

Cultural Rehydration: A Layman's Guide to Dealing with Culture Shock

By:

Gerald W. Anthony, PhD

Edited by:

Lee Seetoo

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Life does not always go as expected. One day friends were coming to a dinner I had planned and I realized after the first guest arrived that I needed more money for the occasion. I asked my friend to wait at my apartment for the other guests while I went to the bank to make a withdrawal.

In the country where I was living at the time, families commonly use bicycles for transportation rather than cars. I hopped on (not in) my vehicle and rushed off to the bank. I turned on the “heat” (that is, I started to pedal faster) and after a few blocks, I arrived. I descended from my bicycle, grabbed my lock, and fastened it around my back tire.

I ran into the bank as fast as I could so as not to keep my guests waiting too long and quickly handled my banking matters. When I came out, I reached for the key to unlock my bike. In my left trouser pocket there was only loose change. The right pocket was empty. Finally, I examined my back pockets only to realize that I did not have my key. It had not fallen out of my pocket, but was back in my apartment.

I weighed my options. Should I call my friend for the key and listen to mockery for a few hours or try to get the locked bike home somehow? Sad to say, I chose to move the bike. Unfortunately, I have my pride. Because the rear wheel was locked, I raised the back of the bike, tipped it forward and pushed. It was like being in a three-legged race with no competition.

As I walked down the street everyone stared at me and whispered, “Look at that foreigner! What is he doing?” It was as if they were in the US or Western Europe watching someone try to hotwire a car on the street. Yes, it must have seemed that I was

stealing a bike! I just ignored the comments and continued walking faster trying to make it home. I arrived at the door sweating and out of breath. My shirt was three shades darker from my perspiration and my hand was beet red from gripping my handlebars. After listening to my adventure, my friend laughed and said, “Why didn’t you just call me?” I knew why. There was one reason and one reason only: all because of my male pride. (Anthony, 2007).

Expatriates are people who voluntarily live outside their native countries. I have been an expatriate since 2002 and have experienced quite a number of cases where therapeutic processing would be helpful, not only to me, but to fellow expats around the world. This book examines struggles in preparation, living, and returning to different countries and strategies to effectively increase coping mechanisms and survival¹ through the use of real-life stories (labeled Hydration Checkpoints), personal psychological application exercises using an accompanying workbook, and a very practical metaphor – Cultural Hydration.

Why the Metaphor?

Our bodies need water to survive. The majority of the human body is water (an average of 60%) so it is vital that we replenish this resource frequently in order to maintain our ability to function. **Dehydration** is a medical condition in which the body lacks an adequate supply of water to function properly. Our bodies lose water as we breathe, sweat, urinate, or suffer from vomiting or diarrhea. When the amount of water

¹ In case of emergencies, this book does not substitute for professional counselors. Please contact a professional counselor if you are dealing with an emergency.

we lose is greater than the amount we take in, we become dehydrated. This is usually a process that happens over time and not a sudden event because, in the short-term, if our body lacks water, we have natural defense mechanisms to compensate. We get thirsty, signaling the need to drink. Our kidneys reduce the water in our urine; it becomes more concentrated and darker in color when we are dehydrated. Other symptoms of dehydration include dry mouth, headaches, increased heart rate, inability to sweat or produce tears, muscle cramps, vomiting, lightheadedness, and confusion. Dehydration can be treated by gradually increasing the amount of liquid in our body by repeatedly drinking small amounts or through IV drips; however, the greatest cure for dehydration is prevention. Without proper hydration, the body will break down and slowly cease to function (Medicine.net, 2009).

Cultural paralysis is a condition experienced by expatriates that causes them to feel unable to function in a foreign environment. Like dehydration, it is usually a process that has developed over time, and can cause changes in the mind and body. The body can compensate for the discomfort of the environment for short-periods of time, but if not properly handled, the body and mind tend to break down. Once paralysis takes place, recovery takes place through frequent small doses of therapeutic exercises. Because of its similarities to dehydration, cultural paralysis can be considered **cultural dehydration**, and the cure is cultural rehydration.

To determine how much of our body composition is water, there are various formulas that take into account age, height, and weight. Similarly, there are key variables we can use to calculate how culturally hydrated or dehydrated we are. Expatriates

planning to live in or visit a new culture must understand the reality of both obvious and subtle factors that will allow them to thrive in an overseas environment.

The first step to overcoming dehydration is to understand the normal process of hydration. If we do not understand that our bodies need water, how can we solve the problem of dehydration? The same is true for cultural dehydration. If we do not first understand the natural processes that our minds and bodies go through when we enter foreign cultures, then it will be hard to remedy cultural dehydration and allow cultural rehydration.

In the next chapter, we will discuss the Cultural Adaptation Process that expatriates experience in a new cultural environment. The stresses of that process can and often do lead to cultural dehydration. In the three chapters after that, we will learn techniques that will serve as hydrators in cases of cultural dehydration.

Are you ready to get culturally hydrated?

Chapter 2: The Cultural Adaptation Process

The Cultural Adaptation Process (or Hydration Cycle) is a four-stage process that occurs within individuals as they adjust to a new culture and experiences in that new culture. The four stages are: (1) The Evaluation Stage, (2) The Interpretation Stage, (3) The Application Stage, and (4) The Readjustment Stage.

Hydration Checkpoint

I once had the pleasure of being the local contact for a group of new expatriates arriving in the country where I resided half a world away from their home. These individuals had been contacting me for weeks with various questions on just about everything imaginable. Their arrival day came and I picked them up at the airport and took them to their respective homes after a good meal. During dinner that evening there were various emotions at the table. Some people were excited, others were anxious, and others were absolutely terrified. It was all normal.

One week later I decided to make a surprise visit to each new expat to make them feel welcome with a small house warming present of fruit. As I went to each person's home, they were thrilled to see me. I would chat a while, see how they were adjusting, and then move on to the next residence. When I arrived at the last one, I knocked on the door and waited for a response. There was none. I knocked again thinking maybe nobody was home. After the second knock, I heard a faint voice. It seemed as if I had disrupted an afternoon nap. The door opened and my mouth dropped. Was this the same person I had picked up from the airport? I handed the basket of fresh apples, oranges, bananas, and local exotic fruit to the new expatriate. Without even inviting me in, the

person snatched the bag of fruit from my hands and began to devour each piece of fruit one by one, chunk by chunk. I stepped inside and sat down on a short wooden stool. When the expatriate was finished, I asked in a voice mixing sarcasm and disbelief, “So, how was the first week?” After a deep breath and a wipe of the mouth with a shirt sleeve, the expat said, “Thanks for coming by. I haven’t eaten in a week!”

The Evaluation Stage

The first stage of the Cultural Hydration Cycle is the Evaluation Stage. When an individual arrives in a new culture, or discovers a new facet of the culture, the first action that takes place is an assessment or evaluation of resources and environment. Resources can be divided into three main categories: (1) Personal Resources, (2) Social Resources, and (3) Material Resources² (Schultz and Schwarzer, 2001, p. 4).

Personal Resources include characteristics and experiences of the individual, such as personality, mental processes, and working experience. Social Resources include all formal and informal relationships. Working and professional relationships are formal relationships; family, friends, and all other relationships not defined as formal are informal. Finally, Material Resources are all tangible resources that can be consumed by the individual, such as food, shelter, and money. These three types of resources will be evaluated immediately upon entering a new culture or a new cultural situation.

In addition to evaluating resources, the individual also evaluates the environment, which can be divided into two aspects: (1) Flexible and (2) Relatively Inflexible. Flexible refers to aspects of the environment that can be changed in the short term by an

² See Exercise 2 in The Cultural Rehydration Workbook.

individual or group acting in the environment, like the economy, fashion, and slang. Relatively Inflexible refers to aspects of the environment that change only very slowly over long periods of time, like the fundamental culture or national language, and would include population and climate. Since you can't expect to exert much influence over Relatively Inflexible aspects of the environment, you are better off trying to accept and adapt to them. Figure 2.1 graphs the Evaluation Stage of the Cultural Adjustment Cycle (Anthony, 2009).

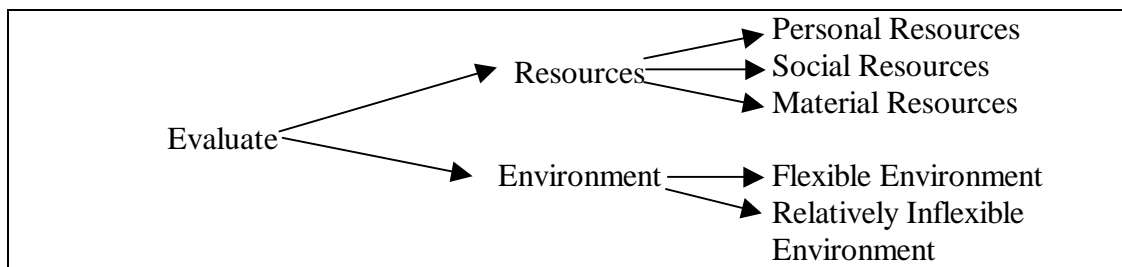


Figure 2.1 The Evaluation Stage

The individual evaluates resources and the environment primarily through observation and secondary informational resources (information shared personally by others or found in written form). After evaluation, the individual continues to the next stage, the Interpretation Stage.

Hydration Checkpoint

Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus. Americans are from America and Patagonians are from Patagonia. These two sentences contrast different people and places, but with the same meaning. I experienced this one night when I was out dancing with some coworkers.

We entered a room about one hundred square meters in area. This was the local club. To us foreigners it looked more like a vacant office. In the front of the room was a

bar. In the left and right corners dangled black concert-sized speakers. The rest of the room was open space with coffee-colored wooden tiled floors for dancing. There was no disc jockey, simply a “greatest hits” cassette playing on repeat.

At first the dance floor was empty. The thirty or so people present were quietly chatting while sipping their drinks. Then the first song came on – a group dance that included instructions on how to do the dance. The atmosphere was immediately energized. Everyone ran out on the dance floor and lined up. The nationals grabbed us foreigners with screams of, “I love this song!” Confused and at the same time eager to try new things, we also ran out on the dance floor. The volume of the song softened, and then the singer in the local language gave the instructions. We foreigners could not understand a single word, but the broadening smiles were a language we could understand. The people lined up in a circle and began to scream louder with enthusiasm.

We joined the circle as the beat began to grow louder. The drums began to pulse and the singer was no longer talking, but singing. As we began to watch the movements of the nationals, we began to recognize the melody and the movements. Screams of joy surrounded us. It was the hokey-pokey! Putting our egos aside we began to dance.

A national beside me asked, “Am I right?” I replied, “Yes.” As I continued dancing, the question was repeated, “Am I right?” I looked at her movements and replied again, “Yes.” When she asked a third time, I understood that my interpretation of the question was incorrect. In fact it was not a question at all. The national was telling me, “I am right; follow me. You are dancing incorrectly.”

The Interpretation Stage

The Interpretation Stage consists of the individual creating “Labels of Belonging,” in various areas to identify a respective place in the new culture. Labels of Belonging are mental processes an individual goes through to make a judgment of high or low inclusion in regard to a specific aspect. Labels of Belonging apply to three areas: (1) Class Placement, (2) Language Placement, and (3) the Ability to Gather Information.

Class Placement establishes a ranking in such areas as power, authority, wealth, working and living conditions, life-styles, life span, religion, education, and culture (Cody, 2002). The distinction between inequalities leads to the creation of superior and inferior groups in each category. Secondly, Language Placement allows individuals to put a label on how well they can communicate in the culture by speaking the new country’s language, listening, reading, and writing. Finally, individuals interpret their Ability to Gather Information. The weaker the individual’s Ability to Gather Information, the lower their self-placement becomes. Each of the three areas of interpretation can be assessed as High or Low. (Intermediate is not commonly considered in a quick assessment: the individual quickly develops either a High or Low self-identification.) After each area is interpreted, a general interpretation is created from the Labels of Belonging to form an Estimate of Probability of Success.³ Figure 2.1 shows a visual representation of The Interpretation Stage.

³ See Exercise 3 in The Cultural Rehydration Workbook.

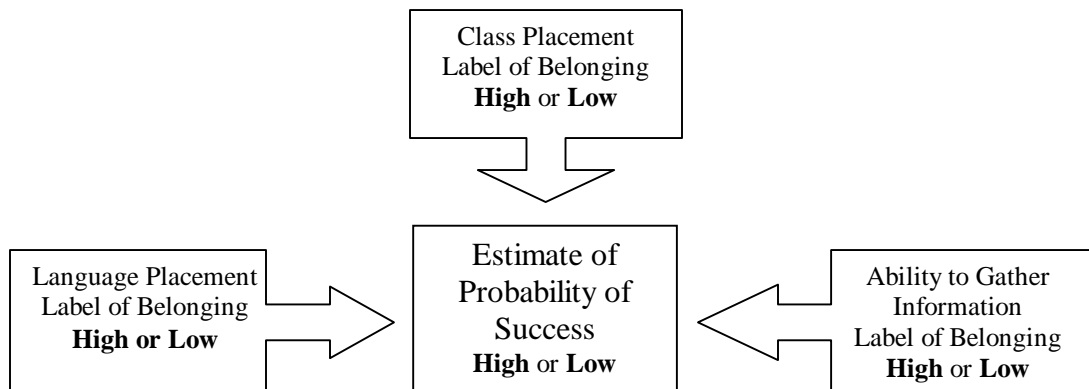


Figure 2.1 The Interpretation Stage

To arrive at an Estimate of High or Low Probability of Success, the number of Highs and Lows from the Labels of Belonging are tallied. Since there are an odd number of Labels of Belonging and no intermediate answers, the composite estimate of Probability of Success in the new culture must ultimately be either High or Low. After an estimate is reached, the individual moves on to the Application Stage.

Hydration Checkpoint

Traffic patterns can vary among regions within a country. To an even greater extent they can vary between different countries. Some countries drive on the left side of the road, others on the right. Some countries have aggressive traffic laws (or enforcement), while other countries are more relaxed.

In a conversation with an expat friend about the challenges of living abroad, I brought up the issue of adjusting to time differences since I had been having trouble sleeping for several nights. My friend tabled my concern by assuring me that I would eventually acclimate and then turned the conversation to another problem. “Why does

nobody seem to stop at a red light? Why do cars drive on the sidewalk?” Both were very good questions. In response, I asked my friend, “What are you going to do about it?” Slightly shocked by my directness, my friend paused for a moment to consider and answered, “I am going to obey the traffic laws and watch others change with me.”

The Application Stage

The Application Stage is the where individuals begin to apply their Estimate of Probability of Success from the various Labels of Belonging to determine their actions. Our actions are motivated by several factors, including beliefs about the effectiveness of increased effort, the certainty of reward, and how much the reward is valued.⁴

Imagine a child preparing for a test in school. If she believes that how she does on the test won't be affected by how much she studies, she won't be motivated to study. She might believe that there is no way she could learn what she needs to know for the test, or that she already knows everything she needs to know; either way, studying more would be seem pointless. On the other hand, if she is confident that by studying harder she will do better, then she will have some motivation to study. We'll use the term **Confidence** for the belief that increased effort will produce a better result.

To a young child, a test score may seem like meaningless number. If the personal satisfaction of achievement is not enough to motivate the child, her parent or guardian could offer a reward, for example, ice cream. When the child brings home a test with a high mark, she will be met with a favorable response. “What a smart child! Let's go get the ice-cream I promised.” Actually, the child here receives both an intangible reward

⁴ I use the terms Confidence, Expectation, and Value as less technical substitutes for the variables Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence from Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory.

(praise and affirmation) and a tangible one (the treat). We'll use the term **Expectation** for the certainty of receiving a reward for a good performance.

Most children love ice cream, but there could be one who did not like it, or would have preferred something else instead. To determine whether or how much a person will be motivated by a particular reward, we must know the **Value** of the particular reward to the particular person. For example, which would be more important to you, to be wealthy or to have a loving family? Neither answer is right or wrong, and different people will attach a different degree of importance to either outcome. One person might say, "I want a loving family; that is very important to me. If I happen to get wealthy along the way, that's great." Someone else might have different priorities. "I want to be wealthy. There are no other alternatives! A loving family will come naturally."

When Confidence, Expectation, and Value are all high, we would expect a person to be highly motivated. However, if any of them is low, motivation will probably be low. If you feel unmotivated, is it because you don't feel that increased effort will produce a better result, or because even if you achieve a good result, there's no reward offered? Or if there is a reward, is it something that you don't care much about?

From the Interpretation Stage, an individual carries an Estimate of High or Low Probability of Success. If the Estimate indicates Low Probability of Success, then in the Application Stage, the individual will likely apply previous familiar actions because those actions were successful in the past and of lack the motivation to try a new application. Conversely if the Estimate indicates High Probability of Success, the individual will try something new.⁵

⁵ See Exercise 4 in The Cultural Rehydration Workbook.

If my friend who was troubled by the lax enforcement of traffic law estimated from this situation a Low Probability of Success, the likely action would be something familiar, like stop at the red traffic light and not try to communicate disagreement with the individuals who continue. If the estimate was of High Probability of Success, then something new or different might be chosen, such as going against the grain by blocking passage until the traffic light was green. This entire process is shown below in Figure 2.3.

| Probability of Success | | Action Taken |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Low | ⇒ | Previous or Familiar |
| High | ⇒ | New |

Figure 2.3 The Application Stage

After application takes place, the individual then enters the Readjustment Stage.

Hydration Checkpoint

There are holidays intertwined with every culture. In my home culture there is a time of year when we bundle up in snow suits. Our noses are red, and we walk outside where a sheet of white snow covers the earth as if it were simply a painting. Patches of ice here and there add color. Everywhere people carry bags filled with presents for others. In the air are sounds of joy - people laughing, children singing, music playing. It is all so wonderful. The smells of home cooking greet us at the door upon our return. Hot apples with nutmeg, spiced pumpkin, the scent of roasting meat are all mixed together to entice us to take another step. This is exactly how the holidays should be.

My first winter abroad was somewhat different. The ground was painted a dismal dark brown with black patches of mud. Old Man Winter did not caress your face, but

slapped it with a force that left no room for questioning. Music was in the air, but it might as well have been humming, for I could not recognize any words. No one laughed, smiled, or even made eye contact. Is this how winter should be?

The Readjustment Stage

Adjustment to a new culture is required whenever our original beliefs or values are in contrast to or conflict with those held in the new culture. We are used to seeing things in a certain way, like a person wearing a pair of yellow glasses. Suddenly we are confronted with the fact that everyone in the new culture wears a pair of blue glasses. It is not really possible or desirable simply to throw away our old glasses and put on the new ones, but we can add the new color to what we already have and arrive at a new cultural tone – green.

During the Readjustment Stage old values are combined with new values to form a different ‘cultural tone’ of acceptable values. I prefer the word ‘tone,’ because with a tone, the new and the old are combined but the base is added upon, not erased. In the readjustment of an individual, the individual’s base or previous experiences and values also cannot be erased, but only added upon. A new culture does not erase the values of your home culture, but simply adds to them to create a new ‘tone.’ For example, if you are from a highly individualistic culture but are now living in a culture that is much more group oriented, you will probably find that your individualism softens a bit, and you begin to appreciate the group value of the new culture. Figure 2.4 depicts the Readjustment Stage.

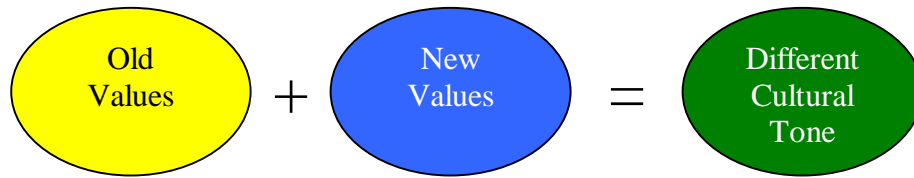
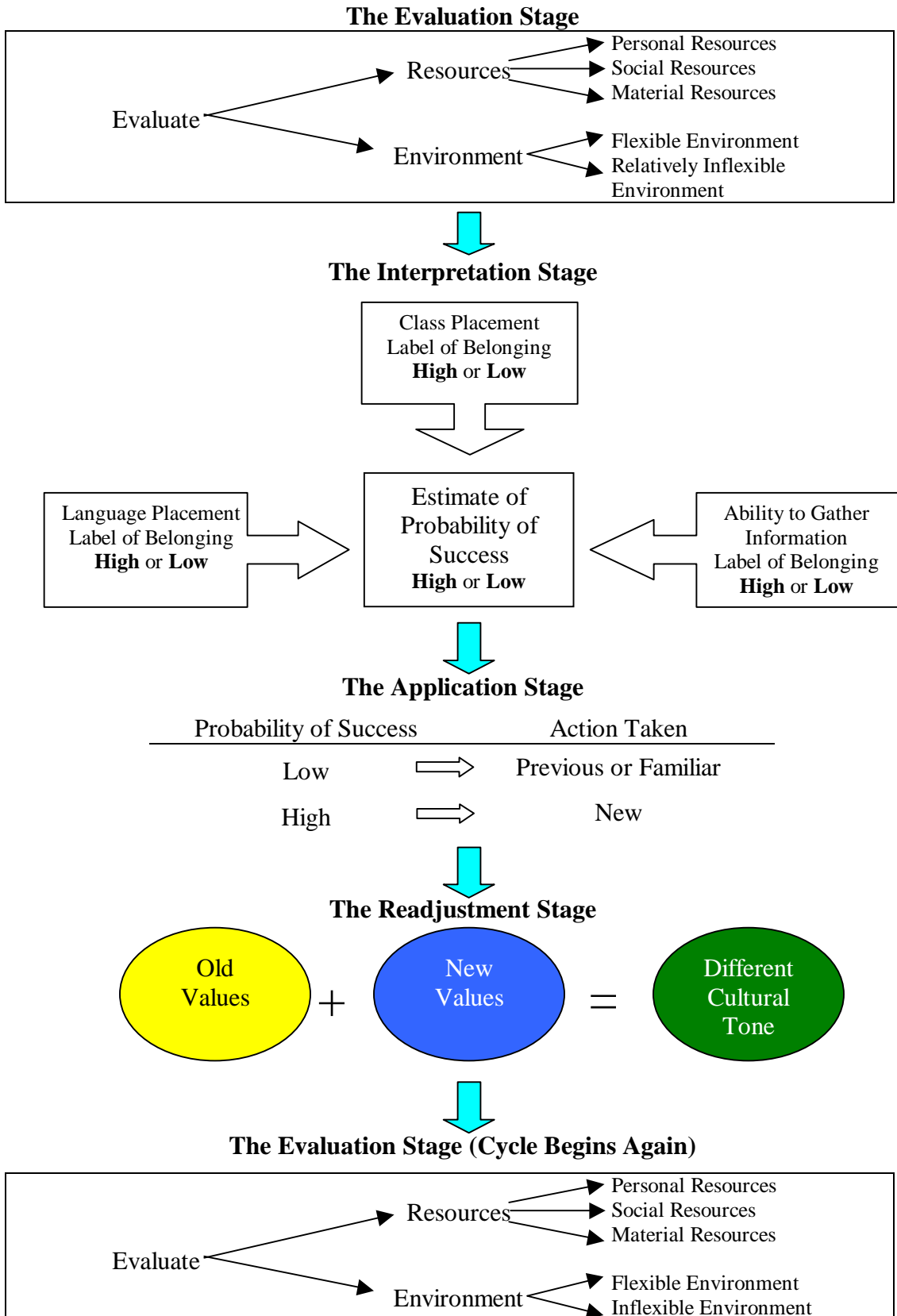


Figure 2.4 The Readjustment Stage

After a different cultural tone is created, the individual then meets new cultures or new situations and the process commences again from the first stage, the Evaluation Stage. For deeper processing, please refer to the accompanying workbook and complete Exercise 5. After the cycle or process has been completed, it is common to ask project feedback questions (Greer, 2007). Figures 2.5 and 2.6 show a summative visual diagram of The Cultural Adaptation Process.



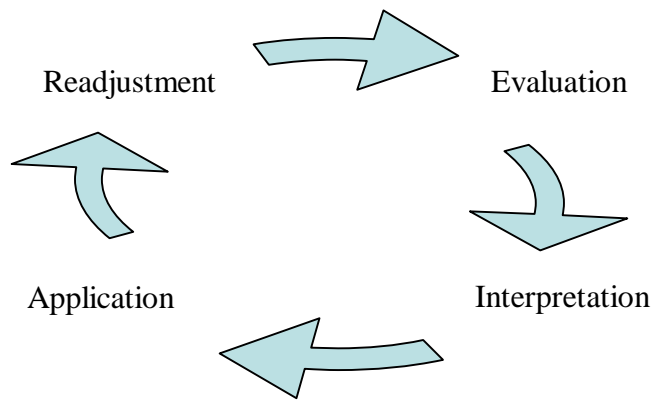


Figure 2.6 Cultural Adaptation Cycle

Chapter 3: Pre-Departure

You have spent the last six months of your life preparing for your trip. You have read books, started practicing saying basic numbers and phrases, and even gone shopping for those last minute items like converters. It can be a nerve-wracking time. A voice in the back of your mind grows with doubt and uncertainty: "Can I make it there? Will I commit some *faux pas*, or do something embarrassing to tarnish my image?" These questions go back and forth in your head as you prepare, but don't worry, they are quite normal. Everyone has a mixture of fear and excitement when facing unknown situations: it is up to you to decide how much will be fear and how much will be excitement.

In 2008, more than 50.5 million foreigners visited America. The top five countries sending the most visitors to the United States were Canada, Mexico, The United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany with 18.9 million, 6.2 million, 4.6 million, 3.2 million, and 1.8 million visitors respectively (Thomas, 2009). People visiting other countries do so now not just for business or travel, but to live in the new country for long periods of time. These people decide to become expatriates.

Why would an individual choose to be voluntarily absent from their home or country? A survey conducted in Britain recently revealed the following as the top reasons for becoming an expatriate. (Shelter Offshore, 2008):

- 57% found better weather made their life abroad more pleasant
- 56% felt they had a better quality of life when living abroad
- 53% enjoyed a higher standard of living
- 49% stated their new country was safer and enjoyed a lower crime rate
- 36% enjoyed a more relaxed and slower pace of life
- 30% had a higher income when living abroad
- 28% preferred the cuisine
- 27% cited the overall 'expat lifestyle' as a great reason for living overseas
- 26% enjoyed mixing with the local people and getting to know the local culture
- 19% reported finding a more social society since moving abroad

Figure 3.1 Reasons for Becoming an Expatriate

All of the reasons stated above plus educational prospects lure individuals to live in foreign countries. However, this chart does not explain the challenges that expats face from living abroad. Expats encounter many situations that are both unique and unusual.

In order to project your overall likelihood of success overseas and to help you better prepare for overseas living, there are twelve areas to consider. A test to measure these areas was created from my doctoral research, and a mini-sample of the test is available in Exercise 5a of The Cultural Rehydration Workbook. The twelve areas that can influence your overseas stay can be divided into two categories, (1) Six Outward Factors, dealing with adjustment to the environment, and (2) Six Inward Factors, dealing with internal mental processes. Let's start with the Outward Factors.

The first Outward Factor is **Exposure**. If you plan to be isolated or will be in an environment that isolates you from the new culture there is a lower likelihood that you can adjust. On the other hand, if you strive to immerse yourself in the new culture, or your environment encourages or even forces this, then there is a higher likelihood of successful adaptation. When planning your trip overseas, if possible try to find locations where you are surrounded by the local culture to a level where you feel comfortable. The higher the level of Exposure to the new culture (while avoiding overexposure), the easier it will be to adapt.

The second Outward Factor is the planned **Duration** of the stay in the new environment. When people leave for a new environment, they usually begin with thinking that centers on "me". However in order to stay in a country for a long time, "we" must enter the picture. It is similar to a relationship. If "me" is the focus, the relationship probably won't last very long. However, when the "me" turns to "we" there

is a higher likelihood of successful adaptation. “We” are willing to stay together longer than a relationship centered on “me”. Of course, there is nothing wrong with wanting to stay for a short period of time – just be realistic with yourself and others about your goals.

The third Outward Factor is **Community**, which refers to the number of people from your home culture that will be with you in the new environment. Expats who come to a new country with some sort of team or partnership have a higher likelihood of being able to adjust compared to individuals who come alone. This being said, just as there are pros and cons to being single versus being married, there are different challenges that face people going alone versus as part of a team or with a partner.

The fourth Outward Factor is **Openness**. Expats can show a range of openness to their new culture, and there are three levels of openness that correspond to three adaptive styles. The first style is preservation, where expats maintain their original lifestyle and values and reject those of the new culture. People with this style are not very open to change. The second style is accommodation, where expats adopt some of the lifestyle and values of the new culture, but maintain their original lifestyle and values for use within their own community. The third classification is assimilation, where expats abandon their original cultural values and lifestyle and completely adopt the values of the culture (Chizzo, 2002). People with this style are said to “go native.” A higher level of openness (the latter two styles) allows for more successful adaptation.

The fifth Outward Factor is **Cultural Awareness**. How much do you actually know about the country you are going to visit or live in for some time? Exercise 5a in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook has great questions to help you measure your cultural awareness. One area that can allow deeper understanding is dining in foreign countries.

Sometimes ignorance is bliss (you may prefer not to know what animal or part of an animal you are eating), however if you want to give yourself a chance for successful adaptation, preparation is helpful.

The sixth and final Outward Factor is **Language Awareness**. There are three levels of language: (1) Communicative, (2) Integrative, and (3) Expressive. These can correspond to basic, intermediate, and advanced language skills. Expats who are aware of and focus only on the first level are likely to experience frustration and even language shock - the inability to communicate in an environment that leads to high amounts of stress and anxiety. Adding the second level greatly helps to improve communication and reduce language shock. The third level, while desirable for some, could be compared to having a PhD – it is not necessary for most expats to function comfortably in a new culture.

Language begins with a fundamental system of sounds and symbols. In English we use the alphabet, in Asian languages they may use characters or script, and in other languages they may use both. At the Communicative level, your goal is simply to convey information – facts, ideas, concepts – so you begin by learning the sounds, symbols, vocabulary, and grammar to produce sentences that accomplish transfer of information. However, a sentence may be free of errors, yet still be misunderstood – communication may fail – because aspects of the second level have been ignored.

Integrative communication takes into account emotions and the cultural environment of a language. The difference between the Communicative and the Integrative levels is like the difference between a resume and a personal statement. A resume presents the bare facts about a person's educational and work background, but

doesn't reveal much about the personality of the person, which can come through in a personal statement.

Expressive Communication, the third and highest level of language, is where new language, like poetry, is created. It requires a deep understanding of a culture as well as a lot of imagination and creativity. If you are motivated to develop your language skills to this level, go for it! Exercise 5a in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook provides examples of expressive communication sentences.

To review, the six Outward Factors are: Exposure, Duration, Community, Openness, Cultural Awareness, and Language Awareness. The higher the value for each of these, the better your chances for successful adaptation to a new culture.

Now let's look at the six Inward Factors. The first Inward Factor is **Motivation**. There are two kinds of people, **Enthusiasts** and **Scientists**, and each is motivated differently. Enthusiasts are motivated to travel because of a desire for the new environment to become a part of who they are. They say things like this: "Look at that wonderful view - it is like a storybook." "How exciting would it be to live there for a year or two?" "I can't wait to speak their language and taste all the wonderful new food." Enthusiasts admire the new environment for its own sake. Scientists, on the other hand, go to the new environment to discover or learn something specific and most likely practical. (Norris-Holt, 2001). Scientists may include people who are going overseas as part of a step towards a larger goal. "My degree requires me to spend one semester overseas studying the language for a certification." "My company is setting up a new branch overseas and I must go there to be the face of the company. This is a great career opportunity." Both Enthusiasts and Scientists have a great chance for successful

adaptation, but Enthusiasts tend to remain in the new environment longer than Scientists because Scientists usually leave (voluntarily or involuntarily) when their objective has been completed.

The second Inward Factor is **Congruence**. This refers to what is similar between the two countries according to the individual. Food is a simple example. Some people go to a foreign country expecting the food there to taste like it does in their home country. When this expectation exists, every time they encounter new food they will make a comparison: "Is this similar to what I am used to eating?" If so, they will probably consider it a 'safe' food and consume it without much hesitation, but if not, they may reject the dish without even trying it. I remember once having to eat live shrimp swimming in alcohol. It was not very similar to what I was used to eating, and a lot of thought went into the decision to accept this specialty dish. The more similarities, the higher chance of successful adaptation, and vice versa.

The third Inward Factor is **Preference**. When deciding between two options, it is natural to prefer one over the other. Who should be the leader, a man or a woman? Is emotion or logic better for making decisions? Which makes for a better pet, a dog or a cat? While there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, whichever way you answer them, you have made a judgment that one is superior and the other inferior. With this dynamic in mind, examine your feelings toward the new environment. Do you consider the new environment superior or preferable in some way to your old one? Holding a strong judgment that the new is inferior will make it harder to adapt, while having no preference, or some degree of preference for the new will make it easier.

The fourth Inward Factor is **Mental Agility**. Can you put together a jigsaw puzzle quickly? Are you good at solving mysteries or riddles? If, so you are probably good at putting events or things in the proper order. This is vital in environments where you can not rely on understanding from spoken or written words. If you have a high level of mental agility, this will help you adapt faster. To improve in this area, you can do mental exercises that work with sequencing in various forms.

The fifth Inward Factor is **Attitude Control**. This refers to the ability to shape a positive attitude toward the new environment by having strong capabilities to control ones own thinking. If an individual has a high ability to control their attitude, there is a higher likelihood of smoother adaptation.

The sixth and last Inward Factor is **Ego-permeability**, or what I prefer to call ‘**Let-go-my-ego**.’⁶ Ego-permeability is the degree to which a person is willing to give up self-presentation in order to learn new skills. In other words, it is the ability of a person to make a fool of themselves in order to learn. People with high ‘Let-go-my-ego’ abilities, including humility and a sense of humor, will find it easier to adapt in new environments.

Exercise 5a in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook gives a mini test to allow you to see how you rate in these twelve pre-departure factors:⁷ (1) Exposure, (2) Duration, (3) Community, (4) Openness, (5) Cultural Awareness, and (6) Language Awareness, (7) Motivation, (8) Congruence, (9) Preference, (10) Mental Agility, (11) Attitude Control, and (12) Let-Go-My-Ego.

⁶ A variation on the Kellogg’s slogan, “Leggo my Eggo®” from television commercials that first aired in 1972 (Smith, 2007) in which one character tries unsuccessfully to snatch another’s freshly toasted frozen waffle (called an Eggo®).

⁷ The mini test covers the twelve factors, but not in the same order.

When living overseas, it is important to remember: “Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.” (Paraphrased from Confucius, *The Analects*, 2.17)

Chapter 4: In Country

You arrived several months ago and have enjoyed the differences between your home country and your new environment. As time passes, a mysterious feeling inside you begins to gnaw away at your optimism like an ant on a slice of bread. You tell yourself it's nothing, but the feeling just doesn't go away. Then one day, you do something you never thought you could do. You never imagined you would think or even act in a manner so primal, so uncivilized, and so barbaric.

Hydration Checkpoint

One warm spring day I went grocery shopping with a friend. We were both teachers. The street was bustling as usual when a group of students spotted us walking in the street. They began whispering to one another and then stared at my friend and I with a look of both curiosity and bewilderment. One student's face flushed red. He took a deep breath and spoke something into the wind. We couldn't hear him but he seemed to expect a response. My friend and I turned to one another with a familiar look: "Is that student talking to me?" He took another deep breath and spoke again, producing only an abrupt, heavily accented, and inappropriately loud, "Hello!" It was less of a greeting than an assault. The snickering of the classmates developed into hysterical laughter as the entire group walked away.

My friend and I shrugged our shoulders and continued talking and walking toward the supermarket. After selecting some unknown but colorful items, we proceeded to the checkout. "Great! There's only one person ahead of us; this should be quick." As we stepped up to the counter, the cashier suddenly grabbed another shopper's items instead

of ours. Was it because the other shopper was buying just a few things? We pushed our items a little closer to the cashier, but someone else slipped their purchases into the remaining empty space and the cashier grabbed them instead of ours. After this we devised a new strategy – handing our items directly to the cashier. We finally checked out after what had turned into quite an episode.

As we crossed the street away from the supermarket, a three-wheel pedicab suddenly brushed my friend. The driver said a few words and continued cycling. Across the street was a vendor selling sugar-dipped fruit. To get our attention, the vendor held some up and pointed to it. I politely waved my hand indicating no. Reaching the other side of the street, my friend and I parted to go home in opposite directions. As I was on my way, I heard a loud, “Boom!” behind me. I turned back to see my friend yelling at the candied fruit vendor and pushing him with obvious anger. The vendor was yelling back, speaking very quickly while pointing to his vendor stall lying on its side with its wheels slowly turning. Candies rolled down the street like a snail trying to crawl to safety. There wasn’t enough sugar to keep the dipped fruit from rolling, but it formed a trail as the pieces turned over and over down the street.

I ran over to see what was going on. I wrapped my arms around my friend to separate the two individuals. “What happened?” My friend replied with a voice of irritation. “He grabbed me! I told him I didn’t want his candy! I don’t want any candy! I just want to go home!” I left the scene with English obscenities ringing in one ear and what I imagine to be the same in the local language in the other.

What happened to my friend is a classic case of cultural dehydration. The cumulative irritation of being shouted at by strangers or students, ignored by cashiers and customers, and physically accosted by aggressive vendors finally led to a meltdown. Most of us who stay in a new environment for longer periods of time will eventually experience something similar. In order to help individuals find healthier ways of dealing with the problem, I have developed a system of Cultural Rehydration.⁸ While many wonderful and positive experiences await expats living in another country, the purpose of this book is to help expats cope with the difficulties and challenges of overseas living or cultural dehydration.

Cultural Rehydration Therapy

With every patient, the correct form of therapy will allow for recovery while an incorrect form of therapy may cause the problem(s) to worsen. My research has led to the development of an effective seven-step process called Cultural Rehydration Therapy.

The first step for an individual in a new environment is to find a friend. This does not mean looking for a dating partner, but someone that you can trust and confide in, preferably with a background similar to yours. You may want to consider aspects such as age, social class, gender, ethnicity, and job type (BRS, 2009). Exercise 6 in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook is a good tool to help you find an appropriate person or persons – you may participate in more than one pairing. The most important thing is to have someone available to you so that you never have to feel alone or isolated. Feelings of isolation make it very difficult to adapt. This step is **Pairing**, the placing together of

⁸ I also developed a second method not discussed in this book for use by mental health professionals.

people with similar backgrounds to help provide a coping outlet and support in a new environment. Cultivating supportive relationships is also a recommended strategy for people experiencing depression (Helpguide.org, 2008).

The second step of Cultural Rehydration Therapy is called **Boundary Setting**, defining personal and group parameters to establish boundaries and connections within a new environment. Once you enter a new environment you will have many opportunities to explore the various aspects on your environment. You must decide which opportunities you want to explore further and which you do not. A common area where there are often different boundaries is ‘night life.’ Some people may see it as a natural part of the culture that is exciting, while others may view it only as a potential source of trouble or danger. Boundary Setting is accomplished by first defining what is negotiable and what is not, then comparing this to what would be acceptable in the home country versus the new environment. If it is acceptable, a self-semi-binding contract is created. If it is not acceptable, negotiables and non-negotiables are reanalyzed. This contract is then communicated with others and boundaries are established, as well as appropriate connections. This second stage is critical to the therapy because in cultural paralysis, a link needs to be established between the home country and the foreign country. The technique of Boundary Setting allows for the participants to understand that stepping outside the boundaries is unacceptable. Without a proper establishment of boundaries, individuals have a tendency to become uncontrollable, which makes any form of therapy ineffective and frustrating. Exercise 7 in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook has a Boundary Setting application to help you understand your boundaries and connections.

After Boundary Setting, stability needs to be established. This is the function of the next two steps in the process.

The third step in Cultural Paralysis Therapy is **Learning**. It is important that the individual begin to interact with others to learn how both formal and informal systems work. One of the more important skills to master is seeing a system at work, but being content with not knowing the answers to all your questions. Sometimes the answer to the question, “Why?” is simply, “Why not?”

Hydration Checkpoint

I can remember one of my first student conferences as a teacher overseas. One day after class, I returned to my office (right next door to my classroom) to gather my belongings and go home. As I picked up my briefcase, I heard a faint knock on the thin wooden door. After being invited in, a student hesitantly entered my office and stood in front of my desk. Responding to my gesture, the student sat down and stared at the concrete floor through a long awkward pause. After a few moments the student looked up and asked me, “Professor Anthony, what would you do if you wanted to marry someone that your parents forbid?” After my initial reaction to such an intense question, I explained my answer from the perspective of a parent and then again from the perspective of a typical student. The student seemed satisfied enough to at least maintain eye contact with me and not the floor. “What do you think?” I asked. The student rose from the chair, smiled, gave me a chuckle, and said, “It’s not about what I think.” The student exited my office, leaving me with many questions.

As part of the Learning step, reading about cultural dynamics can be helpful. For example, Indiana University's Cultural Iceberg Theory expresses that like an iceberg, most culture lies underneath the surface and cannot be seen (Indiana Department of Education, n.d). Knowledge is power, but for expats, it also helps provide stability.

The fourth step of Cultural Rehydration Therapy is **Norming**,⁹ updating expectations and defining roles within your pairing group(s). Within a given group there are usually four roles. One person may fill more than role, but all four roles usually exist in a group (Kline, 2003, p.27).¹⁰ The first role is **Counselor**, someone who is always trying to get others to talk about their feelings and wants everyone to feel cared for. Counselors have a high degree of empathy, and are often the ones who feel sad when you are sad and happy when you are happy. They keep a group from holding too much inside. The second role is **Secretary**, someone that always asks questions to make sure that information is clear and accurate. Secretaries also make sure that group affairs are in order, and help the group maintain control and stay on the same page (share a common understanding). The third role is **Teacher**, someone who challenges the viewpoints of others and causes the group to look at situations from different perspectives. This group member may not be the most liked, but is necessary to keep the group growing instead of always remaining within their comfort zone. The last role is **Doctor**, someone who always analyzes what is going on and therefore seems a little distant from the group. This distance serves to allow others to see their own current or past anxieties and discomforts. The Doctor cures the group by allowing them to see what they fear. Exercise 8 in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook will help you discover which role(s)

⁹ Compare with the third stage of Bruce Tuckman's model of group dynamics: Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing.

¹⁰ The labels for the four roles are my adaptation of Kline's group roles and functions.

you fill in your group(s). The stability from newly created expectations plus the defining of group dynamics creates a foundation necessary to move to the next step.

The fifth step in Cultural Rehydration Therapy is **Challenging**, a two-part process that allows individuals to both participate and explore. First, discuss the current culture. Initially this should be done individually to form opinions about topics, and then in a group setting where opinions can be presented and other viewpoints can also be heard. The more discussion, the more the group and especially the Teacher can identify areas to challenge. Second, challenge cultural thoughts and explanations of the group. By challenging the thinking process of individuals, you begin the actual rehabilitation process. If no challenges are expressed, the group may actually be in denial about what is actually occurring in their new environment and in themselves. Exercise 10 in The Cultural Rehydration workbook gives applications and explanations on how to issue challenges to yourself and other group members.

Steps three to five in the Cultural Rehydration Therapy Process – Learning, Norming, and Challenging – may need to be repeated until you feel a return of self-confidence and a change in your way of thinking. A good gauge is to take the Pre-Boarding Test again and compare your original results. You should notice a change in thinking, feeling, and overall attitude. Your score should be higher, but if not, it should not be more than 20% lower than your original score. If it is, this shows you are culturally dehydrated. If your score is more than 20% above your original score, you are culturally well hydrated and could even consider helping others who are less so. Don't give up on yourself. Tell your pairing group(s) that you would like their help at this challenging time in your life. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of

strength. Once patterns of change occur in your thinking, feelings, and overall attitude, you should progress to the next step.

The sixth step of Cultural Paralysis Therapy is **Processing**. Individuals should reexamine their experiences in the country and describe possibilities for the future. Answering a simple set of reflection questions can cause appreciation for a journey in a new environment. To begin describing the future, one successful method is to think of an individual whom *you feel* adjusted to the new environment rather well and interview the person to discover behaviors you could copy. This method is **Imitation**. It does not mean becoming a clone of someone else, but trying to incorporate some of their healthy patterns into your lifestyle. A second method to try to reflect and prepare for their future is to set a goal for how you will react differently in situations where you are not satisfied with your current response. For example, when confronted with strangers yelling “Hello!” and then walking away laughing, instead of allowing this to irritate me, I trained myself (easier said than done) to think that the person was not doing it with the purpose of annoying me, but was simply eager to take advantage of a rare opportunity to practice language skills. I also decided to answer in the local language rather than English, which gave me the rare opportunity to practice my language skills. I call this method **Odd-Even**; it is an easy way to remember that there are other ways of handling situations. Exercises 12a and 12b in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook will help you apply Processing techniques. It is helpful to remember the simple fact that you won’t cure most cultural discomforts by changing the culture but by changing the way you think about and understand the culture.

The seventh and final step of Cultural Paralysis Therapy is **Linking**. Individuals are encouraged to remain in contact with other group members after the group's time in the new environment ends. Cultural dehydration is not a one-time event but requires a life-long process of rehydration. Linking begins with preparing your pairing group(s) for the conclusion of their time in the new environment. The pairing group(s) should discuss the feelings that come from recognizing this reality. Members are then given the option of 'linking' with other group members.

Linking takes place when an individual ask another person or group to help with a specific behavior in the future, describing (1) a newly suggested behavior, (2) the time when this will be used or applied, and (3) a method for starting the interaction to use the behavior. (Kline, 2003, p. 200). An example of a link created between Sue and Joe at a farewell dinner, went as follows:

Sue: Joe, I seem to have issues with being unable to achieve complete independence. Can you help me with that since we are neighbors?

Joe: Sure.

Gerald: Sue, what exactly do you want Joe to do? You should tell him.

Sue: Whenever I isolate myself or want to have things done the way my culture does them, please just ask me two questions: (1) Where are we now? and (2) Why did you come here?

In this sample link between Sue and Joe, an experimental behavior is suggested (asking two questions), specific circumstances for the behavior are stated (whenever Sue isolates herself or wants things to done the as they would be her home country), and an interaction to promote the behavior (when Joe sees Sue) exists. Linking is necessary in

that it keeps group members in contact with ‘healers’ and sustains accountability in rehydration. Exercise 13 provides help with this final step.

To summarize, the seven steps of the Cultural Rehydration Process are: Pairing, Boundary Setting, Learning, Norming, Challenging, Processing, and Linking. By following this process, you will keep up your ‘fluids’ and stay culturally hydrated.

Chapter 5: Returning Home

Your mini-adventure or journey has concluded. You left many new friends behind, and have fond memories of the foreign environment you eventually adapted to. Your current environment presents similar challenges, but you are completely unaware of it, because this new environment is the place you call 'home.'

Hydration Checkpoint

Returning home for a short visit, I just knew what I needed to rejuvenate myself. I had contacted a few friends who promised to visit me while I was home. My family had agreed to pick me up at the airport. When I saw them I was so excited. However, they looked different: age showed in that brief moment before we exchanged hugs. I never mentioned it, but they didn't match the picture of my family I held in my mind. On the car ride home, there were a few questions asking about my time overseas, but eventually conversation shifted to domestic current events. Many of the names and incidents were completely unknown to me. I nodded in a familiar habit that I had developed overseas when I pretended to understand what natives were saying. As we continued driving I noticed many of the roads, signs, stores and family shops had all changed. I thought to myself, "Where am I?"

I finally arrived home and everyone wanted to visit me or have me visit them. It became a full-time job trying to keep all the appointments straight. That first night I wanted to stay up to watch the nightly news but fell asleep at 5pm. I tried to fight it, but my body couldn't stay awake. The country I had left was twelve hours ahead of my

home time zone. This pattern of sleeping during the day continued for around two weeks, making many of the visits with friends less refreshing and more like a chore.

There were also other changes happening inside of me. My family took me to my favorite restaurant for lunch (they understood that I would be too tired for dinner). At the restaurant I ordered a plate of buttermilk pancakes with fruit topping, two slices of butter, and maple syrup. I devoured the stack of pancakes without saying too many words to my family. As I reclined in the chair with my full stomach, I expressed my satisfaction with the meal. "That sure was good! They don't make food like that in my old environment!" As I went home, I had the feeling not of indigestion, but violent nausea. Every time I ate some 'home-cookin' I spent hours afterwards in the bathroom.

I slowly became used to another change. Out in public, I experienced mental pauses during which I could not understand my mother tongue. This was very scary for me. Besides this, my normal speaking speed slowed down. It seemed like I was a foreigner. I went to visit friends to find relief.

At one friend's home, the conversation was like talking to a relative that I knew from childhood but had nothing in common with anymore. We knew each other's names, but no longer who we really were. I left that house and many others overhearing the words, "He's changed." I was now a lost stranger in my 'home.'

Coming home is a welcome change. It can be a chance to refresh yourself from the stresses of new and unfamiliar environments. However, you must understand one thing: in our minds we keep pictures and pictures always stand still. There is a picture of home, the last time we were there. It may be a few months or a few years ago. Whatever

the picture looks like, we have an expectation that when we return, our world will perfectly match it. When our world differs from the picture, we are left with an array of different feelings, especially confusion. This can lead to cultural dehydration.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that because you are back in familiar territory, you will adjust immediately. It is common to take up to one year to really adjust to your new environment or your home country. The language has changed (slang), new music has come out, and many local events have occurred that didn't make international news. Your diet will most likely be different, fashion will be different, and most of all you are different. Do you remember in our Pre-Departure exercises we were left with a new tone? Now you are looking at your home country through the new tone, not the old original one.

Let's begin with the first basic physical challenge you will face upon returning home – adapting to the time difference. Each person's body has an internal clock that creates a cycle of slightly over twenty-four hours. When you change time zones, this internal clock must readjust. While your body is adjusting you may begin to notice certain problems such as not being able to think clearly, difficulty falling asleep or maintaining sleep, early morning awakening, and headaches or stomachaches. How long this discomfort lasts will depend on how many hours' difference there is between your home time zone and your old environment. The good news however is that as soon as you arrive in your new environment, your body starts to adjust naturally.

Your body and mind will try to maintain the same number of hours of usual sleep, but slowly start shifting to an earlier or later time depending on the direction of time zone shift. If you travel eastward, your new environment will demand that you sleep earlier than in your old environment. From your mind and body's point of view, this means you

will need to go to bed earlier. You will probably notice difficulty going to sleep at 'normal' hours and will wake up later than usual. If you travel westward, your environment will demand that you sleep later than your old environment. This time your mind and body will want to go to bed later. You will wake up earlier than 'normal hours' and find yourself sleeping earlier than the locals (Friedman, 2003). Exercise 14 in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook will help you figure out roughly how long this time zone hydration process should last. If you have a choice, travel westward because recovery time is faster. (This can be remembered by the acronym WISE-TL = West Is Sooner; East –Tired Longer.)

The second challenge you will probably face after returning home is food. If you consume more meat, bread, and sugar than you did in your old environment, you will probably experience slight stomach discomfort and weight gain after a few weeks. This often happens to women moving to new environments because of their tendency to eat more comfort foods. It also usually happens to men moving from an Asian or Mediterranean diet to a western American or European diet. (For dietary purposes, it should be noted that Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East are all classified under a Mediterranean diet.) Conversely, if you consume less meat, bread, and sugar, you may still experience slight stomach discomfort, but you will lose weight after a few weeks. This usually happens to men moving from American or European diets to Asian or Mediterranean diets and to women who move to lesser-developed areas where snacks are not readily available. If your diet is South American or Australian, weight gain or loss can be predicted according to the relative increase or decrease in meat, bread, and sugar.

Exercise 15 in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook will help you deal with food cultural dehydration.

Once you come home you will probably be concerned with meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing, all of which require money. You may be able to stay with family and friends for a while, but eventually you will need a job. The purpose of a job is not only financial but to bring meaning to your life. Do you expect it to be easy to find a job after living overseas? Australian consultant Susie Moore, prompted by employers' comparison between foreign experience and local expertise, says, "If you've been offshore all the time, it's not always easy to translate those skills back domestically" (Yeates, 2009). Give yourself time and start to build up your old network. Friends from overseas may also be able to open a few doors for you. The reflection questions in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook, Exercise 16 will help with work rehydration.

After your basic needs have been addressed, you must get accustomed to the pace of life in your home country. This may or may not be attractive to you. The survey in Chapter Three stated that 56% of expats enjoy a better lifestyle than they would in their home country (Shelter Offshore, 2008). You may also have to adjust to a simpler lifestyle. This takes time.

Finally as you adjust back to the home life you may discover a feeling that you don't quite belong. You no longer belong in your old environment, but you also don't quite fit in your 'home' any more. This is a heavy feeling to process in your heart. Focus on your current uniqueness and how it can help yourself and others. I always tell others "Be the best 'you' that you can be, because no one can be a better 'you' than you. Others will always be better at being someone else."

One reflection tool that is useful one month after you return home is a ‘hydration trail’ – a timeline that uses symbols for significant events in a certain time frame. After creating a hydration trail, it is beneficial to find a new pairing partner you can share it with. This activity is in the Cultural Rehydration Workbook, Exercise 17.

As you get back into the flow of things you will probably see that you need to rehydrate yourself all over again. In life hydration is a daily process; staying culturally hydrated is the same.

Welcome home, good luck to you, and stay hydrated.

The Cultural Rehydration Workbook is available at www.fhandlove.org.cn/tests.html .

If you wish to contact Dr. Anthony, you may contact him at:

health@fhandlove.org

Or

Dr. Gerald W. Anthony
C/O The Faith Hope and Love Foundation
P.O. Box 2603
Manassas, Virginia 20108
United States

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