Business Relationships Across Cultures
By Scott McLean

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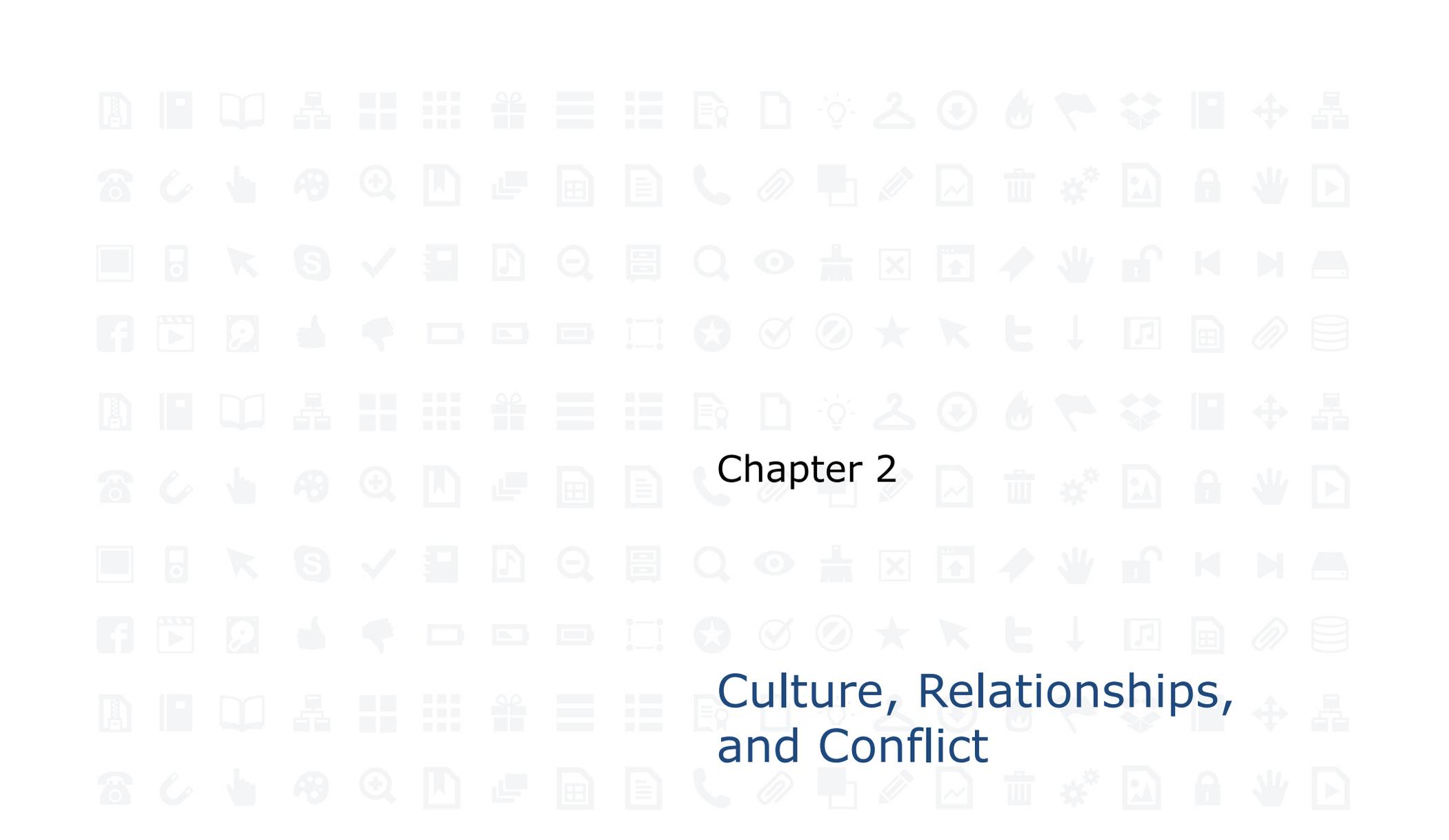
Chapter 2

Culture, Relationships, and Conflict

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Learning Objectives

- Discuss intrapersonal communication.
- Define and discuss self-concept.
- Discuss cultural identities.
- Understand the role of interpersonal needs in the Business Relationships Across Cultures process.
- Discuss social penetration theory and self-disclosure and its principles.
- Describe interpersonal relations.
- Understand the five steps in any conversation.
- Discuss cultural differences across conversations.
- Understand evaluations and criticism, and discuss several strategies for resolving intercultural conflict.

Intrapersonal Communication

- **Intrapersonal communication** can be defined as communication with one's self, and that may include self-talk, acts of imagination and visualization, and even recall and memory.

- From planning to problem solving, internal conflict resolution, and evaluations and judgments of self and others, we communicate with ourselves through intrapersonal communication, influenced by experiences with cultures and groups since we formed our first thought.

- Your internal monologue represents your cultural backgrounds, which may be diverse and divergent, with competing values and expectations.

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Self-Concept and Social Comparisons

- Our self-concept is what we perceive ourselves to be, and it involves aspects of image and esteem.
- We engage in **social comparisons**, evaluating ourselves in relation to our peers of similar status, similar characteristics, or similar qualities.
- **Self-reflection** is a trait that allows us to adapts and change to our context or environment, to accept or reject messages, to examine our concept of ourselves, and to choose to improve.
- **Internal monologue** refers to the self-talk of intrapersonal communication.
- Both internal and external interaction is always dynamic and changing.

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Dimensions of Self

- Quadrant 1 is known to you and others.
- Quadrant 2 represents things others observe about us that we are unaware of.
- Quadrant 3 involves information that is unknown to you and your conversational partners.
- Quadrant 4 involves information that you know but do not reveal to others.

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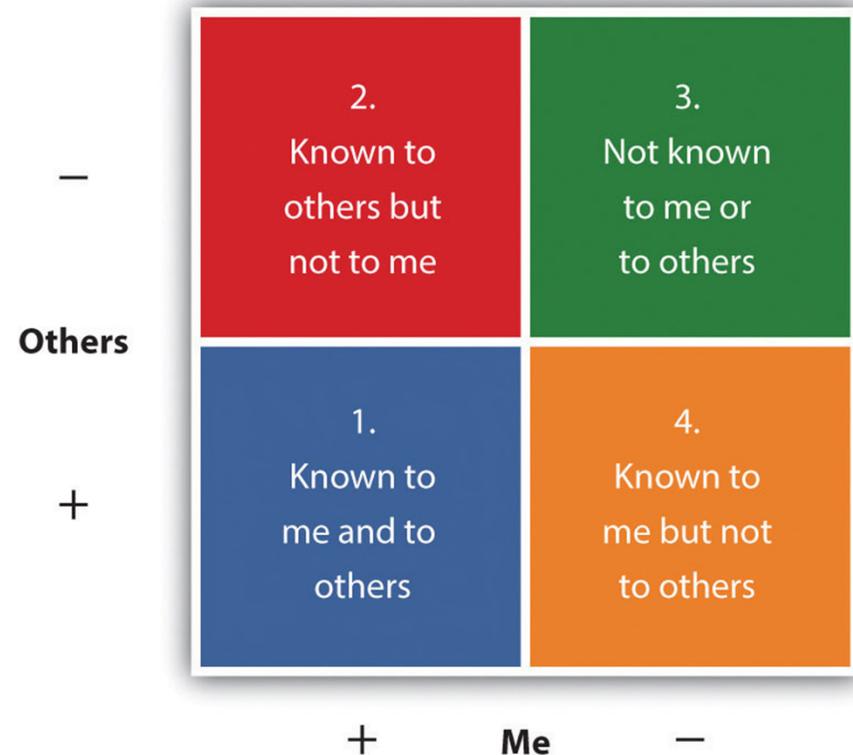
Cultural Identities

- **Gender identity** is the cultural expectations associated with a sex, and it may be in conflict with your views of your biological sex or your sexual preference.
- The **perfect self identity** refers to the ideal person, and the associated characteristics, within a specific culture.
- **Class identity** refers to the association of a person with a particular social class and the cultural expectations that come with it.
- **Age identity** refers to the cultural expectations for people on how they should act, what they should look like, or other defining characteristics based on their chronological or perceived age.
- **Racial and ethnic identity** refers to the cultural association of racial or ethnic characteristics with identity.

Cultural Identities, continued

- **Physical ability identity** involves cultural associations with our bodies and may overlap with other types of identities.
- **Psychological identity** involves cultural associations with our minds, our actions, and our behaviors.
- **Sexual identity** refers to the cultural norms associated with sex across the range of sexuality, including heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality.
- **Spiritual identity** involves cultural norms for spirituality and religion, including religious practices.
- **National identity** refers to the cultural expectations associated with citizenship in a specific country.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

We need the resources listed in level one to survive. If we meet those basic needs, we move on to level two: safety. Love and belonging are sought out in level three. At level four, there is improved self-esteem. Level five represents **self-actualization**, which is recognition, from ourselves and others, that we can make a difference. At level six, we work to fulfill our basic need to know. We can take in beauty for its own sake and value **aesthetics** at level seven.

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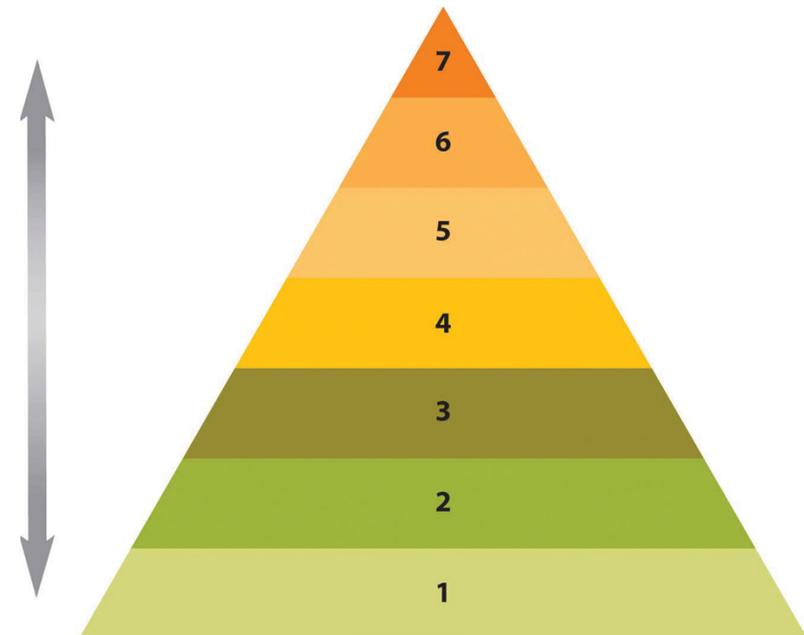
Interpersonal Needs

- According to William Schutz, the need for **affection**, or appreciation of us as individuals within a community, is basic to all humans across all cultures.
    - **Underpersonals** are people who seek limited interaction. **Overpersonals** are people who have a strong need to be liked and constantly seek attention from others. A **personal individual** strikes a health balance between attention-seeking and avoidance behaviors.
- Humans also have a need for **control**, or the ability to influence people and events.
    - **Autocrats** are self-directed in terms of control.
    - **Abdicrats** shift the burden of responsibility from themselves to others, looking to others for a sense of control.
    - **Democrats** share the need between the individual and the group and may try to hold a departmental meeting to gather information and share.

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Interpersonal Needs, continued

- Belonging is a basic interpersonal need.
  - **Undersocials** may be less likely to seek interaction, may prefer smaller groups, and will generally not be found on center stage.
  - **Oversocials**, however, crave the spotlight of attention and are highly motivated to seek belonging.
  - A **social person** is one who strikes a healthy balance between being withdrawn and being the constant center of attention, though cultural expectations play a significant role.

The Onion Theory

- According to social penetration theory, which is often called the "Onion Theory," we fear that which we do not know. That includes people. Strangers go from being unknown to known through a series of steps that we can observe through conversational interactions.

Breadth

Peeling the Onion

Depth

Levels

| Superficial |
| Intimate |
| Personal |
| Core |
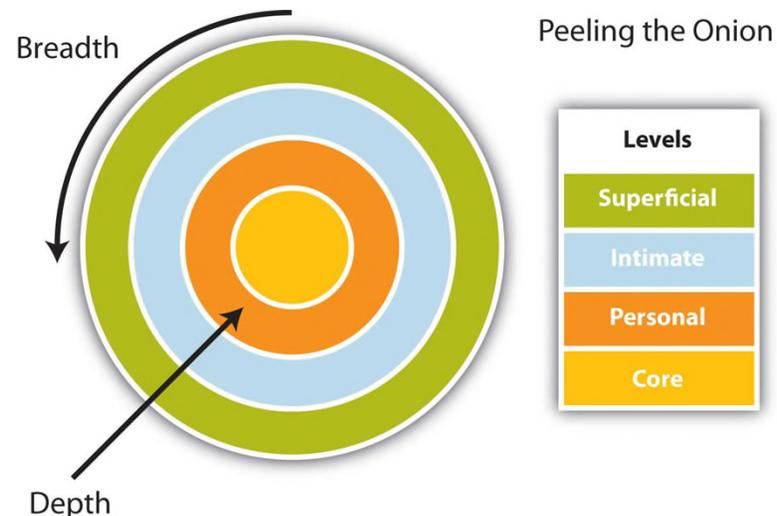
Source: Adapted from Altman and Taylor's social penetration model. Altman, I., & Taylor, D. (1973). Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

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Self-Disclosure

- **Self-disclosure** is information, thoughts, or feelings we tell others above ourselves that they would not otherwise know.
- Self-disclosure usually moves in small steps. Personal information is normally reserved for those of confidence and earned over time.
- Self-disclosure moves from impersonal to intimate information.
- Self-disclosure is reciprocal. The **dyadic effect** is the expectation that when we reveal something about ourselves, others will reciprocate.
- Self-disclosure involves risk, but it can produce positive results.
- Self-disclosure involves trust.

Conversation Across Cultures

- Conversation is an example of a cultural ritual. It is one of the main ways we interact across cultures and it is ripe for misunderstandings.

- The first stage of conversation is called **conversational initiation**, and it requires you to be open to interaction.

- Small talk is also known as **phatic communion**.

- The **conversational preview** is an indication, verbal or nonverbal, of what the conversation is about, both in terms of content and in terms of the relationship.

- You may signal the main points you want to address to your conversation partner. **Conversational talking points** represent the essential meanings shared in the interaction.

Conflict Management Strategies

- Avoidance is choosing to change the subject, leave the room, or not enter the room in the first place. The conflict will remain and resurface when you least expect it.

- **Defensive communication** is characterized by control, evaluation, and judgments, while **supportive communication** focuses on the points and not personalities.

- **Face-detracting strategies** involve messages or statements that take away from the respect, integrity, or credibility of a person. **Face-saving strategies** are actions that protect credibility and separate message from messenger.

- **Empathetic listening** involves listening to both the literal and implied meanings within a message.

Conflict Management Strategies, continued

- **Gunnysacking (or backpacking)** is like carrying an imaginary bag into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. Holding onto the way things used to be can be like a stone in your gunnysack, influencing how you interpret your current context.

- Your awareness of your emotions can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge.

Reacting to Evaluations and Criticism

- Start by listening without interruption. Interruptions can be internal and external, and they warrant further discussion.
- Determine the speaker's intent. You may need to ask a clarifying question if it doesn't count as an interruption.
- Indicate you are listening by taking notes, nodding your head, or leaning forward to display interest and listening.
- Restate the main points to paraphrase what has been discussed.
- If an apology is well deserved, offer it. Communicate clearly what will change or indicate when you will respond with specific strategies to address the concern.
- If you disagree, focus on the points or issues and not personalities. Do not respond in anger or frustration. Always display professionalism.