Models of Culture Shock in Intercultural Communication and Corresponding Countermeasures

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Abstract

When a person leaves the familiar culture, culture shock will appear, which is a necessary stage for foreigners to integrate into the foreign culture circle. Culture shock has a great impact on people both physically and psychologically. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, culture shock has become a huge obstacle. Over the years, by analyzing data collected from a large number of surveys and studies, many models of culture shock is created, revealing the causes of culture shock, its development pattern, and as a result, providing inspiration for finding ways to reduce the negative effects of culture shock.

Keywords

Culture shock; Models; Adaptation; Intercultural communication.

1. Definitions of Key Terms

1.1. Host Culture, Home Culture

Host culture refers to the culture of the country where you are living or temporarily living or the culture in another country that you wish to acquire. For example, if Chinese students want to learn French or American culture, it is called host culture.

Home culture refers to the original mainstream culture in one's birthplace. For example, if Chinese students want to learn British and American culture, Chinese culture is called home culture.

1.2. Culture Shock

Cultural shock is a concept first proposed by American anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1958. It is introduced to describe the uncertainty, confusion or anxiety that produced when a person is on vacation, do business, go to school, or move to another city or country, when he is confronted with a new cultural environment. It is unlikely to be experienced suddenly, from a single event. More likely people still feel it gradually, from day-in, day-out experience of navigating a different symbolic environment. Differences accumulate bit by bit.

Culture shocks are multifaceted, ranging from climate, diet, language, dress to behaviour, population density, political and economic circumstances. And the reaction to culture shock varies from one to another. Generally, it can be divided into two parts. One is physical symptoms like insomnia and headaches. Another is psychological symptoms, including depression, helplessness, anxiety, etc.

Most of the negative effects brought by culture shock will be resolved within a few months, but if the reaction is serious, it is also necessary to seek professional help as soon as possible.

1.3. The Reverse Culture Shock (Reentry Shock)

The reverse culture shock refers to the maladaptation to the environment in the early stage of returning to motherland. The collision and impact of the foreign culture and the mother culture before their return make the returnees need some time to adapt to the native culture when

facing the mother environment at the beginning of the return. The vast majority of returnees who experience the baptism of foreign cultures will encounter a certain degree of re-adaptation pressure. Some people's conditions are serious and even need timely treatment.

2. Models of Culture Shock

2.1. U-Curve Pattern

Curve Pattern was first concluded by Lysgaard (1955). He pointed out that the process of intercultural adaptation moves through three phases: initial adjustment, crisis and regained adjustment and can be described by a U-curve pattern. But now we generally detailed the process into four phases: Honeymoon Period, Crisis Period (Negotiation Phase), Adjustment Period, Biculturalism Period (Mastery Period).

Based on the overall U-shape curve, we can further subdivide or extend the process. The following is the analysis of the classic four-stage model and some other widely used models.
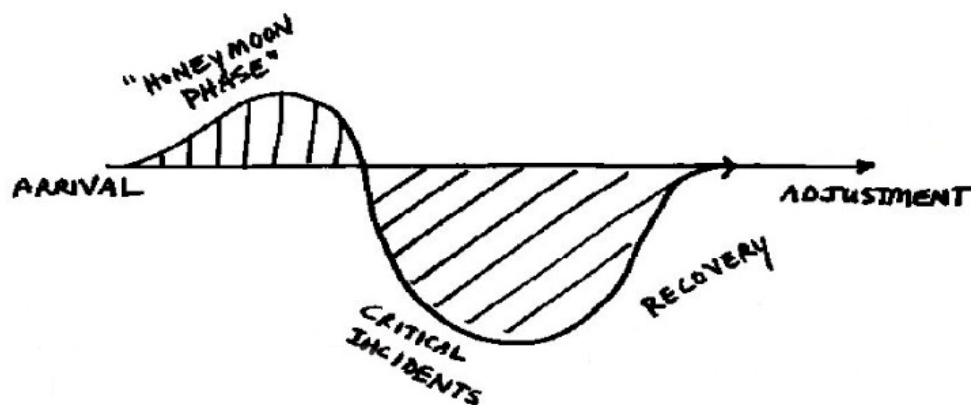
2.1.1. Four-Stage Model

Figure 1. Four-stage model

Honeymoon Period: It is the initial period of culture shock. This stage is characterized by fascination with the new culture and by the excitement about all the new things we encounter in the host culture.

Crisis Period (Negotiation Phase):In this period, sojourners have to directly face the challenge of the new culture on a day-to-day basis. This stage is characterize by frequent confusion and disintegration as we confronted differences in values, beliefs, behaviors, and lifestyles.

Adjustment Period: In this period, sojourners begin to learn to how to respond and adapt appropriately to the new environment by following the social and cultural norms of the host nation. And thanks for the efforts to cope with the problems in the crisis period, they can do all this more confidently and effectively.

Biculturalism Period (Mastery Period): After a period of adjustment, people gradually feel accustomed to the living environment, increasingly adapt to the second culture, basically can take a more objective attitude, and even accept part of the second culture. They are able to communicate freely in another cultural environment and interact with people in other cultural backgrounds so that living in another environment has become their second nature.

2.1.2. Five-Stage Model
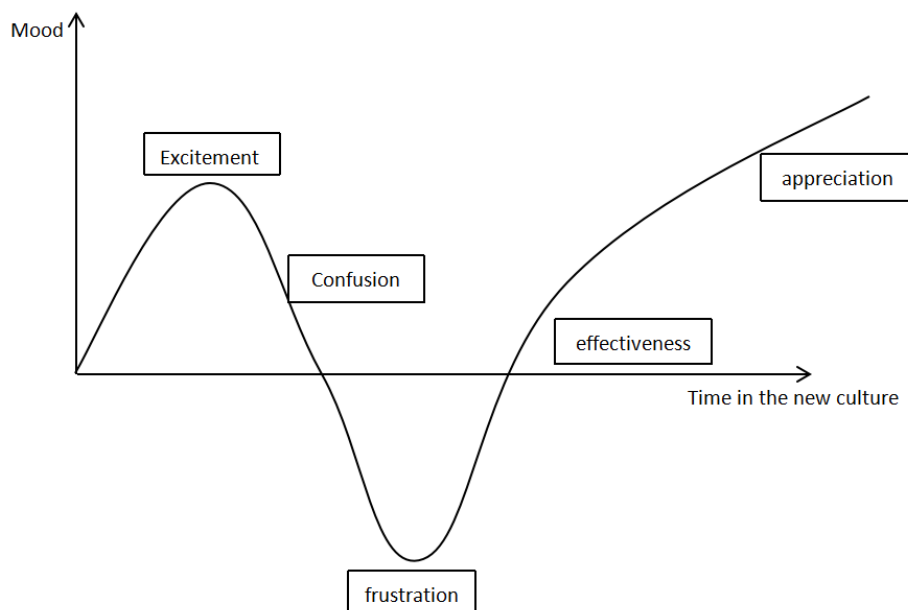
Figure 2. five-stage model

Excitement: People of this stage are full of curiosity, fascination and excitement. They view the new environment from our own cultural perspective and neglecting differences and reinforcing similarities.

Confusion: People of this stage often misinterpret the behavior and speech of the local people because they interpret meaning according to the home culture grammar. So they will feel confused every time they communicate with the local people.

Frustration: during this period, more negative attitude about the new culture is presented. People will blame the new culture and the local people for their own difficulties.

Effectiveness: During this stage, gaining intercultural skills, the sojourner will have more positive feeling about the new culture and be willing to accept the new culture actively and confidently.

Appreciation: People of this stage develop a more personal understanding of the new culture and values it.

2.1.3. Comparison and Conclusion

Compared with the first model, the second is more focused on people's feeling during the process and selects five of the most typical emotions as the five nodes of the model. The overall trend of these two models is consistent, which confirms that the underlying impact trends of culture shock are generally the same -- universal pattern of human acceptance of new things. In fact, many stages of the second model can also correspond to the first one. For example, honeymoon period to excitement; crisis period to frustrated; adjustment period to effectiveness; mastery period to appreciation. "Confusion" is unique to the second model. When the novelty starts to dissipate, all kinds of differences in reality will be presented, making sojourners confused. And when the confusion accumulates to a certain degree, it will make us at a loss because of incompatibility and then self-doubt, finally frustration. In this way, the second model is more specific. But the first model is the most streamlined and typical.

2.2. W-Curve Pattern
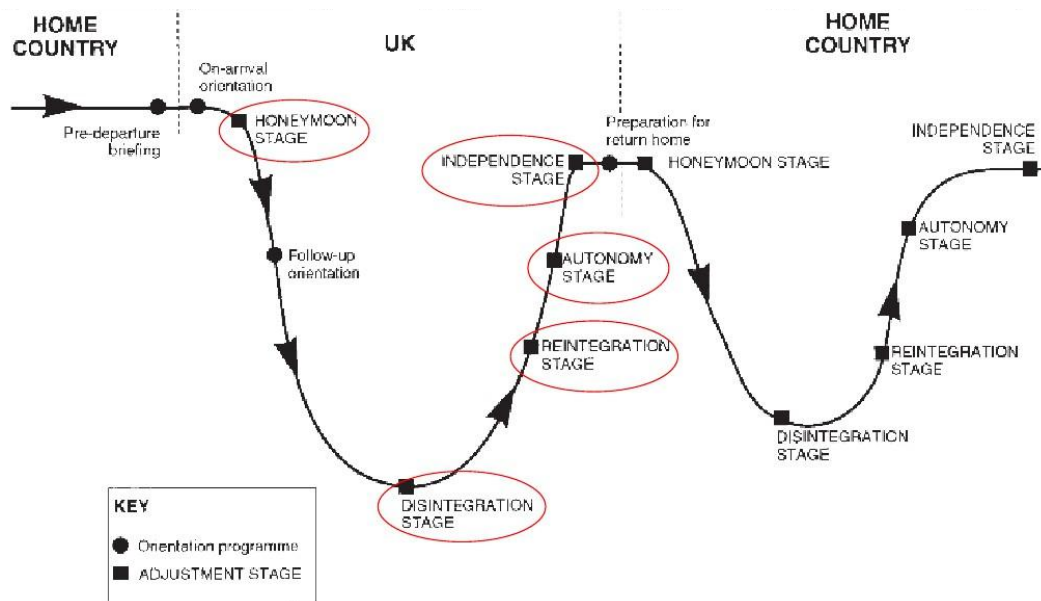
Figure 3. W-Curve Pattern

We can think of the W-Curve model as a combination of two U-Curve models, and indeed it is. This model is based on Reentry Shock. It suggests that when we return home, entering the home culture, we must proceed through the four stages of the U-curve pattern once again. But we can also find that the two "U" are not exactly identical.

First, the lowest point of the first "U" is much lower than the second "U" 's. This means that the degree of crisis or frustration felt during the first culture shock is greater than that of the second. This shows that the same cultural shock presents a different impact when people entering a brand new country than when returning to the original one. In the home culture, with the foundation of the previous life, when facing the transition to a different environment, the original memories and habits will be evoked, greatly relieving the discomfort caused by the culture shock, and people's adaptation will accordingly be faster.

Second, in terms of the highest point of the curve, we can find that the highest point of the second and third arrival mastery period stages are lower than the first, which is before the first departure. It shows that when we are in the Biculturalism Period, although we have fully developed autonomy that provides us with the freedom and capacity for dual cultural identity, we are less adaptable and fresh to either of the two cultural, compared with that when we originally lived in only one. Facts are that when having already been exposed to two cultural environments, people will inevitably and continuously mix one with the other. That is to say, after experiencing a culture shock, people's highest adaptive capacity for both the original culture and the new culture will be lower than those who have lived in only one culture.

Third, we can also draw the conclusion that in view of the time of going through the process from Crisis Period to Mastery Period, the second is much shorter than the first one. The reason for this is that they are more familiar with the home culture and therefore have a better basis for adaptation.

3. Countermeasures for Culture Shock

Be positive and inclusive. A positive and optimistic attitude can help us adapt to the new environment faster. And try your best to accept new information and culture, no matter what field it comes from. Treat it with an inclusive mindset.

Seeking common ground among different cultures. There is no doubt that it is our common ground but not our differences that leads to successful communication. There are always things abroad that are better or more interesting than those at home. Therefore, paying more attention to the positive aspects of a different culture will make you fall in love with and adapt to this culture.

Ask for professional help. Seek necessary assistance if the situation is too terrible for yourself to manage.

4. Conclusion

The globalization of economy, the contraction of time and space, and the emergence of global village make the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds more frequent. Culture shock is something that can happen extremely easily during this process. It is quite folly to completely submit to different cultures. We have to admit that it must be a painful process for every sojourner to experience the four stages of culture shock, but many studies and models can help us locate where we are. Then the things we need to do is bravely face, actively adapt and critically accept.

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