



CULTURE MATTERS

The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook

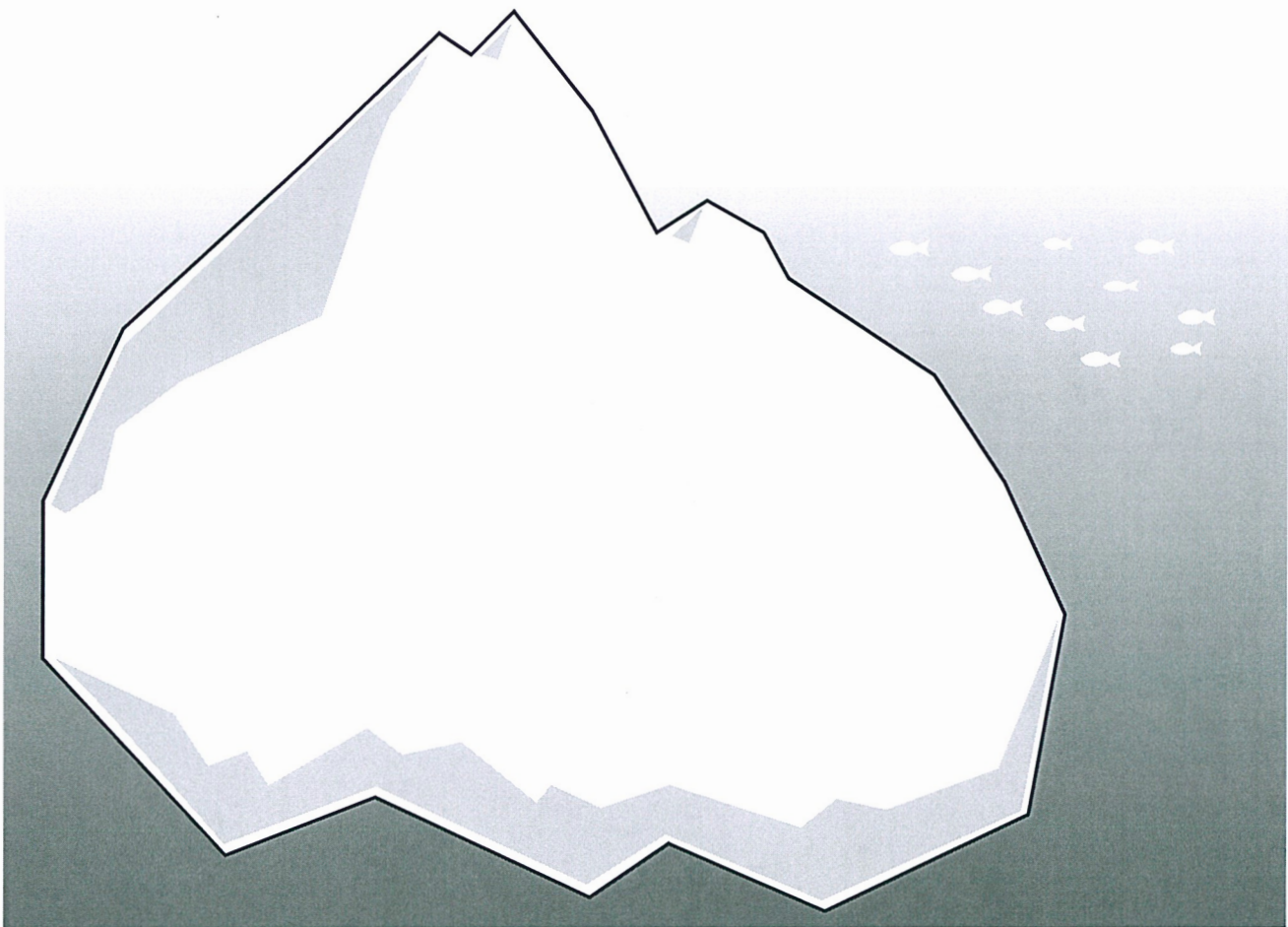
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1.3—WHAT IS CULTURE?

THE ICEBERG

Culture has been aptly compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the waterline, and a larger, invisible section below the water line, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected, imagined, or intuited. Also like an iceberg, that part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole.



The numbered items that appear below are all features of culture. From the drawing of the iceberg on the opposite page, put whether the feature would be visible or invisible on the iceberg. In the blank space place either a “V” for visible or an “I” for invisible

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. facial expressions | 14. notions of modesty |
| 2. religious beliefs | 15. foods |
| 3. religious rituals | 16. eating habits |
| 4. importance of time | 17. understanding of the natural world |
| 5. paintings | 18. concept of self |
| 6. values | 19. work ethic |
| 7. literature | 20. concept of beauty |
| 8. childraising beliefs | 21. music |
| 9. concept of leadership | 22. styles of dress |
| 10. gestures | 23. general world view |
| 11. holiday customs | 24. concept of personal space |
| 12. concept of fairness | 25. rules of social etiquette |
| 13. nature of friendship | |

—INSIGHT—

Surface behaviors are influenced by beneath-the-surface values and assumptions.

You can see that there is a relationship between those items that appear above the waterline and those that appear below it. In most cases, the invisible aspects of culture influence or cause the visible ones. Religious beliefs, for example, are clearly manifest in certain holiday customs, and notions of modesty affect styles of dress.

1.5—LINKING VALUES TO BEHAVIOR

In the iceberg exercise, you saw how certain aspects or features of culture are visible—they show up in people’s behavior—while many other aspects of culture are invisible, existing only in the realms of thought, feeling, and belief. The examples in this exercise show how these two realms, the visible and the hidden, are related to each other, how the values and beliefs you cannot see affect behavior.

To understand where behavior comes from—to understand *why* people behave the way they do—means learning about values and beliefs. The behavior of people from another culture may seem strange to you, but it probably makes sense to them, and vice versa. The reason *any* behavior makes sense is simply because it is consistent with what a given person believes in or holds dear. Conversely, when we say that what someone has done “makes no sense,” what we mean is that that action contradicts what we believe that person feels or wants.

In the exercise below, match the value or belief in the column on the left to a behavior in the column on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Directness | ___ Use of understatement. |
| 2. Centrality of family | ___ Asking people to call you by your first name. |
| 3. External control | ___ Taking off from work to attend the funeral of an aunt. |
| 4. Saving face | ___ Not helping the person next to you on an exam. |
| 5. Respect for age | ___ Disagreeing openly with someone at a meeting. |
| 6. Informality | ___ Not laying off an older worker whose performance is weak. |
| 7. Deference to authority | ___ At a meeting, agreeing with a suggestion you think is wrong. |
| 8. Indirectness | ___ Inviting the teaboy to eat lunch with you in your office. |
| 9. Self-reliance | ___ Asking the headmaster’s opinion of something you’re the expert on. |
| 10. Egalitarianism | ___ Accepting, without question, that something cannot be changed. |

Culture consists of concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are widely shared by people....[These] are transmitted generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions, by parents...and other respected elders.

—Richard Brislin
& Tomoko Yoshida

—INSIGHT—

Behavior makes more sense when you understand the value or belief behind it.

This next exercise contains a list of behaviors. In the underlined space preceding each of them, put a "U" if you think the behavior is universal, "C" if it is cultural, or "P" if it is personal.

1. _____ Sleeping with a bedroom window open.
2. _____ Running from a dangerous animal.
3. _____ Considering snakes to be "evil."
4. _____ Men opening doors for women.
5. _____ Respecting older people.
6. _____ Liking spicy food.
7. _____ Preferring playing soccer to reading a book.
8. _____ Eating regularly.
9. _____ Eating with knife, fork, and spoon.
10. _____ Being wary of strangers.
11. _____ Calling a waiter with a hissing sound.
12. _____ Regretting being the cause of an accident.
13. _____ Feeling sad at the death of your mother.
14. _____ Wearing white mourning robes for 30 days after the death of your mother.
15. _____ Not liking wearing mourning robes for 30 days after the death of your mother.

—INSIGHT—

Some behaviors are shared by us all, while some others are unique to individuals.

Observation Activity

1.7—UNIVERSAL, CULTURAL, OR PERSONAL—MAKING OBSERVATIONS

The differences between universal, cultural, and personal behaviors occur in all cultures. Try to find examples of each in your host country. Spend some time in the streets observing the people around you and try to note four examples of each category of behavior. For personal behaviors, you may find it easier observing people you know well, such as people at your training site or in your host family. When you have completed this exercise, it may be helpful to show your list to someone else to get that person's reactions.

UNIVERSAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

CULTURAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

PERSONAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



1.10—DEFINING CULTURE

Reading through this chapter, you notice a number of definitions of culture presented in the form of short quotations in the margins. Take a minute to reread these quotations and then note, in the spaces below, any idea, concept, or key word that is repeated more than once. Assembling these recurring phrases gives you a good working definition of culture.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

—INSIGHT—

While culture has many definitions, most observers agree on certain fundamental characteristics.



Now look at the list of behaviors or characteristics given below. If you decide the statement is *more likely* to apply to people living in an individualist culture, write “I” in the underlined blank space; if you think it is characteristic of a collectivist culture, write “C.”

CHARACTERISTICS & BEHAVIORS

1. _____ People answer the phone by giving the name of the organization.
2. _____ People give cocktail parties.
3. _____ *Intergroup* rivalry is strong.
4. _____ Employee-of-the-year awards are offered.
5. _____ People adhere to tradition.
6. _____ People are promoted based on production and results.
7. _____ Contracts in business are used frequently.
8. _____ There is a need for autonomy.
9. _____ People change jobs frequently.
10. _____ People believe that conflict clears the air.
11. _____ There is a need for affiliation.
12. _____ Short-term relationships are common.
13. _____ It’s okay to stand out.
14. _____ Face saving is important.
15. _____ It’s common for mothers to ask their preschoolers what they want to wear today.
16. _____ Self-help books are popular.
17. _____ Decisions are made by consensus.
18. _____ The language has one word for mother’s brother, another for father’s brother.
19. _____ Marriages are arranged.
20. _____ People have potluck dinners.

—INSIGHT—

The concept of personal identity differs greatly from culture to culture.

2.2—THE THINGS WE SAY— CULTURE IN CASUAL EXPRESSIONS

PART ONE

A useful way to understand a culture is by examining the expressions people use in everyday conversation. These common expressions, after all, reflect what most people in a given society believe in or value. What cultural value or belief do the following expressions reveal? Write your response in the space provided. The first group of expressions is done for you.

1. He thinks he's better than so and so.
2. She's always putting on airs.
3. That person should be cut down to size.
4. It's gone to his head.

Value/belief: Egalitarianism

1. Talk is cheap.
2. Put your money where your mouth is.
3. He's all talk and no action.

Value/belief: _____

4. She's always beating around the bush.
5. Tell it like it is.
6. Straight talk, straight answer, straight shooter.

Value/belief: _____

7. She did something with her life.
8. Nice guys finish last.

Value/belief: _____

The people who are not pleased with America must be those whose sympathies are fossilized or whose eyes have no power of observation. Such delightful and entertaining schemes for hoodwinking nature you never saw, such ingenuities for beating the terrible forces of the seasons, such daring inventions.

—Edmond Gosse
The Life and Letters of Sir Edmond Gosse, 1884

All kinds of tourists are fair game for [con artists] but Americans seem their favorite targets, not just because of their careless ways with money and instinctive generosity, but also their non-European innocence about the viler dimensions of human nature...

—Paul Fussell,
Abroad

- 9. Every cloud has a silver lining.
- 10. Look on the bright side.
- 11. Tomorrow is another day.

Value/belief: _____

- 12. Where there's a will there's a way.

Value/belief: _____

- 13. Stand on your own two feet.

Value/belief: _____

- 14. Don't judge a book by its cover.

- 15. All that glitters isn't gold.

Value/belief: _____

- 16. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Value/belief: _____

2.4—THINKING ABOUT MY JOB

In the previous exercise, you discovered a number of differences in the way American and host country people view certain key topics. These differences are bound to show up now and again as you go about working at your Peace Corps assignment. Below are five of the categories from the previous exercise, with examples of typical work-related problems. Read each incident and note what you would do.

1. ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGE

The American emphasis on achievements and doing means that age is to be feared and not respected; the older you are, the less you can do or contribute to society. Age is also suspect because new is usually better in American culture, and the elderly are generally out of touch with what is new.

Suppose you're a technical expert in crop rotation assigned to a co-op of village farmers. You discover they do not consult you or even pay much attention to you because they think you're too young to know what you're doing.

My response: _____

2. ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHANGE

Change is considered positive, probably because Americans believe in the march of progress and the perfectability of man. Improvements will always move us closer and closer to perfection. Traditions can be a guide, but they are not inherently superior.

You want to introduce a new teaching technique to your colleagues. It is a faster and more efficient way of presenting certain concepts. When you approach them, they respond: "This is the way we have always been taught." You say, "But this is faster and more efficient." They say, "No doubt."

My response: _____



*Americans ignore history...
The national myth is that of
creativity and progress....They
believe in the future as if it
were a religion; they believe
that there is nothing they
cannot accomplish, that solu-
tions wait somewhere for all
problems, like brides.*

—Frances Fitzgerald,
Fire in the Lake

3. CONCEPT OF EQUALITY

In a strong reaction to the repressive class structure in Europe, Americans created a culture built around egalitarianism: the notion that no one is inherently superior to anyone else because of birth, power, fame, or wealth. We are not all the same, but we are all of equal value.

It has turned cold the last few days and you feel sorry for the teaboy who is stationed just outside the entrance to your building. He doesn't seem to have any warm clothes and huddles over his charcoal fire to keep warm. You approach your boss and ask if you can tell the boy to move into the hallway out of the cold. "Certainly not," he replies. "This building is for faculty, not teaboys."

My response: _____

4. ATTITUDE TOWARDS TAKING RISKS

There will always be enough opportunity to go around, so taking risks involves no real danger. For the truly ambitious, failure is only temporary. Experimentation, trial and error are important ways to learn or to improve your product or service.

You want to try a new way of filtering drinking water for the village. The environmental engineer asks you if this technique has been tried anywhere else in the country, to which you answer, "No. "And what if we fail?" he asks you. "Then we go back to the old way," you respond. "And what happens to my job?" he replies.

My response: _____

5. VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD

The natural world is a kind of mechanism or machine that can be studied and known and whose workings can be predicted, manipulated, and ultimately controlled. It is not to be feared.

Books need to be ordered now to arrive in time for the start of classes in the fall. You go to the head librarian to put in your request, and she asks you how you know how many students you're going to have. You don't of course, but you're projecting, based on previous class size. "It's better to wait," she says, "so we don't waste money buying extra books." You know that if you don't order now, you'll have to teach for several weeks without the books while you wait for them to arrive.

My response: _____

—INSIGHT—

Cultural differences are bound to show up in workplace interactions.



2.6—HOW NON-AMERICANS SEE AMERICANS

PART ONE

In this two-part activity, you look at how Americans are perceived by people from other cultures. Knowing how we come across can be helpful in understanding why foreigners react to us the way they sometimes do.

Newsweek magazine showed the list of qualities given below to people in six countries—Brazil, France, Great Britain, Japan, Mexico, and Germany—and asked them to pick those they associated most and least with Americans.

What do you think were the four qualities most associated with Americans?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |

What do you think were the four qualities least associated with Americans?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |

QUALITIES		
Decisive	Energetic	Honest
Industrious	Intelligent	Self-indulgent
Sophisticated	Nationalistic	Friendly
Greedy	Rude	Inventive
Lazy		

Informant Activity



PART TWO

In the second part of this activity, you need to get together with a host country national or a PCV to stand in as HCN and ask this person which of the qualities from Part One he/she associates most and least with Americans. Write the answers in the spaces provided below. Then ask your informant why he/she selected those particular qualities.

What qualities do you associate most with Americans?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

—INSIGHT—

Host country nationals may have a number of preconceptions about Americans.

What qualities do you associate least with Americans?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



In the following exercise, check the statement that does not belong in the group of four, either because it reflects a universalist attitude and all the others are particularist, or vice versa:

1. Objectivity, not letting personal feelings affect decision making, is possible and desirable.
2. A deal is a deal, whatever happens.
3. Principles have to get bent once in a while.
4. The law is the law.

1. You don't compromise on principles.
2. Friends expect preferential treatment.
3. Subjectivity is the rule.
4. The logic of the heart is what counts.

1. People tend to hire friends and associates.
2. Consistency is desirable and possible.
3. Logic of the head is important.
4. Exceptions to the rule should be minimized.

1. Friends protect friends.
2. Life is neat, not messy.
3. Written contracts are not necessary.
4. This attitude is more consistent with collectivism.

1. Situational ethics are the norm.
2. A deal is a deal, until circumstances change.
3. Deals are made on the basis of personal relationships.
4. Justice is blind.

—INSIGHT—

Cultures differ on how they distinguish between obligations to in-group and out-group members.

The exercise below helps you define the differences. In the underlined space before each of the numbered statements, write “I” if you think it applies to a culture where communication is indirect/high context, or “D” if communication is direct/low context.

CHARACTERISTICS & BEHAVIORS

1. _____ Communication is like that between twins.
2. _____ People are reluctant to say no.
3. _____ You have to read between the lines.
4. _____ Use of intermediaries or third parties is frequent.
5. _____ Use of understatement is frequent.
6. _____ It's best to tell it like it is.
7. _____ It's okay to disagree with your boss at a meeting.
8. _____ “Yes” means yes.
9. _____ “Yes” means I hear you.
10. _____ Communication is like that between two casual acquaintances.
11. _____ It's not necessary to read between the lines.
12. _____ People engage in small talk and catching up before getting down to business.
13. _____ Business first, then small talk.
14. _____ Lukewarm tea means all is not well.
15. _____ Lukewarm tea means the tea got cold.
16. _____ People need to be brought up to date at a meeting.
17. _____ People are already up to date.
18. _____ The rank/status of the messenger is as important as the message.
19. _____ The message is what counts, not who the messenger is.
20. _____ People tell you what they think you want to hear.

—INSIGHT—

Different styles of communication mean an increased possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

3.8—PRACTICING INDIRECTNESS

The next two exercises give you a chance to practice the skill of indirect communication. In this first activity, you are presented with a series of seven direct statements. Try to rephrase them to make them more indirect, writing your suggestions in the blank space below each one. While these statements could be appropriate in some situations, the setting here is a meeting, where allowing people to save face is important. Suggested rephrasing of the first statement is offered as an example.

It's just not in their culture to tell or even suggest what they think you should do. Even when you are asking for advice, I don't think they feel comfortable giving it. The direct American style is often taken as impolite.

—PCV Papua New Guinea

1.	I don't think that's such a good idea.	<i>Do you think that's a good idea? Are there any other ideas? I like most parts of that idea.</i>
2.	That's not the point.	
3.	I think we should....	
4.	What do you think, Mr. Cato? <i>(Calling on people sometimes embarrasses them. How can you find out what Mr. Cato thinks without directly asking him?)</i>	
5.	Those figures are not accurate.	
6.	You're doing that wrong.	
7.	I don't agree.	

—INSIGHT—

The direct way of saying certain things may strike some listeners as too harsh.

3.9—DECODING INDIRECTNESS

This exercise is the opposite of the one you just completed. In this activity, you are presented with a series of indirect statements and asked to decode them—to explain in direct language what the speaker probably means. Looking at the first statement, “That is a very interesting viewpoint,” remember that the person may mean exactly that, but *sometimes* it’s an indirect way of saying “I disagree with you.” In communicating across cultures, you need to *at least entertain the possibility* that the speaker may mean something other than what he or she has said. The first statement has been rephrased for you.

1. That is a very interesting viewpoint.	<i>I don't agree.</i> <i>We need to talk more about this.</i> <i>You're wrong.</i>
2. This proposal deserves further consideration.	
3. I know very little about this, but....	
4. We understand your proposal very well.	
5. We will try our best.	
6. I heard another story about that project.	
7. Can we move on to the next topic?	

—INSIGHT—

The actual meaning of the words may be a poor guide to what an indirect communicator is saying.

In the underlined blank space before each of the behaviors or characteristics listed below, put “M” if you think it is *more likely* to apply to a culture where time is monochronic and “P” if it is polychronic.

CHARACTERISTICS & BEHAVIORS

1. _____ Time is money.
2. _____ To be late is rude.
3. _____ Schedules are sacred.
4. _____ The focus is on the task, getting the job done.
5. _____ Being made to wait is normal.
6. _____ Interruptions are life.
7. _____ Plans are fixed, once agreed upon.
8. _____ This attitude is consistent with an individualist viewpoint.
9. _____ The focus is on the person, establishing a relationship
10. _____ This attitude is consistent with a collectivist viewpoint.
11. _____ Deadlines are an approximation.
12. _____ To be late is to be late.
13. _____ Focus on the internal clock.
14. _____ Plans are always changing.
15. _____ Having to wait is an insult.
16. _____ People are never too busy.
17. _____ Interruptions are bad.
18. _____ People stand in line.

—INSIGHT—

Time is a cultural phenomenon.



In the underlined space before each of the statements below, put an “H” if you think it reflects an attitude of high power distance, or an “L” if low power distance is more likely:

CHARACTERISTICS & BEHAVIORS

1. _____ People are less likely to question the boss.
2. _____ Elitism is the norm.
3. _____ Students question teachers.
4. _____ Freedom of thought is encouraged.
5. _____ Those in power have special privileges.
6. _____ The chain of command is mainly for convenience.
7. _____ There are greater wage differences between managers and subordinates.
8. _____ Workers prefer precise instructions from superiors.
9. _____ Interaction between boss and subordinate is more informal.
10. _____ Subordinates and bosses are interdependent.
11. _____ Bosses are independent; subordinates are dependent.
12. _____ Freedom of thought could get you into trouble.
13. _____ It’s okay to question the boss.
14. _____ Less social mobility is the norm.
15. _____ The chain of command is sacred.
16. _____ The pecking order is clearly established.
17. _____ Management style is authoritarian and paternalistic.
18. _____ Management style is consultative and democratic.
19. _____ Interaction between boss and subordinate is formal.

—INSIGHT—

Power must be exercised more openly in some cultures than in others.

As you read the statements that follow, put an “H” in the underlined space preceding those you think relate to high uncertainty avoidance and an “L” where you think low uncertainty avoidance applies.

CHARACTERISTICS & BEHAVIORS

1. _____ Punctuality is highly valued.
2. _____ People should keep emotions under control.
3. _____ Different is dangerous.
4. _____ People change jobs with more frequency.
5. _____ People expect more formality in interactions.
6. _____ People more readily accept dissent.
7. _____ Take things one day at a time.
8. _____ People should let their emotions out.
9. _____ The chain of command should never be bypassed.
10. _____ Conflict in organizations is natural, nothing to be afraid of.
11. _____ People believe less in common sense.
12. _____ Conflict in organizations should be eliminated.
13. _____ Differences are curious.
14. _____ People change jobs infrequently.
15. _____ A general sense of anxiety prevails.
16. _____ A general sense of well-being prevails.
17. _____ People accept authority more readily; authority is comforting.
18. _____ People accept authority less readily; authority is limiting.
19. _____ Rules should not be broken.
20. _____ Rules can be broken if it makes sense, for pragmatic reasons.
21. _____ Risks should be avoided.
22. _____ Risks are opportunities.



—INSIGHT—

Attitudes toward the unknown shape many human behaviors.

IV.2—THE LOCUS OF CONTROL— INTERNAL & EXTERNAL

Cultures differ greatly in their view of a person's place in the external world, especially the degree to which human beings can control or manipulate forces outside themselves and thereby shape their own destiny. The two sides of this dimension, internal and external control,* are described below:

Internal —

The locus of control is largely internal, within the individual. There are very few givens in life, few circumstances that have to be accepted as they are, that cannot be changed. There are no limits on what I can do or become, so long as I set my mind to it and make the necessary effort. Life is what I *do*.

External —

The locus of control is largely external to the individual. Some aspects of life are predetermined, built into the nature of things. There are limits beyond which we cannot go and certain givens that cannot be changed and must be accepted. Life is in large part what *happens to me*.

In the following sets of statements, check the statement that does not belong, either because it is characteristic of internal control and all the rest are external control, or vice versa.

1. Stoicism is the rule.
 2. The laws of the universe can be discovered.
 3. Progress is inevitable.
 4. Every problem has a solution.
-
1. Optimism is the rule.
 2. Some things are a matter of luck or chance.
 3. Where there's a will there's a way.
 4. People believe strongly in technology.

*Based on concepts developed by F. Kluckhohn and F.S. Strodtbeck, *Variations in value orientations*, NY, Harper & Row, 1961.

1. Unhappiness is your own fault.
2. Progress is not automatic.
3. The workings of the universe are ultimately unknowable.
4. Nature cannot be dominated.

1. You make your own luck.
2. Some problems do not have solutions.
3. Where there's a will there's a will.
4. Unhappiness is a natural part of life.

—INSIGHT—

Culture influences how much control people believe they have over their lives.

V. FURTHER ADJUSTMENT*

- Time period:** Post settling-in.
- Characteristics:** You're getting used to being on your own.
 You're better able to take care of yourself.
 You're making friends in the community.
 You speak the language better.
 You're more effective at work because you understand the culture better.

In the underlined space that precedes each of the statements below, put the Roman numeral for the stage of adjustment you think the person was in who made the remark.

- I. Honeymoon
- II. Initial Culture Shock
- III. Initial Adjustment
- IV. Further Culture Shock
- V. Further Adjustment

1. _____ I'm sick of these bugs.
2. _____ I thought I knew this stuff!
3. _____ You call that a toilet?
4. _____ I'd give anything for a meal without rice.
5. _____ These people are all so nice.
6. _____ Homesick? For what?
7. _____ I'm getting used to these toilets, believe it or not.
8. _____ I'm looking forward to actually doing my job.
9. _____ This language actually makes sense once in a while.



—INSIGHT—

Adjusting to a new country and culture happens over time.

10. _____ I don't believe it! They said I shouldn't jog here.
11. _____ Bugs? What bugs?
12. _____ You know, I actually *prefer* Turkish toilets.
13. _____ I'll never learn this language.
14. _____ Are you kidding? I can't eat curry (or beans) without rice.
15. _____ No one said my job would be like *this!*
16. _____ I never thought my problem would be *too much* free time.
17. _____ I actually prefer soccer to jogging; you meet more people.
18. _____ What a great place!



—INSIGHT—

My understanding
of the local culture
and ability to
function effectively
will evolve over
time.

In the underlined spaces below, write the Roman numeral(s) for the level(s) of cultural awareness you think the person making the observation is in. Some observations may go in more than one stage.

1. _____ I understand less than I thought I did.
2. _____ These people really aren't so different.
3. _____ There is a logic to how these people behave.
4. _____ Living here is like walking on eggshells.
5. _____ These people have no trouble understanding me.
6. _____ It's possible to figure these people out if you work at it.
7. _____ I wonder what they think of me.
8. _____ I know what they think of me.
9. _____ It's nice to be able to relax and be myself.
10. _____ I'll never figure these people out.
11. _____ Why did people say this would be so difficult?
12. _____ There's hope for me here.

PART TWO

Reread Jan's "Dear Friends" letter at the beginning of this chapter on pages 184-189. At various points in this letter, Jan describes certain behaviors or attitudes that clearly place her in one or the other of all six stages outlined on pages 201 and 202. In the exercise below, you are asked to match each stage with a paragraph from her letter:

- I. DenialParagraph # _____
- II. DefenseParagraph # _____
- III. MinimizationParagraph # _____
- IV. AcceptanceParagraph # _____
- V. & VI. Adaptation & IntegrationParagraph # _____