate, plus understanding the core cultural values linked to specific behaviors; (d) working on their tolerance for ambiguity and other flexible personal attributes; (e) developing strong ties (close friends) and weak ties (acquaintanceships) to manage identity stress and loneliness; (f) using a wide range of mass media to understand the symbolic complexity of the host culture; and (g) being mindful of their interpersonal behaviors and suspend snap evaluations of the host or newly adopted culture.

10

Transcultural Communication Competence

Criteria of Transcultural Communication Competence	262
The Appropriateness Criterion	262
The Effectiveness Criterion	263
The Satisfaction Criterion	265
Components of Transcultural Communication Competence	265
The Knowledge Blocks Component	266
The Mindfulness Component	267
The Communication Skills Component	269
From Intercultural to Transcultural Ethics	271
Ethical Absolutism versus Ethical Relativism	272
Moral Exclusion versus Moral Inclusion	275
Final Recommendations	276

Transcultural communication competence (TCC) refers to an integrative theory–practice approach enabling us to mindfully apply the intercultural knowledge we have learned in a sensitive manner. Specifically, it refers to a transformation process connecting intercultural knowledge with competent practice. To be a competent transcultural communicator, we need to transform our knowledge of intercultural theories into appropriate and effective performance.

The word “transcultural” conveys the idea that there is an existing body of knowledge and skills in the intercultural communication literature that is designed to help people communicate appropriately and effectively in a wide range of intercultural situations. Culture-specific and ethnic-specific knowledge, in conjunction with a TCC approach, will yield a wealth of interaction skills that permit individuals to cross cultural boundaries flexibly and adaptively.

This chapter serves as a summation of core themes that we have discussed in the previous chapters. It is divided into four main sections: first, criteria of TCC; second, components of TCC; third, a discussion of intercultural ethics; and fourth, some final recommendations.

CRITERIA OF TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Drawing from the identity negotiation perspective of this book, we reemphasize here that the underlying goal in any intercultural or interethnic situation is to manage content, process, relational and group membership identity issues appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily. In addition to content-related issues, this view emphasizes the importance of understanding the various identity types and needs (e.g., inclusion vs. differentiation) of individuals from different cultures. It also highlights the different operational skills that are needed in managing diversity in a wide range of intercultural episodes.

The criteria of perceived appropriateness, effectiveness, and satisfaction are inferred through the competent exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between persons of different cultures. Competent exchange of messages means that both intercultural communicators perceive that they and their messages are being understood in the proper context and with the desirable effects.

The criteria of TCC act as yardstick measures of a competent transcultural communicator. When both communicators and interested parties experience communication appropriateness and effectiveness plus satisfaction, the process and the outcome of communication can be deemed successful. This section is developed in three parts: (1) the criterion of appropriateness; (2) the criterion of effectiveness; and (3) the criterion of satisfaction.

The Appropriateness Criterion

Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviors are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture. For example, if you are in China, when you offer your guest some food, you should use self-effacing mode of expression such as "The food is not too delicious, but try some. . . ." And if you are an intercultural sensitive guest, you might say something like "All the dishes look so good, you must have been working really hard all day in the kitchen. You're being too humble. . . ." In another example, a Taiwanese top-notch computer programmer might say, "I'm not very familiar with this software program. Please don't expect too much. . . ." You, as a client, might reply with a compliment: "Please don't be so humble. I know your firm's great reputation. If you can't fix this problem, no one can!"

Individuals typically use their own cultural expectations and scripts to approach an intercultural interaction scene. They also formulate their impressions of a competent communicator based on their perceptions of the other's verbal and nonverbal behaviors in relation to the particulars of a

situation. While insiders have worked out a smooth script for their everyday interactions, outsiders may be completely baffled by what seem like a "phony" or "hypocritical" way of expression. The first lesson in TCC is to tune in to our own ethnocentric evaluations concerning "improper" dissimilar behaviors. Our evaluations of "proper" and "improper" behavior stem, in part, from our ingrained cultural socialization experiences.

Thus, to understand TCC, we need to understand the impressions people have of each other in conjunction with the specific sets of behaviors that are performed in a particular situation. It is also critical that we gather short-term and long-term data concerning an individual's TCC quotient. TCC is not a one-time episodic phenomenon. Rather, it is a long-term learning and practicing process.

TCC is an incremental learning journey whereby intercultural communicators learn to mutually adapt to each other's behaviors appropriately and flexibly. To understand whether appropriate communication has been perceived, it is vital to obtain competence evaluations from the standpoint of both the communicators and interested observers. It is also critical to obtain both self-perception and other-perception data. We may think that we are acting appropriately, but others may not concur with our self-assessments.

Appropriate communication can be assessed through understanding the underlying values, norms, social roles, expectations, rules, and scripts of the cultural scene. The criterion of communication appropriateness works concurrently with the criterion of communication effectiveness. When we act appropriately in a cultural scene, our culturally proper behaviors can facilitate communication effectiveness. By signaling to the other party that we are willing to adapt our behaviors in a culture-sensitive manner, we convey our respect for the other's cultural frame of reference.

The Effectiveness Criterion

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutual shared meaning and desired goal-related outcomes. An effective encoding and decoding process leads to mutually shared meanings. Mutually shared meanings lead to perceived intercultural understanding. Ineffective encoding and decoding by one of the two communicators can lead to intercultural miscommunications and misunderstandings. In addition to the accurate encoding and decoding of messages on the content level, communicators need to cultivate mindful awareness and sensitivity along multiple levels of effective intercultural understanding.

The three layers of meanings that are critical to increase intercultural understanding are content meaning, identity meaning, and relational meaning (see Chapter 1). "Content meaning" refers to the substantive information that is being conveyed to the listener in a particular interaction scene.

Content meaning is tied to factual or digital aspects of the message exchange process (e.g., "Did you like the food?") and is verifiable. However, what you decide to say on the content level can be contingent on the culture in which you are located. You might really not like the food; however, if you are in a high-context culture, you may not want to say "no" as a direct answer. You may have to say something like "It's all delicious, but I'm so full . . . I cannot have another bite. . . ." In many high-context cultures, saving the other's face through an indirect expression is much more important than honest, up-front speech.

"Identity meaning" refers to the following questions: "Who am I and who are you in this intercultural interaction scene?" "How should we act as effective hosts or guests in this relationship?" "How can I find out more about your sense of self, your self-image, your cultural identity?" "How should I convey my sensitivity to or respect for your self-image?" Alternatively, other identity meaning questions include the following: "How do I perceive your attitude toward my cultural identity?" "Is my cultural identity being understood and respected in a sensitive manner?" "How can I learn to save face or give face to you in this situation?" Identity meaning is closely intertwined with content and relationship meanings. When identity meaning is effectively managed, individuals are also more open to renegotiate content and relationship meaning issues.

"Relational meaning" refers to the process of how both communicators define the intimacy distance and power distance of their relationship. Drawing from individualism-collectivism and power distance cultural values, for example, we should realize that individuals in different cultures have different privacy and relational needs, and different status expectations concerning the interaction process itself.

In sum, the effectiveness criterion emphasizes the importance of promoting intercultural understanding on content, identity, and relational levels. It is not enough to just understand the content messages that are being exchanged in the communication process. We also have to pay close attention to the identity-based meanings that underlie the exchanged message. By listening mindfully to the exchanged message and its nonverbal nuances, we can gauge whether the speaker is signaling her or his needs for recognition on the cultural or personal identity level and/or gender or ethnic identity level. We can also match proper cultural values with the meaning level to arrive at a culture-sensitive interpretation of how different cultural strangers are viewing the relationship.

Intercultural interaction effectiveness has been achieved when content, identity, and relational meanings are attended to with accuracy and when desired interaction goals have been reached. Intercultural interaction ineffectiveness occurs when content, identity, and relational meanings have been mismatched and when intercultural noises and clashes have jammed the communication channels.

The Satisfaction Criterion

Identity negotiation theory, in this book, assumes that human beings in all cultures desire positive affirmation from others of group membership identity and personal identity. Individuals tend to be more satisfied in interaction scenes in which their desired identity images are elicited or validated. They tend to experience dissatisfaction when their desired identity images are denied or disconfirmed. Thus, to the extent that the important identities (e.g., cultural or gender) of the intercultural communicators have been positively addressed and sensitively dealt with, they will experience interaction satisfaction. To the extent that important identities of the intercultural communicators have been bypassed or patronized, they will experience interaction dissatisfaction.

In order to achieve interaction satisfaction, we have to understand the cultural premises and assumptions that surround the use of verbal and nonverbal messages in the communication process itself. We have to realize that cultural values such as individualism-collectivism and power distance frame the culture-specific functions of verbal and nonverbal communication. For large power distance cultures, for example, formal verbal and nonverbal interaction is expected. For small power distance cultures, informal verbal and nonverbal interaction is preferred. Additionally, verbal styles of direct or indirect communication and self-enhancing or self-effacing communication can arouse different levels of satisfaction in different cultural communities. For individualists, interaction satisfaction is related to person-based emotions and personal self-worth issues. For collectivists, on the other hand, interaction satisfaction is closely tied to in-group emotional reactions and group-based self-worth issues.

In sum, the criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness, and satisfaction can serve as evaluative yardsticks of an intercultural interaction episode. A dynamic transcultural communicator is one who creates and manages meanings appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily in a diverse range of cultural situations. All three criteria can also be applied holistically to the long-term process of mastery of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in practicing competent transcultural communication.

COMPONENTS OF TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

TCC refers to an operationalization process of integrating knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing group membership differences on a transcultural level. To engage in optimal TCC, we have to acquire in-depth knowledge, heightened mindfulness, and competent communica-

tion skills—and, most critically, applying them ethically in a diverse range of intercultural situations. This section is developed in three parts: (1) knowledge blocks; (2) mindfulness; and (3) communication skills. Of the three components of managing intercultural differences, knowledge is the most critical in that it underscores the other two aspects of TCC. We will consider intercultural ethics later.

The Knowledge Blocks Component

Without culture-sensitive knowledge, communicators cannot become aware of the implicit “ethnocentric lenses” they use to evaluate behaviors in an intercultural situation. Without accurate knowledge, communicators cannot accurately reframe their interpretation from the other’s cultural standpoint. Knowledge here refers to the process of in-depth understanding of important intercultural communication concepts that “really make a difference.”

The knowledge blocks in this book offer you the following information: a set of guiding assumptions about intercultural communication in Chapter 1; a mindful intercultural communication model in Chapter 2; cultural value orientation differences in Chapter 3; language functions and cross-cultural verbal interaction styles in Chapter 4; intercultural nonverbal communication differences in Chapter 5; in-group/out-group boundary regulation and stereotype formation processes in Chapter 6; identity and relational themes in managing the development of intercultural relationships in Chapter 7; factors that affect intercultural conflict management in Chapter 8; identity change and intercultural adaptation in Chapter 9; and TCC and ethical issues in this chapter.

Overall, the knowledge blocks in this book focus on how individualists and collectivists negotiate communication, conflict, and relationship differences via distinctive verbal and nonverbal communication styles. Additionally, individualists and collectivists use distinctive ethnocentric lenses to evaluate dissimilar others’ behavior. Our symbolic identities define who we are on group membership and personal identity levels, and our group-based and person-based identities also propel us to choose specific speech codes and nonverbal cues to express our self-images. Our symbolic identity and culture-based identity influence one another. By understanding how intercultural verbal and nonverbal communication works, we can understand the cultural or ethnic identity behind these verbal and nonverbal cues.

By understanding the larger cultural grounding or values that influence the use of specific verbal styles and nonverbal gestures, we can understand the logic that motivates the dissimilar other’s behavior. We should emphasize here that not even an insider of a culture can fully explain or interpret every detail of that culture. Obviously, then, the best chance an outsider has

is to always underestimate her or his knowledge and always be willing to learn more about the new culture.

In this book, we argue for the importance of understanding cultural values as a starting point for understanding the behavior of ourselves and others. By understanding cultural value orientations, we can understand the “ideal model person” in a culture. If a culture is individualistic, the “ideal model person” will emphasize autonomous values, personal initiatives, and personal distinctions. However, if a culture is group based, the “ideal model person” will emphasize relational values, in-group connections, and in-group reputations. Through understanding cultural values such as individualism–collectivism and power distance, we can also understand the low-context and high-context communication styles that reflect such values. We will understand that individualists express themselves in low-context, direct ways because of their priorities of interpersonal efficiency and self-identity assertion, whereas collectivists convey themselves in high-context, indirect ways because of their preferences for relational harmony and mutual face-saving values. Cultural and personal values frame the identity of the individual with whom we are communicating. The identity of an individual, in turn, is expressed through her or his use of habitual verbal and nonverbal messages and interaction styles.

Transcultural communicators need to develop greater sensitivity concerning the values, identities, behaviors, and situations that constitute intercultural communication. Additionally, these concepts are mediated by the linguistic symbols of that culture. In understanding the language of a culture, we hold the key to the heart of a culture. By understanding the nonverbal nuances, expressions, styles, and boundaries of a culture, we enter the heart of that culture. Acquiring knowledge is a good first step when we are preparing ourselves to enter into any new culture. Knowledge together with mindfulness can help us to be more in tune with ourselves and dissimilar others in a vulnerable identity-contact episode.

The Mindfulness Component

Mindfulness (Thich, 1991) means attending to one’s internal assumptions, cognitions, and emotions, and simultaneously attuning to the other’s assumptions, cognitions, and emotions. Mindful reflexivity requires us to tune in to our own cultural and personal habitual assumptions in viewing an interaction scene. By being mindful of the “I”-identity or “we”-identity cultural value assumptions, we may be able to monitor our snapshot ethnocentric evaluations reflexively. By being mindful of the “I”-identity or “we”-identity personal variation standpoints, we may be able to monitor our own individual motivations and actions more consciously.

Beyond mindful reflexivity, we also need to be open to novelty or unfa-

miliar behavior. To be mindful of intercultural differences, we have to learn to see the unfamiliar behavior from a fresh context. In the context of intergroup interaction, we have to simultaneously deal with our own vulnerable emotions regarding unfamiliar behaviors and be open to new interaction scripts. We also need to develop multiple visions in understanding the stylistic and substantive levels of the communication process. Integrating new ideas or perspectives into one's value system requires mental flexibility. Mental flexibility requires one to rethink assumptions about oneself and the world. Such rethinking may cause identity dissonance, but inevitably it can also lead to personal growth and resourcefulness (Ting-Toomey, 1993).

According to Langer (1989, 1997), to act mindfully we should learn to (1) see behavior or information presented in the situation as novel or fresh; (2) view a situation from several vantage points or perspectives; (3) attend to the context and the person in which we are perceiving the behavior; and (4) create new categories through which this new behavior may be understood (Langer, 1997, p. 111). Additionally, we need to learn to shift our perspective and ground our understanding from the other's cultural frame of reference. This practice of analytical empathy enables communicators to see both differences and similarities between each other's cultural and personal perspectives (Rothman, 1997). Analytical empathy leads to new insights and an alternative set of cultural and personal experiences.

On a general level, mindfulness demands creative thinking and living. From a mindful perspective, one's response to a "particular situation is not an attempt to make the best choice from among available options but to create options" (Langer, 1997, p. 114). In an intercultural misunderstanding episode, when two individuals either push against or pull away from each other, the problem is never satisfactorily resolved. Intercultural communicators have to learn to help each other in framing the communication problem from a mutual-interest perspective and collaboratively learn to develop a creative, synergistic solution. Researchers (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1995; Langer, 1997) have found that creative individuals tend to:

1. Cultivate curiosity and interest in their immediate surroundings.
2. Look at problems from as many viewpoints as possible (i.e., openness to novelty).
3. Be alert to complexity and distinction within groups or cultures.
4. Be sensitive to different types of situational uniqueness that may occur.
5. Orient themselves to the present with all five senses focused.
6. Cultivate "flow" or enjoyment in their everyday interaction with others.
7. Practice divergent thinking or sideways learning.

Sideways learning, according to Langer (1997), involves attending to "multiple ways of carving up the same domain. It not only makes it possible to create unlimited categories and distinctions . . . but it is essential to mobilizing mindfulness" (pp. 23-24). While a routine thinker practices mindlessness in managing cultural differences, a creative thinker practices mindfulness.

Mindfulness can help us to arrive at the cognitive and affective "readiness" stage to interact with people who are different from ourselves. It can help us to put our own ethnocentric motivations in check. It can prompt us to examine the motivational needs and bases from the other person's frame of reference or standpoint. Mindfulness is the mediating step in linking knowledge with skillful practice.

The Communication Skills Component

"Communication skills" refers to our operational abilities to interact appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily in a given situation. Many communication skills are useful in enhancing transcultural communication competence. The four core communication skills that are worth summarizing here and can be used in a diverse range of intercultural situations are mindful observation (Chapter 3), mindful listening (Chapters 4 and 5), identity confirmation (Chapter 6), and collaborative dialogue (Chapter 8).

Mindful observation involves an O-D-I-S (observe-describe-interpret-suspend evaluation) *analysis*. Rather than engaging in snapshot, evaluative attributions, we should first learn to *observe* attentively the verbal and non-verbal signals that are being exchanged in the communication process. We should then try to *describe* mentally and in behaviorally specific terms what is going on in the interaction (e.g., "She is not maintaining eye contact with me when speaking to me"). Next, we should generate multiple *interpretations* (e.g., "Maybe from her cultural framework, eye contact avoidance is a respectful behavior; from my cultural perspective, this is considered a disrespectful sign) to "make sense" of the behavior we are observing and describing. We may decide to respect the differences and suspend our ethnocentric evaluation. We may also decide to engage in open-ended evaluation by acknowledging our discomfort with unfamiliar behaviors (e.g., "I understand that eye contact avoidance may be a cultural habit of this person, but I still don't like it because I feel uncomfortable in such interaction). By engaging in a reflexive dialogue with ourselves, we can monitor our ethnocentric emotions introspectively. We may want to cross-sample a wide variety of people (and in a wide range of contexts) from this cultural group to check if the "eye contact avoidance" response is a cultural or individual trait. We may even decide to approach the person (with the low-/high-context styles in mind) directly or indirectly to meta-communicate about such differences.

In an intercultural exchange episode, communicators have to work hard to *listen mindfully* to the cultural and personal viewpoints that are being expressed in the problematic interaction. To understand identity-salient issues, they have to learn to listen responsively to the tones, rhythms, gestures, movements, nonverbal nuances, pauses, and silence in the interaction episode. They have to learn to listen to the symphony and the individual melodies that are being played out in the interaction scene.

In order to listen mindfully, transcultural communicators have to learn to use paraphrase and perception checking skills in a culture-sensitive manner. Paraphrase is using verbal restatement to summarize the speaker's message. Perception checking skill is to use eyewitness accounts on a descriptive level to check whether the hearer genuinely understands the message or whether she or he has certain unmet needs or wants.

Identity confirmation skills include addressing people by their preferred titles, labels, names, and identities. Addressing people by their desired titles or identities conveys to others our recognitions of their existence and the validity of their experiences. For example, individuals sometimes may identify strongly with their ethnic-based memberships and sometimes their person-based identities. By being sensitive to people's self-images in particular situations and according due respect to their desired identities, we confirm their self-worth. Calling others what they want to be called and recognizing group memberships that are important to them are part of supporting their self-images.

Additionally, using inclusive language rather than exclusive language (i.e., "you people"), and using situational language rather than polarized language are part of identity confirmation skills. Inclusive language means we are mindful at all times of our use of verbal messages when we converse with both in-group and out-group members in a small group setting. We should cross-check our own verbal habits and make sure that we are directing our comments evenly to both in-group and out-group members on an equitable basis. Inclusive language usage also includes the use of inclusive nonverbal behavior (e.g., eye contact is evenly spread out to both in-group and out-group members and not just to in-group members). Situational language means when we observe out-group members' behavior, we are willing to take situational contingencies into account in understanding out-group members' behavior and accord them the same courtesy as we accord in-group members. In sum, we honor the identities of out-group members as if they are members of our in-group rather than overemphasize in-group/out-group circles.

Thus, we confirm and disconfirm dissimilar others by the words we choose to address them and by the attitude behind the words with which we "name" them. Sometimes we may want to downplay group-based identities because members who belong to dissimilar groups do not identify strongly with their groups. However, we may also be interacting with dissimilar in-

dividuals who value their group memberships enormously. To communicate sensitively with others, we must pay close attention to their preferences of identity affiliation in particular situations.

Transcultural communicators can practice *collaborative dialogue skills* in their meaning management process. A monologue approach pushes for ethnocentric needs exclusively. A collaborative dialogue approach, on the other hand, emphasizes ethnorelative sensitivity. Collaborative dialogue attempts to discover common ground and share power productively, and it assumes that each cultural team has a piece of the bigger picture (see Chapter 8).

Collaborative dialogue means that people suspend their assumptions and refrain from imposing their views on others. They practice mindful listening and display a respectful attitude regarding the other's viewpoints, needs, and interests. Concurrently, they are also mindful of their own needs, interests, and goals. In collaborative dialogue exchange, individuals orient themselves fully in the present. They are inwardly reflexive and outwardly reflective of identity, relational, and content-based issues.

Many other interaction skills are useful in facilitating transcultural communication competence. To recap, the discussions of these TCC skills appear in the previous chapters: mindful observation skills in Chapter 3; mindful listening skills in Chapter 4; verbal empathy skills in Chapter 4; nonverbal perception checking skills in Chapter 5; mindful stereotyping skills in Chapter 6; culture-sensitive relationship management skills in Chapter 7; constructive conflict management skills in Chapter 8; trust-building and collaborative dialogue skills in Chapter 8; and intercultural adaptation skills in Chapter 9. These skills have been discussed in the "Recommendations" section of each of these chapters. Combining this skills list and the skills that other researchers (e.g., Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Sudweeks, & Stewart, 1995; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Wiseman & Koester, 1993) have identified, we can identify seven clear attributes associated with an effective transcultural communicator: tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, cognitive flexibility, respectfulness, situational adaptability, verbal and nonverbal sensitivity, and creative thinking (see Table 10.1).

To act competently across a wide range of cultures, individuals have to increase their knowledge and heighten their mindfulness in practicing adaptive interaction skills in a variety of intercultural situations. Moreover, to engage in optimal TCC, the role of ethics undergirds the other three TCC components.

FROM INTERCULTURAL TO TRANSCULTURAL ETHICS

Ethics are principles of conduct that govern the behavior of individuals and groups. Ethical approaches represent "a community's perspective on what

TABLE 10.1. Transcultural Competence: Attributes and Abilities

Attributes	Abilities
Tolerance for ambiguity	Ability to meet new situations with mindfulness
Open-mindedness	Ability to respond to cultural others in nonevaluative ways
Flexibility	Ability to shift frame of reference
Respectfulness	Ability to show respect and positive regard for another person
Adaptability	Ability to adapt appropriately to particular situations
Sensitivity	Ability to convey empathy verbally and nonverbally
Creativity	Ability to engage in divergent as well as systems-level thinking

is good and bad in human conduct and lead to norms (prescriptive and concrete rules) that regulate actions. Ethics regulate what ought to be and help set standards for human behavior" (Paige & Martin, 1996, p. 36). We will now discuss some of the existing approaches concerning intercultural ethics. While the term *intercultural ethics* is used here to include approaches and issues of ethical absolutism versus ethical relativism, the term *transcultural ethics* probes deeper into the morality stance, characters, and attitudes of the transcultural communicator. Under transcultural ethics, the issues of moral exclusion versus moral inclusion will be considered.

Ethical Absolutism versus Ethical Relativism

Ethical absolutism emphasizes the principles of right and wrong in accordance with a set of "universally" fixed standards regardless of cultural differences. In comparison, ethical relativism emphasizes the principles of right and wrong in terms of the values and goals of a particular cultural group. Each approach has positive and negative implications.

Under the *ethical-absolutism approach*, the importance of cultural context is minimized. Ethical absolutists believe that the same fixed evaluative standards should be applied to all cultures in evaluating "good" and "bad" behavior. Unfortunately, the dominant or mainstream culture typically "defines and dominates the criteria by which ethical behavior is evaluated. Cultural [or ethnic] differences between groups are disregarded" (Pedersen, 1997, p. 154). For example, a dominant culture may view Western medicine as the best "civilized" way of treating a sick person and thus impose its view on all groups. Meanwhile, many nondominant cultural groups may

view holistic or spiritual healing as an integral part of curing a sick person. However, their cultural practice is suppressed or denied.

The positive aspect of this approach is that one set of standards is being applied to evaluate a range of practices, thus preserving cross-situational consistency. The negative aspect is that it is an "imposed, universalistic" perspective that is reflective of the criteria set forth by people in the dominant cultures or groups (e.g., "First World" nations vs. "Third World" nations). The ethical-absolutistic approach often results in marginalizing or muting the voices of nondominant groups in domestic and international arenas. It does not take into account the problems of colonial ethnocentrism.

Under the *ethical-relativism approach*, right and wrong are determined predominantly by the culture of the individual. Ethical relativists try to understand each cultural group "in its own terms, with a minimum of 'contamination' by outside influence. Actions are not evaluated or even explained by outside criteria. Psychological [or behavioral] differences are explained by cultural differences" (Pedersen, 1997, p. 155; see also Barnlund, 1980). The positive implication of this approach is that it takes the role of culture seriously in its ethical decision-making process. It takes into account the importance of ethnorelativism rather than ethnocentrism. However, the danger is that it discourages "moral discourse and disregards ethical guidelines outside of each cultural context. Standards of moral behavior are tied to conventional behavior in each cultural context, which might change from time to time, place to place, and person to person" (Pedersen, 1997, p. 155). Intolerable cultural practices (e.g., Chinese footbinding practices of middle- and upper-class women under the Ching dynasty), however, are often preserved by dominant group members to reinforce the status quo or to keep nondominant groups in their subordinate "proper roles."

A third approach, a synthesizing *derived ethical-universalism approach*, emphasizes the importance of deriving universal ethical guidelines while placing ethical evaluations within the proper context, culture, and time. Thus, judgments about ethical behavior require understanding both the "underlying, fundamental similarities across cultures and the idiosyncratic . . . identity features of a culture" (Pedersen, 1997, p. 155). A derived universalistic approach highlights a combined culture-universal and culture-specific evaluative framework. However, this is easier said than done.

While a "derived" universalistic stance is an ideal goal to strive toward, it demands collaborative dialogue, attitudinal openness, and hard work from members of all gender, ethnic, and cultural groups. It demands that all voices be heard and affirmed. It also demands equal power distributions and that representations of members of diverse groups be able to speak up with no fear of sanctions. Most of the current "universal ethics" approaches, unfortunately, are "imposed ethics" that rely heavily on Eurocentric moral philosophies and principles to the exclusion of other cultural groups' voices and standpoints.

A more realistic alternative for guiding our actions in contemporary society may be that of *contextual relativism*, that emphasizes the importance of understanding the problematic practice from a contextual perspective. A contextual perspective means that the application of ethics can only be understood on a case-by-case basis and context-by-context basis. Each ethical case is a unique case, and each context is a unique ethical context that stands alone. With clarity of understanding of the context that frames the behavior in question (on sociocultural, historical, and situational levels), intercultural learners can make a mindful choice concerning their own degree of engagement or disengagement in approaching the context.

Understanding the role of context in making a meta-ethical decision connotes an in-depth understanding of the many factors (e.g., sociohistorical, economic-political, religious or cultural, power dynamics) that frame the questioning behavior (e.g., bribery in Indonesia, child labor in Pakistan, female genital mutilation in Somalia and Sudan). A meta-ethical decision is to move beyond the objectionable practice and go deeper to gather information in an effort to understand the reasons giving rise to such a practice. After understanding the reasons behind that practice, we can then decide to accept, or condemn such problematic "customs." While some questionable behaviors across cultures can be deemed to exist on a mildly offensive continuum (and we may be using our ethnocentric lenses to evaluate such behaviors), other practices are completely intolerable on a humanistic scale.

The contextual reasons have to be placed against the cultural background in which the questionable behavior occurs. We have to also place the ethical dilemma against our own personal, gender, and cultural judgments. We may not personally condone business bribery, but at the minimum we have to understand the conditions that contribute to such a practice. We can then reason that "Bribery, within this cultural context is a common practice because of the following reasons . . ." or "Unfair child labor practice originated in this cultural context because. . ."

Once we understand the specific sociohistorical and immediate reasons for a particular practice, we can then evaluate the reasons from an humanistic standpoint with the following questions: Who or which group perpetuates this practice within this culture? Who or which group resists this practice and with what reasons? Who is benefiting? Who is suffering—voluntarily or involuntarily? Does it cause unjustifiable suffering to an individual or a selected group of individuals at the pleasure of another group? What is my role and what is my "voice" in this ethical dilemma? Should I condemn this practice publicly? Should I go along and find a compromising solution (e.g., in the bribery practice case) and reconcile cultural differences (e.g., accept the "appreciation money" and donate it to a local charity, informing your international business partner that it is not customary in your company to accept "appreciation money" and that you have forwarded the money to a charity, thus saving "mutual face"). Should I reject the practice, withdraw

from the cultural scene, or act as a change agent in the local scene? Many problematic cultural practices perpetuate themselves because of routinized cultural habits or ignorance of alternative ways of behaving or solving a fundamental problem. Education or a desire for change from within the people in a local culture is usually how questionable practice is ended.

From a contextual-relativistic framework, making a mindful ethical judgment demands both breadth and depth of context-sensitive knowledge, culture-specific knowledge, and genuine humanistic concern. A contextual relativism stance can, perhaps, ultimately lead us to develop a set of derived ethical-universalistic principles. It demands individuals from diverse communities who, with cognitive and emotional integrity, agree upon an ethical-universalistic framework. Struggling with problematic cultural practices is a complex issue—we can commit the error of being either too ethnocentric in our judgment or too ethnorelative in our attention. A mindful inquiring attitude to gather pertinent information may help us in neither hasting to condemn nor lagging in our passivity or naive ignorance.

Moral Exclusion versus Moral Inclusion

Morality involves the cognitive and emotional conditioning of individuals or groups within a particular community or society. It refers to a conception of "wrongness" or "rightness," or "a way of being" (i.e., character, honor, or integrity) concerning ethical dilemmas and choices. Morality forms the deep-seated values and attitudes that drive ethical choices. *Moral exclusion* occurs when "Individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just" (Opatow, 1990a, p. 1). Moral exclusion can be mild or severe. Severe instances include violations of "human rights, political repression, religious inquisitions, slavery, and genocide. . . . Milder instances of moral exclusion occur when we fail to recognize and deal with undeserved suffering and deprivation" (Opatow, 1990a, p. 2). While moral exclusion applies the scope of justice to a handful of concerned, self-interested communities (e.g., own gender communities), moral inclusion expands the scope of justice (or fairness) to include all individuals across all diverse communities.

The underlying characteristics that constitute moral inclusion (Opatow, 1990a, 1990b) are:

1. The belief that considerations of fairness apply to all other identity groups.
2. The willingness to redistribute economic and social resources to the underprivileged.
3. The willingness to make sacrifices to foster another's well-being.

4. The view that conflicts are opportunities for learning and that individuals are willing to integrate diverse perspectives—so that solutions will include mutually agreed-upon procedures to divide resources fairly.
5. The genuine belief of the “we” group in incorporating individuals from all walks of life—on a truly global level.

The underlying philosophy behind this book echoes the moral inclusion idea: human respect is a fundamental starting point for collaborative, transcultural dialogue. Human respect is a prerequisite for any type or form of intercultural or interethnic communication. Without basic human respect, a community can easily fall apart. In considering a committed, morally inclusive community, Peck (1987) observes that “the spirit of a true community is the spirit of peace. When a group enters [an inclusive] community there is a dramatic change in spirit. And the new spirit is palpable. . . . An utterly new quietness descends on the group. People seem to speak more quietly; yet, strangely, their voices seem to carry better through the room. . . . The people listen and can hear” (p. 76). An inclusive community is a vibrant community that engages in active identity support work. This does not mean that conflicts do not exist. It means, however, that voices of diversity are being listened to and are being understood. As Kale (1991) concludes, “The concept of peace applies not only to relations between cultures and countries but also to the right of all people to live at peace with themselves and their surroundings. As such, it is unethical to communicate with people in a way that does violence to their concept of themselves or to the dignity and worth of their human spirit” (p. 424).

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

An ethical transcultural communicator honors the sacredness of her or his sense of self, and the sacredness of others’ sense of self. To conclude, an ethical transcultural communicator:

1. Respects people of diverse cultures and groups on the basis of equality.
2. Is willing to engage in a lifelong learning process of culture-universal and culture-specific communication knowledge.
3. Is willing to make mindful choices in response to the various situational contingencies of problematic cultural practices.
4. Is willing to assume a social commitment to work for mindful change so as to create a morally inclusive society.
5. Is willing to uphold the human dignity of others via a respectful mindset, an open heart, inclusive visions through ethnorelative lenses, and practicing mindful transcultural communication competencies.

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