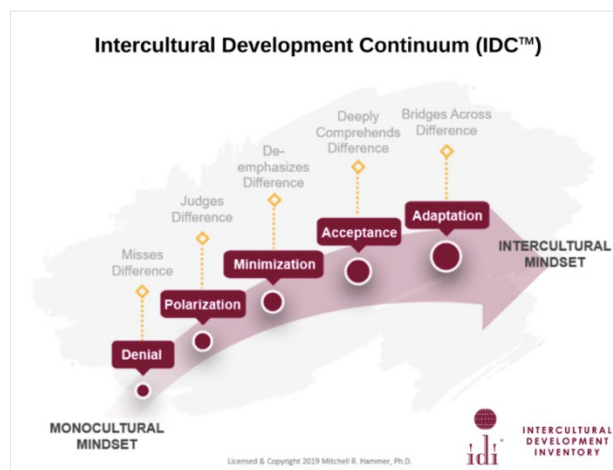


## The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™):

One of the models most commonly used to describe the process of intercultural development is the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™) (Hammer, 2012). The IDC (see image below) is a set of orientations that describe an individual's attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skill sets related to navigating cultural difference. The orientations along the continuum go from a more monocultural mindset (meaning the individual primarily interprets cultural difference through their own values and beliefs and relies on stereotypes to explain cultural difference) to an intercultural mindset (meaning that the individual interprets cultural difference through multiple lenses, using both their own and others' values and beliefs, and explains cultural difference using generalizations rather than stereotypes). The five orientations on the IDC are denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation:



- *"Denial:* an orientation that likely recognizes more observable cultural differences (e.g., food) but may not notice deeper cultural difference (e.g., conflict resolution styles) and may avoid or withdraw from cultural differences."
- *"Polarization:* a judgmental orientation that views cultural differences in terms of 'us' and 'them'. This can take the form of:
  - Defense: an uncritical view toward one's own cultural values and practices and an overly critical view toward other cultural values and practices.
  - Reversal: an overly critical orientation toward one's own cultural values and practices and an uncritical view toward other cultural values and practices."
- *"Minimization:* an orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences."
- *"Acceptance:* an orientation that recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one's own and other cultures."
- *"Adaptation:* an orientation that is capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways (IDI, LLC, 2012)."

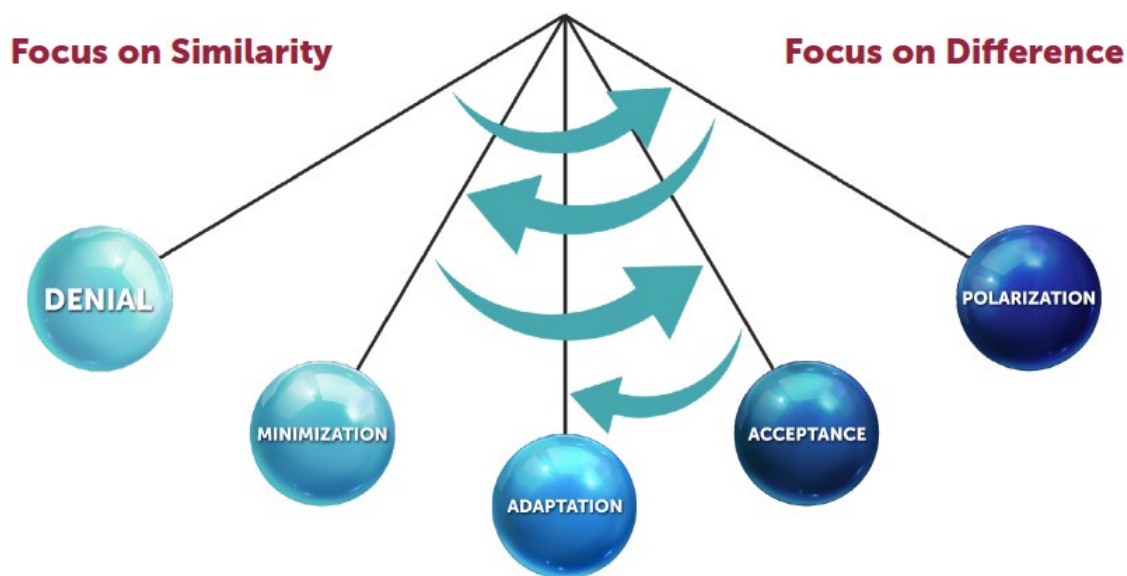
One common critique of the IDC is that movement across the orientations is depicted as linear and unidirectional. Therefore, Acheson & Schneider-Bean (2019) propose a new conception of intercultural development as a pendulum.

Quotations in this document are from the following:

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## The Pendulum Metaphor for Intercultural Development:

The intercultural development “pendulum swings between a focus on similarity and a focus on difference, with the orientations that have the most unbalanced focus on similarity (denial) and difference (polarization) located at the most extreme reaches of the pendulum trajectory. Moving from one orientation to the next on the continuum (for example, from polarization to minimization) means swinging from one side to the other (in this case, from too much emphasis on difference to too much emphasis on similarity), with each swing less extreme until one may eventually find balance between the two in adaptation. Adaptation is situated midway between the two extremes because in this orientation, when we are able to successfully bridge cultural differences and behave appropriately in contexts beyond our native culture(s), we have resolved the dissonance between self and other, achieving a dialectic of similarity and difference.”



“If change can be likened to propulsion, an external force that causes the pendulum to swing, we must also account for other forces that affect the pendulum’s behavior. Two of the most important of these are magnets and anchors. Magnets are exterior forces which tend to pull the pendulum towards one side or the other. [The figure on the following page] provides several examples of magnets that pull us towards a focus on either similarity or difference. For instance, a rhetoric of religion that emphasizes the common humanity shared by self and other (i.e., “we are all God’s children”) encourages us to concentrate on similarity and ignore cultural differences, as does an expat lifestyle that isolates us from the local community, leading us to believe that life abroad is not all that different from life back home. Magnets that pull us towards a focus on difference include moments when we are confronted with strikingly unfamiliar environments, behaviors and belief systems, as well as dissatisfying encounters with others filled with uncertainty, conflict or unmet expectations. Tourist lifestyles are listed on both sides: A hotel-and-guided-tour type of cultural experience might buffer us from local customs and blind us to significant cultural differences (pulling towards similarity); on the other hand, the exoticization of foreign cultures that undergirds much tourism – that is, the performance of local rituals as a spectacle for the enjoyment of visitors rather than for their original purpose and the

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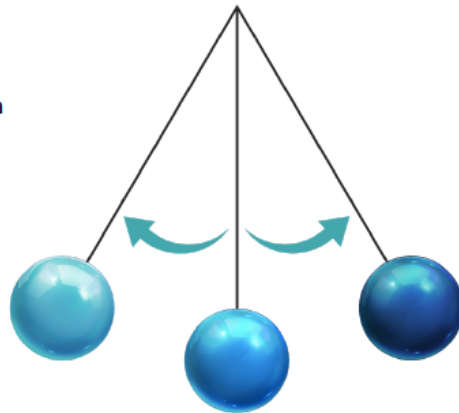
commodification of cultural artefacts as souvenirs – can encourage us to frame the world as us vs. them (pulling towards difference).

Like magnets, anchors also exert an attractive force on the pendulum, but rather than pulling you away from your habitual orientation, anchors ground you and allow you to resist swinging to previous stages on the IDC in times of stress. While magnets operate on the pendulum largely outside of our control, anchors require deliberate cultivation on our part; we must drop anchors if we want them to help hold us in place.”

## Focus on Similarity

Examples of Magnets:

- Religion
- Separatism (e.g., isolation in an expat community)
- Moments of connection with others
- Tourist life style



## Focus on Difference

Examples of Magnets:

- Traumatic encounters with difference
- Moments of conflict with others
- Tourist life style

Examples of Anchors:

- Physical and emotional health
- Strong diverse social networks
- Habits of mindfulness

## Sundae Schneider-Bean's Story:

Sundae Schneider-Bean's story below provides a real-life example of intercultural development as a pendulum:

“I grew up rather sheltered from other cultures in Williston, North Dakota, USA. I left for a study abroad semester in Toledo, Spain when I was twenty-one. Until that point, my cultural experiences had been comprised of fairly limited and superficial encounters with domestic diversity in the Mid-western USA and a few quick trips north to our ‘neighbors’ in Canada. In my early years I had no idea how important culture was to me, to others, or to my relationships with others, but in Spain I discovered how exciting it was to gain a glimpse of the world from another perspective. After finishing my degree in Spain, I added a few months exploring Europe and a whirlwind backpacking adventure in south-east Asia to my suite of experiences. In Vietnam, I met someone special and this led to a move to Bern, Switzerland at the age of twenty-two to commit to a relatively new relationship. I was starry-eyed, in love and hungry for cultural experiences. I soaked in the rich architecture of this UNESCO World Heritage Site; I tested out new foods and awkwardly learned how to properly greet friends. Bernese German

DENIAL

MINIMIZATION

POLARIZATION

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(Barnduutsch) presented a challenge, especially since I had to learn German (Hochdeutsch) to eventually understand it, but became well worth the effort. Even as I became more proficient in the language, though, I often found myself being taken off guard when I observed how the Swiss did certain things, or when I realized that they expected me to behave in ways that didn't feel natural to me. Sometimes the identity challenge, physical distance from family and sorrow for all I had given up brought me to my knees in tears. I tried to cope by focusing on all the things I had in common with the Bernese, the values we seemed to share and what good people they were.

Over the years I began to understand and even appreciate 'the way they do things here', including the importance of planning in advance, how friendships take more time to build and even the high value placed on security. I learned to tone it down in a restaurant or on public transport, being careful not to laugh too loudly and draw attention. Eventually I was able to integrate quite deeply, spending much of my time with Swiss friends and even heading up intercultural management at a major Swiss corporation. I was proud of the fact that I could train and coach my clients in German. I still felt a little different, but accepted. Over the years, Switzerland became 'home', so much so that I felt like an outsider when I went back to the USA to visit."

"Three years ago, I did something many people thought was crazy. I left what I had worked so hard to build in Switzerland (the language, geographical familiarity, a strong network of friends, a rewarding and impactful job) to move to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (West Africa). I was no longer starry-eyed. I was an established professional and mother of two young children. I was leaving an immensely secure situation and diving into the unknown on so many levels. What had not changed is that I was still hungry for new cultural experiences. Moving to West Africa felt like going to a whole new world. On a reconnaissance trip to Ouagadougou my husband sent photos, reported on the infrastructure and gave his first impression of what the people were like. We agreed we were all in. We said goodbye to all we were leaving behind in Switzerland and landed in the airport on 5 August 2013.

I was responsible for training in the new nanny and helping the children adjust to the changes in the first few weeks. I did a lot of observing of how the Burkinabe greeted each other and how the men did not make as much direct eye contact as they do in Switzerland or in the USA. I wondered how I was ever going to learn how to drive in this seemingly perilous and erratic traffic. Every time I would go out in the city, I would just stare out the window of my car soaking in the views of the donkey carts, mothers carrying babies on their backs using only a simple piece of fabric and the live goat strapped to the top of a moving bus. What got loaded onto motorcycles seemed to be limitless: a family of four, full (raw) egg cartons stacked 20 high, live cows, or a large wooden door. It felt exotic. There were differences everywhere, and I was taking it all in. Some of the differences felt less playful when I experienced them, such as lower security measures at an amusement park resulting in an injury for my son, or waiting for the internet technician to come back... for six weeks instead of 'tomorrow at 9:30' as promised.



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Another challenge is that I felt like a surgeon with oven mitts on when it came to speaking French. It was a deep plummet down from being able to interact professionally in fluent German to stumbling through my basic French and having Spanish resurface again when I had reached my French limits. I wanted to ask so many questions of the locals I was interacting with. I wanted to dive deep into discovering how things worked here, what was appropriate and how I should handle specific delicate situations. But, I simply didn't have the resources to express myself and dig out this gold mine of information."



Focus on Similarity



"One welcome respite from the immense task of getting settled in Ouagadougou was how quickly I was able to meet a lovely group of friends and acquaintances. I felt immediately welcomed into the International School community. All of the patience and effort I had expended to make new friends of my own in Bern got turned on its head in Burkina. Instead of my husband introducing me to his community, I was the one making connections within the expat community while my husband was at work. I was surrounded by families who were also raising Third Culture Kids. The downside to this fast-track community is that my needs for connection were being met by expats, thereby curbing the 'burn' to meet Burkinabe friends. There were also so many barriers, it seemed, to connecting meaningfully with the Burkinabe.

Focus on Difference



Another aspect that helped me in terms of community and making friends is that I had spent the last 15 years practicing how to have relationships with my loved ones from a distance. I knew that no matter where I was on the planet that I could stay connected, and this sense of security gave me some inner stability.



A year into our life in Africa, I really needed some stability. Two days after we returned from a vacation to Switzerland, the WHO declared a state of emergency in West Africa due to the Ebola outbreak. I had never been challenged quite on this level before. I felt so responsible as a parent with two small children to protect. I struggled to find a balance between being prudent and rational. There were times when I battled an urge to withdraw from the local community, 'just in case' they were in physical contact with a relative who was affected. I recall when the hype around Ebola was at a high that I was hesitant to touch the guard outside of the bank I frequented every week so instead began to greet him with "Bonjour! a va? Et la famille?" sans handshake.

Focus on Difference



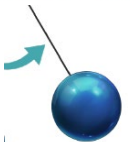
Focus on Similarity



A few months later, the panic around Ebola had subsided, but political uncertainty started to mount, with a declaration of civil disobedience by the opposition to President Blaise. This disobedience campaign led to the ousting of the President in a political uprising on 31 October 2014. The critical nature of these events and their inherent risks kept me focused on staying safe and functioning as normally as possible. These were not moments when I was pondering how I could expand my French vocabulary or develop relationships with locals.

Normal life quickly returned to Ouagadougou after the political uprising, but uncertainty remained with a transitional government and elections ahead. This uncertainty coupled with a level of heat that could melt any store of patience took its toll. In February 2015 I started writing about 'expat fatigue' for my blog because I was seeing hints of it all around me. Exaggerated responses to small disruptions, heightened frustrations with daily life and a general feeling of lethargy were just a few of the signs. I didn't want to let this fatigue hijack the joy that I had for the life and culture in Ouaga. But, I noticed I could respond to change so much more playfully

Focus on Difference



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when I had gone for a run or made time for a night out with my girlfriends. Likewise, on the evenings where I was able to slip away and read a bit or journal before heading to bed, I felt more energized in the mornings. These things grounded me. Whenever I got a bit sloppy about taking good care of myself, though, I felt more vulnerable and allowed myself to be more quickly frustrated by disruptions of my daily routine, such as power or water cuts. By being really diligent about prioritizing my health, my connections to others and time for myself, I could bring myself back to 'me'. Restoring my balance allowed me to better match the Burkinabe spirit of optimism, friendliness and demonstration of mutual respect. So when a local contact unexpectedly dropped by to say hello, I could see the visit not as an interruption, but rather as a pleasant surprise and a welcome opportunity to stop what I was doing, speak about the latest with the family and drink a bottle of cold soda."

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