Exercise 2.14

Who's in Charge Here?

So the people did get a new lagoon. They got it the same way they got their light plant that didn't work and their dock that stood high and dry at low tide: by sitting on their haunches and doing nothing. Some irrational part of me hoped that the rains would not come and that the lagoon would sit there forever... completely dry.

—Moritz Thomsen
Living Poor

This exercise is a brief introduction to the last of the four building blocks, the locus of control. The two poles of this dimension, internal and external locus, will be defined in the exercise immediately following this one.

Which of the following two statements do you most agree with? Circle one.

A. What happens to me is my own doing.

B. Sometimes I feel I don't have control over the direction my life is taking.

Percentage of Americans who chose A =   89%
Percentage of Chinese who chose A =   35%

What do you think accounts for the difference between American and Chinese answers? Now read the discussion on the following page for an explanation.

Discussion

There could be many explanations, but one almost certainly is the fact that many Americans believe in the power of the individual to prevail against all obstacles. There is nothing people cannot do or become if they want it badly enough and are willing to make the effort. This notion is best exemplified in the classic American expression: "Where there is a will there's a way."

In Chinese culture, many people believe that while you can shape your life to some extent, certain external forces beyond your control also play an important part. What happens to you in life is not entirely in your hands.

Exercise 2.15

Internal–External

Americans ignore history....
They believe in the future as if
it were a religion; they believe
that there is nothing they can-
not accomplish, that solutions
wait somewhere for all prob-
lems, like brides.
　　　—Frances Fitzgerald
　　　　Fire in the Lake

Cultures differ greatly in their view of the individual's place vis-à-vis the external world, especially on the question of to what degree human beings can control or manipulate forces outside themselves and thereby shape their own destiny. While all cultures believe that certain things happen outside of one's control, they differ as to what extent they believe this and on how much one can do in response. The two poles of this dimension, *internal* and *external*, are defined below.

> *Internal*: The locus of control is largely internal, within the individual. There are very few givens in life, few things or circumstances which have to be accepted as they are and cannot be changed. There are no limits on what you can do or become, so long as you set your mind to it and make the necessary effort. Your success is your own achievement. You are responsible for what happens to you. Life is what you do; hence, these represent more activist cultures.

> *External*: The locus of control is largely external to the individual. Some things in life are predetermined, built into the nature of things. There are limits beyond which one cannot go and certain givens that cannot be changed and must be accepted. ("That's just the way things are.") Your success is a combination of your effort and your good fortune. Life is in large part what happens to you; thus, these represent more fatalist cultures.

Once again, bear in mind that no culture is going to be exclusively internal or external, that all cultures will have elements of both poles. But cultures do tend to be *more* one way than the other. Because of personal differences (see exercise

1.3), individuals in a given culture could of course be anywhere along the continuum and may very well be at one location in one set of circumstances and somewhere else in another. As a general rule, however, you should expect to find most individuals on the same side of the dichotomy as their culture as a whole.

The next exercise asks you to take the definitions of *internal* and *external* locus of control presented above and apply them to specific examples of behavior. Below you will find a list of twelve items, each of which is more representative of one pole of this dimension than the other. Read each one and put an *I* next to those behaviors more consistent with an internal orientation to control and an *E* next to those more consistent with an external locus.

_____ 1. The laws of nature can be discovered and manipulated.

_____ 2. Progress is inevitable.

_____ 3. Every problem has a solution.

_____ 4. Some things are a matter of luck or chance.

_____ 5. Where there's a will, there's a way.

_____ 6. Unhappiness is your own fault.

_____ 7. There is nothing automatic about progress.

_____ 8. The laws of nature are ultimately unknowable and cannot be manipulated.

_____ 9. You make your own luck.

_____ 10. Some problems do not have solutions.

_____ 11. Where there's a will, there may or may not be a way.

_____ 12. Unhappiness is a natural part of life.

Suggested Answers

_I_ 1. Nature, therefore, does not need to be accepted as it is.

_I_ 2. Progress is inevitable if it is within our control; if it weren't within our control, we couldn't say whether it was inevitable or not.

_I_ 3. This implies that we can figure everything out, that nothing is beyond our grasp.

_E_ 4. Luck or chance are hallmarks of the external locus worldview.

_I_ 5. This means everything depends upon individual motivation, not external factors.

_I_ 6. If we're in control, we can do what it takes to be happy.

_E_ 7. We would think this if we didn't feel we were ultimately in charge.

_E_ 8. In other words, there are factors and forces beyond our control.

_I_ 9. If we're in control, we make things happen.

_E_ 10. Some problems are beyond our ability to figure out.

_E_ 11. Willing something is not the same as making it happen; there could be other factors involved.

_E_ 12. If there are things we have no control over, we are naturally susceptible to being unhappy.

Choices

This exercise introduces additional aspects of the locus of control building block and reviews some of those presented in exercise 2.15. It also asks you to think about your own assumptions about this matter. Below you will find eight sets of paired statements, *a* and *b*. Read each pair and circle letter *a* or *b*, whichever best describes the way you feel or the action you would take vis-à-vis that item. Please choose one even if you think the two alternatives are not mutually exclusive, in other words, that both are true or possible. For many of the examples, you might also be tempted to say, "It depends on the situation," which indeed it does. But choose anyway, without thinking too much!

Caution does not avert the decree of fate.
—Southern Arabian proverb

_____ 1a. I tend to be an optimist, to take a positive view of life.

_____ 1b. I tend to be a realist, to see life as neither better nor worse than it is.

_____ 2a. If I'm unhappy, I should do something about it.

_____ 2b. Nothing's wrong if I'm unhappy; it's just part of life's ups and downs.

_____ 3a. The external world is complex, dynamic, and mysterious. It cannot ultimately be understood or manipulated.

_____ 3b. The external world is a mechanism like other mechanisms; its workings can be discovered, predicted, even manipulated.

_____ 4a. If I try hard enough and want something badly enough, there is nothing to stop me from getting what I want.

_____ 4b. Some things are beyond my reach, no matter what I do.

_____ 5a. If a friend is depressed, there is no need for me to do anything.

_____ 5b. If a friend is depressed, I try to cheer him/her up.

_____ 6a. There is a solution for every problem, if you look hard enough.

_____ 6b. Some problems don't have a solution.

_____ 7a. I tend to be a stoic.

_____ 7b. I tend to be proactive and a doer.

_____ 8a. My success is a personal achievement.

_____ 8b. My success is my good fortune.

Now that you have circled your choices, read all the items again and decide which are more consistent with an internal locus of control (put an _I_ in the blank) and which with an external orientation (put an _E_). Then check your answers. How many of your circled choices turned out to be internal and how many external?

This exercise isn't scientific, of course, and doesn't "prove" anything about you. For one thing, all the items, as noted earlier, are taken out of context; you might very well select one alternative in one set of circumstances and the opposite one in another. Moreover, the choices you made for any given item may have more to do with some other aspect of your personality than your internal or external tendencies. Even so, you have no doubt been given some food for thought and also been exposed to additional contexts in which this important concept operates and additional circumstances under which it might influence people's behavior.

Suggested Answers

Remember that an item marked *I* or *E* means only that the particular behavior tends to be *more* characteristic of individuals who believe in an Internal or an External locus of control but is by no means exclusive to members of that category.

1a. *I*
1b. *E*
2a. *I*
2b. *E*
3a. *E*
3b. *I*
4a. *I*
4b. *E*
5a. *E*
5b. *I*
6a. *I*
6b. *E*
7a. *E*
7b. *I*
8a. *I*
8b. *E*

Exercise 2.17

What Would You Do?

Now that you are familiar with the internal/external control dichotomy, the time has come to begin applying what you have learned. In this exercise, you will be presented with two situations where differences concerning this aspect of culture have caused a problem. These may be situations you have been in or can imagine being in. Whatever the case, a successful resolution of each incident requires putting into practice what you know about the concept of the locus of control. Read each incident and jot down in the space below it what you would do or say if you were faced with this situation.

1. The Bright Side

You are an activist working in a fatalistic society. The company you work for has hired you to help its expand its business and get new customers. You have designed a campaign that should result in a 5 percent increase in market share in six months if you can get all the resources you need. You have been spending the last few weeks drumming up enthusiasm and support for your master plan, but to be honest, colleagues and upper management haven't been responding the way you would like. They're quite pessimistic about your estimates; to get that kind of increase, they say, will take a lot longer than six months. "Things just don't happen that fast here," you were told by one manager. Your reply was that things can happen as fast (or slow) as people want them to; they just have to make the necessary effort.

Everyone seems to have a reason why the plan won't work, why the potential stumbling blocks are more serious than you think. You realize there will be some obstacles, of course, but you have faced these kinds of obstacles before and know that if people rise to the occasion, they can overcome them. If the company isn't serious, however, if it doesn't commit the person-

nel and other resources required, this expansion won't happen in six years, much less six months.

You're starting to doubt whether these people are really committed to this effort or if they're just making the right noises. And you weren't encouraged today when your boss told you that some department heads have been complaining about the demands you're making of them, saying that you're not being very realistic. What should you do?

_____

_____

_____

2. It Wasn't Meant to Be

You work for an advertising firm in an activist culture to which you emigrated two years ago. While you like your adopted homeland very much, it has been difficult to adjust your more fatalist inclinations to the prevailing mindset, especially at work. You work as hard as anyone else, but you have been accused of giving up on prospective new accounts when you might have won them with more effort. You feel that after you have pitched to and courted clients for a certain period, the rest is up to them, that beyond a certain point there's nothing more you can do. You have even been accused of being defeatist for saying that certain goals were unrealistic.

Last week your boss called you in for your yearly performance review. He pointed out that you needed to be more aggressive in pursuing business and not be so eager to adopt a wait-and-see stance after you have pitched to clients. "Things happen because you make them happen," he said, "not because they're *meant* to happen." You don't necessarily agree, but you obviously need to adjust your style if you're going to succeed in this organization. What can you do to be more effective in this environment?

_____

_____

_____

Discussion

Each of these incidents raises the same basic issue: What does an individual from one end of the continuum of this building block do when working in a culture that is at the other end? What adjustments in his/her behavior and attitudes might be expected and appreciated by members of such a culture? Individuals in these situations do not *have* to make any such adjustments, of course, but they should at least consider the possibility—as well as the consequences of not doing so.

1. The Bright Side

Coming from an activist culture and believing as you do in an internal locus of control, you see getting things done as merely a function of people making the required effort. Your colleagues, on the other hand, look at the world and see a very different place, a place where even when people do all they can, certain things still may not happen—or may not happen until some other things are done. And these other things may be beyond anyone's control. This doesn't mean you can't get the job done here, but it may very well mean, as these people keep telling you, that it's going to take longer than you think.

Your view of the stumbling blocks is likewise colored by your culture's sense of the individual being in control. If there are obstacles, you just take whatever steps may be needed to vanquish them. Your colleagues probably believe that obstacles can ultimately be vanquished too, but once again they calculate into the equation that doing so will require a combination of one's own efforts and the efforts of people or forces outside one's control. These outside factors, needless to say, will proceed at their own pace; you can and should try to nudge them along, but there are limits to what you can do.

Your strategy here should be to calm down; do all you can, encourage others to do all they can, even be a bit of a nuisance if you like. But don't be too attached to your timetable. Meanwhile, both you and your colleagues will be a lot happier if you stop judging how much people want this expansion by the amount of effort they're willing to put into it.

2. It Wasn't Meant to Be

You should remember that people who believe in an internal locus of control will probably come across as unrealistic to you. At the same time, you will come across as defeatist to them unless you adopt (publicly, at least) a generally positive, can-do attitude. Optimism is a natural attitude for people who believe deeply in their ability to "make things happen," as your boss has put it. In such cultures, anyone who suggests that there may be more to getting things done than a positive attitude and lots of effort, who believes as you do that factors beyond your control may also play a role, runs the risk of appearing to be making excuses for not working hard enough.

Your approach, then, might be to act a little less like a realist, support goals you think may be unattainable—what does it hurt to set one's sights a little too high?—and especially to pursue clients further than you would in your own culture. You might think these clients will be put off by your tenacity, but in some cases they might actually be impressed by your persistence, or, as they might see it, by your confidence in your company.

Above all, remember that in cultures where the prevailing belief is that people make things happen, there is always more you can do in pursuit of any goal. Even if those things don't work, even if you know those things aren't going to work, you should never appear to be giving up.

Building Blocks 3 and 4

If Walt Disney had been Norwegian, there would have been a dwarf called Gloomy.
—Roland White
Sunday Times

In this second continuum exercise, you will be comparing your own and target cultures vis-à-vis the third and fourth building blocks of culture: the concept of time (monochronic/polychronic) and the locus of control (internal/external). Once you see your culture's view of these important dimensions and the view of your target cultures, you will have identified major cultural differences that are a likely source of and explanation for common misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Once again, you will use the continuum technique to make these comparisons (see pages 80-81). You will see three different continua, two for monochronic/polychronic (one called Concept of Time and one called Time and Other People) and one for internal/external Locus of Control, with the poles or extremes of each topic described at either end. For each continuum, read the two descriptions and put a vertical line somewhere along the continuum, depending on which explanation you think more accurately describes the view of people from your culture in general on this issue. Not everyone will take the same view, of course, but try nevertheless to make a generalization about the position of a "typical" person from your culture on this topic.

For example, on the continuum marked Concept of Time, if you think the description under Monochronic (left side) more accurately describes your culture's position on this matter, you will put your mark nearer to the left. As in the Review Exercise on pages 48-52, for purposes of marking, think of each continuum as being divided into five segments, starting at the left:

extreme left   Put your mark here if the text at the left describes your culture very accurately.

halfway to the middle   Put your mark here if the text at the left is more or less accurate about your culture.

in the middle   Put your mark here if your culture is a true combination of the text at the right and left.

halfway from the middle   Put your mark here if the text on the right is more or less accurate about your culture.

extreme right   Put your mark here if the text at the right describes your culture very accurately.

After you have marked all three continua, you can then use the chart to compare your own culture with your target culture (or cultures) and identify important differences. You can do this in one of two ways:

1. You can give the chart to someone from the target culture and ask that person to complete it the same way you did, following the instructions given above.
2. You can consult the master list on page 82. This list locates a number of cultures or cultural groupings on the chart.

What do these marks mean? While these are all generalizations and therefore not predictive of what individuals in any given culture might think, each mark represents how the people in that culture in general feel about that item on the continuum. More precisely, the marks indicate

- what the people in that culture think of as natural, normal, right, and good;
- how these people assume everyone feels about these issues; and
- which perspective these people use to interpret and judge the behavior of others (including you).

Where there is a wide gap between your mark and that of someone from the target culture, you can assume that you and that person may not see eye to eye on this matter. He or she may think your behavior or attitude is strange or surprising, and you

may think the same about that person. And each of you is more likely to misinterpret or misunderstand the actions of the other in certain situations.

This doesn't mean that the two of you will never understand each other or be able to live or work together successfully, but it does mean that you may have very little intuitive understanding of each other with regard to this particular item. In other words, each of you will have to make some effort and exercise patience in trying to understand the other.

Finally, remember that context determines everything in human interaction. Nothing happens "in general"; things only happen in context, in specific circumstances. And depending on those circumstances, the monochronic/polychronic or internal/external control tendencies of a person may or may not play a role, or at least not a deciding role, in any particular interaction. But they are always there as a potential, waiting for an opportunity to show themselves.

Concept of Time

Monochronic

Time is a limited commodity; the needs of people are subservient to the demands of time; deadlines and schedules are sacred; plans are not easily changed; people may be too busy to see you; people live by an external clock.

Polychronic

Time is bent to meet the needs of people; there is always more time; schedules and deadlines are easily changed; plans are fluid; people always have time to see you; people live by an internal clock.

CHAPTER 2

Time and Other People

One Thing at a Time

People do one thing at a time and finish one thing before starting another; people expect undivided attention; interruptions are to be avoided; to be late or kept waiting is rude; people stand in line; the goal is to stick to the schedule.

Many Things at Once

People may do several things at the same time and may split their attention between several people/tasks; to be late or kept waiting is okay; interruptions are part of life; people don't stand in line; the goal is to enjoy life.

Locus of Control

Internal

The locus of control is internal; fate has little or no importance; there are few givens in life, few things that can't be changed and must just be accepted; where there's a will, there's a way; one makes one's own luck; unhappiness is one's own fault; people tend to be optimistic; life is what you make it.

External

The locus of control is external; fate plays a major role; people believe they have limited control over their destiny/external events; many things in life must be accepted/can't be changed; success/lack of success is partly a result of good/bad fortune; people tend to be realistic/fatalistic; life is what happens to you.
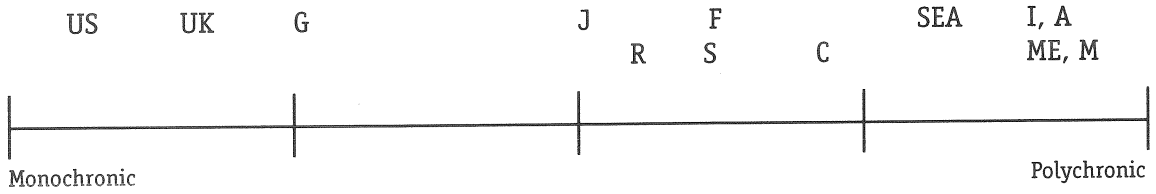
Position of Selected Cultures

A number of cultures or cultural groupings have been selected for inclusion on this chart. The positions given here reflect either where nationals of these countries/regions have consistently placed themselves on this chart in numerous workshops and training seminars given by the author or where the author has placed these cultures after consulting various surveys and studies in the literature of the intercultural field. Remember
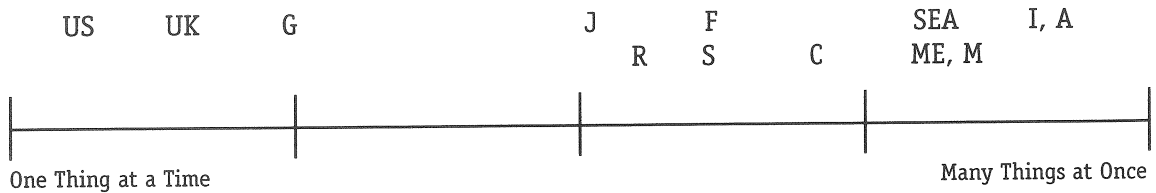
that these placements are approximations and that they indicate the position of a culture as a whole on these matters, not of individuals. Even then, it's possible the reader may not agree with where his or her culture has been placed or even where other cultures have been placed. The best way to use these continuum charts is not to take our word for any of this but to hand them to a person from another culture and let that individual speak for his or her own society. If any of your target cultures do not appear on this chart, you may be able to infer their position by noting the placement of a similar culture.
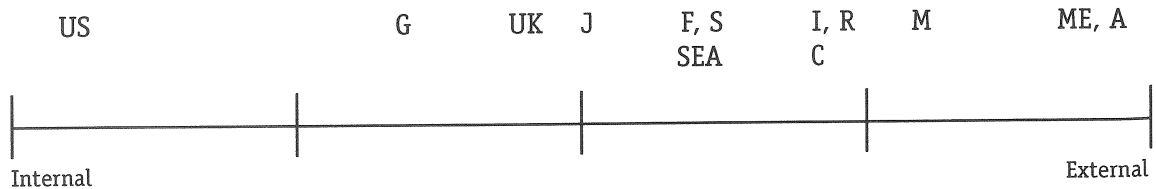
Concept of Time

| US | UK | G | | J | F | | SEA | I, A |
| | | | | R | S | C | | ME, M |

Monochronic   Polychronic

Time and Other People

| US | UK | G | | J | F | | SEA | I, A |
| | | | | R | S | C | ME, M | |

One Thing at a Time   Many Things at Once

Locus of Control

| US | | G | UK | J | F, S | I, R | M | ME, A |
| | | | | | SEA | C | | |

Internal   External

A—Africa   C—China   F—France   G—Germany   I—India   J—Japan
M—Mexico   ME—Middle East   R—Russia   S—Spain
SEA—Southeast Asia   UK—United Kingdom   US—United States

CHAPTER 2

Dialogues Revisited

Now that you have completed this chapter, reread the dialogues in the diagnostic exercise (exercise 2.1) on pages 21–22 to see whether you notice anything new in light of what you have learned about culture in the foregoing exercises. Then read the analyses below for a description of the cultural differences that were being illustrated in the dialogues. (It's possible you will have seen differences other than those described below.)

1. Near the Family

This dialogue illustrates a classic difference between the collectivist and individualist worldviews. Sharon, from an individualist culture, assumes that Fatima, now that she is about to finish college and go to work, will be living on her own. In Sharon's culture, after all, to live on one's own, to be independent and self-reliant, is the goal one prepares—and is prepared—for throughout one's formative years. Achieving that goal, symbolized by moving out of your parents' home and into your own residence, indicates that you are ready to take your place in the adult world.

It does in some cultures, anyway, but apparently not in Fatima's more collectivist culture. On the contrary, in cultures like Fatima's the goal you work toward during your youth is the ability to live easily and happily with your primary group, usually your immediate or extended family. You have become an adult in such cultures when you are able to take your rightful place in this ingroup and fulfill your various duties and responsibilities, whether as oldest son, married daughter, son-in-law, and so on.

In other words, Fatima isn't going to live near her family; she is, of course, going to live *with* her family, for now and for the foreseeable future.

2. Vacancy

There's a good reason why Luigi hasn't finished writing that job advertisement yet: advertising is a mighty poor way to fill a vacancy. After all, *anyone* can respond to an ad, and what company wants just anyone working for it? What you want is someone you can trust and rely on, someone from the right background, with the right values and the right style and manners. And it goes without saying that you don't *find* such people, you *know* them. Or someone you know knows them and can vouch for them—or so the thinking goes in Luigi's particularist culture.

Naturally, when Luigi suggests his niece Marta, a member of his ingroup, he expects that will solve the matter of the vacancy and make the advertisement unnecessary. Clearly, Luigi wouldn't risk the good name of his ingroup by recommending his niece if she weren't the right sort of person for the job, and since Marta *is* his niece, then he will know if she's the right sort of person. But unaccountably, Horst tells Luigi to ask Marta to *apply* for the job, implying that Marta will be subject to some other set of criteria.

For the more universalist Horst, there are such criteria: Is Marta the most technically qualified person available? She may be a nice young lady from a good family, but the bottom line is: Can she do the work? Does she have the skills and experience? Regardless of whom she is related to, she must be judged according to certain objective standards. This matters to Luigi too—he wouldn't have recommended the girl if she didn't have the necessary basic skills—but her relationship to Luigi and all that that implies (which isn't much as far as Horst is concerned) is what really qualifies her.

In universalist cultures, Luigi's approach smacks of favoritism at best and discrimination at worst—and is even illegal in some cases.

3. Helping Miss Thomas

This is a classic monochronic/polychronic incident. Miss Thomas, from a monochronic culture, expects to receive the undivided attention of the shopkeeper, Roberto, until she has finished her business. Then he will direct his attention to the next

customer, who, meanwhile, is supposed to wait quietly in line until it is his or her turn to be served.

Or so things unfold in Miss Thomas's well-ordered mono-chronic world. But not, clearly, in Roberto's neck of the woods. Being polychronic, he greets all his customers as soon as they arrive (it would be impolite to ignore them) and proceeds to do the only courteous thing under the circumstances—wait on them all simultaneously. Miss Thomas may perceive this as service interrupted, but Roberto no doubt sees it as service expanded.

4. Out of Order

Here we have an activist and a fatalist squaring off in front of a broken elevator. Larisa apparently comes from a culture where the locus of control is internal, where the normal, instinctive response to something that is broken is either to fix it or to set in motion the chain of events that will result in its becoming fixed. Her cultural assumption is that the solution to this prob-lem—and to any problem—lies in individual, personal action. One may or may not choose to take such action, of course, but there is no question that if one does, one can bring about the desired end.

Miranda inhabits a different world. While there are some things she believes she can affect by personal action, there are other things, all those under the sway of an external locus of control, which she cannot influence by any amount or kind of personal intervention. And one such thing, apparently, is this broken elevator. Hence her surprise at Larisa's attempts to get to the bottom of this problem ("Whom should we talk to?"), for this problem is clearly one where individual action cannot af-fect the outcome.

For Miranda, of course, who is also taken aback, there is ultimately no such category as individual action.