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## CHAPTER 22

# **Intercultural Competence Development and Triple-Loop Cultural Learning Toward a Theory of Intercultural Sensitivity**

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Modern global assignments require individuals to seamlessly transition from one cultural context to the next (Bhawuk, 1990; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Earley & Mosakowski, 2000) as “cultural chameleons” (Earley & Peterson, 2004). However, just as a chameleon sitting on a soccer ball may change its colors to black and white without understanding the game of soccer, individuals may not realize the true nature of their social environment. Researchers and practitioners have long recognized this and have investigated the competencies (Dinges, 1983; Dinges & Baldwin, 1996; Dinges & Liberman, 1989), skills (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cushner, 1989), and personality traits (Detweiler, 1975, 1978, 1980) that help predict effectiveness in intercultural interactions. Concepts such as intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; Bhawuk, 1989; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cushner, 1989), intercultural development (Hammer, 1998), intercultural effectiveness (Elmer, 1987), cross-cultural adaptability (Kelley & Meyers, 1992), intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 1996), cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003), intercultural consciousness (Landreman, 2003), and intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) have furthered our understanding of intercultural effectiveness. Though these constructs differ in their definitions and assessments, they broadly fall under the domain of intercultural expertise development, and at the root of this development is the role of learning.

What one should know in intercultural interaction has been examined and advocated extensively (e.g., cultural values), but how an individual can learn during the interaction has not been fully conceptualized in the literature of intercultural expertise development. Understanding how individuals learn is important, as modern global assignments now involve constant travel from country to country. Though one country may be designated as the official assignment, international managers may simply use that country as a sta-

tion for countless trips to other countries to conduct business. As a result, the realities of global business have forced a premium on the ability to learn how to learn about different cultures.

In this chapter we attempt to synthesize learning theories with intercultural expertise development to provide a model of how individuals can learn and grow in intercultural environments. We do this by discussing the models of expertise development and then synthesizing them with the construct of intercultural sensitivity (Bhawuk, 1989; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Bhawuk & Sakuda, *in press*). While many aspects of intercultural sensitivity appear to mirror many of the personality traits and skills found in other indicators of cross-cultural success, intercultural sensitivity differs by placing a premium on the development of interest, sensitivity, and respect at the expense of more immediate priorities of accomplishing task-related goals. While our model parallels the metacognitive aspect of cultural intelligence (CQ), which is defined as the capability of an individual to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including knowledge of and control over individual thought processes relating to culture (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer, Tay, and Chandrasekar, 2007), it also cuts across the emotional and behavioral aspects of intercultural interaction. Building on the model of change management at the individual level, we present a triple-loop cultural learning model of intercultural sensitivity, and present a video metaphor to further explain the model. Synthesizing the learning process, we propose a theory of intercultural sensitivity and conclude with a discussion of intercultural sensitivity in light of CQ and the intercultural development model.

## MODELS OF CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERTISE DEVELOPMENT

Berry and Ward (2006) argued that the conceptualization and theorizing of CQ can greatly benefit from the vast literature on intercultural training. Specifically, they cited the role of culture assimilators in developing metacognitive strategies. Consistent with their recommendation, Bhawuk's (1998) model of intercultural expertise development synthesizes the role of theory in developing metacognitive strategies. In this model, he suggested that people move in phases, from "layperson," to "novice," to "expert," and finally to "advanced expert." A layperson is one who has knowledge of only his or her own culture, and is at the cognitive stage of learning. A novice is likely to have spent some time living in another culture, thus developing some intercultural skills or expertise. Experts are those who can organize cognitions about cultural differences meaningfully around a theory, and are typically at the associative or proceduralization stage of learning. Advanced experts are those who not only understand cultural differences but also can enact different cultural behaviors smoothly and are at the autonomous stage of learning.

The model of intercultural expertise development also fits well with the model of cross-cultural competence development in which people move from "unconscious incompetence," to "conscious incompetence," to "conscious competence," to "unconscious competence" (Howell, 1982). We are all experts at the unconscious competence level in our own culture, and by fiat become unconsciously incompetent in other cultures, *i.e.*, we do not even know what we don't know. By paying attention to our mistakes in

interacting with people from other cultures, we become consciously incompetent, and by intending to modify our behaviors and making an effort to learn new behaviors we become consciously competent. Practicing the behavior leads to its acquisition at the level of unconscious competence. Unconscious incompetence corresponds to the layperson, conscious incompetence to the novice stage, conscious competence to the expert stage, and unconscious competence to the advanced expert level of expertise development.

### **DISCONFIRMED EXPECTATION AND LEARNING HOW-TO-LEARN**

Disconfirmed expectation refers to situations in which sojourners expect a certain behavior from the host nationals, but experience a different one (Bhawuk, 2002; Brislin & Bhawuk, 1999). On the positive side, disconfirmed expectations offer the opportunity to learn by providing concrete examples of how intercultural differences may impact the individual's life. Encountering a disconfirmed expectation creates what Vygotsky calls critical space, in which the individual either chooses to ignore the situation as an aberration or reflect on the situation and learn. For the motivated sojourner, disconfirmed expectations offer the opportunity to go from concrete experience to reflective observation and then to abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 1976; Hugh-Weiner, 1986).

In an intercultural setting, failure to engage in reflective observation may lead to the attribution that an individual's intercultural counterpart is not a nice person or that the host culture is not a good culture. Learning does not occur and the individual may continue to act the same way in the future as they have acted in such situations in the past. However, if reflective observation is practiced, the individual may learn about cultural differences and gain a perspective of the host culture.

If we further develop abstract conceptualization, we acquire theoretical insights, which help us organize cultural experiences coherently into categories and theories. This leads to culture general understanding, and we develop an understanding of *etics*, or universals, and *emics*, or cultural representations of those etics. Active experimentation completes the cycle in that the learner is now testing theories and learned ideas. Through practice, the individual grows beyond a "nice-talk-interculturalist" to become a sophisticated intercultural practitioner (Bhawuk, in press).

### **TRIPLE-LOOP CULTURAL LEARNING MODEL**

It has long been recognized that intercultural sensitivity is necessary for effective intercultural relations (Bhawuk, 1989; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cushner, 1989). It has been described as the essence of intercultural effectiveness and defined as possessing the temperament to be "interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures" (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992, p. 416). In this section we trace the mental thought processes involved in intercultural encounters, and present a new triple-loop cultural learning model as a basis for developing intercultural sensitivity.

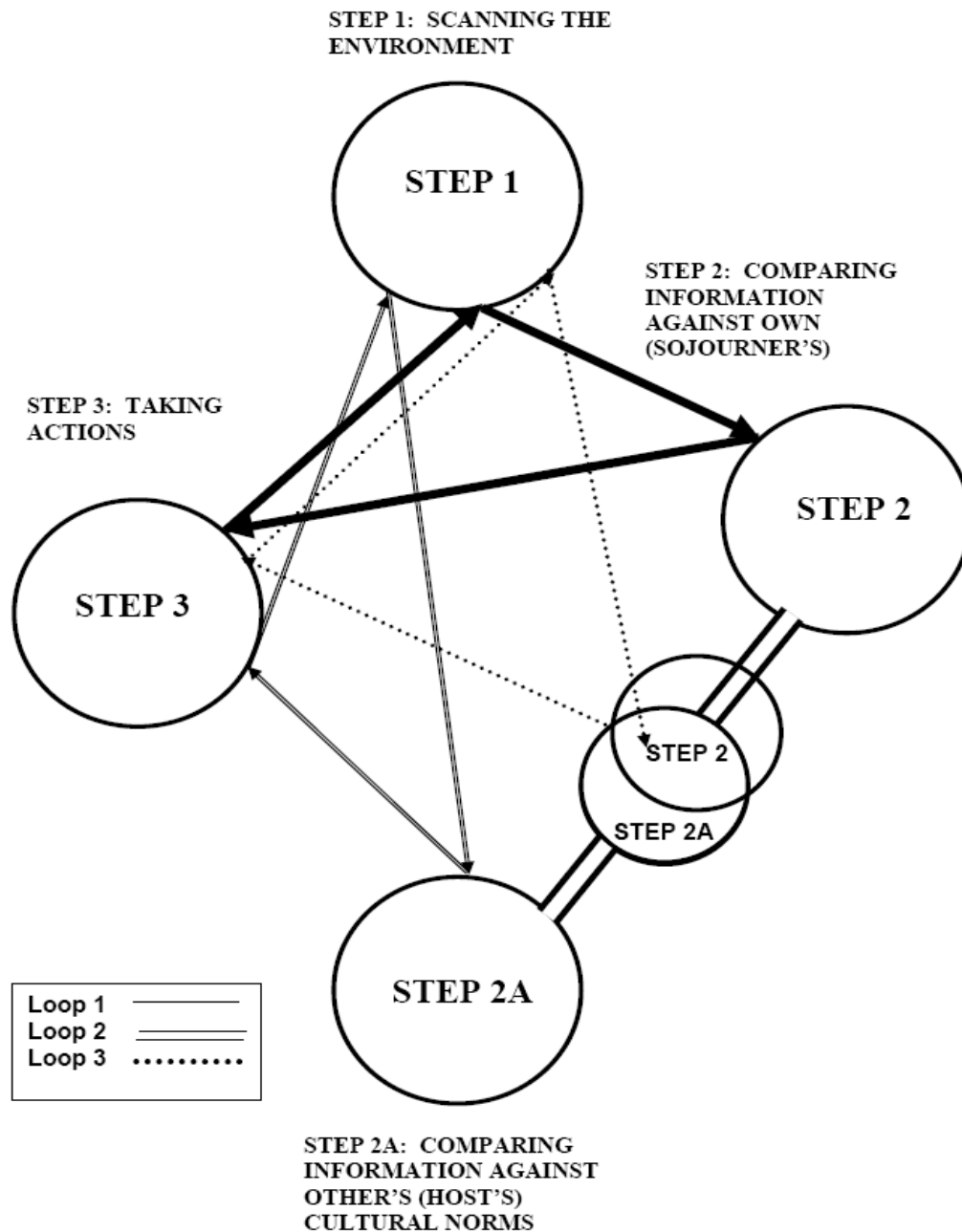
In monocultural settings the mind interprets the world through a three-step process. Step 1 involves scanning the environment to gather information from the immediate surroundings. The mind dedicates its energy to maximizing the flow of sensory inputs into the brain, and only the simplest cognitive processes are active in deciphering social phenomena. In step 2, the mind compares the information collected in step 1 against its operating norms, or cultural baseline, which is grounded in the individual's native culture. Based on these expectations, which carry components of cultural values, beliefs, and social expectations, the mind deciphers and interprets the environment to process the social situation. In step 3, the mind builds upon step 2 to produce a set of strategies for interacting with the social environment. From the produced set of strategies, one will be selected and performed as a situation-appropriate response. This three-step process is derived from cybernetics, and is analogous to single-loop learning in management literature (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Morgan, 1997). In Figure 22.1, it is described as loop 1.

When confronted with an unfamiliar intercultural situation, the mind will initially follow its single-loop process to generate and perform an appropriate response behavior. This is likely to lead to a disconfirmed expectation and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). This stressor may either lead to abandonment of the intercultural encounter or motivate individuals to challenge their intercultural competence, as responding to a disconfirmed expectation forces the mind to operate in a more complex double-loop process.

Once the inappropriateness of the single-loop process is realized, those who are interculturally sensitive initiate a recursive mental loop by questioning the appropriateness of their cultural baseline. They recognize that their lack of experience with the other culture may be obscuring their understanding of the situation, and that the disconfirmed expectation may be related to culture. Step 1 is repeated to account for the possibility that an inappropriate cultural baseline has been used and to account for the new social stimuli (usually negative) generated from the first attempt at performing a situation-appropriate behavior.

The reassessment of step 1 forces a second learned cognitive subcomponent to step 2 to assess the validity of the native cultural baseline for the situation. If the cultural baseline is deemed invalid, a new cultural baseline must be imported to replace the original cultural baseline. Imported cultural baselines are often generated from past experiences with other cultures. Those lacking prior intercultural experiences are incapable of importing new cultural baselines and must proceed through intercultural social information processing with a faulty set of operating norms.

Once an appropriate cultural baseline has been imported, it serves as the basis for attributing social information and for developing a new set of response strategies. If the new cultural baseline is appropriate, then the intercultural interaction is perceived from a similar cultural perspective. If the cultural baseline is inappropriate, then a disconfirmed expectation will be encountered and high levels of intercultural sensitivity will be needed to sustain the motivation to repeat the process using a different imported cultural baseline. Once appropriate operating norms have been found, the individual can proceed to step 3 and attempt to bridge cultural differences by producing a culturally appropriate set of interacting strategies. One of these strategies will be selected and performed as a situation-appropriate response.



The recursive double-loop process of intercultural sensitivity serves as the basis for creating isomorphic attributions, the process of attributing the actions of another by adopting their cultural perspective. It is also dependent on the realization of a disconfirmed expectation. Disconfirmed expectations serve as a feedback device to evaluate the effectiveness of the selected response strategy. Intercultural situations are often clouded in uncertainty, and more often than not the enacted behavior is not completely appropriate.

An individual may need to probe a social situation with multiple cycles of the double-loop process to determine appropriate behaviors.

As the initiator of isomorphic attributions, the double-loop process of intercultural sensitivity is well-suited for the majority of interpersonal interactions across cultures. It is particularly appropriate for situations where one partner chooses to adopt the cultural baseline of another. This often occurs in situations with a power hierarchy, such as host-guests, supervisor-subordinate, or client and service provider. Another scenario for double-loop intercultural sensitivity is when a person has more intercultural experience and chooses to adopt their counterpart's cultural baseline to foster smoother communication.

Despite the effectiveness of the double-loop process, there are situations where the two parties may choose not to appoint one cultural baseline over the other. These situations often occur when the parties wish to promote equality in the relationship or are vying to project an impression of superiority over the other. Long-term friendships are an example of the former, while diplomatic negotiations are an example of the latter. Under those situations, intercultural partners may engage in the recursive triple-loop of intercultural sensitivity.

The triple-loop builds upon the double-loop process by creating a distinctly original cultural baseline specific to the intercultural relationship. It seeks to transcend the boundaries of a single culture through the synthesis and convergence of cultural baselines. As outlined in Figure 22.1, the cultural baseline adopted during the triple loop is comprised of the mutually created operating norms adopted from the represented cultural baselines.

A recent phenomenon that has attracted the attention of cross-cultural researchers is the proliferation of intercultural teams in multicultural contexts. Most intercultural encounters involve only two cultural baselines, but intercultural teams in multicultural contexts potentially involve as many different cultures as there are members of the team. In these situations, the triple-loop model of intercultural sensitivity allows for the team to create its own distinct cultural baseline from the aggregate expectations, values, and beliefs of the team. Variation among team members' personal cultural baselines is inevitable, but mutual humility to adopt shared cultural perspectives allows the team to function as a unit. Visualizing triple-loop intercultural sensitivity in multicultural contexts would require adding an additional dimension to Figure 22.1. Step 2A would exist as the intersection of all the cultural baselines of members of the multicultural team, with each team member following their own triple-loop mental process.

While the recursive looping models of intercultural sensitivity provide direction for forming isomorphic attributions or transcultural perspectives, it is important to remember that intercultural sensitivity is more than just the ability to adopt the mindset of an intercultural partner. It is also the ability to switch quickly and seamlessly back to the individual's home culture. Expatriates who "go native" become so immersed in their new culture that they abandon their home culture. This is not a demonstration of intercultural sensitivity because the inability to switch back to the home culture makes one incapable of navigating cultural differences. The true essence of intercultural sensitivity is learning to change and adapt to the intercultural requirements of the moment while preserving the flexibility to return to one's home culture.

## CULTURAL LEARNING: A VIDEO METAPHOR

Intercultural sensitivity is a process that can be nicely captured using a video metaphor. The first step in the intercultural mental process is to consciously and continuously suspend the attribution process, i.e., to consciously “pause.” This pause can take place at multiple times during an intercultural interaction and is necessary because intercultural sensitivity requires suspending cultural attributions and taking the perspective of the cultures involved in the interaction. Scholars have argued that people tend to make quick but stable inferences based on their senses (Argyris & Schon, 1978), and perspective-taking is only possible if the individual’s own cultural (stable) perspectives are paused. *Pause* here applies to pausing before interaction, pausing during interaction, and pausing after interaction. Pausing is important because it allows the individual to think before an interaction (e.g., learning cross-cultural differences), suspend judgment during the interaction especially when it did not meet prior expectations (e.g., active probing), and reflect on behavior after the interaction (e.g., debriefing). Depending on the individual’s ability, the pause can decrease in terms of duration and frequency over time, but it will never cease.

The second step in the intercultural mental process is to question attributions, expectations, and behaviors. Using the video metaphor, the individual must “rewind” and reflect on behavior in terms of upbringing, cultural norms, organizational culture (e.g., standard operating procedures), and identity. For example, a quick response to a simple mathematical question of  $1 + 1 = 2$ . But, behind this answer, there are few assumptions that go unnoticed. For instance, we assume that 1 is an integer. What if 1 is actually 1.4 but rounded to 1? If we allow one decimal point, then the answer would be rounded up to 3 ( $1.4 + 1.4 = 2.8 \rightarrow 3$ ). Hence, the standards that are applied impact the decision. In the “rewind” stage, learning focuses on cultural standards. By rewinding, individuals would be able to make sense of why they behave the way they do, or find out the reason for the behavior.

The third step involves making sense of new cultural standards. Using the video metaphor, the “forward” button is engaged. Being able to understand the cultural reasons for behavior, the individual can now move forward by making sense of the new cultural information and acting accordingly. This is the stage where new cultural standards are understood. Going back to the mathematical example, this is the stage where calculation occurs based on the new operating rules.

The fourth step is about internalizing what has been learned and achieving cognitive consonance. Using the video metaphor, this is the “recording” stage. Once an individual has made sense of new cultural information and the appropriate behavior, learning can be internalized. This is an important stage. Organizational theorists have argued that “people quickly lose track of the data that caused them to draw the inference” (Dixon, 1996, p.8) and hence the recording stage is vital for future retrieval. This would constitute the third loop of learning discussed earlier and is where the individual learns from both cultures (knowing), makes sense of the information (understanding), and acts accordingly (doing).

The fifth step is to modify action and act accordingly. To use the video metaphor, the play button is engaged, and a new cultural behavior is practiced. As individuals act, their actions reinforce the previous stages of pausing, rewinding, forwarding, and recording. Mistakes may still be made, but these mistakes are narrowed down through “recursive behaviors” and are also used to modify the attribution process. The whole process of pause, rewind, forward, record, and play is repeated whenever it is necessary. Aptly put by Dixon (1996, p. 19), “Perspective-taking is more than just being able to play back others’ argument in order to check with them for accuracy. It is the ability to comprehend and voice how the situation appears from another’s standpoint. Perspective-taking is the opposite of egocentrism, in which the individual is locked into a single view of the situation and is unaware of the limitations of that view or that other viable views may exist.”

### **TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

People are socialized to be ethnocentric (Triandis, 1990). It is natural for all of us to be socialized to value our own cultural practices and to think ethnocentrically that our way is the best way. Accepting this simple fact endows the individual with the humility needed to progress in an intercultural journey. Intercultural encounters provide an opportunity to gain cultural humility as the individual learns new ways of doing the same behavior, hopefully leading toward intercultural sensitivity.

This first step toward developing intercultural sensitivity is the *acknowledgement* of another culture as a way of living differently from the individual’s own culture. It is similar to going from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence following the skill acquisition paradigm of Howell (1982). The naivete is broken, and the individual learns to become conscious of another culture in which people act differently. The other cultural practices may still be rejected by ethnocentrically judging them as inferior. Or, the individual can choose to be more flexible in judgment and move toward acquiring ways of acting and thinking from the perspective of the other culture. This leads us to the second step, which is accepting the other culture as a valid way of being and doing. It does not mean that individuals must stop practicing their own cultural behaviors, but that they should be willing to accept the practices of the other culture in their own right as valid and not inferior. At this point the individual is still in a cognitive stage of learning, but has taken the first mental step toward accepting other ways of doing and being. This is an early phase of intercultural sensitivity development and a necessary first step toward acquiring intercultural competence. Without crossing the cognitive barrier from acknowledgement to acceptance, it is not possible to acquire intercultural competence.

The challenge of moving from acknowledgement to acceptance can also be explained by theoretical ideas captured by the process of false-consensus effect (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Krueger & Zeigler, 1993; Mullen et al., 1985; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). People who agree with a position believe that a large percentage of the population agrees with their position, whereas people who disagree with a position believe that a small percentage of the population disagrees with their position. Since we are all ethnocentric, we have a tendency to view our personal cultural values and practices as useful and ef-



fective and mistakenly believe that others share our views. Moving toward acceptance requires correcting this process.

Acceptance of cultural differences requires more than just recognizing that people are different from one another. There must be recognition and acceptance of the fact that differences occur beyond the unit of analysis of the individual. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) suggests that humans have an innate tendency to classify and identify themselves as members of social groups. Often these groups are based on demographic features, such as ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic parameters, but inherent in the groupings is the realization that members of each group share more than just surface-level features. Membership in these groups often marks shared values, attitudes, and behaviors, but in some societies (e.g., in the United States) the pressure toward political correctness has created a seemingly distorted belief that member affiliation does not coincide with any mutual similarities other than demographic. Rather, similarities among group members are coincidental and differences between groups are a result of individual differences manifested at the group level. These societal pressures have resulted in the principle that all interpersonal differences are individual differences and every individual must be treated as an individual. Intercultural sensitivity requires a rejection of that notion and an acceptance that differences across groups are often attributable to cultural differences.

Once cultural differences have been recognized and accepted, the next step is for a person to have the *intention* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Triandis, 1980) to modify his or her behavior in view of the challenges evoked by the cultural differences. Intention being the best predictor of human behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), it seems necessary that an individual has the intention to change behavior to go beyond acceptance. Often, cultural differences strike at the core of our values systems. Overcoming natural tendencies grounded in home cultural perspectives may sound easy, but in reality may be quite difficult. Initial feelings of discomfort may be masked, but suppressing visceral reactions from striking differences in core values or beliefs can be nearly impossible. Even after the initial shock of a cultural difference is weathered, one may still need to confront longer-lasting repercussions. Also, since cultural behaviors are habitual, intention to modify behavior must be weighed against strength of old habits (Triandis, 1980).

Tolerance and self-reflection are essential tools to inspire intention to bridge cultural differences. Tolerance builds upon acceptance by receiving a cultural difference into the immediate surroundings. Instead of simply accepting the existence of a cultural difference, a tolerant person agrees to allow a difference to impact his or her life. For example, there is nearly universal acceptance that religious differences exist not as functions of individual differences but as part of the world's tapestry of different cultures. However, despite this acceptance, many people do not exhibit the tolerance to interact with those from different religious backgrounds.

Discomfort may still exist in the midst of tolerance. In those cases, self-reflection offers a path to move away from discomfort toward understanding. Asking questions of oneself to understand why one feels discomfort opens a window to investigate the inner self. Further exploration can be done by seeking knowledge about the differences between the encountered culture and one's own culture. Tolerance and self-reflection reveal a

personal willingness to engage in informed compromise over a cultural difference. Once such willingness is offered, a personal strategy can be laid out to effect personal change to accommodate the difference.

The fourth step in developing intercultural sensitivity requires *learning other cultural practices*, which is a necessary behavioral exercise that involves both cognitive and affective dimensions. For example, there are tremendous differences in cultural practices regarding the amount of contact permitted between people of opposite sexes. A person moving from a noncontact culture to a contact culture will face a great deal of emotional strain in learning to properly interact with members of the opposite sex. This affective response is a result of the conflict between two ways of performing a task or behavior. When individuals override behaviors mastered in their own culture, arousal of strong emotion is natural and similar to cognitive dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Controlling this affect requires consciously managing emotions while learning new cultural behaviors.

According to Howell's (1982) paradigm, this conscious management of affect is moving from *conscious incompetence* to *conscious competence*. Positive reinforcement comes from host culture nationals, and slowly but definitely the joy of learning allows the dissonance to fade. It is often the case that many learned cultural behaviors continue to cause discomfort, and a conscious effort must be made to perform the behavior while hiding emotion. This is the fifth step toward developing intercultural sensitivity. Often, cultural behaviors do not change when they fall in the domain of the individual's private life, but those that fall in the public domain or in the workplace do need to be learned despite the discomfort (Bhawuk, 2005).

As in all socially desirable behaviors, it is possible to fake intercultural sensitivity by knowing the appropriate behaviors of another culture. For example, it is difficult to decipher based on behavior whether an individual is performing an organizational citizen behavior or performing a political behavior to please a superior (Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor, & Judge, 1995). Because of the risks associated with insincerity, it is in the best interest of the individual and the organization to be *authentic* in intercultural interactions. This is an important characteristic of intercultural sensitivity. An interculturally sensitive person is likely to genuinely enjoy adopting ideas and practices from other cultures, and thus enjoy the personal growth and interpersonal harmony. Borrowing a concept from positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2005), we posit that intercultural sensitivity offers an optimistic new direction in cross-cultural adjustment that is grounded in the positive construct of authenticity (Harter, 2005).

Intercultural sensitivity requires us to go beyond a simplistic monocultural perspective of being authentic to a much more challenging and trying concept where the maxim "know thyself" is contrasted with knowing the other. On the surface, a call for authenticity in interpersonal interactions seems almost trite. Idealistic concepts such as authenticity seem out of place in the competitive world of business, and most practitioners would support the notion of authenticity as beneficial, but not necessarily cost-effective or practical for business success. Only recently has research begun to uncover value and merits for authenticity in interpersonal interactions (Swann & Pelham, 2005). It is through this

emerging movement in positive psychology that intercultural sensitivity may provide direction and understanding for an increasingly intercultural world.

It is virtually impossible for any person to learn all the cultural practices of a different culture. This is why it is appropriate to view the development of intercultural sensitivity as a lifelong journey. This journey means the accumulation and the amplification of personal growth to bring the joy of learning new concepts, ideas, and behaviors. The reward for undertaking the journey is not always extrinsic or of practical consequence or value, but often intrinsic to the person. The development of intercultural sensitivity is likely to make a person more humane, more tolerant and accepting of differences, and above all, open to dialogue with people with different ideas. Those on the journey of intercultural sensitivity are likely to contribute to better intercultural understanding, a harmonious world, and peace.

## DISCUSSION

The constructs of intercultural sensitivity and CQ are similar in several ways. Both view cross-cultural competence as developmental and trainable and focus on the ability to understand and make sense of cultural cues. By placing an emphasis on learning both declarative and procedural knowledge, CQ and intercultural sensitivity can be developed through training techniques such as role-play and experiential learning (Tan & Yong, 2003). They are also similar in that both capture the three domains of cognition, motivation, and behavior. As new cultural behaviors or experiences are encountered, sojourners must metacognitively synthesize their cognitive processes, maintain control over their emotions, and perform situation-specific and culturally appropriate behaviors.

Despite their similarities, CQ and intercultural sensitivity differ in several ways. CQ is often seen as a new facet of a multidimensional perspective of intelligence, making it a skill or developable tool. Intercultural sensitivity, being progressive/regressive, contextual, and variable within a person, is more of a process. Its constant need for commitment and refinement, as well as its fragile and transient nature, require that it be honed and perfected for each encounter. Whereas the skill-based nature of CQ makes it more functional, the process nature of intercultural sensitivity requires more of a commitment to a set way of developing authentic intercultural relationships.

Unlike other cross-cultural competency measures that focus on the completion of objective tasks and assignments, intercultural sensitivity stops short of defining success through goals external to the individual. Rather, it suggests that developing higher levels of intercultural sensitivity is a goal worthy of its own merits. Echoing Kant's categorical imperative, the process of intercultural sensitivity seeks to be an "end," rather than a means to an end. Other cross-cultural constructs are content to provide moral-free guidance and direction, but intercultural sensitivity recognizes that the humanistic potential vested in every intercultural encounter far exceeds the financial benefits that may accrue to the participants.

To conclude, the theoretical foundations of intercultural sensitivity are based on six attributes of intercultural understanding and acceptance that lead to the unifying goal of

interpersonal harmony across cultures. We can simplify these six attributes to an acronym of 6 As: *acknowledgement*, *acceptance*, *aim* (intention to act), *action* (learning cultural behaviors), *authenticity*, and *accumulation* (lifelong journey). Our notion of intercultural sensitivity resonates with Perry's (1981) work on ethical growth. He described the highest form of committed relativism as the stage at which we accept that, "This is how life will be. I must be wholehearted while tentative, fight for my values yet respect others, believe my deepest values right yet be ready to learn. I see that I shall be retracing this whole journey over and over—but, I hope, more wisely." This statement captures the spirit of intercultural sensitivity by urging all to follow the wisdom of self-truth while embracing others with respect and dignity.

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