INTRODUCTION

The analysis of intercultural communication for international business dealings must begin with a cultural universal. All people are socialized as children into a culture and one of the major purposes is to prepare them to be responsible and respected adults. Even when there are failures, as with criminals and adults who spend long periods of time on welfare, people are judged according to the standards set by successfully socialized individuals. People learn many skills that mark the well-socialized individual in their culture: how to meet and interact with strangers, appropriate topics for conversation, who should be given special attention (relatives, powerholders, etc.) and how to negotiate with others. A major aspect of intercultural communication in international business is that people who were socialized in different cultures come together for the purpose of identifying shared goals and working toward their accomplishment. Many times, they bring different culturally-influenced preferences for how best to interact, how best to communicate, and how best to follow through on business agreements.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce theoretical concepts and analytical frameworks that will assist people in international business dealings that transcend cultural boundaries. Since there have been book-length treatments that deal with this and related topics (Brislin, 2000; Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995), our goal will be to highlight what we feel are especially important
issues. We will begin with a discussion of intercultural business success and how effective communication facilitates the goal of productive international business dealings. We will use the term “sojourner” to refer to people who accept overseas business assignments and who expect to return to their own culture after they complete these assignments. People on the receiving end of visits from sojourners are called “hosts” or “host nationals.” We then review research on the traits and abilities of people who are likely to be successful. This is followed by a treatment of key intercultural communication issues that sojourners must face: stylistic differences, an understanding of attributional processes, and awareness of well-researched cultural dimensions that have effects on many specific interpersonal misunderstandings, and high-order management issues like ethical dilemmas.

There is an interesting, perhaps ironic, aspect of effective intercultural communication. As people become more skillful and more successful during their international assignments, they will be asked to become involved in more and more business dealings. Some of these dealings will challenge the ethical standards that have guided people’s behavior in their own culture. For example, sojourners from the United States might be asked to serve on a hiring committee. Should the best candidate be sought, or should the less qualified nephew of the company’s vice president be hired? To obtain government clearance for a new construction project, should the company provide key public officials with financial incentives? Given that there is absolutely no enforcement of applicable laws, shall the company ignore intellectual property rights and purchase low-cost pirated software for its computers? To assist in decision making when faced with difficult questions such as these, we review treatments of ethical considerations that could prove helpful in complex international business dealings.

**International Business Success**

When sojourners are considered successful, they have satisfied requirements of a four-part criteria. (1) They enjoy their intercultural assignments, feel that they have been productive, and feel that the assignments have been good for their careers. These feelings (2) must be reciprocated by host nationals who should report that the sojourners made contributions and that their presence was welcome. Overseas businesspeople (3) have tasks that are central to their overseas assignments, such as the establishment of joint ventures, and these should be accomplished in a timely manner. The final part of the criteria of success is that (4) people manage stress effectively. The term “culture shock” is used to refer to a special set of stresses that almost always cause emotional difficulties for sojourners (Bochner, 1994). These stresses include dealing with very different ways of accomplishing goals in different cultures, and the sheer