

women retire completely from the workforce once they had their first child and devote full time to raising their children. When Britain's prime minister Tony Blair limited his schedule but continued to work when his fourth child, Leo, was born in May 2000, a public debate ensued about the justification of such an action with some criticizing his action as irresponsible and others hailing it as an example for paternal responsibly. Britain is, of course, near the masculine end of the scale.

#### AVOIDANCE OF UNCERTAINTY

Avoidance of uncertainty is a dimension that refers to the extent to which people in a society feel anxious about ambiguous situations and the steps that they are willing to take to create stability through formalization of rules and regulations. In high uncertainty avoidance societies such as Belgium, Japan, and France, there are many rules that govern the behavior of employees, as well as the work process. In contrast, in low uncertainty avoidance societies such as Great Britain, Jamaica, and South Africa, there are fewer regulations and a general belief that there should not be more rules than are strictly necessary. High job mobility is prevalent and expected in societies with low uncertainty avoidance, and job stability and lifetime employment are more common and cherished in societies with high uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (1997) notes the importance of the anxiety component of uncertainty avoidance and its impact on time orientation in the work context:

In strong uncertainty avoidance societies people like to work hard, or at least to be always busy. Life is hurried, and time is money. In weak uncertainty avoidance societies people are quite able to work hard if there is a need for it, but they are not driven by an inner urge towards constant activity. They like to relax. Time is a framework to orient oneself in, but not something one is constantly watching (pp. 121–122).

### **Cross-Cultural Communication**

Effective interactions in today's global business world depend to a great extent on the ability to convey a clear message that people in different cultures can comprehend in the way the communicator intended them to understand it. Business communication can be interpreted very differently, depending on the cultural orientation of a particular country. For example, in masculine societies, an effective manager is one who communicates directly, assertively, and even aggressively. Those from feminine-leaning societies may interpret such behavior as unfriendly, arrogant, and even rude. A Swedish manager reading a help-wanted advertisement for a salesperson in the United States might

be taken aback by the requirement that the qualified candidate be “aggressive.” On the other hand, British managers may interpret a Chinese manager’s modesty and humility in stating his qualifications as a weakness.

An incident in the city of Najaf during the 2003 war in Iraq (see Box 8.1), demonstrates one leader’s bold and effective use of nonverbal, cross-cultural communication that probably saved many lives that day. Unable to speak Arabic and with no interpreter on site, the commander of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division was unable to use language to communicate his nonaggressive intentions to the Arabic-speaking crowd. In a spur-of-the-moment decision, he instructed his soldiers to kneel on one knee, smile, and point their weapons to the ground. This vulnerable yet friendly posture was clearly understood by the crowd that responded likewise by smiling and sitting on the ground. Luckily, in the Najaf incident, the nonverbal body language was sufficiently universal to convey the peaceful intentions of the soldiers and to prevent what could have been a deadly incident.

**Box 8.1** Leadership Through Effective Cross-Cultural Communication Saves the Day in Najaf

Early in June 2003 during the U.S. war in Iraq, the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division on a mission to secure the area entered the city of Najaf. It was an uneventful patrol. The search turned up nothing. The Shia Muslim population, which traditionally has not supported Saddam’s rule, seemed curious and friendly, but didn’t get too close. The local population has cautiously welcomed the U.S. troops. Word came from the Grand Ayatollah Sistani that he was willing to meet with the American commander, but he asked first that the U.S. soldiers secure his compound.

As the troops started down the road toward the Ayatollah’s compound, the crowd that assembled there to watch the American soldiers mistook their intentions to mean that they were progressing toward the Imam Ali Shrine located in Najaf. The Imam Ali Shrine is the burial site of the prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law and considered one of the holiest sites in the world for Shia Muslims.

The once friendly crowd became alarmed and chaos ensued. Earlier warm greetings were replaced with angry shouts and gestures as hundreds of people attempted to block the soldiers’ way. Clerics appeared with a message from the Grand Ayatollah that the soldiers were progressing at his invitation, but their message was drowned out.

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