CHAPTER 2

Cultures and the challenges of international hospitality management

Chapter objectives

After working through this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the context of international hospitality management
- Determine the roles of different cultures in international hospitality management
- Explore the cultural dynamic for organizations with national cultures, organizational cultures and touristic cultures
- Examine the processes used in managing cultural diversity
- Consider the implications of overlapping cultures in international hospitality management

Introduction

As we have seen in Chapter 1, anyone who travels, crosses boundaries not only of time and space but also of culture and the observant will recognize and react to a series of differences which confront them. We have already noted differences in language, lifestyle and rituals which in the context of hospitality become very important for the management of hospitality services. This book will explore the reactions that companies make to fit with the international dimensions of their markets. However in this chapter we will be more concerned with the cultural impacts on the operational environment of hospitality organizations. We will argue that cultural differences constitute a sufficient force for companies to actually consider different ways of organizing and communicating within their own organizations. This rejects traditional notions that organizations could operate in a culture-free environment, sometimes seen as "universalism" and urge you to consider that international hospitality management is not only culture sensitive but also culture specific. You may think that it is old history to consider the universal accounts of management, but there are close similarities between these accounts and those offered by the evangelists of globalization. It is not a big jump from the homogeneity of globalization to arguing that there is, or will be, a global cultural response which is appropriate for all hospitality.

In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a growing interest in studying management in different countries, but this work was still underpinned by a concern with how the ways in which we managed could be made to work in these strange places. In other words, the researchers set out to identify the benefits of the universal principles of management that underpinned sound management practice and would be applicable anywhere despite the specificities of local cultures. This was recognized as the convergence hypothesis and argued that all countries would come into line with the accepted best practices of Western capitalism. It was based on a similar assumption to that which we have identified in writings on globalization, that the logic of industrialization would have a homogenizing effect on

business practice, eventually leading to the evolution of a universal type of business organization. The focus of this work shifted in the 1970s as the belief in convergence waned, perhaps with the emergence of the powerful Japanese models that almost led to a convergence with Eastern models rather than with Western ones.

The danger with emphasizing the importance of the cultural factors in the analysis of management is that we must remember that they do not operate in isolation. The work of culture is set in a context that is influenced by the changes in technology, scale of operation and even contingency factors that may well operate across cultures as well as within them. The complexity of international hospitality organizations means that we may find both convergence and distinctiveness factors at work within them. We are not denying that there are pressures towards convergence and homogeneity but would stress both the need to recognize the difference and the opportunities for resistance that local cultural options offer. Moreover Child (1981) noted that the forces may work at different levels of the organization. He saw the formal aspects of organization being shaped by the convergency factors of technology and industrialization. However significantly he recognized that the formal organization works alongside the informal organization (see Chapter 7) which would be more influenced by the cultural factors of distinctiveness. The interactions of leadership and the patterns of decision-making would be set within the local cultural contexts. However even this recognition may not go far enough according to some of the work we will consider next.

Culture is a difficult concept to define and has been the subject of many attempts. Some of the definitions use culture as a synonym for nation or country without seeking to give the concept any theoretical grounding (Child, 1981: 304). The problem with such a loose definition is that the concept becomes nothing more than a catch all or an omnibus variable representing social, political, economic and historical factors. What we can put forward is that culture is not a characteristic of individuals but of a collection of individuals sharing common concerns that may include values, beliefs, ideas and rituals. These groupings can be seen operating within organizations, but you can also track the cultural patterns at regional and national levels. These categories often overlap, reinforcing and challenging cultural values and establishing ways of behaving, thinking and perceiving that are common to all those who belong to the group and differentiate them from others who are not members of that particular group.

Defining culture

What has to be observed is that the cultural patterns we share are learned and continue to be learned. Culture is neither static nor fixed. It is a set of beliefs that we develop from childhood and throughout our lives, with some values becoming relatively fixed whilst others are more changeable. This process is recognized as socialization but we must reinforce that the process works differently in different regions and differently within different organizations. The process is grounded in the specific contexts which generate and are generated by the production of culture.

This means that the cultures we live are historically informed and shaped by our social environments. For instance, even the climate can have effects on the cultural patterns as lifestyles differ between warm and cold climates. This also includes the conditions in the organizations that we work for and are aware of (Figure 2.1).

What is Culture?

Culture comes from the Latin word "colere", meaning to build on, to cultivate, and to foster.
Culture is a set of accepted behaviour patterns, values, assumptions, and shared common experiences.
Culture defines social structure, decision-making practices, and communication styles.
Culture dictates behaviour, etiquette, and protocol.
Culture is something we learn. It impacts everyone, and influences how we act and respond.
Culture is communication. It is a way people create, send, process and interpret information.

Figure 2.1
What is culture?

Culture in general is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave, individually and in groups. Broadly and simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which you share common experiences that shape the way you understand the world. This has usually been seen at the national level and the organizational level. We believe that it is now possible to talk of a touristic culture which exerts pressure on the hospitality industry, that is to say the demands placed on the hospitality industry are themselves culturally determined. However the demands arise from a group – the tourists – that exist within and beyond national cultural boundaries and share the common experience of travel, thereby forming a distinct culture of their own.

The cultural minefield … identifying yourself

ACTIVITY

Understanding and effectively interacting within the cultural groups to which we belong is like walking through a minefield. Being culturally aware means much more than just understanding the culture of other groups or countries. It means understanding who you are and your own cultural dynamic.

Consider the following "cultures", and the impact on your life:

- Where you were born.
- Your nationality and heritage.
- How you were raised and your family life.
- The schools you attended.
- Your religious preferences.
- Your profession.
- Your company and its corporate culture.
- Your gender.

Thus, the same person can belong to several different cultures depending on his or her birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, family status, gender, age, language, education, physical condition, sexual orientation, religion, profession, place of work and its corporate culture.

Culture is the "lens" through which you view the world. It is central to what you see, how you make sense of what you see and how you express yourself.

For example, consider what it means to say you are an American. A recent search in Yahoo for "American Culture" pulled up 56 categories! America, once considered a global melting pot, is now viewed as a salad bowl filled with a large variety of ingredients.

Example: The cultural iceberg

Culture is like an iceberg. As everyone who has seen *Titanic* knows the problem with icebergs is not the part that you can see, as this represents only some 10% of the iceberg. The other 90% is hidden below the waterline but is most definitely still there.

The tip of the cultural iceberg is easy to see. This includes the visible aspects and do's and taboos of working in other cultures. The remaining huge chunk of the iceberg hidden below the surface includes the invisible aspects of a culture such as the values, traditions, experiences and behaviours that define each culture. Venturing into different cultures without adequate preparation can be just as dangerous as a ship manoeuvring icy waters without charts, hoping to be lucky enough to avoid hitting an iceberg. The difference is that the ship will know immediately when it hits an iceberg.

Unsuspecting companies may never realize they hit an iceberg but they will, nevertheless, feel the impact. It appears in the form of delayed or abandoned projects, misunderstood communications, frustrated employees and a loss of business and reputation. The costs of cultural myopia and the inability to adjust can be staggering. By definition, cross-cultural awareness means not only becoming culturally fluent in other cultures but also having a solid understanding of your own culture.

Building trust across cultural boundaries

Research indicates that there is a strong correlation between components of trust (such as communication effectiveness, conflict management and rapport) and productivity. Cultural differences play a key role in the creation of trust, since trust is built in different ways and can mean different things in different cultures.

For instance, in the US, trust is demonstrated by performance over time. In the United States, you can gain the trust of your colleagues by "coming

through" and delivering on time on your commitments. In many other parts of the world, including many Arab, Asian and Latin American countries, building relationships is a pre-requisite for professional interactions. Building trust in these countries often involves lengthy discussions on non-professional topics and shared meals in restaurants. Work-related discussions start only once your counterpart has become comfortable with you as a person and recognized your status as appropriate.

Cultural differences in multicultural teams can create misunderstandings between team members before they have had a chance to establish any credibility with each other. Thus, building trust is a critical step in creation and development of such teams. As a manager of a multicultural team, you would need to recognize that building trust between different people is a complex process, since each culture has its own way of building trust and its own interpretation of what trust is.

Harnessing the power of diversity

Diversity is a specialized term that describes a workplace that includes people from various backgrounds and cultures, and/or diverse businesses – and therefore it is a concept which we come across in international hospitality all the time. You can find a strategic competitive advantage in an organizational and cultural context by seeking to leverage, rather than diminish, what might appear to be opposing forces. An important but widely overlooked principle of business success is that integrating opposites, as opposed to identifying them as inconsistencies and driving them out, unleashes power. This can be demonstrated on both a personal and on an organizational level.

Cultures and standards

We are often tempted to take our own culture for granted and in fact, we are scarcely aware of it until we interact with another. Each culture has a worldview: a set of values and beliefs that allow its members to understand and interpret the world they live in and experience. This will be meaningful to its members but appear alien to others. As a consequence, we look at people from other cultures, see that their ways are different and often react to that by saying that their ideas are not normal and we end up disliking their ways even before we understand them. For instance, research on the food industry in the United Kingdom would uncover rather different variables to the ones that Johns *et al*. (2002) found in Hong Kong. Their study of 400 employees found that their relationships with customers were affected by saving "face", conservatism and the repayment of good/evil. These are the factors to be found in the local Hong Kong culture and therefore have a local power over the service offer. You would not necessarily expect them to emerge in a study set in the United Kingdom.

Employees who have cross-border responsibilities and/or cross-cultural relationships need to be prepared to effectively handle the inevitable intercultural tasks and challenges involved.

Six fundamental patterns of cultural difference

1. Different **communication styles**.
2. Different **attitudes towards conflict**.
3. Different **approaches to completing tasks**.
4. Different **decision-making styles**.
5. Different **attitudes towards disclosure**.
6. Different **approaches to knowing**.

There are differences that we experience not only **between** cultures but also **within** cultures. For example, Australian culture can be identified with that of the majority Anglo-Celtic population but the nation's culture also encompasses a number of distinctive subcultures. Hofstede argued that an individual's culture may have several levels: (1) national; (2) regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic; (3) gender; (4) generation; (5) social class; (6) organizational. We can see that this mixture provides an intriguing cocktail for anyone involved in organizational recruitment to attempt to disentangle for a performance assessor to misunderstand during an appraisal a management consultant or trainer to "correct". All in all, there is massive scope for a clash of cultures – and the emergence of prejudices.

The development of genuinely transnational business organizations therefore requires managerial approaches and systems which allow for variations recognizing and deriving from such diversity. This might be "national" cultural diversity between nations, races or ethnic groups (e.g. in a two-nation joint-venture), intra-national diversity involving the range of cultures within a single nation (e.g. in the United States or in China) or internal cultural diversity where managers need to deal with foreign-owned transnational companies in their own country. All this is well known, and there is indeed a burgeoning literature on the management of cultural diversity. But the problems go deeper than is often appreciated: it is not simply a matter of minding your manners or learning to deal with varying attitudes to punctuality. These are the surface manifestations of much deeper differences in mental structures and cultural acceptance.

The perception of time

Our cultures mean that we all have in-built standards, the origins of which we rarely question and which we interpret as "normal". This has profound implications for people management at the global level. Triandris (1972) pinpoints the perception of time as one element of cultural complexity. He argues that different cultures have different attitudes towards time and deal with varying attitudes to punctuality. Time-keeping

is treated tolerantly in underdeveloped societies – with few things to do, one can do them in any order. But in industrialized countries there are many things to do and they must be coordinated with other people. Hence, time becomes more important and is regarded as something precise and highly significant. However even in Europe it is possible to identify differences in the attitude to time. Organizing a meeting with participants from the north of the Netherlands and from southern Italy reveals differences in the European attitude to time. The Dutch will characteristically arrive early to be ready for the starting time and not cause any delays to other participants. The Italians, on the other hand, will be happy to take another coffee before moving into the meeting even if the scheduled start time has already passed. (Please note that this presentation commits the sin of stereotyping at the national level – not all Italians are the same and therefore do not share the same attitudes to time. We will address the dangers of stereotyping later.)

Another significant time characteristic is that of short- or long-term orientation. Typically, it has been recognized that East Asians are considered to have a longer-time perspective than nationals of many other regions. The impact of short termism on business planning becomes apparent when the plans of different companies are considered and the demands for instant returns are minimized. These are the surface manifestations of much deeper differences in mental structures. A few examples will make this clear.

Human resources

The global operator obviously needs managers capable of working globally. Some European hospitality organizations are now recruiting "non-nationals" in order to resolve their problems quickly, but how does a human resource specialist trained in his own culture, who can make a rough assessment of a candidate's capabilities in a brief interview, deal with the problems of recruiting staff in other cultures? How valid is psychological testing when applied cross-culturally? How much do most human resource managers know about other school and university systems? Suppose a German manager needs to choose between, say, a Finn, an Italian and a Portuguese. That would require an awareness not only of the very different education systems in European countries but also the ways in which educational background influences patterns of thought and managerial style: how, for example, education underlies the way in which the same conflict might be addressed in France by seeking orders from a superior, in Britain by sending the people in conflict on a management course and in Germany by employing a consultant.

Assuming for a moment that these problems can be resolved, how might the issue of dual allegiance be tackled? For the employment of local managers necessitates the creation of loyalty on their part to a distant entity with culturally diverse norms and assumptions. Even a long-term expatriate who is nominally still of the same nationality but has in fact

"gone native" might respond to an order in this way: "I'm sure my local employees won't like this, so I won't tell them and try to smooth over the issue in some other way". It can be much more difficult for the locally employed manager, especially under stress.

Roles

Triandris also relates cultural complexity to the way we define our working and other roles. In complex societies roles become increasingly specific – compartmentalized into separate mental boxes and hierarchical positions. We can be finance managers, parents and social club officials, and behave differently in each role. In less-complex societies, on the other hand, roles are diffuse, affecting every aspect of people's lives. Religion, politics and matters of taste are important in these more diffuse cultures. They are less important in role-specific cultures unless they become formalized into the specification of the role. Developed countries tend to be role-specific, avoiding role confusion. Recruitment practices in Northern Ireland used to say that there was no discrimination between Protestant and Catholic applicants, but research demonstrated that putting the name of your school on the application form could effectively reveal your religion and disqualify you from consideration by employers who justified their discrimination by arguing that they were wanting to maintain a cohesive workforce.

Theory and best practice in key human resource management (HRM) areas such as selection, performance measurement and development assume an equal opportunities approach in which people are dealt without favour or prejudice. However, this notion is alien to diffuse-role cultures, in which it is natural to favour members of one's own family or community.

Cultural training

Human resource managers have a considerable role to play in preparing staff for work overseas. Given the range and sensitivity of cultural differences, it is clear that people working in an international context can benefit from tuition in the business customs and social manners of the countries they will work in. Human resource managers can play a major part in developing programmes for sales and other staff whose behaviour must be fully acceptable in target countries. For instance, this type of training can often encompass language, social behaviour, local business, structure and practice and table etiquette.

Cultural training is essential to avoid potential conflicts and to improve the disastrous failure rate of joint-ventures in the recent past. In fact, most hospitality organizations with global ambitions now provide cross-cultural training in order to create genuinely international managers. This sometimes involves in-house training, and is also provided by consultants and business schools. Yet much of this training deals with the traditional, superficial problems without seeking to explore the deeper causes of underlying cultural differences. Another problem is that much of the research and background material is rapidly out-dated as the pace of cultural change accelerates.

Language

Language is one of the most obvious aspects of culture and therefore it can be readily recognized that the use of language has critical implications. It is not just the question of what is the correct literal translation but of observing what would be the appropriate translation for the specific context. If you are asking for quiet in a meeting saying "shut up" may be appropriate in the United Kingdom and the United States but translated into Hungarian it is a very rude thing to say and alternative ways of requesting silence should be found if you do not want to cause offence.

In appraisal feedback meetings or interviews, people managers must be aware of cultural differences covering for instance:

- **Directness**: Westerners may begin an informal meeting with a joke (well, some of us might). At this stage in a Japanese relationship such familiarity would be regarded as extremely offensive, expecting formality until each other's status and authority are clearly understood. Some cultures deem it appropriate to talk about family and friends before commencing the business of the meeting – to refuse to join in is not seen as being efficient or wanting to get down to business, it is interpreted as a lack of respect and becomes a barrier to building trust in the relationship.
- **Politeness**: All cultures employ polite forms of address which are expected in particular circumstances. Politeness is socially supportive behaviour which maintains harmony and respect between individuals. You need to understand the local culture in order to appreciate what is acceptable. In many languages there is a distinction between formal terms of address and the informal for friends and family – however your host may feel that you have become acceptable and shift to the informal terms even in business settings and you must be able to respond appropriately. To continue to reply in the formal terms would again be to show disrespect to your host. Similarly to greet them in the informal is to be presumptuous and also shows them a lack of respect they may feel is due to them.

Customs or rules

These patterns of behaviour are the product of historical evolution and establish standards that are embraced by the members of the society. The greetings example demonstrates how complex this is even at a simple level. A knowledge of the historical practices may also help managers to understand the different concepts of morality that condition the way in which business is conducted. Some key issues that are culturally conditioned include: bribery, nepotism, the giving of gifts (and when this should become the exchange of gifts), buying and selling, eating and drinking and, as we have seen, rules about time. We will return to some of these controversial issues in the Section on Social responsibility which comes later in this book.

Non-verbal behaviour

One of the most critical areas in multicultural settings is that of non-verbal behaviour. Stories abound of contracts being lost because of inappropriate expressions, overeagerness, unacceptable familiarity and general insensitivity. It is possible to detail a number of key behavioural features: proximity, touch and gaze; expressiveness; gestures; accompaniments of speech; symbolic self-presentation; rituals that have to be considered in international settings. Once again we behave normally at our peril, as our definition of what is normal may be alien to our proposed partners and may jeopardize any negotiations if it is thought to be too outrageous in the terms of the host culture.

Cross-cultural communication challenges

Culture is often at the root of communication challenges. Exploring historical experiences and the ways in which various cultural groups have related to each other is key to opening channels for cross-cultural communication. Becoming more aware of cultural differences, as well as exploring cultural similarities, can help you communicate with others more effectively. Next time you find yourself in a confusing situation, ask yourself how your knowledge of your culture and your knowledge of the host's culture may be shaping your own reactions, and try to see the world from the other's point of view.

Eye contact

In some cultures, looking people in the eye is assumed to indicate honesty and straightforwardness; in others it is seen as challenging and rude. In the United States, the cheapest, most effective way to connect with people is to look them into the eye. Most people in Arab cultures share a great deal of eye contact and may regard too little as disrespectful. In English culture, a certain amount of eye contact is required, but too much makes many people uncomfortable. In South Asian and many other cultures direct eye contact is generally regarded as aggressive and rude.

Culture shock

Failure to identify cultural issues and take action can lead to a culture shock. In order of priority, the most often found symptoms of culture shock are:

- feeling isolated,
- anxiety and worry,
- reduction in job performance,
- high nervous energy,
- helplessness.

Not coping with culture shock symptoms when they appear can lead to a very negative situation.

Respecting differences and working together

Anthropologists discovered that, when faced by interaction that we do not understand, people tend to interpret the others involved as "abnormal", "weird" or "wrong". Awareness of cultural differences and recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step towards understanding each other and establishing a positive working environment. Use these differences to challenge your own assumptions about the "right" way of doing things and as a chance to learn new ways to solve problems. Organizationally there is often conflict between the international culture of the management and the culture of the local people. Huyton and Ingold (1995) detailed the problems that the Ritz–Carlton group experienced in Hong Kong when they attempted to introduce the company's total quality management (TQM) programme. The implementation was hindered because the local workforce adhered to the Chinese value system, known as "guanxi" which is not necessarily compatible with TQM. Guanxi supports:

- Respect for authority: Employees would always do what they were told.
- Power relationships: Clearly defined, recognized and observed, totally deferential.
- Authority without responsibility: Doing things is important but the authority for the task is passed upwards within the organization.
- Face: Preserving one's status and reputation creates an unwillingness to be open about weaknesses or mistakes.
- Unwillingness to share information: Saying too much is seen as dangerous and a possible weakness.
- Forming informal social groups: Giving an alternative to the official organizational channels.

When we work together we hope for meaningful interaction but often find this difficult to achieve. One way of looking at this is the Hopes and Fears model:

Communication: hopes and fears

Hopes
- the possibility of dialogue,
- learning something new,
- developing friendships,
- understanding different points of view.

Fears
- being judged,
- miscommunication,
- patronizing or hurting others intentionally.

There are several suggestions to make the attempt at communications more meaningful.

Approaches

- Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype. Use them rather to understand better and appreciate other multifaceted human beings.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Don't assume that yours is the only right way to communicate. Keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate. Communicate trust and build rapport by talking in your client's preferred mode.
- Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown.
- Listen actively and empathetically. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Honour others' opinions about what is going on.
- Suspend judgement, and try to look at the situation as an outsider.
- Honest acknowledgement of the mistreatment that has taken place on the basis of cultural difference is vital for effective communication. Use this as an opportunity to develop trust.
- Awareness of current power imbalances is necessary for understanding each other and working together.
- Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behaviour of any particular individual. We are all more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest.

Levels of cultures

It is also possible to identify different aspects of culture. One approach, developed from the work of Triandris (1972), notes the difference between objective and subjective aspects of culture. Objective culture is seen as the tangible aspects of culture, such as art and architecture. Subjective culture refers to the intangible aspects, such as ways of perceiving and belief systems. What is apparent in studying organizational culture is that the two are connected and are used to reinforce each other. Objective aspects such as the design of the hotel and the uniform are important in establishing the recognition of the brand and also serve to embody the value system the organization is advocating.

Another way of looking at culture was developed in the important work undertaken by Hofstede (1991). In the study of international culture,

four layers of culture are identified ranging from the visible to the deeper meanings of the culture. The four layers are:

1. symbols,
2. heroes,
3. rituals,
4. values.

The symbols level refers to words, gestures and objects that carry a particular meaning to members of the group. If you think in terms of a national culture you will see obvious symbols in the national flag and the national anthem. However these can be amended to more local groups, for instance with the change to the national anthem always sung at the English football cup final, where "God save the Queen" becomes "God save our team" – producing a reference to the symbols relevant to the group of supporters attending the match (although both team's supporters may make the same change to the national anthem invoking God for both teams involved in the contest!).

Heroes refer to those people, living or dead, real and imaginary, who have a status in the group and may serve as role models for the group. Reading a history of a nation will make these characters apparent – although the Scottish may have mixed emotions about the invocation of Braveheart (William Wallace to the Scots) constructed by Mel Gibson and Hollywood! Within an organization, you can see attempts to use this level of culture in the award of prizes to the best worker(s) in the organization. These awards confer hero status on the holder and serve to motivate them and their colleagues to achieve the desired standards.

Rituals are those patterns of behaviour encouraged by a group, from simple forms of greeting to more complicated ones like weddings or organizational induction programmes. Even the simple form can be constructed differently, marking out the group members effectively from those who do not belong. A greeting in the United Kingdom is formally very easy – you meet someone and you shake hands. In Hungary the traditional greeting is to kiss on both cheeks (not the lips as that conveys other meanings). What happens when a Hungarian is introduced to someone from England becomes an unchoreographed dance – an English hand is extended as the Hungarian cheek is offered, but then realizing the mistake the hand is withdrawn and English lips are prepared only to find the Hungarian head withdrawing and a hand being offered in its place. Experience suggests that the way to avoid such embarrassment is to do both greeting rituals at the same time, thereby avoiding any awkwardness. The moral of this tale is to demonstrate the importance of difference, not to point to the right or wrong of either greeting. To assume one particular set of rituals is right is limiting and can be called ethnocentrism – in international collaboration such reactions can create increased likelihood of conflict in partnerships.

Example: Cultural distance and participation in cultural tourism

Bob McKercher and Billie Chow So-Ming's (2001) research looked at the concept of cultural distance, which refers to the extent to which the culture of the originating region differs from that of the host region. It is hypothesized in this article that cultural distance influences participation in cultural tourism, with visitors from more culturally distant source markets being more interested in cultural tourism than those from culturally proximate source markets. Through the comparison of visitor profiles, cultural tourism participation rates and activities pursued visitors to Hong Kong from three Asian and three Western source markets were examined and it was revealed that there were statistically significant differences between these two groups.

Hofstede maintains that values operate at the deepest level of culture, representing collective beliefs, assumptions and feelings. This allows group members to understand what is normal in their society without having to think consciously about it. It is important that these values do not have to be consciously recognized as they are deeply embedded. For instance, in most Asian societies it is common to accept the authority of the social elders and this carries through into relationships in the workplace.

Four cultural dimensions

Cultures – both national and organizational – have been studied among many dimensions in order to try and explain the differences. Four of the most important can be seen to be:

1. **Directness** (get to the point versus imply the messages);
2. **Hierarchy** (follow orders versus engage in debate);
3. **Consensus** (dissent is accepted versus unanimity is needed);
4. **Individualism** (individual winners versus team effectiveness).

The study for which Hofstede is justifiably famous involved research in 50 countries and 3 regions of IBM's operation, both in the parent company and its subsidiaries, involving a formulation of these four dimensions. The work recognizes the overall context of the multinational organization's own culture and was relatively controlled in terms of the age and gender of the samples in the different places. Hofstede claimed that the national differences explained more of the differences in work-related values than did the position within the organization, profession, age or gender. The research was designed to look at the four issues outlined below:

1. Power distance: how marked are the status differences between people with high and low power.

2 Uncertainty avoidance: a measure of flexibility and need for rules.
3 Individualism versus collectivism: is a culture focused on individuals or groups?
4 Masculinity versus femininity: aggressiveness (level of individual assertiveness and competition) as masculinity (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Scoring the four cultural dimensions

Country	Power/distance		Uncertainty/ avoidance		Individualism		Masculinity	
	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank
Argentina	49	18–19	86	36–41	46	28–29	56	30–31
Australia	36	13	51	17	90	49	61	35
Austria	11	1	70	26–27	55	33	79	49
Belgium	65	33	94	45–46	75	43	54	29
Brazil	69	39	76	29–30	38	25	49	25
Canada	39	15	48	12–13	80	46–47	52	28
Chile	63	29–30	86	36–41	23	15	28	8
Colombia	67	36	80	31	13	5	64	39–40
Costa Rica	35	10–12	86	36–41	15	8	21	5–6
Denmark	18	3	23	3	74	42	16	4
Ecuador	78	43–44	67	24	8	2	63	37–38
Finland	33	8	59	20–21	63	34	26	7
France	68	37–38	86	36–41	71	40–41	43	17–18
Germany (FR)	35	10–12	65	23	67	36	66	41–42
Greece	60	26–27	112	50	35	22	57	32–33
Guatemala	95	48–49	101	48	6	1	37	11
Hong Kong	68	37–38	29	4–5	25	16	57	32–33
Indonesia	78	43–44	48	12–13	14	6–7	46	22
India	77	42	40	9	48	30	56	30–31
Iran	58	24–25	59	20–21	41	27	43	17–18
Ireland	28	5	35	6–7	70	39	68	43–44
Israel	13	2	81	32	54	32	47	23
Italy	50	20	75	28	76	44	70	46–47
Jamaica	45	17	13	2	39	26	68	43–44
Japan	54	21	92	44	46	28–29	95	50
Korea S.	60	26–27	85	34–35	18	11	39	13
Malaysia	104	50	36	8	26	17	50	26–27
Mexico	81	45–46	82	33	30	20	69	45
The Netherlands	38	14	53	18	80	46–47	14	3
Norway	31	6–7	50	16	69	38	8	2
New Zealand	22	4	49	14–15	79	45	58	34
Pakistan	55	22	70	26–27	14	6–7	50	26–27
Panama	95	48–49	86	36–41	11	3	44	19
Peru	64	31–32	87	42	16	9	42	15–16

(*continued*)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Country	Power/distance		Uncertainty/ avoidance		Individualism		Masculinity	
	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank
The Philippines	94	47	44	10	32	21	64	39–40
Portugal	63	29–30	104	49	27	18–19	31	9
South Africa	49	18–19	49	14–15	65	35	63	37–38
Salvador	66	34–35	94	45–46	19	12	40	14
Singapore	74	40	8	1	20	13–14	48	24
Spain	57	23	86	36–41	51	31	42	15–16
Sweden	31	6–7	29	4–5	71	40–41	5	1
Switzerland	34	9	58	19	68	37	70	46–47
Taiwan	58	24–25	69	25	17	10	45	20–21
Thailand	64	31–32	64	22	20	13–14	34	10
Turkey	66	34–35	85	34–35	37	24	45	20–21
United Kingdom	35	10–12	35	6–7	89	48	66	41–42
United States	40	16	46	11	91	50	62	36
Uruguay	61	28	100	47	36	23	38	12
Venezuela	81	45–46	76	29–30	12	4	73	48
Yugoslavia	**76**	**41**	**88**	**43**	**27**	**18–19**	**21**	**5–6**
Regions								
East Africa	64	(31–32)	52	(17–18)	27	(18–19)	41	(14–15)
West Africa	77	(42)	54	(18–19)	20	(13–14)	46	(22)
Arab countries	80	(44–45)	68	(24–25)	38	(25)	53	(28–29)

Source: Hofstede (1991).

Power distance

This aspect of national culture looks at how different societies have addressed the issue of social equality and how they have legitimized power relations in those societies. In the context of organizational development, high power distance – a high tolerance for differences in power – means acceptance of strong leaders and centralized organizations. For Hofstede power distance is the extent to which members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally. Inequality of power is traditionally to be found in formalized, hierarchical organizations with well established superior–subordinate relationships. The study found that there were large power distance values in Latin countries (both in Europe and in the Americas) and for Asian and African countries. Northern Europe and the English-speaking countries scored much lower on this dimension.

Uncertainty avoidance

This variable recognizes that the future is unknowable and therefore there is a degree of uncertainty in all our lives. How a society deals with these uncertainties is one of the defining aspects of its culture. What Hofstede was exploring here was the extent to which the society could tolerate uncertainty and how it would deal with ambiguity. Societies with formalized rules for such situations also tend to recognize absolute truths and respect expertise. The pattern of responses on this variable does not fit easily with the suggested link to economic wealth or development, as the top four countries are Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark and Sweden. High scores, indicating a high propensity to accept uncertainty, were found in Latin America, Latin European and Mediterranean, Japan and South Korea. The scores in German-speaking countries in Europe (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) were medium high. Scores of medium to low were found in Asian and African countries, and Anglophone and Northern European countries.

Individualism versus collectivism

This continuum reflects the degree to which individuals in a country feel a part of the society or experience life as individual actors rather than as members of cohesive social groupings. In individualistic countries, everyone would be expected to look to their own interests and their own families with an agenda of self-preservation. In countries where collectivism dominates the emphasis is on extended social ties between individuals, with commitments to an extended family, clan, tribe or community within the society and these ties help to secure social responsibilities.

On the whole, the developing countries were characterized as collectivist and the industrialized countries as individualist. Hofstede's study showed a high correlation between the wealth of the nation (GDP per capita) and the individualism of its people's attitudes. The richer the country, the more individualist were its people's values. It is worth noting that the exception identified in the study was Japan, where despite the wealth in the economy, there were still relatively strong collectivist values compared to most Western countries.

Masculinity versus femininity

The words are used by Hofstede in a deliberately stereotypical way. Hofstede took masculine values to be a strong work ethic linked to financial rewards and achievement recognition. There was a sense of "tough" or "macho" values such as performance, achievement, making money, showing off, glorifying power and success. Feminine values were taken to be those which demonstrated stronger concern for social well being and quality of life. Here caring values were emphasized, such as putting relationships

first, care for the young and weak, protection of the environment and a concern for the "small is beautiful" ethos. Masculine dominant societies were seen to define male–female gender roles more strictly than feminine dominant societies. On the basis of the study Hofstede concluded that Japan and Austria were highly masculine, whilst the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands were highly feminine.

These four characteristics are not the only ones that can be identified in the study of the effects of national culture on organizational performance, but they do offer an insight into structuring the analysis of different patterns of behaviours. We shall return to this in looking at motivation and leadership in the Section on International human resource management.

Given our definition of culture and the caveats we added about the importance of context and specificity, it is interesting to think through how the intervening 30–40 years since the study would impact on the findings. The attitude to feminism and the changing international political alignments may well have changed some of the attitudes and experiences which the original study was based on. Hofstede has recognized this and in a more recent work (Hofstede and Bond, 1988) added a fifth dimension to try and look at national values from a non-Western perspective. This was called Confucian dynamism and attempted to capture the values related to persistence, relationship definitions, thrift, shame, reciprocity, saving face and respect for tradition. We will refer to many examples of this dimension in looking at what is important in organizations as we focus on face and trust in other discussions.

Chapter case study: Tipping

Tipping is a sensitive topic in Asia, where breaches of social convention are taken more personally than they would be in the West. Tipping practices are widespread, and rewarding good service without causing anyone to "lose face" in Asia can be difficult. Tipping is not a Chinese custom, but with British influence came the practice of tipping. Though there is a 10% service gratuity added to most restaurant and hotel bills, tips are still expected. Dewald's research (2001) examined the tipping habits of tourists from six distinct countries – three Asian and three Western – while visiting Hong Kong. This study shows that even though there is a slight adaptation to local tipping habits, those who tip more often at home do the same while travelling abroad. Americans tended to tip more often and in relation to service whereas British and Australian tourists tipped less frequently. Mainland Chinese tipped the least often. Furthermore there seemed to be a relationship between the level of service quality and tipping frequency for some personal, one-on-one services (Plate 4).

This photograph taken recently in a five-star hotel in China underlines the differences in practices and cultures. Not only is the issue of tipping addressed directly, but also explicitly prohibited. Also of interest is the way that the tip is represented with a $ sign, underlining the cultural differences at play in this international meeting point.

Plate 4
Chinese attitudes towards tipping in hotels.
Source: Vonzerö 2005 bt.

Organizational cultures

Every organization will develop a culture of its own as it matures and draws on the beliefs of its original creators but reacts to the changing environment it finds itself in. It is difficult to move in the Marriott empire without finding some reference and even photographs of the founder of the international corporation, and those views still underpin the mission and operation of the company. This is a recognition of the espoused culture of an organization, but we must also be aware that cultures can emerge from other sources and that these other cultures can support or resist the views of the espoused culture.

Robbins (2001) suggested that there are seven elements that define an organization's culture. These elements will be more or less present in all organizations, but their specific alignment would allow you to explore the nature of the organization (Figure 2.2).

These dimensions would allow us to plot an organization and to explore these interesting elements, but it would not necessarily reveal the same depth of understanding about an organization as we have been considering in the early part of this section in terms of national cultures. To add that depth we would have to consider the values and beliefs of the organization as well as its expressed practices. One way to approach this is through Schein's (1985) classification (Figure 2.3).

You can experiment with the levels of culture outlined here and try to think through them with some examples. For instance the artefacts of airlines include the uniforms they design for their cabin crew and these uniforms carry messages about the company which we may or may not be

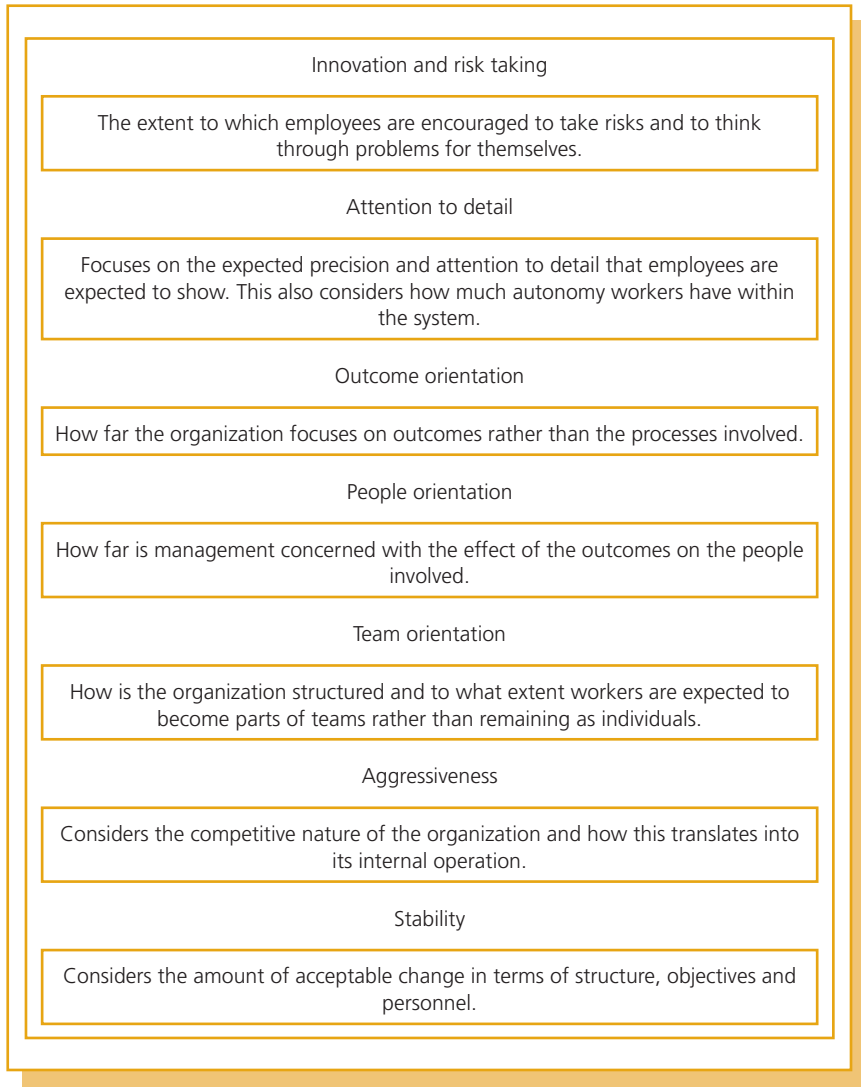

Figure 2.2 Elements of organizational culture

able to interpret. In the mid-1990s, Lauda Air was a low-cost carrier that dressed its cabin crew in tight black jeans, explicitly because this gave the crew ease of movement in the cabin and had nothing to do with the heightening of the sexuality of the hostesses that such a uniform created! A target market of middle-aged businessmen might explain one or other of these interpretations. If you look at many of the national flag carrying airlines, you can see that their designs have been set within a recognition of the traditional national costume and stylized into a fashionable, stylish uniform.

The values may be seen in such things as the name badges of staff and the information they contain. It says much about an organization if the title of the post is more important than that of the person in the position. Equally you might be able to draw conclusions about the organizational

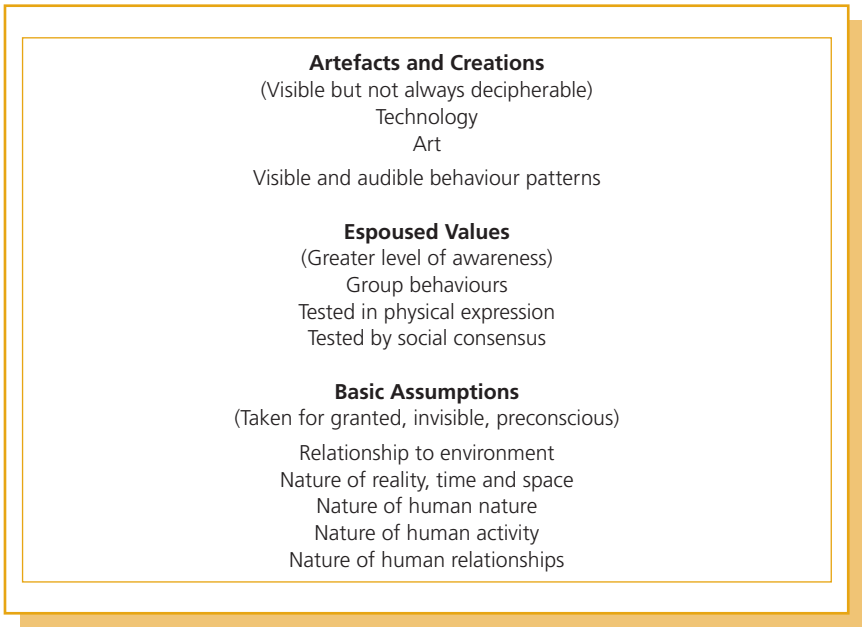

Figure 2.3
Schein's levels of culture

culture of a hotel where the lowly positions are named on a first name basis but the senior positions are filled by people with surnames.

The basic and tacit assumptions are those that are taken for granted in the organization and it is possible to identify both strong and weak cultures, although there may be some strong values in even a weak organizational culture. We will consider this later in the book in relation to absenteeism and the acceptance of absenteeism within certain cultures, but not others.

Many of the texts suggest that strong cultures come from a formal process of socialization within the organization, based on the assessment of induction programmes at places such as Disney and McDonald's. Strong norms – the implicit rules of accepted behaviour – can be very useful to the management as they avoid the need for managers to constantly manage. The workforce effectively subscribes to the values and beliefs that the managers would want to see voluntarily as part of their sense of belonging to the company. We would also urge you to consider the importance of informal groups within organizations and how these also generate norms, which can also be very powerful within the organization and follow an informal process of socialization.

Example: Everyday work

Then there is the nitty—gritty of everyday working together to consider, the problem of creating the rituals, the back-room humour and the "off-stage" relationships which are so vital to harmonious corporate life.

Company jokes and in-group stories, for example, are notoriously difficult to translate into other cultures: what sounds laudable to a Briton can seem risible to an Italian. Language is another problem. Although it might appear that the use of English as the common working language of the international hospitality community favours native English-speakers, this can turn into a disadvantage when one of them is unaware of the problems that a regional accent or rapid speech might create, and how linguistic confidence can be perceived as a manifestation of quasi-colonial arrogance. Non-conformity with what might be termed the "industry pidgin" can also generate unexpected tensions.

Worse still, behind the words on the surface, lurk centuries of cultural and ideological rivalries which have even often exploded into war. At moments of strain, when a minor conflict might have irreversible consequences, simmering stereotypes and prejudices boil up. Studies of cross-cultural teams indicate that often it is the most superficially similar cultures which in the end experience the greatest traumas: while differences such as those between the United States and Japan are obvious, serious problems often occur where they are least expected – say, between Britain and Denmark – and warning signals are neither perceived nor acted upon. In a world as competitive as that of international hospitality will be in coming decades, nothing may be taken for granted.

Touristic cultures

The final element in our presentation of the dynamic surrounding the cultural understanding of hospitality deals with the tourist or the guest, who we forget at our peril. It is becoming apparent that there are patterns of behaviour emerging that would allow us to consider them as a form of culture. There are codes of dress and behaviour which are manifestly different from the styles adopted by the same people in their own home or working environments. There are also sets of expectations about the quality of the service and increasingly of the experience as a whole that underpin the consumption of hospitality. It is certainly still possible to identify the national characteristics of groups of tourists, but within these national characteristics are some underlying elements that underpin the process. The level of demand is increasing and the knowledge base of the guests is increasing. As we noted in the introduction, Pearce's notion of touristic literacy looks at the way in which tourists move through a continuum from inexperienced to more experienced. Inexperienced travellers would have little knowledge of what to expect from the hospitality offer and seek safety in familiar experiences. The greater the experience of travel becomes so does the knowledge of what to expect and how to ask for it. The sense of consumption is heightened and highlighted. This experience becomes a challenge to the hospitality industry as the response must be

well judged not only in terms of the local offer but also of the touristic culture.

We can see this touristic culture consisting of four characteristics:

1. Touristic culture is not innate, but learned – through travel but also done through every day living and interaction at home, school, work or in the church with other travellers and non-travellers.
2. Various aspects of touristic culture are interrelated – meaning that certain aspects of touristic culture will connect with aspects of other cultures that can influence the experience such as religion and diet.
3. Touristic culture is shared – when people visit there is an exchange, no matter how limited, with the other elements of culture in a region or organization, such as religion or language.
4. Touristic culture defines boundaries of different groups both within and without the tourist experience – such as the distinction between the host and the guests or the paying customers and their servants.

It is the touristic culture that makes sense of the growth in the number of Irish pubs found around the world. As a matter of curiosity, this example can be found in the midst of Schipol International Airport in Amsterdam! There is an expectation that travellers would like to drink in the style of an Irish pub even in the Netherlands. You can play an interesting game as you travel by playing "I Spy the Irish Pub". They tend to come with English sports on television and English breakfasts on the menu and have few similarities to the authentic Irish pub that they are trying to recreate (Plate 5).

Plate 5
Outside an Irish pub.
Source: Vonzerö 2005 bt.

The final case study in this chapter is a little unusual. It is the notes from a discussion at a World Tourism Organization (WTO) meeting in which leaders of the tourism and hospitality industry came together to discuss the role of cultural diversity in the future of their industries. There are many interesting and challenging observations that you need to consider carefully.

Example: Section case – Tourism, cultural diversity and sustainable development

"Tourism is like a fire: it helps us cook our food but it can also burn the house down" Fox. The extensive setting which opens this phrase, cited by the Director of the Dialogue, Tomás de Azcárate, was where the theses and proposals of all the speakers of the session came together.

The incredible growth which tourism has experienced on a global level, in terms of the number of travellers or destinations available, has shown just how ill prepared we are to take on such developments. Handallah Zedan, the Executive Secretary for the Convention on Biological Diversity, was the first to cite the threats for society that the deficient management of the growth in tourism has created during the last few years. The last speakers also put forward their own contributions in this line, adding information and facts which were summed up in the arguments of Eugenio Yunis Ahués, Head of Sustainable Development of the WTO: "Few states have preferred to optimise the arrival of tourism and preserve a certain social, environmental and economical stability in this way". According to Yunis, "tourism must never squander that off which it lives".

That is to say, culture and indigenous culture must never be adversely affected in order to favour the tourist.

This is lamentably an exception. Administrations have believed that the more tourists who arrive, the better, something which has led to a low-quality tourism which has specifically contributed to the deterioration of the tourist destination itself. Zedan and Yunis also coincide in stating that the solution is in the hands of the administration and the private sector working together. The former have to take on the responsibility for establishing a legal framework and, through constant evaluations, ensure that the regulations are strictly adhered to. Businessmen, for their part, should manage their own activities in a more rigorous manner. On this point, Joan Gaspart, President of the Executive Committee of Tourism in Barcelona, not only urged businessmen to lose their fear of a possible regulation of the sector, but also encouraged the administration to "do whatever has to be done to preserve heritage", as "the sacrifice of today's businessmen will be sure to

bring in profits in the future". According to Gaspart, one of the examples to follow is the city of Havana, where part of the heritage has been recovered thanks to the investments of hotel chains. This case was explained earlier by Eusebio Leal Spengler, Director of the Historian's Office of the Cuban capital. The reconstruction plan allowed the recovery of 33% of land and created some 11,000 jobs. However, according to Leal Spengler, the most important element was that achieved "by making the culture of the country the flagship of the project". Apart from the statistics, the greatest success was that visitors respected the local identity. What is the magic formula for achieving this? "We have to make the visitor feel emotion. Only emotion can create the type of link which is needed to convert rubble into beauty".

The importance of achieving this kind of respect by the tourist was also underlined by the Deputy Assistant Director General for Culture in UNESCO, Milagros del Corral. In her view, a way of not losing the soul of the city is by promoting those specific traits which differentiate it from other cities. This is what she calls cities with vocation or creative cities: cities which learn to make the most of their distinctive characteristics and so convert themselves into new tourist destinations.

To sum up, although tourism is a factor which ensures peace and allows developing countries to have a considerable source of income, the future is a black one if more emphasis is not placed on the management of tourism itself. The cooperation of the administration and businessmen is as important as the cooperation between hosts and tourists. Once again, dialogue, comprehension and respect are presented as being as essential as written regulations.

Conclusion

Cultures are like underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgements and ideas of self and other. Though cultures are powerful, they are often unconscious, influencing decisions and attempts to resolve issues in imperceptible ways. Cultures are more than the explicit signs of language, dress and food customs. Cultural groups may share race, ethnicity or nationality, but groupings also arise from cleavages of generation, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affiliation, language and gender – to name only a few of the factors that may contribute to the distinctiveness of cultures.

Two things are essential to remember about cultures: they are always changing, and they relate to the symbolic dimension of life. The symbolic dimension is the place where we are constantly making meaning and

enacting our identities. Cultural messages from the groups we belong to give us information about what is meaningful or important, and who we are in the world and in relation to others – our identities. Cultural messages, simply, are what everyone in a group knows that outsiders do not know. They are the water fish swim in, unaware of its effect on their vision. They are a series of lenses that shape what we see and do not see, how we perceive and interpret and where we draw boundaries. In shaping our values, cultures contain starting points and currencies. Starting points are those places it is natural to begin, whether with individual or group concerns, with the big picture or particularities. Currencies, in a cultural sense, are those things we care about that influence and shape our interactions with others.

How cultures work

Though largely below the surface, cultures are a shifting, dynamic set of starting points that orient us in particular ways and away from other directions. Each of us belongs to multiple cultures that provide us with messages about what is normal, appropriate and expected. When others do not meet our expectations, it is often because our cultural expectations are different. We may mistake differences between others and us for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense on the part of others, not realizing that common sense is also cultural. What is common to one group may seem strange, counterintuitive or wrong to another.

Cultural messages shape our understandings of relationships, and of how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. Writing about or working across cultures is complicated, but not impossible. Here are some complications in working with cultural dimensions of conflict, and the implications that flow from them:

- Culture is multilayered: What you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface. Therefore, cultural generalizations are not the whole story, and there is no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences, coming to know others more deeply over time.
- Culture is constantly in flux: As conditions change, cultural groups adapt in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways. Therefore, no comprehensive description can ever be formulated about a particular group. Any attempt to understand a group must take the dimensions of time, context and individual differences into account.
- Culture is elastic: Even knowing the cultural norms of a given group will not always allow us to predict the behaviour of a member of that group, who may not conform to norms for individual or contextual reasons. Therefore, taxonomies (e.g. "Italians think this way", or "Buddhists prefer that") have limited use and can lead to error if not checked with experience.

Culture is largely below the surface, influencing identities and meaning-making, or who we believe ourselves to be and what we care about – it is

not easy to access these symbolic levels since they are largely outside our awareness. Therefore, it is important to use many ways of learning about the cultural dimensions of those involved, especially indirect ways, including stories, metaphors and rituals. Cultural influences and identities become important depending on context. When an aspect of cultural identity is threatened or misunderstood, it may become relatively more important than other cultural identities and this fixed, narrow identity may become the focus of stereotyping, negative projection and conflict. This is a very common situation in the development of international partnerships.

It is useful for people to have interactive experiences that help them see each other as broadly as possible, experiences that foster the recognition of what is shared as well as those that are different (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4
Patterns of cultural interaction in international hospitality management

Since culture is so closely related to our identities (who we think we are) and the ways we make meaning (what is important to us and how), it will always be a factor in international hospitality management. The dynamics can be read from the figure above, where we have attempted to represent the coming together of the cultures that we have discussed in this chapter. Cultural awareness suggests that we ought to apply the Platinum Rule in place of the Golden Rule. Rather than the maxim "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you",the Platinum Rule advises: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them".

No comprehensive solution to the problems of cultural diversity in the context of the hospitality industry has yet been conceived. Yet it is clear that preparation for the successful management of such diversity in all its ramifications will be a vital component of long-term success in the global market. For while business is already global, management remains culture-bound.

Review questions

1. Can you describe the levels of culture involved in international hospitality management?
2. How can cultural differences be made into positives for an organization rather than being seen as problems?
3. Explore the tensions generated by intercultural communications in at least one international setting.
4. Why do you need to do more than understand other cultures?