

Culture shock in a foreign country...

Is the difficulty person has adjusting to a new culture that differs markedly from their own. The shock of moving to a foreign country often consists of distinct phases, though not everyone passes through these phases and not everyone is in the new culture long enough to pass through all four. There are no fixed symptoms ascribed to culture shock as each person is affected differently.

The Four Phases

1. Honeymoon phase: During this period, the differences between the old and new culture are seen in a romantic light, wonderful and new. For example, in moving to a new country, an individual might love the new foods, the pace of the life, the people's habits, the buildings and so on. During the first few weeks, most people are fascinated by the new culture. They associate with the nationals that speak their language and are polite to the foreigners. This period is full of observations and new discoveries. Like most honeymoon periods, this stage eventually ends.^[3] "When an individual sets out to study, live or work in a new country, he or she will invariably experience difficulties with language, housing, friends, school, work..."

2. Negotiation phase: After some time (usually three months but sometimes sooner or later, depending on the individual), differences between the old and new culture become apparent and may create anxiety. Excitement may eventually give way to unpleasant feelings of frustration and anger as one continues to experience unfavorable events that may be perceived as strange and offensive to one's cultural attitude. Language barriers, stark differences in public hygiene, traffic safety, food accessibility and quality may heighten the sense of disconnection from the surroundings.^[4]

While being transferred into a different environment puts special pressure on communication skills, there are practical difficulties to overcome, such as biological clock disruption that often leads to insomnia and daylight drowsiness; adaptation of intestinal flora to different bacteria levels and concentrations in food and water; difficulty in seeking treatment for illness, as medicines may have different names from the native country's and the same active ingredients might be hard to recognize.

Still, the most important change in the period is communication: those people who are adjusting to a new culture would feel lonely and homesick because they must get used to the new environment and meet people with whom they are not familiar every day. The language barrier may become a major obstacle in creating new relationships: special attention must be paid to one's and others' culture-specific body language signs, linguistic faux pas, conversation tone, linguistic nuances and customs, and false friends.

Due to the strain of living in a different country without parental support, some students might develop additional symptoms of loneliness, ultimately affecting the lifestyle as a whole. International students therefore often feel anxious and have a higher pressure in adjusting to the new cultures. This is even more valid when the cultural distance is wide, as logical and speech patterns are different and a special emphasis is put on rhetorics.

3. Adjustment phase: Again, after some time (usually 6 to 12 months), one grows accustomed to the new culture and develops routines. One knows what to expect in most situations and the host country no longer feels all that new. One becomes concerned with basic living again, and things become more "normal". One starts to develop problem-solving skills for dealing with the culture, and begins to accept the culture ways with a positive attitude. The culture begins to make sense, and negative reactions and responses to the culture are reduced.

4. Mastery phase: In the mastery stage assignees are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture. Mastery does not mean total conversion; people often keep many traits from their earlier culture, such as accents and languages. It is often referred to as the biculturalism stage.

See references on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_shock#cite_note-2

If you survive the two first weeks, you'll feel less tight each passing day...[to, 01nov2011]