



## Group Member Diversity

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## HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

When you read or hear the word *diversity*, you may think about race or about people from other countries. The concept of diversity, however, involves much more than country of origin, skin color, or ethnic heritage. When discussing group communication, we use the term *diversity* in its most general sense—the quality of being different. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines *diverse* as “made up of distinct characteristics, qualities, or elements.”<sup>1</sup>

The homogeneous–heterogeneous dialectic is particularly applicable to the study of group membership. As we note in Chapter 1, the prefix *homo* comes from the Greek language and means “same” or “similar”; *hetero* means “different.” Thus, a homogeneous group is composed of members who are the same or similar, and a heterogeneous group is composed of members who are not the same. And remember, there is no such thing as a purely homogeneous group because no two members can be *exactly* the same. Diversity exists in all groups.

Every person on this earth—and thus every member of a group—is different. Even identical twins have different experiences as well as different characteristics, abilities, and beliefs. Think about the many ways in which you differ from others by asking the following questions:

- Where did you grow up, and how did that influence who you are now?
- What aspects of your culture do you most appreciate and are not likely to give up?<sup>2</sup>
- Which of your physical characteristics do you like or dislike?
- What are your interpersonal, intellectual, and physical skills?
- When you have free time from work or studies, what do you like to do?
- What are your most obvious personality traits?

As a member of a group, you join a diverse collection of people. Although you may share similar backgrounds, interests, and talents with the other members, you rely on differences to establish your unique identity and value to the group. James Surowiecki, author of *The Wisdom of Crowds*, explains that member diversity helps groups make better decisions because it “adds perspectives that would otherwise be absent and because it takes away . . . some of the destructive characteristics” of poor group decision making.<sup>3</sup> James G. Marsh, an organizational theorist, contends that groups that are too much alike find it harder to keep learning, because each member is bringing less and less new information to the table.<sup>4</sup> Groups benefit when their members have distinct characteristics and qualities.

Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, authors of *Diverse Teams at Work*, note that “individual differences and uniqueness make every group diverse. . . . [In addition to race], gender, ethnicity, variations in age, education level, parental status, geographic location, sexual orientation, and work experience are a few of the many ways in which people can be different.”<sup>5</sup>

Why should groups strive to understand, respect, and adapt to member diversity?  
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Figure 3.1 displays the three layers of diversity within every group member. Your core personality—which permeates all the other layers—is at the center and represents your unique ways of experiencing, interpreting, and behaving in the world around you. The second layer represents internal dimensions over which you have little or no control. The outer layer represents societal and experiential factors such as religion, marital status, and educational background. Not only do these three layers of diversity distinguish you from others, but they also form the screen through which you see yourself and those around you.<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, we examine how all three layers of diversity influence your interaction in groups as well as overall group productivity and member satisfaction.

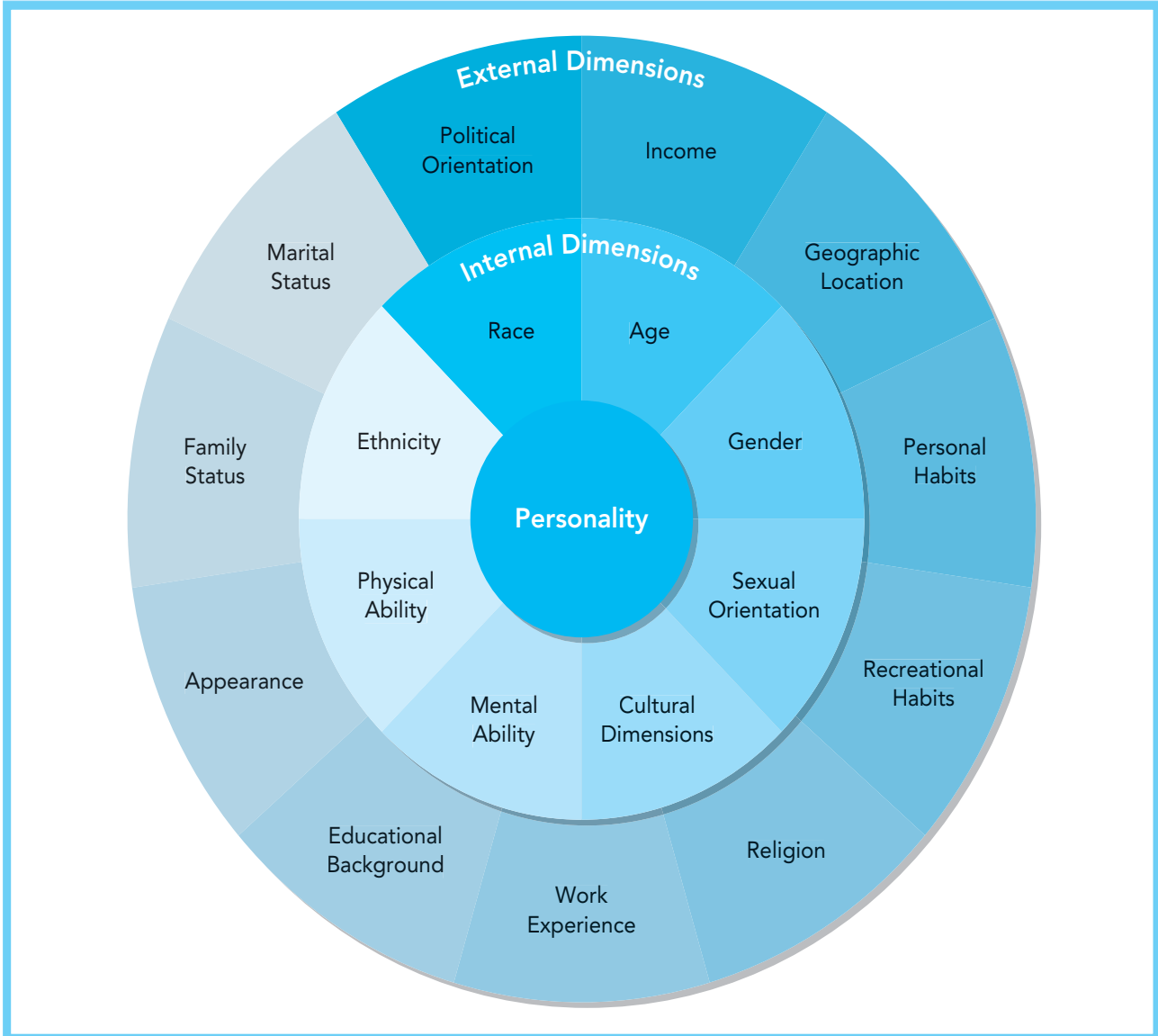
## PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

When diverse personalities join together in pursuit of a common goal, the resulting combination of personality traits may be compatible or conflicting. Each of us has a unique way of interacting with others. How would you rate yourself in terms of the following personality traits?

- Serious \_\_\_\_\_ Humorous
- Relaxed \_\_\_\_\_ Tense
- Rational \_\_\_\_\_ Emotional

Now consider this question: Which of these traits make someone an effective group member? Depending on the circumstances, these traits can help or hinder

FIGURE 3.1 Three Layers of Diversity

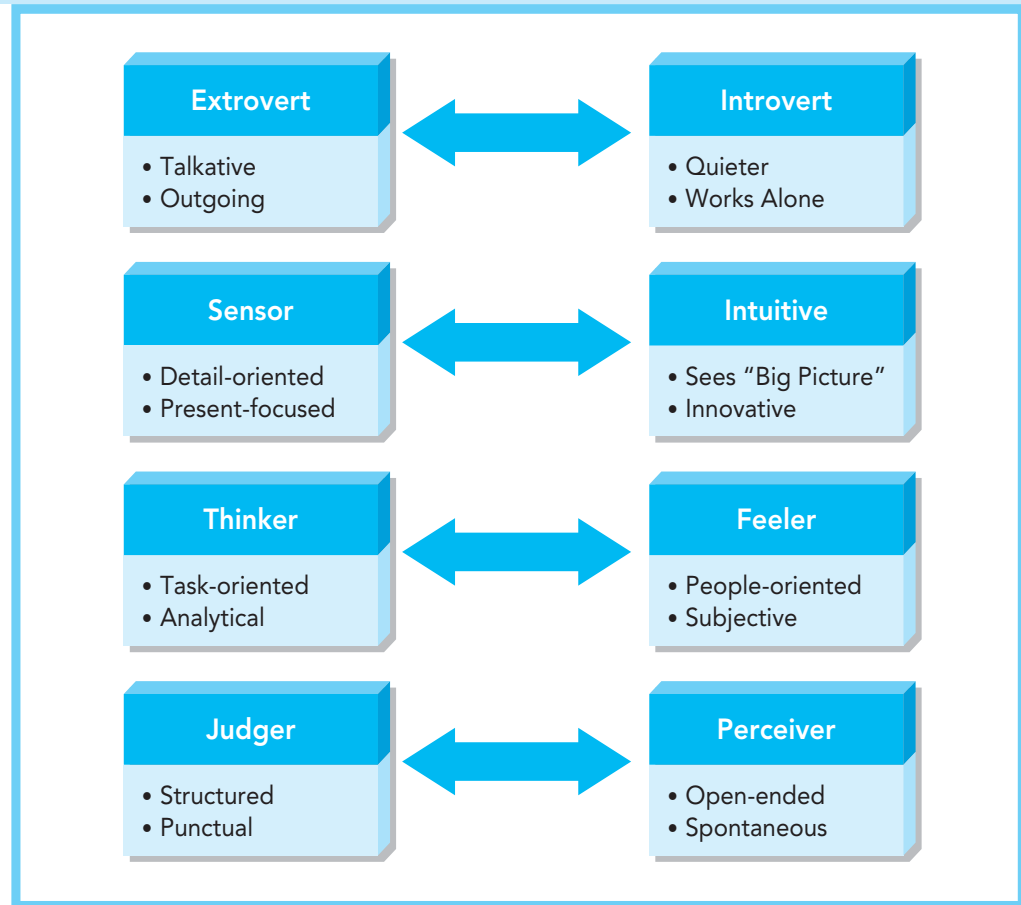


a group's interaction and progress toward a common goal.<sup>7</sup> Understanding personality theories can help a group balance its collection of unique temperaments, traits, and talents.

### Personality Theory

There are many personality theories available for study. Here we examine the **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator**<sup>®</sup>, a personality theory that demonstrates why and how certain group members react to group tasks and social interactions in different ways.<sup>8</sup> Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother, Katherine Briggs, developed a personality type measure that examines the different ways in which people see and understand the world around them and also the different ways in which people reach conclusions and make decisions about what they have experienced.<sup>9</sup>

FIGURE 3.2 Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Preferences



The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, as the measure is known, looks at the different ways in which “people *prefer* to use their minds, specifically, the way they perceive and the way they make judgments.”<sup>10</sup> All of us have preferences of thought and behavior that can be divided into four dialectic categories, with two opposite preferences in each category (see Figure 3.2). As you read about the following categories and traits, ask yourself which preferences best describe the reasons you choose one way of reacting or behaving over another.

**Extrovert–Introvert.** These two traits relate to where you like to focus your attention—outward or inward. **Extroverts** are outgoing, talkative, and enthusiastic; they enjoy interaction with others. Extroverts get their energy by being with people. They like solving problems in groups and involving others in projects. In a group setting, extroverts may have a tendency to dominate the discussion without listening to others. At the same time, they can be terrific energizers and contributors. **Introverts** are more reserved, quiet, and private. They also need more time to themselves to think and reenergize. Although they may have a great deal to offer in a group discussion, they can find the experience exhausting. In general, introverts prefer to work by themselves rather

than in groups. Notice how the differences between extroverts and introverts represent dialectic tensions:

**Extrovert**<sup>11</sup>

Outgoing, sociable, expressive  
 Enjoys groups and discussions  
 Talks first, then thinks  
 Does many things at once  
 Thinks out loud

**Introvert**

Reserved, private, contained  
 Prefers one-to-one interactions  
 Thinks first, then talks  
 Focuses on one thing at a time  
 Thinks to him- or herself

Extroverts are not necessarily wild and crazy talkers, nor are introverts necessarily shy and withdrawn. Rather, these two personality preferences refer to how individuals become energized. Extroverts draw energy from the outside world and the people in it. Introverts draw energy from their inner world of ideas, emotions, and impressions.

Knowing whether you or another group member is an extrovert or an introvert can be valuable. Whereas an extrovert is likely to prefer working on a subcommittee, an introvert may prefer a solo assignment. Introverts need more time to think before they speak or act. A group may miss out on good ideas and needed analysis if it rushes into solutions proposed by enthusiastic extroverts.

Misunderstandings between extroverts and introverts are common in groups. “Extroverts complain that introverts don’t speak up at the right time in meetings. Introverts criticize extroverts for talking too much and not listening well.”<sup>12</sup> Effective groups try to balance the needs of both personality types by accommodating the differences in communication style and tapping the best ideas from all members.

**Sensor–Intuitive.** These two traits focus on the way you look at the world around you—whether you see the trees or the forest. **Sensors** focus on details and prefer to concentrate on one task at a time. In groups, they may uncover minor flaws in an idea and request detailed instructions for completing a task. **Intuitives** look for connections and concepts rather than rules and flaws. They like to come up with big ideas but become bored with details. Notice how the differences between sensors and intuitives exemplify a dialectic tension:

**Sensor**

Focuses on details  
 Practical and realistic  
 Likes concrete information  
 Likes facts  
 Trusts experience  
 Values common sense

**Intuitive**

Focuses on the big picture  
 Theoretical  
 Likes abstract information  
 Gets bored with facts and details  
 Trusts inspiration and intuition  
 Values creativity and innovation

In a group, sensors and intuitives often see things quite differently. Sensors focus on regulations, step-by-step explanations, and facts, whereas intuitives focus on outwitting regulations, supplying theoretical explanations, and ignoring details.<sup>13</sup>



## TOOLBOX 3.1



### Group Survival Guide for Introverts

In *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World*, psychologist Marti Olsen Laney discusses the many pitfalls awaiting introverts in group settings. She writes that “introverts are often surprised when they are not valued for their considerable contributions” to a group, in part because they don’t speak up and because “they usually find it hard to both absorb all the information *and* formulate an opinion about it. They need time away from meetings to sift and sort data.” Some introverts can become “brainlocked” because they can’t find the right words to express their meaning.<sup>1</sup> Given the inherent challenges facing introverts in group settings, Laney offers a list of strategies for letting other group members know that they are present, interested, and involved in a group and its work:

- Don’t schedule too many meetings on the same day.
- Say hello and smile when you enter a room.

- Sit near the door in case you need a quick break.
- Take notes to help you focus your thoughts and avoid becoming overloaded with information.
- Use nonverbal signals like nodding your head, smiling, and eye contact to let others know that you are paying attention.
- Say *something*. Ask a question, or restate what someone else has said.
- Let people know that you will continue to think about the topic and get back to them with a reaction.
- Email or jot a note to other group members to ask for and provide feedback about issues discussed in a meeting.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marti Olsen Laney, *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World* (New York: Workman, 2002), pp. 190 and 191–192.

<sup>2</sup> Laney, pp. 193–194.

Communication between sensors and intuitives can be difficult “because they see things so differently, and each believes that his or her information is more accurate, valid, and real.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, intuitives should appreciate how much sensors accomplish by being realistic, down-to-earth, and practical, while sensors should appreciate the intuitive’s inventive mind, original ideas, and ability to solve problems creatively.

Groups need both kinds of members in order to function effectively and efficiently. The example that follows emphasizes the importance of having a balance between the “nuts and bolts types” and those individuals who are capable of being creative and conceptual: “In the construction business it’s important to have the ‘big picture’ people who can see the conceptual side of a project and know when major changes are necessary. This needs to be balanced, however, by people who are at the job site supervising the very detail-oriented portions of the work. Both are necessary members of a good project team.”<sup>15</sup>

**Thinker–Feeler.** These two traits explain how you go about making decisions. **Thinkers** are task-oriented. They take pride in their ability to think objectively and logically. Thinkers often enjoy arguing and making difficult decisions; they

want to get the job done, even if the cost is bad feelings among some group members. **Feelers** are people-oriented. They want everyone to get along. Feelers will spend time and effort helping other members.

**Thinker**

Task-oriented  
Objective, firm, analytical  
Enjoys arguing  
Prefers businesslike meetings  
Values competence, reason,  
and justice  
Direct and firm-minded  
Thinks with the head

**Feeler**

People-oriented  
Subjective, humane, appreciative  
Thinks arguing is disruptive  
Prefers social interchange in meetings  
Values relationships and harmony  
Tactful and tenderhearted  
Thinks with the heart

When thinkers and feelers work together in groups, there is a potential for misunderstanding. Thinkers may appear unemotional and aggressive. Feelers may annoy others by “wasting” time with social chitchat. Thinkers should try to modify their criticism of others—what’s intended as good advice may be seen as cruel. Feelers should learn not to take criticism so personally and to speak up if they feel they’re being treated unfairly.<sup>16</sup> When thinkers and feelers appreciate their differences as decision makers, they can form an unbeatable team. While the thinkers make decisions and move the group forward, feelers make sure that the group is working harmoniously.

**Judger–Perceiver.** The last two traits focus on how you deal with the outer world and its problems. **Judgers** are highly structured and well organized. They plan ahead, follow lengthy “to do” lists, and like closure. Judgers are very punctual and can become impatient with people who show up late or waste time. **Perceivers** are less rigid than judgers. Because they like open-endedness, being on time is less important to them than being flexible and adaptable. Perceivers are risk takers who are willing to try new options. However, they often procrastinate and end up in a frenzy to complete a task on time. Consider how the following dialectical differences can affect group interaction:

**Judger**

Values organization and structure  
In control and definite  
Likes deadlines  
Work now/play later  
Needs standards and expectations  
Adjusts schedules to complete work

**Perceiver**

Values flexibility and spontaneity  
Goes with the flow  
Dislikes deadlines  
Play now/work later  
Feels constrained by rules  
Works at the last minute

Judgers and perceivers often have difficulty working together. To a judger, a perceiver may appear scatterbrained. To a perceiver, a judger may appear rigid and controlling. Whereas judgers come prepared to make decisions and solve problems,



perceivers “aren’t comfortable with things being ‘decided’; [they] want to reopen, discuss, rework, argue for the sake of arguing.”<sup>17</sup> As difficult as it is for them, judges should try to stop “doing” and take time to relax with others. Perceivers should try to respect deadlines and keep promises that they make to judges.

### Implications of Personality Dimensions

Just as it is desirable to achieve a balance between members’ task and maintenance roles, the same is true for personality traits. A group without judges can miss deadlines and fail to achieve its goal. A group without a sensor can overlook important details or critical flaws in a proposal. Although it is tempting to choose members who are just like you, a group will perform better with representatives of every type. According to Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, in an ideal group, “we would have a smattering of Extroverts, Introverts, Sensors, Intuitives, Thinkers, Feelers, Judges, and Perceivers—and we would put them together in such a way that they would not only understand their differences but could also draw upon them.”<sup>18</sup>

We often see Myers-Briggs preferences in our students’ behavior. For example, judges tell us that they usually finish class assignments well in advance, whereas perceivers may pull all-nighters to get their work done. Judges often describe perceivers as irresponsible and disorganized, whereas perceivers describe judges as

## TOOLBOX 3.2



### Intelligent Groups Can Make Dumb Decisions

Group diversity improves group performance and member satisfaction in many ways—even in terms of how well a group makes “smart” decisions. Scott Page, a political scientist at the University of Michigan, studies groups and problem solving. He concludes that “on the group level, intelligence alone is not enough, because intelligence alone cannot guarantee you different perspectives on a problem. . . . Grouping only smart people together doesn’t work that well because the smart people (whatever that means) tend to resemble each other in what they can do. . . . Adding in a few people who know less, but have different skills, actually improves the group’s performance.”<sup>1</sup>

Think about the many intelligent people on a U.S. president’s staff—and then consider some of the poor decisions made within the White

House, e.g., the U.S. invasion of Cuba, Watergate, and, some would say, the war in Iraq. Then think about the well-educated, intelligent people who run U.S. corporations and consider some of their poor decisions—from useless or defective consumer products to “creative” bookkeeping. In Chapter 7, “Conflict and Cohesion in Groups,” we examine Irving Janis’s concept of groupthink, a phenomenon that describes the deterioration of group effectiveness that results from in-group pressure. As you will see, it takes a lot more than collective intelligence to avoid the pitfalls of poor decision making.

<sup>1</sup> James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies, and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 30.

critical and compulsive workaholics. Nevertheless, both judges and perceivers get their work done and do it well.

Students who are extroverts love to participate in heated class discussions, whereas the introverts don't like being put on the spot. Sensors like learning "the facts," and intuitives like "playing with theories." Thinkers become impatient with the social chitchat of feelers, and the feelers wonder whether the thinkers have hearts. Rather than criticizing others, Myers-Briggs helps group members learn how to accommodate and capitalize on differences in personality types and preferences, how to build on personal strengths, and—as a result—how to foster group productivity and cohesiveness.

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

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The cultural diversity of group members plays a critical role in whether a group achieves its common goal.

Respecting and adapting to cultural diversity begins with an understanding of different cultures. **Culture** can be viewed as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people."<sup>19</sup> Within most cultures, there are also groups of people—members of **co-cultures**—who coexist within the mainstream society, yet remain connected to one another through their cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, American Indian tribes are co-cultures, as are African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, Irish Americans, and members of large and small religious groups. Given our broad definition of culture, a Nebraska rancher and a Boston professor can have very different cultural perspectives, as would a native Egyptian, Brazilian, Indonesian Muslim, and member of the Chippewa tribe.

According to the 2000 Census, the population of the United States has changed significantly. Not only are there many more people, but the color and characteristics of their faces have changed as well.<sup>21</sup> During the 1990s, the Hispanic population increased 58 percent, and the Asian population increased 48 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, more than 13 million people immigrated to the United States, the largest number of immigrants in a ten-year period in the country's history.

The 2000 Census also reports that three-quarters of the people in this country are white. But more than half of the people living in California are non-white, as are the majority of individuals living in several large American cities. Moreover, the population of Hispanic, Asian, and other immigrant groups is growing and will continue to grow, so that soon after the middle of this century, whites will become one of the many minority groups living in America.<sup>22</sup> In short, all groups will need to understand, respect, and adapt to cultures that are not their own.

We owe a great deal to a psychologist and an anthropologist for identifying several significant dimensions of culture. Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede's groundbreaking research on cultural characteristics has transformed our understanding of others. He defines an **intercultural dimension** as "an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures."<sup>23</sup> His work on cultural differences identifies four dimensions that characterize cultural groups: individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculine–feminine values. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall adds two more dimensions: high-context and low-context cultures and monochronic–polychronic time.<sup>24</sup> When group members with different cultural perspectives interact, they must find ways to negotiate the dialectic tensions that accompany cultural interactions. Figure 3.3 provides an overview of these six cultural dimensions and how they can be used to recognize and adapt to group member diversity.

**FIGURE 3.3** Cultural Dimensions of Group Members

Cultural Dimension	Definition and Example	Group Member Behavior	Recommended Adaptations
INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM	Prefer to act independently or interdependently. <i>Individualism:</i> Value individual achievement and freedom. <b>United States, Australia, Canada</b> <i>Collectivism:</i> Emphasize group identity. <b>Asian and Latin American Countries</b>	<b>Individualistic</b> members will work alone and seek credit for their own work; <b>collectivist</b> members will work in groups and try to help each other. Collectivist members may prefer face-to-face discussions instead of virtual discussion.	Encourage collectivism. Make sure that individualistic members understand that they are part of a larger group that needs their input and participation to achieve a shared goal.
POWER DISTANCE	Extent of equity or status among members. <i>High Power:</i> Inequity between high- and low-status members. <b>Mexico, India, Singapore</b> <i>Low Power:</i> Equity and interdependence among group members. <b>Israel, New Zealand, Denmark</b>	<b>High power-distance</b> members try to take charge and make decisions; <b>low power-distance</b> members seek consultation and consensus.	Establish clear norms for member behavior. To what extent will members participate in decision making? How will specific tasks be assigned? How and by whom will members be evaluated? Who will serve as leader(s)?
UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE	Extent of comfort in uncertain situations. <i>High Uncertainty:</i> Prefer rules, plans, and routines. <b>Japan, Belgium, Greece</b> <i>Low Uncertainty:</i> Comfortable with ambiguity and unpredictability. <b>Jamaica, Hong Kong</b>	<b>High-uncertainty</b> members require structured tasks and spend more time on details; <b>low-uncertainty</b> members want less structure and can work independently with little supervision.	Provide clear instructions to the high-uncertainty members while giving low-uncertainty members opportunities to function unaided.  (continued)

FIGURE 3.3 Cultural Dimensions of Group Members (continued)

Cultural Dimension	Definition and Example	Group Member Behavior	Recommended Adaptations
MASCULINITY-FEMININITY	Concern for self and success versus a focus on caring and sharing. <i>Masculine:</i> Assertive, decisive, dominant. <b>Japan, Venezuela, Italy</b> <i>Feminine:</i> Nurturing, cooperative. <b>Sweden, Norway, Denmark</b>	<b>Masculine-oriented</b> members focus on the task and personal success; <b>feminine-oriented</b> members focus on member relations and respect for others.	Balance masculine and feminine values in order to achieve task and social goals. Do not forgo action in order to achieve total cooperation and consensus.
HIGH CONTEXT-LOW CONTEXT	Directness of communication in specific circumstances. <i>High Context:</i> Messages are implied and context-sensitive. <b>Japan, China, Greece, Mexico</b> <i>Low Context:</i> Messages are explicit, factual, and objective. <b>England, United States, Germany</b>	<b>High-context</b> members consider background, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal history when communicating; <b>low-context</b> members want facts and clear, direct, explicit communication.	Give high-context members time to review information and react; demonstrate the value of going beyond “just facts” to low-context members.
MONOCHRONIC-POLYCHRONIC	How people organize and value time. <i>Monochronic:</i> Adhere to plans, schedules, and deadlines because time is valuable. <b>North America and Northern European.</b> <i>Polychronic:</i> Not obsessed with promptness or schedules because time is not highly valued. <b>Kenya, Argentina, African Americans</b>	<b>Monochronic</b> members focus on one task at a time and work hard to meet deadlines; <b>polychronic</b> members are frequently late, do many things at once, are easily distracted and tolerant of interruptions.	Encourage monochronic members to take responsibility for time-sensitive tasks while accepting that polychronic members will vary promptness based on the nature and importance of a situation or relationship.

## Individualism–Collectivism

According to Hofstede and many contemporary researchers, most of us in the United States accept **individualism** as a cultural value. As a whole, we believe that the individual is important, that independence is worth pursuing, that personal achievement should be rewarded, and that individual uniqueness is an important value.<sup>25</sup> In the United States, an “I” orientation prevails. However, the value of individualism is not shared by most other cultures. As much as 70 percent of the world’s population regards interdependence or **collectivism** as a more important value.<sup>26</sup> In these cultures, “we” is much more important than “I.” The following behaviors are characteristic of collectivist cultures:

- There is greater emphasis on the views, needs, and goals of the group than on the individual’s views, needs, and goals.

- Social norms and duty are defined by the group rather than by the individual's personal pleasure or personal benefits.
- Beliefs that are shared with the group are more important than beliefs that distinguish an individual from the group.
- There is greater readiness to cooperate with group members.<sup>27</sup>

At first, a collectivist perspective may appear ideally suited for group work. Yet, the opinions of individualistic members may be essential to ensure that a group recognizes and adapts to a variety of useful perspectives.

You should not assume that *all* Americans are individualistic just because the United States is ranked first among individualistic cultures. Many Americans are not highly individualistic. For example, African Americans often have the characteristics of collective societies, as do Mexican Americans and other Hispanic/Latino co-cultures. Even so, the United States's focus on individual achievement and personal rewards can make interaction with group members from collectivist cultures quite difficult. People from these cultures may view a highly individualistic communication style and behavior as selfish, arrogant, antagonistic, power-hungry, ruthless, and impatient.

### Power Distance

Can you walk into your boss's office, or do you have to navigate your way through an army of secretaries and administrative assistants? Is it easy to make a personal appointment with the president of your college or university? Does our society truly believe in the sentiments expressed in the U.S. Declaration of

How do cultures demonstrate power distance among members?  
(© Fujifotos/The Image Works)





Independence that all people are created equal? These are the questions addressed in Hofstede's power distance dimension. **Power distance** refers to the physical and psychological distance between those who have power and those who do not have power in relationships, institutions, and organizations. It also represents "the extent to which the less powerful person in society accepts inequality in power and considers it normal."<sup>28</sup>

In cultures with **high power distance**, individuals accept major differences in power as normal, assuming that all people are *not* created equal. In a high-power-distance culture, you accept and do not challenge authority. Parents, for example, may have total control over their children, and men may have total control over the women in their family. The government, corporate officers, and religious or legal authorities may dictate rules of behavior and have the power to ensure compliance.

In cultures with **low power distance**, power distinctions are minimized: Supervisors work with subordinates; professors work with students; elected officials work with constituents. Despite the fact that the United States claims to be the greatest democracy on earth and an equal opportunity society, Hofstede ranks the United States sixteenth on the list of low-power-distance cultures—after Finland, Switzerland, Great Britain, Germany, Costa Rica, Australia, the Netherlands, and Canada.<sup>29</sup>

Power distance has enormous implications for groups, particularly given the strong correlation between collectivism and high power distance and between individualism and low power distance. If you are individualistic and are strongly encouraged to express your own opinion, you are more willing to challenge group members and leaders. If, on the other hand, your culture is collectivist and your personal opinion is subordinate to the welfare of others, you are less likely to challenge the collective authority of the group.

## Uncertainty Avoidance

How well do you handle unexpected changes or uncertainty? Do you feel more comfortable if your future is predictable? Hofstede defines **uncertainty avoidance** as the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations that they perceive as unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable. If uncertainty makes them very nervous, they avoid these situations by maintaining strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute truths.<sup>30</sup>

In cultures with **high uncertainty avoidance**, members "feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. This feeling is expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability: a need for written and unwritten rules."<sup>31</sup> Hofstede puts it this way: "What is different, is dangerous."<sup>32</sup> Cultures with **low uncertainty avoidance** accept change as part of life, tolerate nonconformity, take risks, and view rules and regulations as restricting and counterproductive. Members of low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures "tend to live day to day. . . . Conflict and competition are natural, dissent is acceptable, deviance is not threatening, and individual achievement is regarded as beneficial."<sup>33</sup>



The United States is eleventh on the list of countries that feel comfortable with uncertainty. More highly ranked countries include Malaysia, India, and the Philippines. Imagine the communication challenge you face if you are comfortable with change and ambiguity, but you have to work with group members who have a strong desire to avoid uncertainty. While you are willing to take risks, other members find your attitude unconventional and even threatening. At the same time, you may see the other member as rigid, uncompromising, and fearful to break or bend rules.

### Masculine–Feminine

Hofstede uses the terms *masculine* and *feminine* to describe whether masculine or feminine traits are valued by a culture. In **masculine societies**, men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. In **feminine societies**, gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.<sup>34</sup>

Hofstede ranks the United States as fifteenth in terms of masculine values, but less masculine than Australia, New Zealand, and Greece.<sup>35</sup> In masculine societies, personal success, competition, assertiveness, and strength are admired. Unselfishness and nurturing may be seen as weaknesses or “women’s work.” Although women have come a long way from the rigid roles of past centuries, they have miles to go before they achieve genuine equality in a masculine-oriented culture.

Think of the challenges groups face when there is a mix of masculine and feminine values. Members with masculine perspectives may compete for leadership positions and exhibit highly assertive behavior. Members with more feminine values may be highly effective and supportive but never achieve a real voice or influence in the group.

### High Context–Low Context

All communication occurs in a **context**, a physical and psychosocial environment. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall sees context as the information that surrounds an event and is inextricably bound up with the meaning of the event.<sup>36</sup> He claims that context—in and of itself—may hold more meaning than the actual words in a message. As with Hofstede’s dimensions, we can place cultures on a continuum from high context to low context.

In a **high-context culture**, very little meaning is expressed through words. Gestures, silence, and facial expressions as well as the relationships among communicators have meaning. In high-context cultures, meaning can be conveyed through status (age, gender, education, family background, title, and affiliations) and through an individual’s informal network of friends and associates.<sup>37</sup>

In a **low-context culture**, meaning is expressed primarily through language. As members of a low-context culture, people in North America tend to speak more,

speak louder, and speak more rapidly than people from a high-context culture. We “speak up,” “spell it out,” “tell it like it is,” and “speak our mind.” Figure 3.4 contrasts the characteristics of high- and low-context cultures.

High-context communication usually occurs in collectivist cultures where members share similar attitudes, beliefs, and values. As a result, spoken communication can be indirect and implied because everyone *gets* the meaning by understanding the context, the person’s nonverbal behavior, and the significance of the communicator’s relationships with others. Notice how the following sayings capture the nature of high-context communication:

Seeing is better than hearing. (Nigeria)

It is the duck that squawks that gets shot. (Japan)

Once you preach, the point is gone. (Zen phrase)

Group members from high- and low-context cultures express and interpret messages in different ways. For example, suppose everyone knows that Allison and Philip have a close personal relationship. During a group discussion, Allison scowls every time Philip expresses his opinion or makes a suggestion. However, when asked whether she agrees with Philip, she says yes. Group members with high-context perspectives would pay more attention to Allison’s nonverbal behavior and decide that she may be angry with Philip and disapproves of his ideas, whereas members with low-context perspectives may only hear the “yes” and assume that Allison and Philip are in total agreement.

### Monochronic Time–Polychronic Time

In northern European and North American cultures, time is a very valuable commodity. As a result, we fill our time with multiple commitments and live a fast-paced life. However, the pace of life in countries such as India, Kenya, and Argentina is driven less by a need to “get things done” than by a sense of participation in events that create their own rhythm.<sup>38</sup>

FIGURE 3.4 Characteristics of High- and Low-Context Cultures

Characteristics of High- and Low-Context Cultures	
HIGH-CONTEXT CHARACTERISTICS	LOW-CONTEXT CHARACTERISTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely on Nonverbal Meanings</li> <li>• Reserved Reactions</li> <li>• Strong In-group Bonds</li> <li>• High Level of Group Commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely on Verbal Meanings</li> <li>• Reactions on the Surface</li> <li>• Flexible Group Membership</li> <li>• Lower Level of Group Commitment</li> </ul>

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall classifies time as a form of communication. He claims that cultures organize time in one of two ways: either monochronic or polychronic.<sup>39</sup> In **monochronic time (M time)**, events are scheduled as separate items—one thing at a time. M-time people like to concentrate on one job before moving to another and may become irritated when someone in a meeting brings up a personal topic that is not related to the purpose of the meeting.

In **polychronic time (P time)**, schedules are not as important and are frequently broken. People in polychronic cultures are not slaves to time and are easily distracted and tolerant of interruptions. P-time people are frequently late for appointments or may not show up at all.<sup>40</sup> If you are a P-time person, you probably like doing several tasks at one time, find it stimulating to think about several different problems at the same time, and feel comfortable holding two or three conversations at the same time. In polychronic-time cultures—such as the Spanish-speaking cultures in Spain and Latin America—relationships are far more important than schedules. “Appointments will be quickly broken, schedules readily set aside, and deadlines unmet without guilt or apology when friends or family members require attention.”<sup>41</sup>

When monochronic- and polychronic-time people interact in group settings, the results can be frustrating. Hall notes that monochronic Americans become distressed by how polychronic people treat schedules. For P-time people, schedules and commitments, particularly plans for the future, are not firm, and even important plans may change right up to the last minute.<sup>42</sup>

If you are an M-time person, you can try to modify and relax your obsession with time and scheduling. If you are a P-time person, you can do your best to respect and adapt to a monochronic member’s need for careful scheduling and promptness.

## Barriers to Cultural Understanding

Learning to communicate effectively in the global village that characterizes life in the twenty-first century can be a significant challenge. Culturally sensitive group members develop strategies and skills for interacting with others from diverse backgrounds. Yet simply learning about other cultures will not make you a more effective group member. You must also avoid four obstacles to understanding others: ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

**Ethnocentrism.** **Ethnocentrism** is a belief that your culture is superior to others. Ethnocentrism is not just about patriotism or pride; it is a mistaken belief that your culture is a superior culture, with special rights and privileges that are or should be denied to others. An ethnocentric communicator believes that

- My culture should be the role model for other cultures.
- People would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.
- Most other cultures are backward when compared with my culture.

## GROUPTECH



## Cultural Diversity in Virtual Groups

In their book *Mastering Virtual Teams*, Deborah L. Duarte and Nancy Tennant Snyder contend that culture has an impact on how we use communication technology based on Hofstede's dimensions and Hall's research on context.<sup>1</sup>

- *Individualism–collectivism.* Members from highly collectivist cultures may prefer face-to-face interactions, whereas individualistic communicators may like having the screen to themselves as they share ideas and opinions.
- *Power distance.* Members from high-power-distance cultures may communicate more freely when technologies are asynchronous (do not occur in real time) and when they allow anonymous input.
- *Uncertainty avoidance.* Members from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance may be slower to adopt technology. They may also prefer technology that produces permanent records of discussions and decisions.
- *Masculinity–femininity.* Members from cultures with more feminine values may use technology in a nurturing way, that is, as a way of encouraging, supporting, and motivating others.
- *High context–low context.* People from high-context cultures may prefer more information-rich technologies (such as videoconferences), as well as those that offer the feeling of social presence. People from low-context cultures may prefer more asynchronous communication.
- *Monochronic–polychronic.* Monochronic members may become frustrated by polychronic members who are late to join a teleconference. Polychronic members may become distracted during an online meeting and interrupt the group to discuss unrelated issues.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Deborah L. Duarte and Nancy Tennant Snyder, *Mastering Virtual Teams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), p. 60.

Ethnocentric group members offend others when they imply that they represent a superior culture with superior values. For example, have you ever been insulted by someone who implies that her religious beliefs are “true,” whereas yours are not? Have you been disrespected by someone who believes that his traditions, language, or music preferences are “better” than yours? If so, you may have seen ethnocentrism in action. Group members with ethnocentric attitudes can derail group progress before it begins.

**Stereotyping.** Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people that oversimplify their characteristics. When we stereotype others, we rely on exaggerated beliefs to make judgments about a group of people. Unfortunately, stereotyping usually attributes negative traits to an entire group when, in reality, only a few people in that group may possess those traits. A study of college students found that, even in the mid-1990s, African Americans were stereotyped as lazy and loud, and Jews were described as shrewd and intelligent. In addition to negative stereotypes, we may hold positive ones. Comments such as “Asian students

excel in math and science” or “Females are more compassionate than males” make positive but all-inclusive generalizations. While positive stereotypes may not seem harmful, they can lead to unfair judgments. Stereotyping other group members does more than derail progress; it prevents members from contributing their best skills and creates long-lasting resentment and anger. Too often, female group members are asked to chair a social committee or take notes because “women are better at that.”

**Prejudice.** Stereotypes lead to **prejudices**—“negative attitudes about other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.”<sup>43</sup> Prejudices about an individual or cultural group often arise when we have no direct experience with that person or group. The word *prejudice* has two parts: *pre*, meaning “before,” and *judice*, as in *judge*. When you believe or express a prejudice, you are making a judgment about someone before you have taken time to get to know that person and see whether your opinions and feelings are justified. Although prejudices can be positive—“He must be brilliant if he went to Yale”—most prejudices are negative. Statements such as “I don’t want a disabled person working on our group project,” “I’m not putting someone that old on the team,” and “I’m not voting for a pregnant woman to lead this group” are all examples of prejudging someone based on stereotypes about people with disabilities, older people, and pregnant women. These kinds of prejudices have several characteristics:

- Biased perceptions and beliefs about group members that are not based on direct experience and firsthand knowledge
- Irrational feelings of dislike and even hatred for certain groups
- A readiness to behave in negative and unjust ways toward members of the group<sup>44</sup>

**Discrimination.** The word *discrimination* has many definitions. People with acute hearing can discriminate (that is, differentiate) one sound or tone from another. We also use the term **discrimination** to describe how we act out and express prejudice. When we discriminate, we exclude groups of people from opportunities granted to others: employment, promotion, housing, political expression, and equal rights.

Sadly, discrimination comes in many forms: racial discrimination; ethnic discrimination; religious discrimination; gender discrimination; sexual harassment; discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability, or age; and discrimination against people from different social classes and political ideologies. Discrimination has no place in groups.

You are surrounded by and dependent on diverse groups of people who deserve the same understanding and respect that you bestow on your own culture. The sooner you learn about the people around you, the better you will communicate with the range of people in our pluralistic society.



## TOOLBOX 3.3



### There Is *No* Such Thing as Race

The statement “There is *no* such thing as race” may seem dimwitted. Of course there’s such a thing as race. After all, the U.S. Census asks questions about race, and we have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race. We’ve witnessed race riots, seen an increasing number of interracial marriages, and debated the fairness of race-based grants and scholarships. No wonder most Americans believe that there *is* such a thing as race.

**Race** is a socially constructed concept that classifies people into separate value-based categories.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, many people see races as subdivisions of the human species based on significant genetic differences. Even in ancient times, the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans left paintings, sculptures, and writings depicting people with perceived racial differences.<sup>2</sup> But ideas about race as we know it today did not exist until the eighteenth century, when a German scientist named Johann Friedrich Blumenbach classified humans based on geography and observed physical difference by using Caucasians as the ideal. The result was a racial ranking of Europeans first (white), Africans

and Asians last, and Malays and Native Americans between them. These classifications led to the separation of people based on skin color: white (highest), yellow (middle), and black (lowest).

Modern anthropologists, biologists, geneticists, and ethicists, however, do not share these historical or popular beliefs about the nature of race. Despite countless studies searching for proof of biological differences among racial groups, scientists have come up empty-handed. Furthermore, geneticists have not turned up a single group of people that can be distinguished from outsiders by their chromosomes. The most sophisticated genetic tests cannot determine whether you are purely European, African, Asian, South/Central American, or from an indigenous people. In fact, 99.9 percent of DNA sequences are common to all humans.<sup>3</sup> Extensive research indicates that pure races have never existed and that all humans belong to the same species,<sup>4</sup> *Homo sapiens*, which had its origins in Africa. The characteristics on which we base our ideas of “race,” such as skin color, are entirely superficial.



## GENDER DIMENSIONS

In our discussion of cultural differences, the terms *masculine* and *feminine* describe whether masculine or feminine traits are valued by a culture. Hofstede uses the terms to describe a societal perspective, rather than male or female individuals. Here we take a look at individual gender differences. However, keep in mind that Hofstede ranks the United States as a more masculine-oriented culture—one in which men are assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.

Numerous studies conclude that boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures, making talk between men and women a cross-cultural experience. In *You Just Don't Understand*, Deborah Tannen makes a strong case for this two-world hypothesis. She concludes that men seek status and women



## TOOLBOX 3.3 (continued)

A recent study at Pennsylvania State University helped dispel the notion of race. A group of students who thought of themselves as “100 percent” white or black or something else took complex genetic screening tests. It turned out that very few fell into any such category. Most learned that they shared genetic markers with people of other skin colors. One “white” student learned that 14 percent of his DNA was African—and 6 percent was East Asian.<sup>5</sup>

In 2006, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr hosted a public television program which analyzed the DNA tests of famous African Americans such as Oprah Winfrey, Whoopi Goldberg, Quincy Jones, and surgeon Ben Carson. Professor Gates had believed that a white slave owner was his great-great-grandfather, but found no evidence to verify that claim. Oprah Winfrey had mistakenly believed she was descended from Zulu people. Almost all of the DNA tests conducted on the program’s participants revealed evidence of Asian, European, or American Indian heredity.<sup>6</sup> In another case, an African American reporter for the

*New York Times* learned from a genetic screening test that half of his genetic material came from sub-Saharan Africa, one-quarter from Europe, and (which shocked him *and* his family) one-fifth from Asia!<sup>7</sup>

Even though there is no genetically justified reason to classify people by race, we continue to do so. We do it because we were brought up doing it, because textbooks do it, because the media do it, and because people of different “races” continue to do it.

<sup>1</sup> Mark P. Orbe and Tina M. Harris, *Interracial Communication: Theory into Practice* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron, *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Danesi and Perron, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Orbe and Harris, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Editorial, “Debunking the Concept of Race,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2005, p. A28.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Heffernan, “Taking Black Family Trees Out of Slavery’s Shadow,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/01/arts/television/01heff.html>

<sup>7</sup> Brent Staples, “Why Race Isn’t as ‘Black’ and ‘White’ as We Think,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2005, p. A20.

seek connection. Men seek independence; women prefer interdependence. In *Diverse Teams at Work*, Gardenswartz and Rowe summarize male and female differences as follows:

Men use communication as a means of establishing a hierarchy of order and power in which they can solve problems. Women, on the other hand, interact to form relationships and share feelings and reactions. This difference can lead to subtle barriers in transmitting information and even subtler unconscious assumptions. She may be seen as wasting time; he may be seen as cold and insensitive. Her comments may be taken as nagging or an attempt to control; while the solutions he offers may be rejected as proof that “he didn’t hear what I was saying.”<sup>45</sup>

Given the potential clash of gender-based cultures in groups, all members should monitor and adapt to differences in the ways in which women and men interpret the world and express their opinions. Unfortunately, many women feel undervalued or even invisible in groups. William Sonnenschein, a diversity

## TOOLBOX 3.4



### Do Women Talk More than Men?

Many people believe that women talk too much. Yet, most women experience just the opposite, particularly when they're working in groups. Social scientists Rodney Napier and Matti Gershenfeld provide a brief history of this myth and a summary of research studies:

Throughout history, women have been punished for talking too much or in the wrong way. In colonial America, there were a variety of physical punishments: women were strapped to dunking stools and held under water; they had to wear signs declaring their misconduct

in public; they were gagged and silenced with a cleft stick applied to their tongues. . . . Yet study after study shows that it is men who talk more—at meetings, in mixed-group discussions held in classrooms where girls or young women sit next to boys or young men. . . . And not only did men speak for a longer time, but the women's longest turns were shorter than the men's shortest turns."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rodney W. Napier and Matti K. Gershenfeld, *Groups: Theory and Experience*, 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. 29.

consultant and university professor, often hears working women complain that when they say something in a meeting, no one responds, yet a few minutes later a man makes the same suggestion and is praised for the quality of his input. Sonnenschein offers a list of common complaints voiced by men and women in work groups:

#### Women's Complaints:

- Men have low expectations of women.
- Women are misunderstood, underutilized, and unrecognized.
- Men do not accept a broad range of communication styles.
- Men focus too much on women's physical appearance.

#### Men's Complaints:

- Men do not see cross-gender communication as being as great a problem as women do.
- Men have to be cautious about what they say and do around women coworkers.
- Women want both to be provided for and to have equality.
- Women dress and act in ways that draw attention to their sexuality.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, women and men share frustrations and confusion about how to act in mixed company. Such unresolved dialectic tensions between men and women

can prevent a group from working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. So, are men really from Mars and women from Venus? Absolutely not! We're all from Earth—the planet positioned between Mars and Venus.

Group members should consider any differences between female and male members as differences in personality preferences—even though many men classify themselves as thinkers and many women see themselves as feelers. Here's some additional advice for adapting to both thinkers and feelers:

**Thinkers (men):**

- Don't use sarcasm or tell women they're illogical.
- Don't tell them they're too sensitive or too emotional.
- Listen to their concerns, but unless they ask for advice, don't try to solve their problems for them.
- Let women know that you appreciate their warmth, understanding, and compassion.

**Feelers (women):**

- Don't expect or force men to talk about or display their emotions.
- Ask men what they think, rather than what they feel.
- Express your disagreements without worrying about being unkind or starting an argument.
- Let men know that you appreciate their insightful analysis and their ability to remain calm and detached.<sup>47</sup>

We cannot end this section on gender differences without a few words on the risk of reaching erroneous or oversimplified conclusions about the characteristics of a group of people. Are all men thinkers and all women feelers? No. Do some women talk more than some men? Yes. Are some men more sympathetic, gentle-hearted, tactful, and emotional than some women? Yes. Unfortunately, assertive, thinking women may be viewed as unfeminine, while caring, feeling men are dismissed as effeminate “girly-men.” Both labels are absurd and counterproductive to the work of good groups.



## GENERATIONAL DIMENSIONS

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Given the amazing advances in technology, improvements in health care, and significant increases in career opportunities for women and minority groups in the last half century, there are more pronounced differences between the generations today than there ever have been. Just think about the ways in which different

generations use language differently. For example, to people from an older generation, the term *communication skills* means writing and speaking abilities, but it means email and instant messaging to a young college student.<sup>48</sup> Toolbox 3.5 describes the four major generational classifications.

The mixing of generations in families, communities, college classrooms, and work settings adds diversity *and* potential difficulties to the challenge of communicating in groups. Of all the generational mixes, the interaction of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers may be the most problematic. Several communication strategies can help Baby Boomers and Generation Xers interact more effectively.<sup>49</sup>

## TOOLBOX 3.5



### Generational Labels

Once upon a time, we classified people based on their age by putting them into one of two categories: the older generation and the younger generation. Today—probably because of marketing and advertising research—we are cataloged, graded, and pigeonholed based on our potential as buyers and voters. Labeling any group, however, allows members to identify with their contemporaries and to view other generations with some level of suspicion and even disapproval. After all, how can “they” be as good and as smart as “us”? Thus, we offer this unofficial list of generational descriptions with the understanding that these are only generalizations:<sup>1</sup>

- *Traditionalists or the Builder Generation, born 1900 to 1945.* Experiencing two world wars and the Great Depression taught this generation how to live within limited means. Traditionalists are loyal, hardworking, financially conservative, and faithful to institutions.
- *Baby Boomers or the Boomer Generation, born 1946 to 1964.* This is the generation that grew up with television and experienced the Vietnam War. Many of them bravely challenged the status quo and are responsible for many of the rights and opportunities that are now taken for granted. As a whole, this generation is politically adept when it comes to navigating political minefields in the workplace. Its

members often believe that they are always right, but are willing to work hard to get what they want. The term *workaholic* was coined to describe Baby Boomers.

- *Generation Xers or the X Generation, born 1965 to 1980.* Generation Xers are technologically savvy in the era of video games and personal computers. Because they witnessed skyrocketing divorce rates, employment layoffs, and challenges to the presidency, organized religion, and big corporations, they are often skeptical and distrustful of institutions. Generation Xers believe that work isn't the most important thing in their lives.
- *Millennials, the Net Generation, Generation Yers, or Nexters, born 1981 to 1999.* Many Millennials are still in school or just graduating from college. These are kids who've grown up with cell phones, pagers, and personal computers. Generally, they're confident and have high self-esteem. They're collaborators and favor teamwork, having functioned in groups in school, organized sports, and extracurricular activities from a very young age. They like keeping their career options open.

<sup>1</sup> Mayo Clinic, “Workplace Generation Gap: Understand Differences Among Colleagues,” Special to CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/WL/00045.html>, July 6, 2005.

**If you belong to Generation X, you should**

- Show respect to Baby Boomers and acknowledge that you have less experience than the Baby Boomers and can learn from them.
- Communicate face to face rather than relying totally on email. Many Baby Boomers prefer speaking with someone face to face.
- Learn to play the political game. Baby Boomers are often diplomatic and can help Generation Xers navigate politically charged environments.
- Learn the corporate history and culture. Nothing bothers Baby Boomers more than a new employee who wants to change things, with seemingly no thought given to what's gone on before.

**As a Baby Boomer, you should**

- Get to the point. State your objectives clearly when communicating with Generation Xers.
- Avoid micromanaging Generation Xers who need autonomy.
- Get over the notion of dues paying. Although Baby Boomers may have worked 60 hours a week to get ahead, don't expect members of younger generations to do the same. Generation Xers—who value a healthy work-life balance—rarely spend that many hours at work, and they're getting ahead anyway.
- Lighten up. Remind yourself that it's OK for work to be fun. Generation Xers tend to think that Baby Boomers are too intense and set in their ways.

In general, the need to feel part of a group or team is a common value among Baby Boomers, but is less important to Generation Xers and Millennials. Whereas many Baby Boomers see group work as being more like football, in which all members act in concert and according to a plan, the younger generations see group work as more like a relay race: "I'll give it all I've got—when and where I'm supposed to."<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly, the American Association of Retired People points to research studies showing that older adults are better at solving problems, more flexible in their strategies, and better able to keep their cool during a crisis than are younger people. They also tend to bounce back from a bad mood more quickly. As one neurobiologist notes, in the old days, you called it wisdom.<sup>51</sup> Of course, in the not too distant future, young people will be older (and hopefully just as wise), and researchers will probably make the same claims about them.



As an effective group member, you must perform a difficult balancing act. You must balance your own needs and interests with those of the group. You must analyze your own personality traits as well as those of others to determine the

different ways in which members understand and make decisions about the world around them. And certainly you must understand, respect, and adapt to the cultural, gender, and generational differences that shape every group.

William Sonnenschein writes that “we can be equal and still acknowledge our differences. . . . Embracing differences does not mean that all differences are acceptable. . . . Yet, we need to discover those differences, acknowledge their

## ETHICAL GROUPS



### Does the Golden Rule Apply to Groups?

The well-known Golden Rule—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”—may not work in groups with diverse members. Intercultural communication scholars Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama note that “ethical principles are often culture-bound, and intercultural conflicts arise from varying notions of what constitutes ethical behavior.”<sup>1</sup> For example, someone from an individualistic culture may see self-serving ambition as appropriate and ethical behavior—after all, that’s how you get ahead. In collectivist cultures, however, the same behavior may be viewed as unethical, because the individual is not putting group interests ahead of personal interests.

Ethical group members should learn about cultural differences—the differences between their own culture and those of others. Martin and Nakayama recommend three strategies:<sup>2</sup>

1. *Practice self-reflection.* When you learn about other cultures, you also learn more about your own intercultural beliefs—and your prejudices. For example, you may believe that arranged marriage is unethical because it denies individuals the right to choose a spouse that they love. If, however, you meet someone who is in a successful arranged marriage, you may discover that there are some advantages, including a much lower divorce rate compared with traditional romantic marriages.

2. *Interact with others.* Ethical group members learn about others by interacting with them and talking about differences. Although you can read about differences in white and black perspectives or western European and Asian values, talking about such differences can help you understand group members as individuals rather than as stereotypical representatives of a different culture.

3. *Listen to others’ voices.* Listening to the experiences of others has the power to transform your understanding of cultures and realize how their voices may be stifled. When, for example, Catholic priests from Spain established missions in what is now Texas, they imposed conditions on native people who sought the food, water, shelter, protection, and medical care offered in those missions. Native people had to give up their language and learn Spanish, change many of their customs and dress, and convert to Catholicism. Whether you believe the Catholic priests were ethical or unethical depends, in large part, on how you view the value of diversity and the sanctity of diverse cultures. Ethical group members should listen carefully to different voices as a way of integrating the contributions and perspectives of all members into the group process.

<sup>1</sup> Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, *Experiencing Intercultural Communication*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Martin and Nakayama, pp. 20–22.



existence, and learn how to best utilize whichever ones we can to create a good team.”<sup>52</sup> As we note in Chapter 2, some behaviors and values are detrimental to a group and must be resolved. At the same time, we must understand, respect, and adapt to differences that can make a group more effective. Groups that learn how to balance and benefit from the diversity within the group have the power to create a collaborative climate. This kind of climate is the essence of group excellence and teamwork.<sup>53</sup>

## GROUPWORK

### Personality Preferences

**Directions.** Read the two sets of descriptions for each personality type. For each pair of personality preferences, put a check mark next to the phrases that *best* describe you. Note the personality type with the most check marks—extrovert or introvert; sensing or intuitive; thinking or feeling; judging or perceiving. Answer as you really are, not as you wish you were or wish you could be in the future.

1. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

#### Extrovert

- I am outgoing, sociable, expressive
- I enjoy groups and discussions
- I talk first, think later
- I can do many things at once
- I think out loud
- Other people give me energy
- Total**

#### Introvert

- I am reserved, private, contained
- I prefer one-to-one interactions
- I think first, then talk
- I focus on one thing at a time
- I think to myself
- Other people often exhaust me
- Total**

2. Are you a sensor or an intuitive?

#### Sensor

- I focus on details
- I am practical and realistic
- I like concrete information
- I like facts
- I trust experience

#### Intuitive

- I focus on the big picture
- I am theoretical
- I like abstract information
- I get bored with facts and details
- I trust inspiration and intuition

**Sensor**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I value common sense
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want clear, realistic goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

**Intuitive**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I value creativity and innovation
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to pursue a vision
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

## 3. Are you a thinker or a feeler?

**Thinker**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I am task-oriented
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am objective, firm, analytical
- \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy arguing
- \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer businesslike meetings
- \_\_\_\_\_ I value competence, reason, justice
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am direct and firm-minded
- \_\_\_\_\_ I think with my head
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

**Feeler**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I am people-oriented
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am subjective, humane, appreciative
- \_\_\_\_\_ I think arguing is disruptive
- \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer social interchange in meetings
- \_\_\_\_\_ I value relationships and harmony
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am tactful and tenderhearted
- \_\_\_\_\_ I think with my heart
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

## 4. Are you a judger or a perceiver?

**Judger**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I value organization and structure
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am in control and definite
- \_\_\_\_\_ I like having deadlines
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will work now, play later
- \_\_\_\_\_ I like standards and expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_ I adjust my schedule to complete work
- \_\_\_\_\_ I plan ahead
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

**Perceiver**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I value flexibility and spontaneity
- \_\_\_\_\_ I go with the flow
- \_\_\_\_\_ I dislike deadlines
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will play now, work later
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel constrained by rules
- \_\_\_\_\_ I do work at the last minute
- \_\_\_\_\_ I adapt as I go
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

Summarize your decisions by indicating the letter that best describes your personality traits and preferences:

\_\_\_\_\_

**E or I**

\_\_\_\_\_

**S or N**

\_\_\_\_\_

**T or F**

\_\_\_\_\_

**J or P**

Considering the type of group member you are *based on your four-letter personality type*, answer the following questions:

1. Name two of your most effective personality traits as a group member. (Example: I am tactful and considerate of other group members.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name two ways in which group members see you as a group member. (Example: Other group members see me as objective and fair.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name two ways in which you can improve your effectiveness as a group member in light of your personality traits and preferences. (Example: I need to put more focus on the group's task rather than using so much time socializing with members.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is for licensed use only by qualified professionals whose qualifications are on file and have been accepted by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. The exercise is only a quick self-test and is not a licensed instrument.

## GROUPASSESSMENT

### Identifying Cultural Dialectics

**Directions.** Your textbook identifies six dialectical dimensions that explain many cultural differences. The 20 statements listed here represent a group member's attitude or behavior. Match each statement with the appropriate cultural dimension or dimensions. Use the blank space before each statement and place the appropriate letter (A through F) in that space to indicate which dimension best explains the cultural perspective of the member. In some cases, more than one answer may be appropriate.

#### Cultural Dimensions

- A. Individualism–Collectivism
- B. High Power–Low Power Distance
- C. Uncertainty Avoidance–Uncertainty Acceptance
- D. Masculine–Feminine

E. High Context–Low Context

F. Polychronic–Monochronic

### Statements

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When a member of my group wins a prize, I feel proud.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I function best in a group when I can organize my responsibilities and put them on a schedule.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I prefer a leader who makes decisions promptly, communicates them to the group, and expects us to carry out the task.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I rely on a member's nonverbal behavior to tell me what he or she is really thinking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I am good at figuring out what other members think about me and my ideas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Groups don't function effectively if members are emotional and sensitive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I am confident in my ability to predict how other group members will behave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I enjoy "doing my own thing" in a group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I prefer working in groups in which members are appreciative, curious, forgiving, kind, and understanding.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I become frustrated when someone in a meeting brings up a personal topic that is unrelated to the purpose of the meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Group norms should be followed—even when I disagree with them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Groups don't function effectively when members are aggressive, hardheaded, and opinionated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. My satisfaction in a group depends very much on the feelings of other members.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I don't like to focus my attention on only one thing at a time because I may be missing something important or interesting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I prefer a leader who calls a meeting when an important issue comes up, gives us the problem to discuss, and seeks a group decision.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I can sit with another group member, not say anything, and still be comfortable.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I find silence awkward in conversations and group discussions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I like to be clear and accurate when I speak to other group members.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I like doing several tasks at one time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I like working in groups where I can compete with other members.

## NOTES

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 527.
2. William Sonnenschein, *The Diversity Toolkit* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1997), p. 101.
3. James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies, and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 29.
4. Quoted in Surowiecki, p. 31.
5. Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, *Diverse Teams at Work: Capitalizing on the Power of Diversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 18.
6. Diversity layers based on Gardenswartz and Rowe, pp. 31–80; Marilyn Loden and Judy R. Rosener, *Workforce America!* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990).
7. Gardenswartz and Rowe, pp. 34–35.
8. Hundreds of books and articles have been written about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®. The material in this chapter is based on Isa N. Engleberg's background and experience as a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® trainer and a synthesis of materials from several MBTI resources: Isabel Briggs Myers (Revised by Linda K. Kirby and Katharine D. Myers), *Introduction to Type*, 7th ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1998); Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1990); Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk* (New York: Delacorte, 1988); Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk at Work: How the 16 Personality Types Determine Your Success on the Job* (New York: Delta/Tilden Press, 1992); David Keirse, *Please Understand Me II* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis, 1998); S. K. Hirsh, *Introduction to Type and Teams* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists, 1992); Larry Demarest, *Looking at Type in the Workplace* (Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1997).
9. Note: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is for licensed use only by qualified professionals whose qualifications are on file and have been accepted by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.
10. Myers with Myers, p. 1.
11. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI) uses the word *extravert*—with an *a* in the middle of the word—to describe this personality preference rather than *extrovert*, the more common spelling. Dictionaries and psychology textbooks use *extrovert* as the preferred spelling but often note the alliterative similarities between *introvert* and *extrovert*. *Working in Groups* uses the term *extrovert*, but here acknowledges the MBTI preference for *extravert*.
12. Robert E. Levasseur, *Breakthrough Business Meetings: Shared Leadership in Action*. (Holbrook, MA: Bob Adams, 1994), p. 79.
13. J. M. Jaffe, "Of Different Minds," *Association Management*, 37 (1985), pp. 120–124.
14. Renee Baron, *What Type Am I?* (New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 20–21.
15. Carl E. Larson and Frank M. J. LaFasto, *TeamWork: What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), p. 63.
16. Baron, pp. 29–30.
17. Kroeger and Thuesen, *Type Talk*, p. 80.
18. Kroeger and Thuesen, *Type Talk*, p. 114.
19. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2006), p. 25.
20. Intercultural authors use a variety of terms (*co-cultures*, *microcultures*) to describe the cultural groups that coexist within a larger culture. Using either of these terms is preferable to using the older, somewhat derogatory term *subcultures*. The combined co-cultures living in the United States will, by mid-century, make up the majority population.
21. The statistics in this section come from two sources: *Encyclopedia Britannica Almanac 2004* (Chicago: Britannica Almanac, 2003), pp. 770–775; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, <http://www.census.gov/population>.
22. U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population>.
23. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 14. Also see Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), p. 29. Hofstede identifies a fifth dimension: long-term versus short-term orientation, which relates to the choice of focus for people's efforts—either the future or the present. Cultures in Asia rank at the top of the list on long-term orientation, whereas those with a shorter-term orientation include English-speaking countries as well as Zimbabwe, Philippines, Nigeria, and Pakistan. We have not included this fifth dimension in the textbook because fewer cultures have been thoroughly studied on this dimension.
24. See Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1959); Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*

- (New York: Anchor, 1976); Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1983); Edward T. Hall and M. R. Hall, *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French and Americans* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990).
25. Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995).
  26. Harry C. Triandis, "The Self and Social Behavior in Different Cultural Contexts," *Psychological Review*, 96 (1994), pp. 506–520. Also see Triandis, *Individualism and Collectivism*.
  27. Harry C. Triandis, "The Cross-Cultural Studies of Individualism and Collectivism," in *Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. J. J. Berman (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 52.
  28. Geert Hofstede, "The Cultural Relativity of the Quality of Life Concept," in *Cultural Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. G. R. Weaver (Boston: Pearson, 2000), p. 139.
  29. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, quoted in Larry A. Samovar and Richard Porter, *Communication Between Cultures*, 5th ed (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004), p. 65.
  30. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, p. 113.
  31. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*.
  32. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, p. 119.
  33. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, p. 118.
  34. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, p. 84.
  35. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*.
  36. Hall and Hall, p. 6.
  37. Dean Allen Foster, *Bargaining Across Borders* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), p. 280.
  38. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2003), p. 101.
  39. Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life*, p. 42.
  40. James W. Neuliep, *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), pp. 132–133.
  41. Lustig and Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, 5th ed., p. 226.
  42. Edward T. Hall, "Monochronic and Polychronic Time," in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, 10th ed., ed. Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002), p. 263.
  43. Lustig and Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, 5th ed., p. 151.
  44. Lustig and Koester, *Intercultural Competence*, 4th ed., p. 153.
  45. Gardenswartz and Rowe, pp. 39–40.
  46. Sonnenschein, pp. 19–20.
  47. Baron, p. 28.
  48. Dennis Kersten, "Today's Generations Face New Communication Gaps," [www.usatoday.com/money/jobcenter/workplace/communication/2002-11-15-communication-gap\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/jobcenter/workplace/communication/2002-11-15-communication-gap_x.htm), posted 11/15/2002, 10:03 a.m.
  49. Mayo Clinic, "Workplace Generation Gap: Understand Differences among Colleagues," special to CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/WL/00045.html>, July 6, 2005.
  50. David Stauffer, "Motivating Across Generations," in Harvard Business School Press, *Teams That Click* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2004), p. 119.
  51. Kelly Griffin, "You're Wiser Now," September/October 2005, p. 77.
  52. Sonnenschein, p. 100.
  53. Larson and LaFasto, p. 94.