

Culture shock

Psychology



Culture Shock (Add (Add (Add Culture Shock Cultural shock can be defined as the trauma one experiences when one moves into a culture that is different from one's own home culture. There are various factors that lead to cultural shock. Some of them are differences in food, difficulty in communication, differences in customs and values, unacceptable standards of cleanliness, fear for personal safety, and so on and on. According to Oberg (n. d), the very first factor that leads to culture shock is the disappearance of customs, cues, and norms. For example, a person in a society is guided by various explicit and subtle norms, cues, and customs regarding social intercourse. To illustrate, the norms in a culture decide how to greet people, how to dress, how to and when to accept and refuse invitations, and what is a joke and what is an insult. Thus, when these all explicit and implicit hints that guide one's life disappear at once, one gets no idea as to how to interact with, and how to be in harmony with, the new culture one is in. According to the Oberg, people who are to a foreign culture for a very short period of time are not likely to face culture shock as they only enter the honeymoon stage; and this so because they are likely to visit only places of attraction where the realities of social life are not often met with. As a result, a celebrity who visits a foreign place for a short time is highly likely to make positive comments about the place. On the other hand, a commoner who goes to a foreign culture and lives there for a considerable period of time, interacting with the common people and the real environment, is highly likely to face culture shock, because one comes into contact with, and realizes the contradiction in, the new culture. However, there are various other factors too that decide the degree of culture shock one suffers. They are; stereotypes, one's own readiness to change, and the extent of difference

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between the home culture and the host culture. To illustrate, it is common for people to possess misconceptions and prejudices about other cultures. An example is the picture of ‘dollar grasping American’ and the ‘indolent Latin American’. As people love to stick to these long-cherished beliefs, they do not get ready to look into the realities of life in the new culture, and into how the various environmental, geographical, and social factors have led to the development of that particular culture. Thus, the people who are ready to change their own attitudes find it easy to overcome this culture shock. Irwin (2007) is of the opinion that this culture shock has various serious influences on the quality of field experience of anthropologists. It is pointed out that an anthropologist is a sojourner who lives in a new culture for an unspecified period of time. Irwin (2007) opines that though culture shock is not an acute illness, its symptoms make a long list; ranging from general uneasiness, nausea, excessive hand washing, excessive concern over water and food safety, dislike to have physical contact with the natives, fear of getting injured, fear of robbery, and the list is long. According to Oberg, K (1960), there are four stages of culture shock; honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. The very first stage is honeymoon. The scholar is of the opinion that at this stage, one is less likely to face culture shock. This is so because for a newcomer, everything is new, exciting, and fascinating, and this stage can be compared to the visit of a tourist (p. 178). A tourist often has very limited interaction with the local people, and is likely to see and experience pseudo events and places that are groomed for a tourist. In addition, a tourist enjoys the hospitality of well-trained people, and eats specially prepared food. Thus, a tourist is highly unlikely to suffer culture shock. This is especially so because the tourist goes back home before the honeymoon

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ends. If one stays longer, one reaches the crisis stage. Here, one gets to know the real life situations in the new culture. The visitor interacts with the local people without the aura of a tourist, and finds that the natives are not at all intended to accept them as equal members of the society, or do not show any concern at all. The natives are often unsympathetic and indifferent to the newcomer. The most common coping mechanism people adopt at this stage is aggression and frustration. Thus, the visitor tries to find solace in the company of his own countrymen in the area, and find comfort in emotionally charged stereotyping. This discussion results in national and ethnic generalizations. In the third stage known as 'recovery', one learns the language of the new culture, and slowly starts interaction with the host culture. At this point, the person is able to help other newcomers in getting used to the new culture. The last stage is the complete merger into the host culture, accepting it as another way of living. A look into the work of anthropologists like Malinowski proves that even anthropologists are prone to culture shock as common people are. To illustrate, Malinowski often felt homesickness and depression. However, there are various strategies suggested by renowned anthropologists to deal with the issue. As it has become evident from studies that the main reason behind culture shock is the lost symbols, and the inability to share the symbols of the host culture, the first coping strategy is to have extensive background reading about the culture before entering it. Also, it is beneficial to talk with the people who have prior experience in the culture to be visited. Thereafter, according to Furnham & Bochner (1986), another useful way is to learn such behaviours that are appropriate in the new culture; also, there is the suggestion that meeting people through community events will help avoid the fears

associated with going outside alone. Thus, according to anthropologists, culture shock is the trauma one faces when one enters a new culture where ones long-cherished values, customs, and cues are no longer present and no longer useful. This feeling is further exacerbated by factors like stereotyping and willingness to change. However, this can be overcome through proper background reading and rational thinking. References Furnham, A & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments*. USA: Taylor & Francis. Irwin, R. (2007). Culture shock: Negotiating feelings in the field. *Anthropology Matters*, 9(1). Oberg, L. Culture shock & the problem of adjustment to new cultural environments. *Worldwide Classroom*. Retrieved from http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7, 177-182.