



Counselling that enables you to embrace life and thrive ...

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## Making Sense of Values and Identity When You Live Between Two Worlds

The Two Worlds approach<sup>1</sup> can be helpful in assisting staff to manage cross-cultural adjustment. It assists in reintegrating a sense of self, making decisions about which values to live by, and how much to integrate into a new culture. This is useful when working with cross-cultural staff who are trying to assimilate into a different culture, and when they return to life in their home country. This model provides a means of forming a healthy identity and a more integrated way of operating within a culture.

### Two Worlds Theory

The Two Worlds approach has been used in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder. It is used as an analogy that describes the experience of posttraumatic stress disorder as being like living in a *trauma* world and a *now* world simultaneously. The *trauma* world consists of re-experiencing symptoms through intrusive thoughts and images and environmental triggers. This stops the person from being able to live in the *now*, or the present, because they are distracted, cannot concentrate, and have a lower processing capacity for what is actually going on around them. The issue for the person is that they fall into the trap of applying the rules and values of the *trauma* world to the *now* world and this results in problems because they wrongly apply rules to situations.

### Application to Cross-Cultural Work

Staff who have gone to live in another less developed country to do some kind of voluntary work need to navigate through the difficult transition of integrating into another culture, and then reintegrating back into our society. For many of these staff this Two Worlds analogy is helpful because their sense of self and identity changes when they leave Australia and transition from one worldview or culture to another, and then return to find that they are people who live in-between more than one world. If they have difficulty working through the change of values, culture and worldview, they can experience adjustment issues. In this context, the Two Worlds approach can be very helpful for assisting them to navigate through this adjustment successfully.

### World View, Culture and Values

Cross-cultural work requires a person to assimilate into another culture. In doing so they need to decide which parts of this new culture they are happy to integrate into the way they operate in society. For example, they need to abide by the laws of this

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<sup>1</sup> Giarratano, L (2012). *Clinical skills for managing acute psychological trauma*. Talomin Books, Ligare Pty Ltd.

country, but might need to think about and choose which other aspects of society they will integrate into. On a deeper level, they might weigh up some of the new values and beliefs. They might decide that they will move from a task focussed Western culture to a relationship focussed culture. These decisions impact the person's identity, and the longer they live in their new context the more likely it is that these changes will result in different thoughts, feelings, and ways of making judgements. This alters a person's identity.

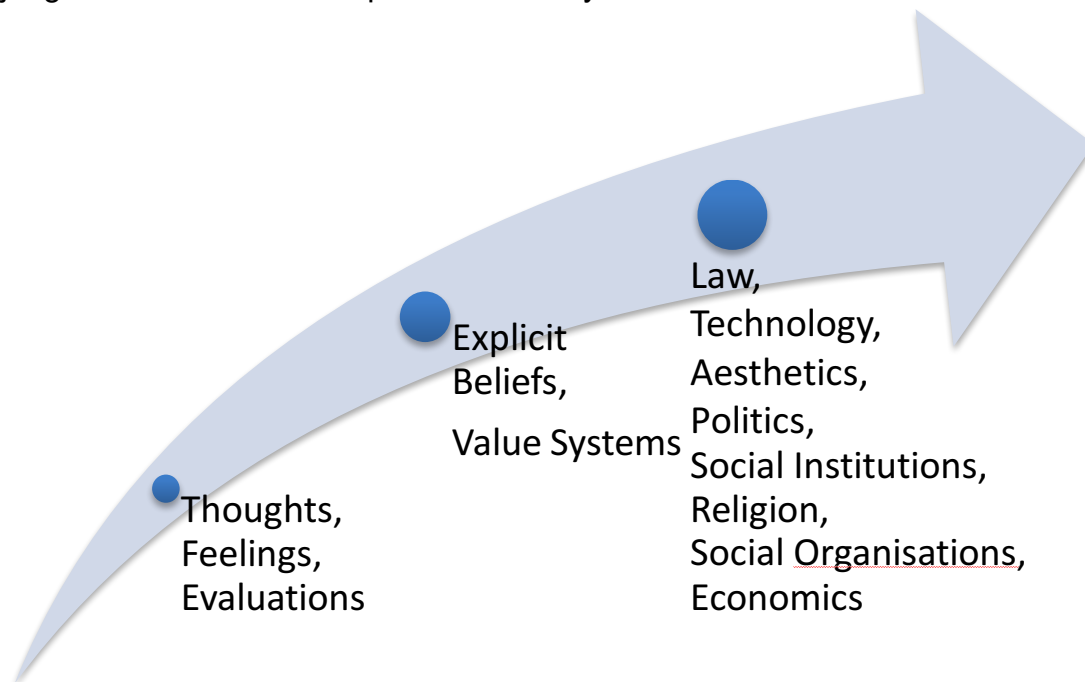


Figure 1. Worldview adapted from Hiebert<sup>2</sup>.

### Applying the Two Worlds Approach to Cultural Adjustment

At a basic level, it is helpful for people who have moved to a different culture to make a list of rules that apply to their home culture, and their new culture. On return to their home country this can be done in reverse, i.e. new culture vs. home culture.

Table 1. Kazakhstan vs. Australia

Kazakhstan	Australia
Relationship focussed	Task focussed
Family/community focussed	Individualistic
Hospitality as most important value	Materialism as most important value
Gender equality in the workplace via communism	Gender equality in the workplace via human rights
Nominal Islam and Muslim culture	Post-Christian humanistic culture
Respect for the elderly	Devaluing of older people

If a person writes a list like this it becomes really clear what kind of things are unconsciously playing into their behaviour, from simple everyday things to larger value choices. And as many of these value differences are not directly related to faith

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert, P. G. (2004). *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

and beliefs assimilation into the new culture and reintegration back into the old culture requires processing which values the person wants to adopt and keep and which ones they want to change. To illustrate this further I have given some examples below:

### **Example 1. Work vs. Relationships**

*World 1 Rule (Kazakhstan):*

People are more important than work.

*Impact World 2 Now (Australia):*

Returning to Australia, will I return to being work focussed, or will I value my relationships? If I choose relationships, then I will need to live out-of-step with the people around me and resist being busy all the time. I will live at a pace that allows me to connect with other people and be available to them.

### **Example 2. Raking Leaves**

*World 1 Rule (Kazakhstan):*

Straw brooms are the most effective way to rake leaves.

*Impact World 2 Now (Australia):*

In Australia, people use leaf blowers or rakes to collect leaves. I am going to be counter-cultural and continue to use a straw broom because it is better than a rake, and more environmentally friendly than a leaf blower.

### **Encourage Staff to have the Conversation**

Encourage staff to work through these issues and decide what values they want to keep as part of their identity and why, and which rules are actually unhelpful and need to change. The core of their identity needs to be their Christian faith, not the values of either culture. Help them to have this conversation with their family and friends, or journal it, so they can actively process the adjustment and change they are going through. It is essential that families work through this together, otherwise they can become out-of-step with one another and this can become a source of conflict. Ultimately, people who successfully move from one culture to another can turn this adversity into a strength because it gives them new eyes through which to view their behaviour and decide what type of person they want to be.