

Cultural Dynamics in Leadership

When my way isn't the only way.

Legal Notice and Terms of Use

Copyright 2018 by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® North American Division. All rights reserved. The information is provided for training purposes only and is not intended nor should it be used as legal counsel. This program may not be used or reformulated for any commercial purposes; neither shall it be published by any person or agency other than an official organizational unit of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church, unless prior written authorization is obtained from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® North American Division Office of General Counsel. Subject to the foregoing terms, unlimited permission to copy or use this program is hereby granted upon inclusion of the copyright notice above. “Seventh-day Adventist” and “Adventist” are registered trademarks of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® and may not be used by non-Seventh-day Adventist entities without prior written authorization from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists® . Use of all or any part of this program constitutes acceptance by the User of these terms.

SDA Church employees may be called upon to work in, or with colleagues from, cultural environments that differ markedly from their own. It is therefore increasingly important to understand how cultural sensitivity functions in the workplace environment.

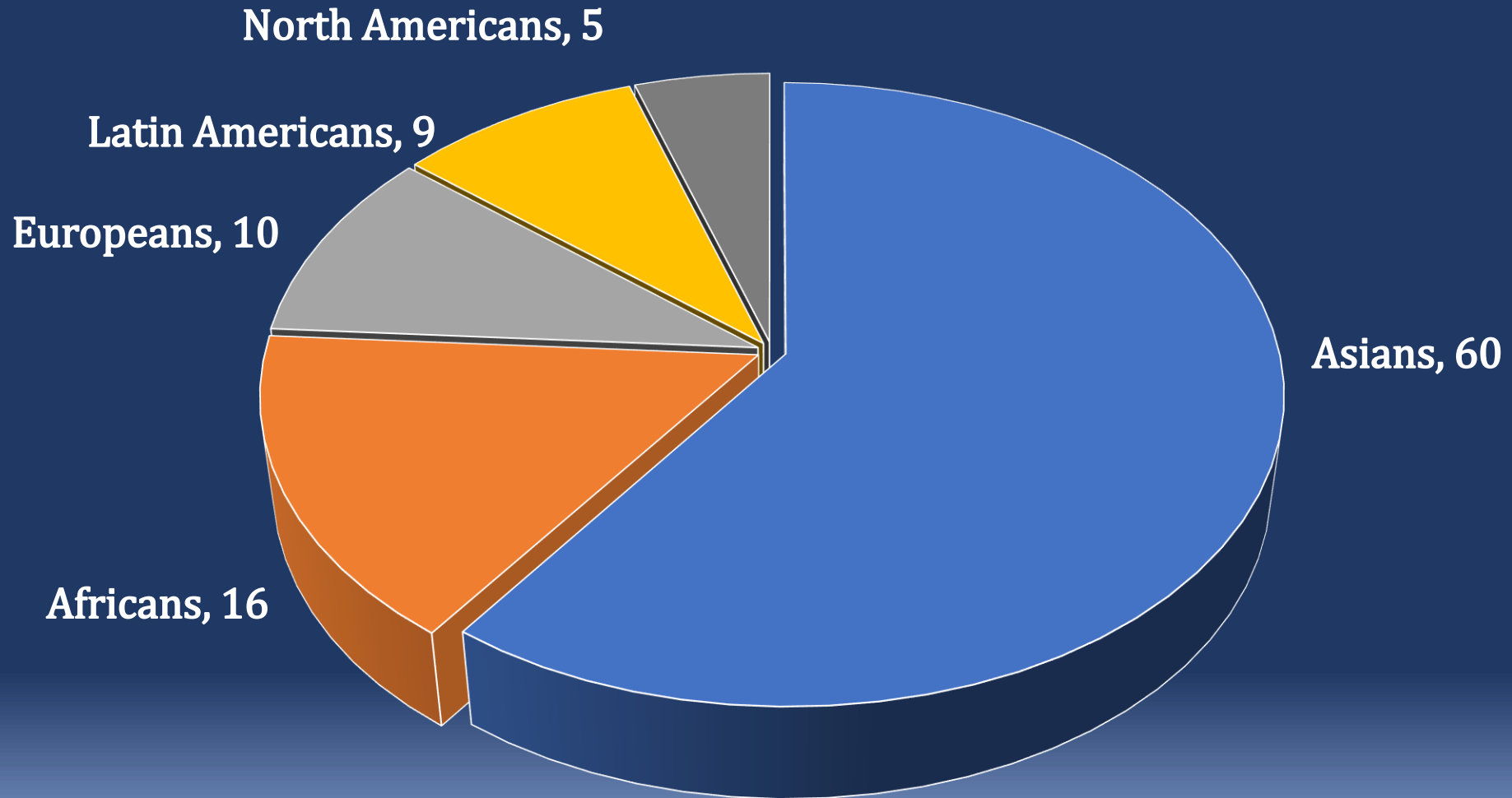


“There are no foreign lands;
it is only the traveler who is foreign.”

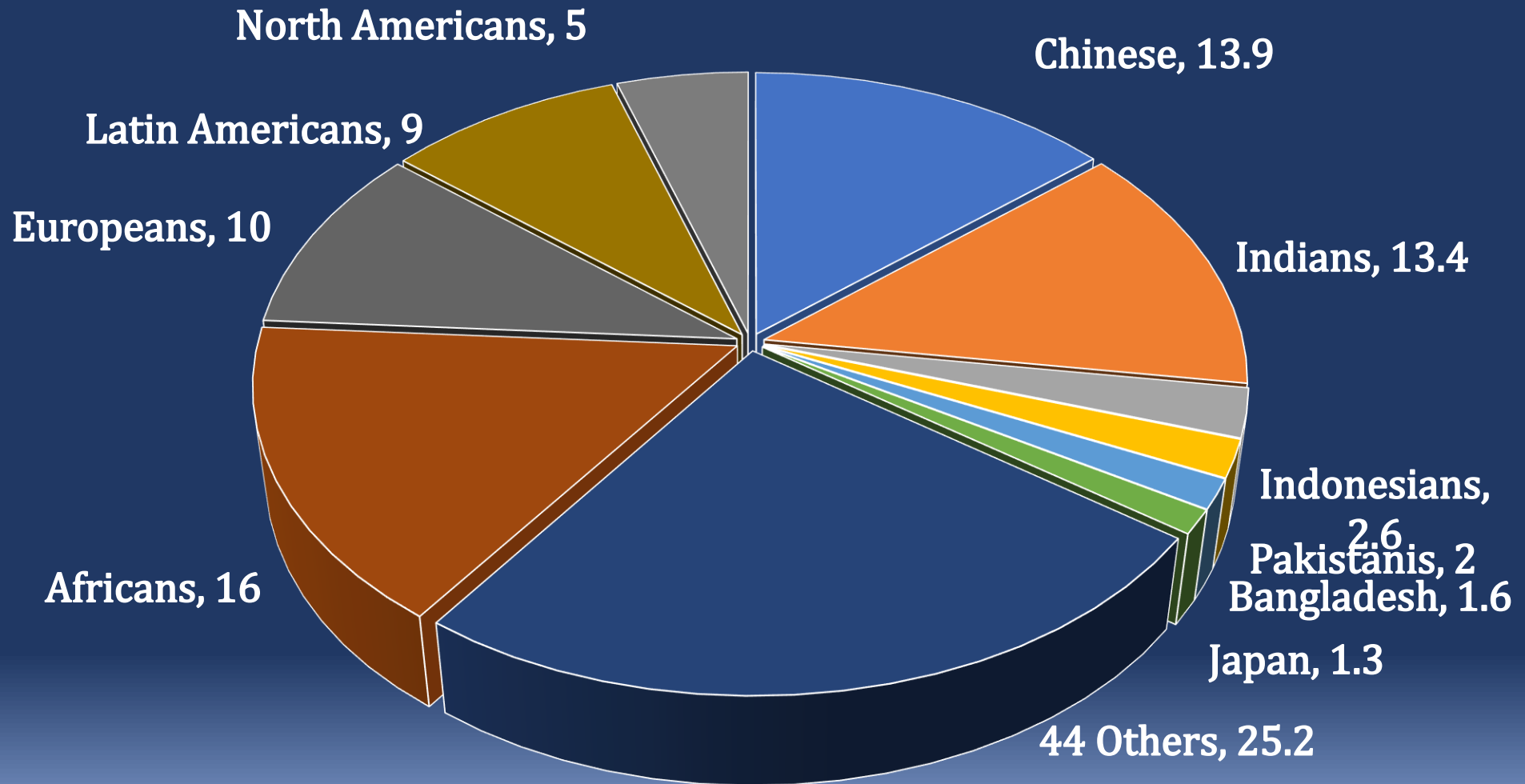
ANTARCTICA

(all territorial claims are held in abeyance under the 1959 Antarctic Treaty)

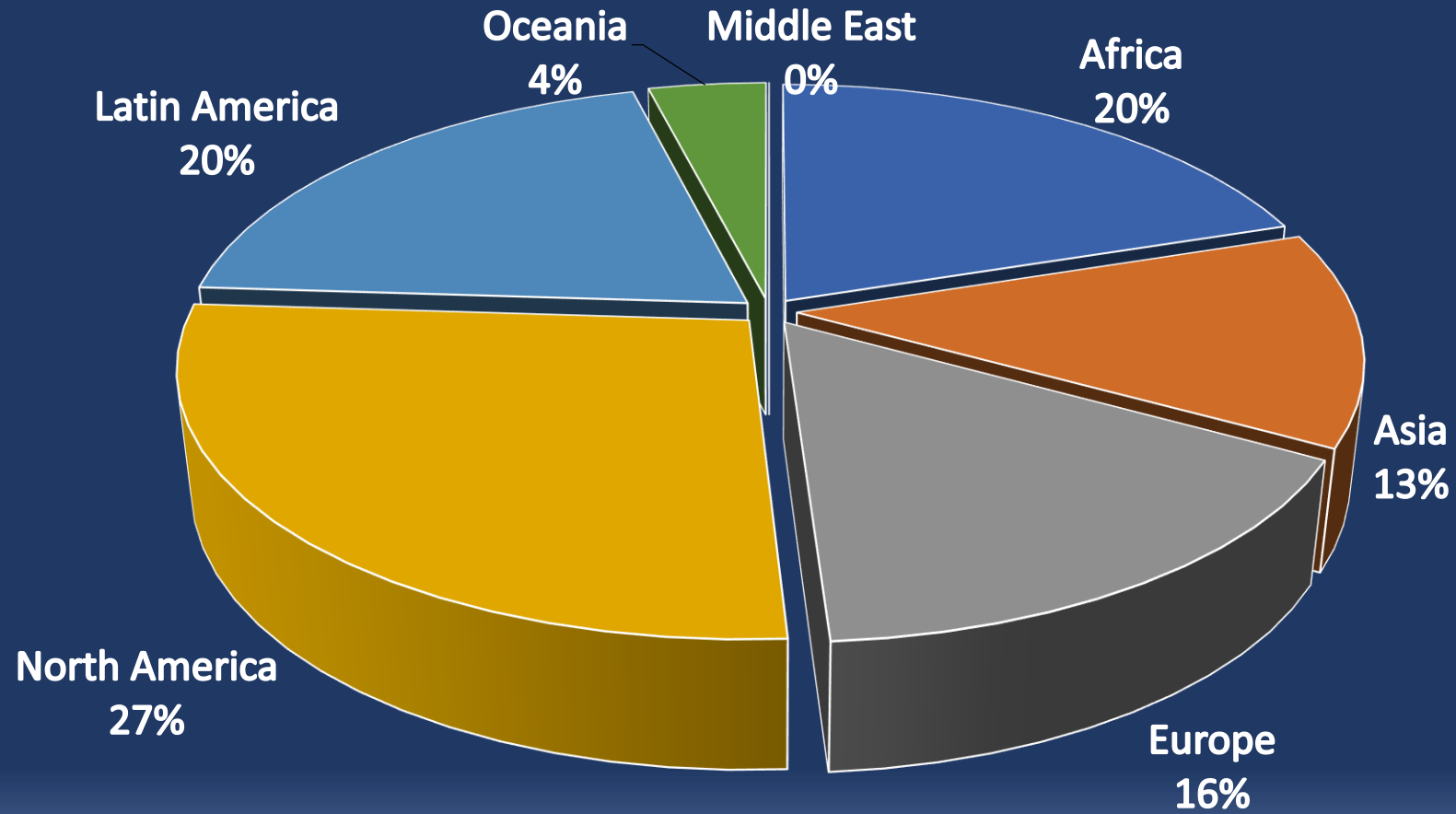
The world in a village of 100 people:



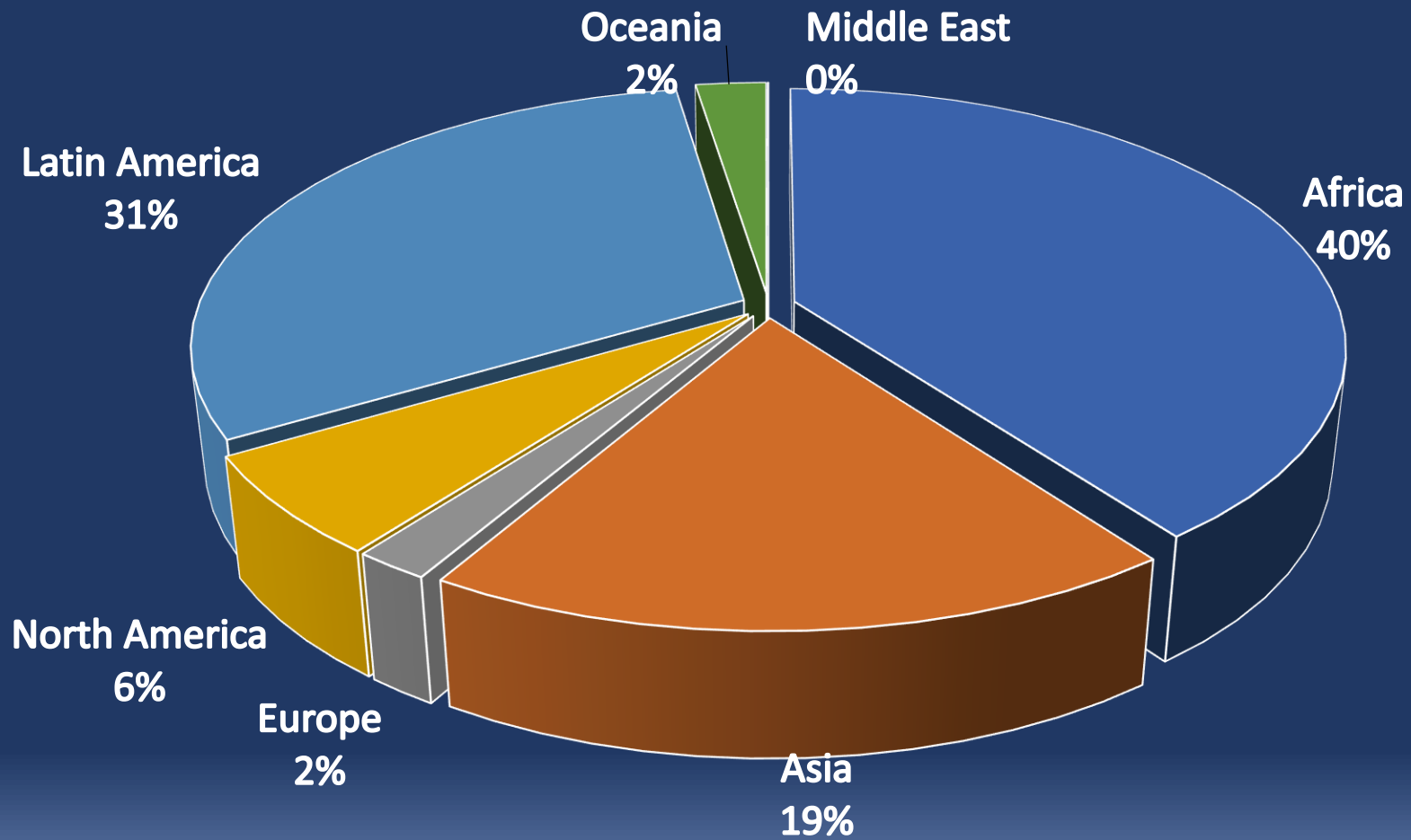
The world in a village of 100 people:



SDA Membership distribution--1960



SDA Membership distribution--2016



We live in a multi-cultural world. The extent and impact of communication technology results in relatively few people living in a mono-cultural setting.

Cultural differences may not always be complex and confusing. But the possibility for misunderstanding is greater due to unfamiliarity with individuals and the beliefs and attitudes that motivate their behaviors.

Study of cultures necessarily involves making generalized statements—summaries of likelihood rather than certainty.

Generalizations can be helpful in moving us toward understanding but should never be taken as absolutes.

What is culture?

Culture is the sum of shared **assumptions, values, and beliefs** held by a large group of people that result in characteristic **behaviors**.

Notice the invisible parts—assumptions, values and beliefs.

Notice the visible parts—behaviors.

Culture-based behavior is not accidental or arbitrary—it has a foundation. There is a cause and effect relationship that operates in culture.

Ethnocentrism:

Seeing the world through the lens of my own culture, evaluating other people by my cultural values, beliefs and behaviors.

What may be the underlying belief?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Inviting the janitor to eat with you. | 1. Equality |
| 2. Asking the boss's opinion when you are the expert. | 2. Deference to authority |
| 3. Disagreeing openly at a meeting. | 3. Being direct |
| 4. Accepting without question that something cannot be changed. | 4. Fatalism |
| 5. Agreeing in a meeting to a suggestion you think is wrong. | 5. Saving face |

Much of our behavior has no inherent meaning. Over the course of time a culture decides or comes to accept what a specific behavior means. When people assign similar meaning to a specific behavior communication can take place either with the use of language (sounds with agreed-upon meaning) or gestures.

In cross-cultural situations an important principle to remember is to suspend judgment or the assigning of meaning to a given behavior until you can discover what the behavior means in the other person's culture.

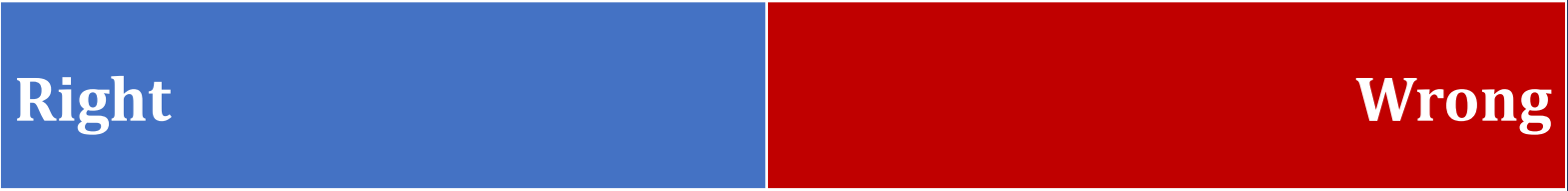
Not all behavior is cultural. Cultural behavior occupies a space in between universal and personal behavior.



Is it universal, cultural, or personal?

1. Sleeping with an open bedroom window.
2. Running from a wild animal.
3. Men opening doors for women.
4. Eating regularly.
5. Speaking Spanish.
6. Feeling regret at causing an accident.
7. Wearing a suit and tie to worship.
8. Dislike of wearing a suit and tie to worship.
9. Needing sleep.
10. Needing sleep right now.

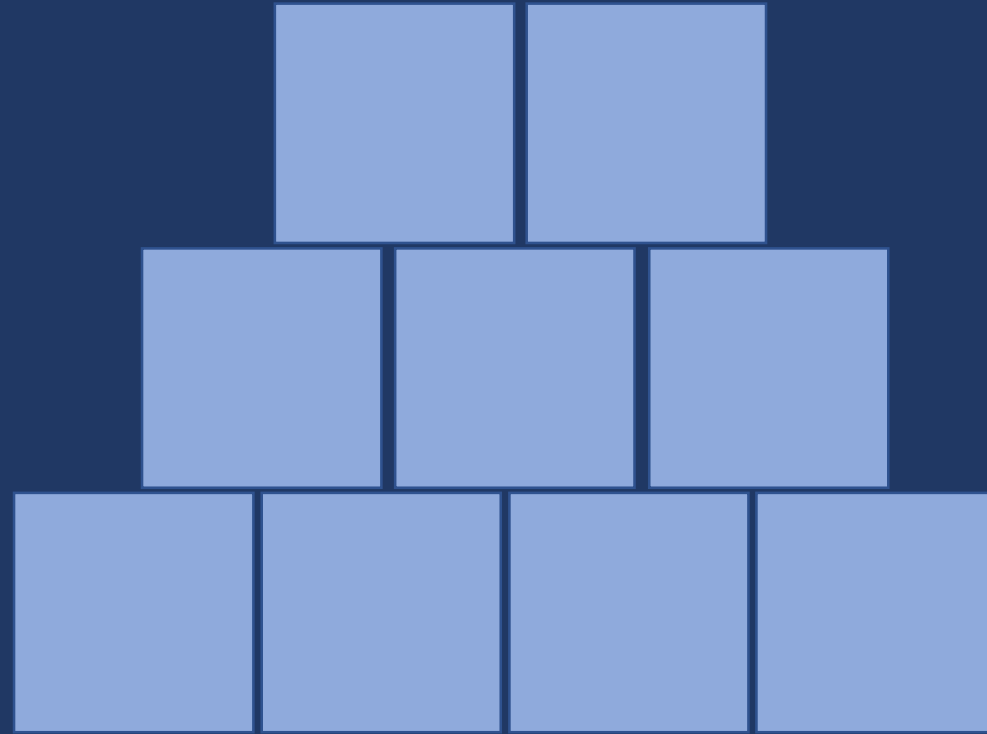
Some culture differences are just that— differences. We should not assign a value judgment (i.e. right or wrong) to them. Indeed, it may be appropriate to assess a value judgment on some cultural behavior. But we must not rush to judgment as soon as we notice a difference.



“We stand in awe of the ocean,
The thunderstorm,
The sunset,
The mountains;
But we pass by a human being
Without notice
Even though
The person
Is God’s most
Magnificent
Creation.”

—Augustine

The
building
blocks
of
culture



Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of the cosmos (religion):

1. Theism (monotheism, polytheism, atheism)
2. The character of God/gods (loving/angry)
3. Origins (creation/naturalism)
4. Meaning/purpose in life
5. Good and evil (influence of spirits)
6. Death and the future (restored earth, heaven, bliss, reincarnation, nothingness)

Particularly in the West, there is a tendency for culture to move away from Christianity—from any religious expression for that matter. Religion is increasingly consigned to the arena of private life with little or no opportunity for a voice in the public square. This situation is not true in several other culture clusters around the world. In fact, in some areas of the world religion is playing an increasing role in public life.

How should we view the global Church in a world of many cultures?

Is Seventh-day Adventism cross-cultural, counter-cultural, trans-cultural or a sub-culture within cultures?

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
- 2. Concept of self**
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of self (individualist/collectivist)

Individualist:

- Smallest unit of survival is the individual.
- Needs of the individual are satisfied before those of the group.
- Independence and self-reliance are stressed and greatly valued
- Personal freedom is highly desired.
- More psychological and emotional distance from others.

Concept of self (individualist/collectivist)

Collectivist:

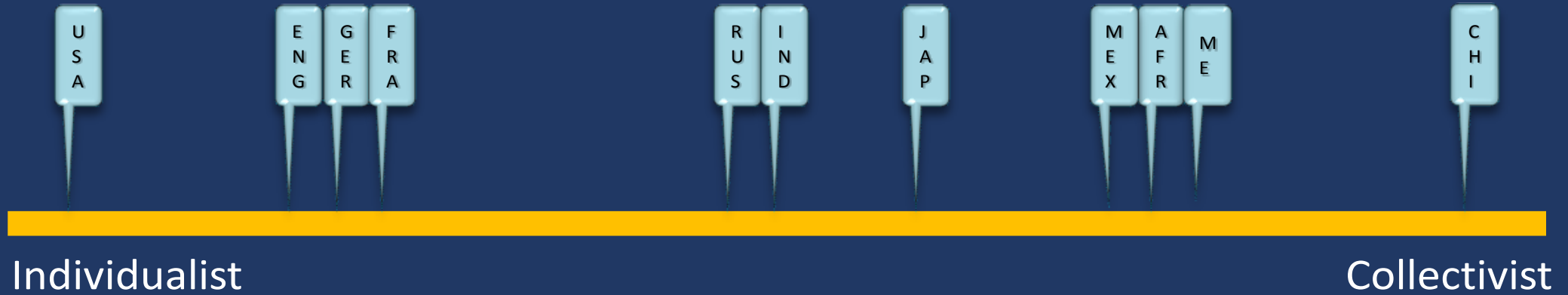
- A group, usually family, is the smallest unit of survival.
- One's identity largely determined by his membership and role in a group.
- By considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself.
- Harmony and interdependence valued.
- Group decisions more important than individual decisions.

No culture is exclusively individualist or collectivist. All cultures will exhibit some blend of the two concepts. However, cultures do tend more towards one or the other end of the spectrum.

Individualist or collectivist culture?

1. Companies give employee-of-the-year awards.
2. Harmony and saving face highly valued.
3. Friendships are many and casual.
4. There is less of a need for signed contracts in business.
5. A mother asks her four-year-old what he or she wants to wear today.
6. Self-help books are popular.
7. Consensus decision making is the norm.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of self: (approximations only)



Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
- 3. Concept of responsibility**
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of responsibility: (universalism vs. particularism)

Universalism:

- The idea that right is right regardless of circumstances.
- Same rules apply to everyone.
- Fairness: everyone alike in similar situations—no preferential treatment for family.
- Matters are to be analyzed and judged objectively, deal with the “facts”.

Concept of responsibility: (universalism vs. particularism)

Particularism:

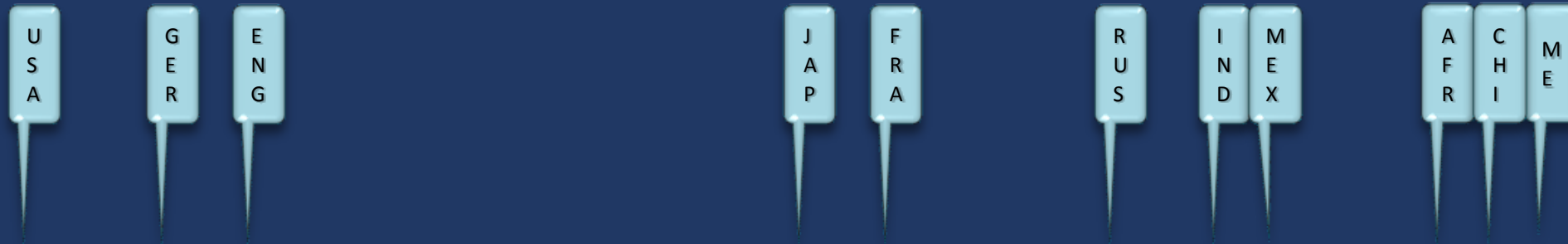
- What is right in one situation may not be right in another, evaluate circumstances.
- Treat family and friends the best you can.
- To be fair is to treat everyone as unique.
- Exceptions will be made for some.
- Personal feelings should not be ignored.
- Special requests can be made of in-group members because they are assured special treatment when the time comes.

No culture is purely universalist or particularist. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views concerning responsibility, what is right and what is fair. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

Universalist or particularist culture?

1. An agreement is valid whatever happens afterward.
2. Friends stick together no matter what.
3. Objective reasoning takes precedence over subjective feelings.
4. Justice is blind and impartial.
5. Every situation is different; you cannot apply rules rigidly.
6. If circumstances change, a promise may not need to be kept.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of responsibility: (approximations only)



Universalist

Particularist

Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. **Concept of time**
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of time: (monochronic vs.
polychronic)

“Danish punctuality would result in hypertension in Greece”

— Max Messmer, *Staffing Europe*

Concept of time: (monochronic vs. polychronic)

Monochronic:

- Time is measurable and quantifiable—a limited amount of it.
- Efficiency and urgency are highly valued.
- The needs of people must be adjusted to the time (schedule, deadline, etc.).
- Interruptions are annoying because they waste time.
- Doing one thing at a time is better than trying to multi-task.

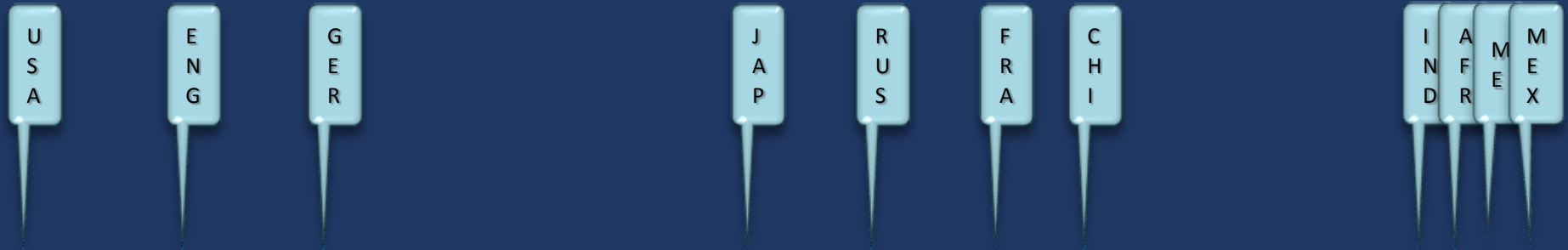
Concept of time: (monochronic vs. polychronic)

Polychronic:

- Time is elastic and limitless. There is always more time.
- The event is more important than the time.
- Schedules and deadlines can be changed since time must be adjusted to people's needs.
- It is not necessary to finish one thing before starting another. Multi-tasking OK.

No culture is purely monochronic or polychronic. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views concerning time. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of time: (approximations only)



Monochronic

Polychronic

Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

Which statement do you agree with most?

1. What happens to me is my own doing.
2. Sometimes I feel I don't have control in my life's direction.

- Percentage of Americans choosing first statement = 89%
- Percentage of Chinese choosing first statement = 35%

Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

Internal:

- Control over life is largely internal.
- Very few things have to be accepted as they are or cannot be changed at all.
- You can accomplish most anything you want to do.
- Success is up to you—you are responsible for what happens to you.

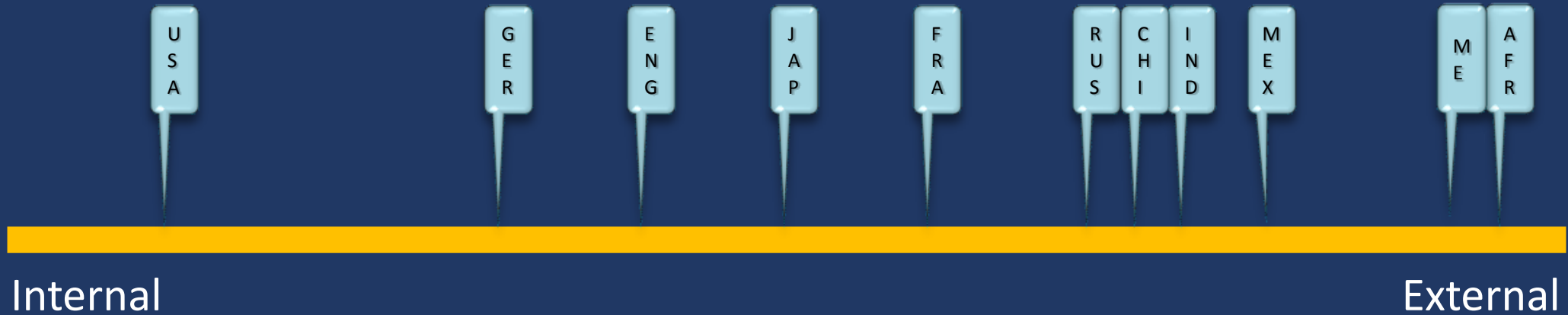
Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

External:

- Control over life is largely outside the individual.
- Some things in life are simply predetermined.
- There are limits beyond which one cannot go.
- Success is then a combination of good fortune and your effort.

No culture is purely internal or external in its concept of control. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of control: (approximations only)



Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

These differences might be described as a **time-oriented** bias versus a **relationship-oriented** bias. Does one or the other bias influence a person's valuation of the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) above or beneath the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)? Is it realistic to think that one culture may emphasize the Commission (time-oriented) while another may emphasize the Commandment (relation-oriented)?

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

The dimension of communication on which cultures differ the most and the one affecting more aspects of the communication dynamic is the matter of directness.

Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

Directness:

- Seen more often in individualist cultures.
- People lead more independent lives, there is less instinctive understanding of others.
- Tendency to be more explicit in speech, say exactly what is meant rather than suggest or imply.
- The words said are important; what is left unsaid is rather inconsequential. “No” can be said directly.

Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

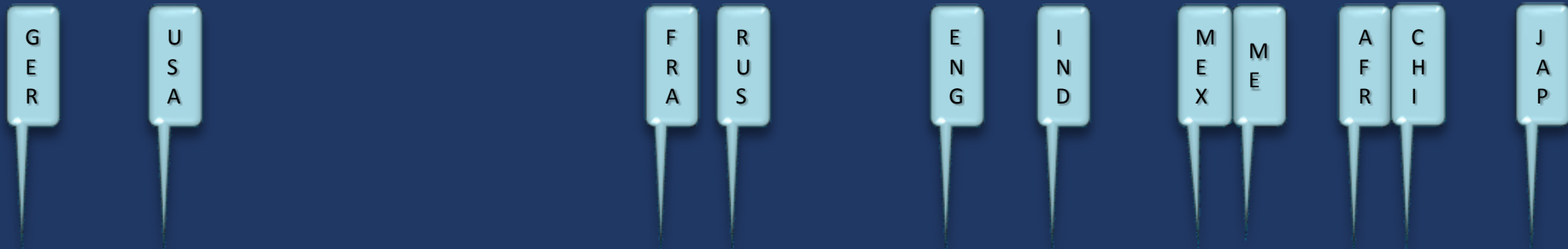
Indirectness:

- More typical of collectivist cultures.
- Prefer inference, suggestion or implication rather than direct speech.
- Harmony and saving face are important.
- Confrontation is avoided.
- Emphasis on relationships brings intuitive understanding and thus less need for specificity and directness.
- Very careful in how “No” is said.

Other factors in cross cultural communication:

- **Body language** (we must hear with our eyes)
- **Space** (personal space)
- **Power distance** (i.e. boss and subordinate)

How cultures view themselves on communication: (approximations only)



Direct

Indirect

Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

The Bible and culture:

In the move from the Old Testament covenant people to the New Testament covenant people there is a shift from a single nation (Children of Israel) to an international group—the Church, with representatives from all nations. The people of God come from every nation, tribe, tongue and people. (Revelation 5:9 and 7:9)

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

—Revelation 7:9,10 NKJV

The OT-NT transition to awareness of an international covenant people introduced many new and complex questions concerning the life of faith: How does one relate to government? How do believers relate to socially expected customs when those customs had religious overtones (i.e. circumcision, food offered to idols)? What should be the religious posture with respect to economic structures in society? And how does a believer deal with persecution?

Some insights from a study of culture:

1. Every culture reveals something of God's image and likeness in humanity while also giving evidence of how this image and likeness has been distorted and corroded by rebellion.

Some insights from a study of culture:

2. The mission of God addresses all of human existence and thus is cultural, cross-cultural and trans-cultural. The Gospel confronts all cultures for redemptive rather than destructive purposes.

Some insights from a study of culture:

3. The Bible encourages good citizenship while insisting that the worshippers of God have a primary allegiance to the King of Kings. (See 1 Peter 2:13-17) Christians are to submit to the authority of the state except in those situations where doing so places one in disobedience to God, the supreme authority.

Some insights from a study of culture:

4. The Kingdom of God is not to be equated with any political, social or economic order—with any culture.

Some insights from a study of culture:

5. If differences are culturally based and not a violation of the clear teaching of scripture, we can/should learn how to accept, honor, and respect fellow believers whose behavior may differ from ours on the basis of cultural background.

Some insights from a study of culture:

6. The Gospel message is meant for the whole world and every culture. In its mission to reach every culture, the Church will need to engage increasingly with questions of unity and diversity. Relevancy to cultural and geographic specifics will lead to increasing diversity of practice—but this need not threaten the underlying unity of a mission-focused Church.

Christ's love for us and our love for Christ
and His people creates unity in the midst of
diversity.

Culture and my work:

1. How does cultural awareness inform my relationships and communication with colleagues?
2. What cultural biases do I bring to the workplace?
3. What are defining marks of SDA culture?
4. Does or should SDA culture override other cultural considerations?

Resources:

- Carson, D A; *Christ and Culture Revisited*, W B Erdmans Publishing Company, 2008, Kindle Edition
- Elmer, Duane; *Cross-Cultural Connections*, Inter-Varsity Press, Kindle Edition
- Livermore, David, *Leading With Cultural Intelligence*, AMACOM, Kindle Edition
- Storti, Craig (2011-03-04); *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide* (pp. 25-26). Quercus. Kindle Edition.