3.1D: Culture Shock

Culture shock is the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life in a new country.

Learning Objectives

- Discuss culture shock in terms of its four phases – honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment and mastery

Key Points

- Culture shock is the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to immigration or a visit to a new country.
- Culture shock can be described as consisting of at least one of four distinct phases: honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, and mastery.
- During the honeymoon phase, the differences between the old and new culture are seen in a romantic light.
- After some time (usually around three months, depending on the individual), differences between the old and new culture become apparent and may create anxiety. This is the mark of the negotiation phase.
- In the adjustment phase, one grows accustomed to the new culture and develops routines.
- Lastly, in the mastery stage, assignees are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture.
- One knows what to expect in most situations and the host country no longer feels all that new.
- Lastly, in the Mastery stage, assignees are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture.
Key Terms

- **biculturalism**: The state or quality of being bicultural.

Culture shock is the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to immigration or a visit to a new country, or to a move between social environments. One of the most common causes of culture shock involves individuals in a foreign country. There is no true way to entirely prevent culture shock, as individuals in any society are personally affected by cultural contrasts differently.

Culture shock can be described as consisting of at least one of four distinct phases: honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment, and mastery. During the honeymoon phase, the differences between the old and new culture are seen in a romantic light. During the first few weeks, most people are fascinated by the new culture. They associate with nationals who speak their language, and who are polite to the foreigners. This period is full of observations and new discoveries. Like most honeymoon periods, this stage eventually ends.

After some time (usually around three months, depending on the individual), differences between the old and new culture become apparent and may create anxiety. This is the mark of the negotiation phase. Excitement may eventually give way to unpleasant feelings of frustration and anger as one continues to experience unfavorable events that may be perceived as strange and offensive to one’s cultural attitude. Still, the most important change in the period is communication. People adjusting to a new culture often feel lonely and homesick because they are not yet used to the new environment and meet people with whom they are not familiar every day.

Again, after some time, one grows accustomed to the new culture and develops routines, marking the adjustment phase. One knows what to expect in most situations and the host country no longer feels all that new. One becomes concerned with basic living again and things become more normal. One starts to develop problem-solving skills for
dealing with the culture and begins to accept the culture’s ways with a positive attitude. The culture begins to make sense and negative reactions and responses to the culture are reduced.

In the mastery stage, assignees are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture. Mastery does not mean total conversion. People often keep many traits from their earlier culture, such as accents and languages. It is often referred to as the biculturalism stage.