

Cultures at Work: Intercultural Communication in the Canadian Workplace

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Why be concerned with cultural diversity?



World Migration

- has increased considerably in the last decade
- total estimated between 185 and 192 million, up from 175 million in 2000
- three per cent of the global population
(*World Migration 2005*)

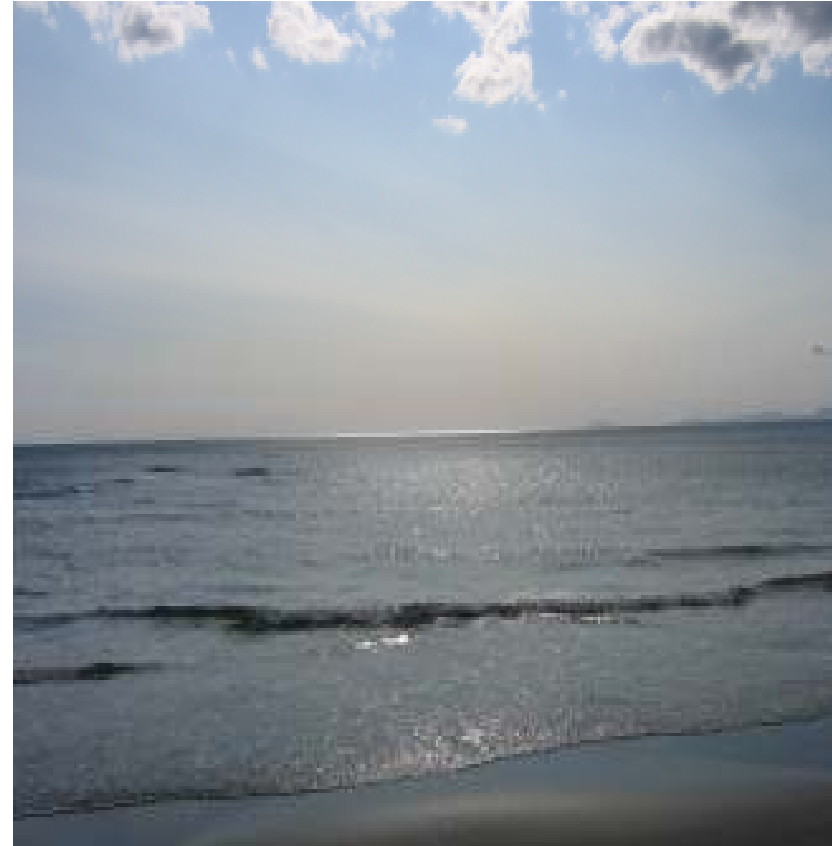
Reasons:

- globalization
- worldwide expansion of economic relations
- international commerce
- rapid modernization of less developed regions

Flow

**From: Asia
and Africa**

**To: Europe and
North America**



Immigrants in Canada

- one out of every five people born outside Canada
- two million immigrants in the last decade
- two in five Canadians, aged 15 and over, were born outside Canada or have one or both parents born outside Canada
- immigrants originate from more than 200 countries

Cultures at work



- **Why be concerned about cultural diversity in the workplace?**

- In large Canadian metropolitan centres one in every three workers is a first-generation immigrant (born outside Canada)
- workers approaching retirement
- low fertility rates
- immigrants represent almost 70% of the total growth of the labour force

(Census of Canada, 2001)

Cultural diversity

- adds complexity to management
- provides opportunities
- involves more knowledge and skills
- links organization to wider community



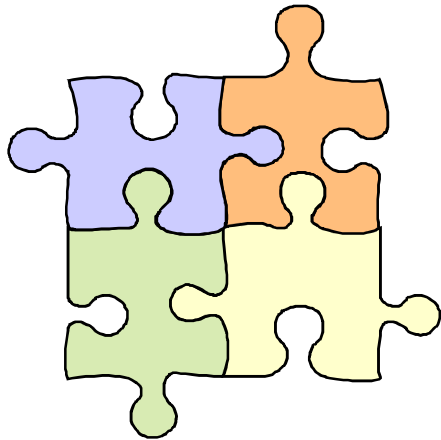
What is Culture?



“the way of life of a particular society or group”

Includes:
material and ideal
objects

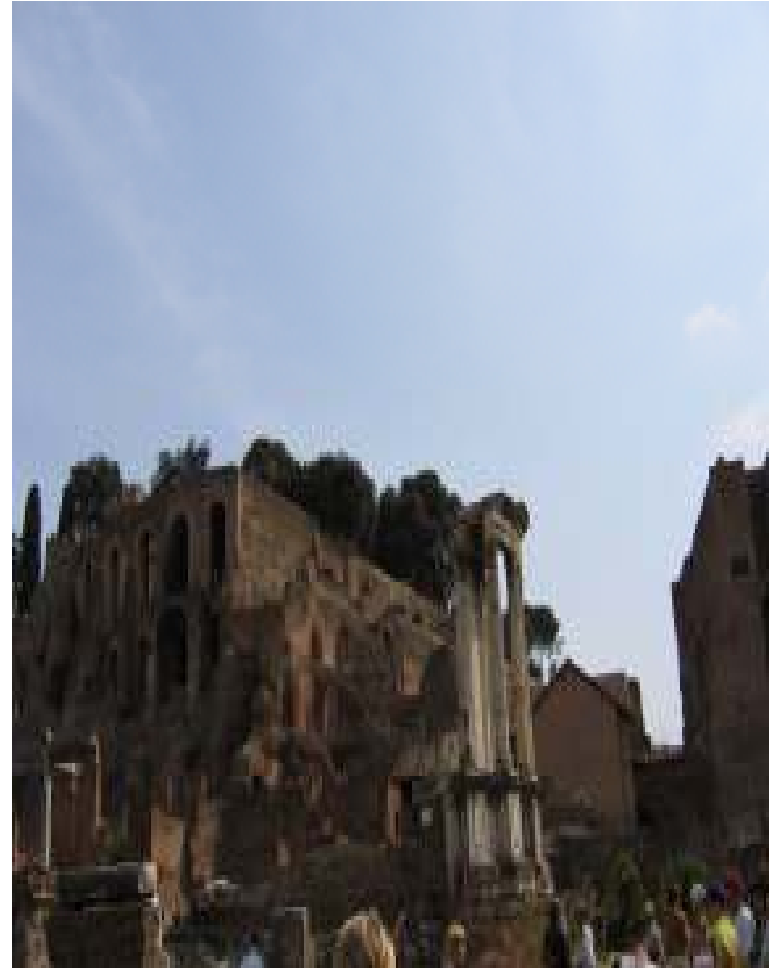
Cultural Models



- Partially conscious or unconscious knowledge that helps to:
- interpret, organize, and evaluate experiences, and
- guide actions

Cultural Narratives

- answer “big questions”
(Why...?)
- make reality more
intelligible and predictable
- connect past, present,
and future



Who am I?

Identity (psychosocial construct) made of:

- *time* inhabited
- *space* inhabited
- *relationships* with others



Time, space, and relationships

=

foundation of intercultural practice

Migration: Transition without ritual



- “extra-ordinary” turning point
- no socially established “rites of passage”
- little social support

Psychological Dynamics

In migrating to a different culture the person experiences:

- fear of loss
- fear of the unknown

a struggle between permanency and change

Culture and the individual

- Individuals, generally, know their culture only partially
- Social class, age, gender, rural or urban upbringing, family dynamics and personality shape the persons' position and perspective within their culture and sub-cultures.

Context



“While culture is a source of tools for action, the individual must still engage in a good deal of interpretation in figuring out which schemas apply in what circumstances and how to implement them effectively”



(Michael Cole, “Cultural Psychology”)

Context



Context allow us to differentiate, by comparison and contrast, certain attributes and properties that otherwise we will not even know exist.

The notion of “exotic” arises from removing an event or action from its context.

Culture Shock

Direct and prolonged contact with different culture causes:

- excitement
- anxiety
- disorientation
- identity loss.

“Mirror Effect”

- The more people try to understand another culture,
- the more they must reflect on their own (creates self-discovery).

The Golden Rule

“Do unto others as you would have it done
onto you”

- assumption of similarity
- differences are only superficial
- people are basically the same

(Milton Bennett)

The Platinum Rule

“Do unto others as they themselves would
have done unto them”

(Milton Bennett)

Cultural Encounters in the Workplace

Culture is a daily event, and everyone is an active participant in the re-enactment of different cultural scripts and narratives. plays out in everyday life through:

- different notions of time and space
- nature of change
- relationships
- freedom of choice
- concept of authority
- professional responsibility
- communication styles
- cooperation and competition
- linguistic misunderstandings
- communication styles

Instructor: “Ole, you should be more careful, the students sitting beside you have copied some of your answers”

Ole: “Yes, we study together sometimes”

Instructor: “But you know that it is not fair, answers should be personal. How can I evaluate what each one of you has learned?”

Ole: (silence)

Manager: “Based on what you have told me, I think we should change our intake form”

Worker: “But we have been using this form for years. It is fine”

Manager: I think we can improve it by adding some items and deleting others”

Worker: “But then we will have to change the way we do our work”

Manager: “Sometimes change is good. Let’s get started!”