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A Model of Intercultural Communication Competence

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The world we live in is shrinking. Travel that once took months now takes hours. Business dealings that were once confined primarily to local economies have given way to an extensively integrated world economy. Information that once traveled through error-prone and time-consuming methods now appears in the blink of an eye across a wide range of media. People in virtually all locations of the globe are more mobile than ever, and more likely to traverse into cultures different from their own. Literally and figuratively, the walls that separate us are tumbling down. Though we may not have fully become a "global village," there is no denying that the various cultures of the world are far more accessible than ever before, and that the peoples of these cultures are coming into contact at an ever increasing rate. These contacts ultimately comprise interpersonal encounters. Whether it is the negotiation of an arms treaty, or the settlement of a business contract, or merely a sojourner getting directions from a native, cultures do not interact, people do.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the concept of interactional competence in intercultural contexts. For the purposes of this essay, intercultural *communication competence* is considered very broadly as an impression that behavior is appropriate and effective in a given context. Normally, *competence* is considered an ability or a set of skilled behaviors. However, any given behavior or ability may be judged competent in one context, and in-

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competent in another. Consequently, competence cannot inhere in the behavior or ability itself. It must instead be viewed as a social evaluation of behavior. This social evaluation is composed of the two primary criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness.

Appropriateness means that the valued rules, norms, and expectancies of the relationship are not violated significantly. Effectiveness is the accomplishment of valued goals or rewards relative to costs and alternatives. With these dual standards, therefore, communication will be competent in an Intercultural context when it accomplishes the objectives of an actor in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationship.

These two standards obviously bear on the concept of interactional quality. Communication that is inappropriate and ineffective (that is, minimizing) is clearly of low quality. Communication that is appropriate but ineffective (that is, sufficing) suggests a social chameleon who does nothing objectionable, but also accomplishes no personal objectives through interaction. Finally, communication that is inappropriate but effective (that is, maximizing) would include such behaviors as lying, cheating, stealing, bludgeoning, and so forth, messages that are ethically problematic. While there may be instances in which such actions could be considered competent, they are rarely the ideal behaviors to employ in any given circumstance. Only the interactant who is both simultaneously appropriate and effective seems to meet the requirements of the optimal interpersonal communicator. The remainder of this essay examines issues surrounding appropriateness and effectiveness in intercultural interaction.

A Model of Intercultural Competence

Most existing models of intercultural competence have been fairly fragmented. Typically the literature is reviewed and a list of skills, abilities, and attitudes is formulated to summarize the literature (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Such lists appear on the surface to reflect useful guidelines for competent interaction and adaptation. For example, Spitzberg's (1989) review of studies, along with

other more recent studies, produces the partial list in Table 1. While each study portrays a reasonable list of abilities or attitudes, there is no sense of integration or coherence across lists. It is impossible to tell which skills are most important in which situations, or even how such skills relate to each other.

A more productive approach would be to develop an integrative model of intercultural competence that is both consistent with the theoretical and empirical literatures, and also provides specific predictions of competent behavior. This approach is reflected in basic form in Figure 1, and is elaborated on by means of the series of propositions that follow. The propositions are broken down into three levels of analysis: (1) the individual system, (2) the episodic system, and (3) the relational system. The individual system includes those characteristics an individual may possess that facilitate competent interaction in a normative social sense. The *episodic* system includes those features of a particular Actor that facilitate competence impressions on the part of a specific Coactor in a specific episode of interaction. The *relational* system includes those components that assist a person's competence across the entire span of relationships rather than in just a given episode of interaction. Each successive system level subsumes the logic and predictions of the former. The propositions serve both to provide an outline of a theory of interpersonal competence in intercultural contexts as well as offer practical advice. To the extent that interactants can analyze intercultural situations sufficiently to understand initial conditions, then each proposition suggests a course of action that is likely to enhance their competence in the situation encountered.

The model portrays the process of dyadic interaction as a function of two individuals' *motivation* to communicate, *knowledge* of communication in that context, and skills in implementing their motivation and knowledge. Over the course of the interaction both within and across episodes, behavior is matched to expectancies that each interactant has of the other and the interaction process. If expectancies are fulfilled in a rewarding manner, then interactants are likely to perceive both self and

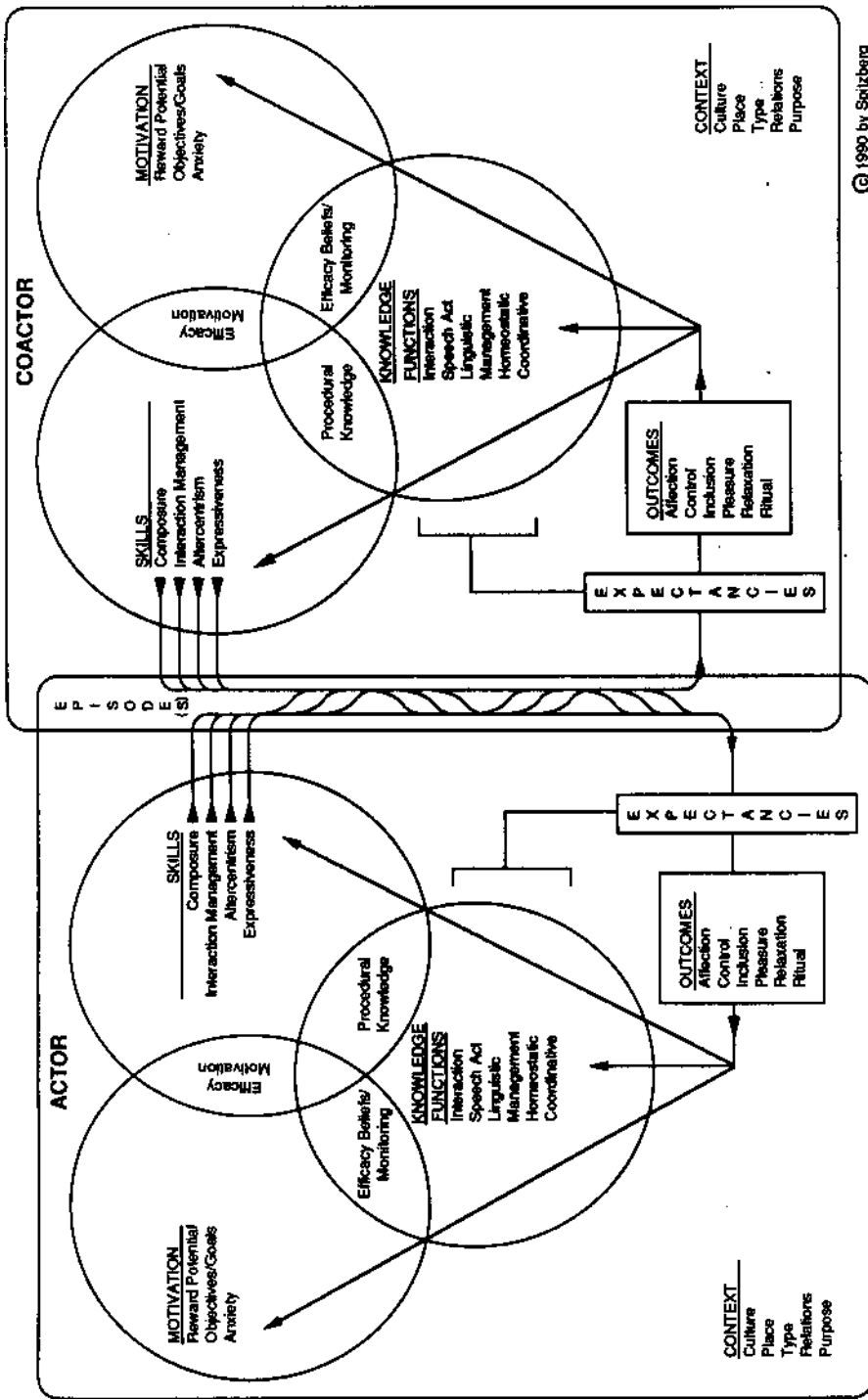
Table 1 Empirically Derived Factors of Intercultural Competence

Ability to adjust to different cultures	Frankness
Ability to deal with different societal systems	General competence as teacher (task)
Ability to deal with psychological stress	Incompetence
Ability to establish interpersonal relationships 4H	Intellectualizing future orientation
Ability to facilitate communication	Interaction involvement
Ability to understand others	Interpersonal flexibility
Adaptiveness	Interpersonal harmony
Agency (internal locus and efficacy/optimism)	Interpersonal interest
Awareness of self and culture	Interpersonally sensitive maturity
Awareness of implications of cultural differences	Managerial ability
Cautiousness	Nonethnocentrism
Charisma	Nonverbal behaviors
Communication apprehension	Personal/Family adjustment
Communication competence (ability to communicate)	Opinion leadership
Communication efficacy	Rigidity (task persistence)
Communicative functions	task accomplishment
Controlling responsibility	Transfer of "software"
Conversational management behaviors	Self-actualizing search for identity
Cooperation	Self-confidence/Initiative
Cultural empathy	Self-consciousness
Cultural interaction	Self-disclosure
Demand (long-term goal orientation)	Self-reliant conventionality
Dependent anxiety	Social adjustment
Differentiation	Spouse/Family communication
Empathy/Efficacy	Strength of personality
Familiarity in interpersonal relations	Verbal behaviors

other as communicatively competent, and feel relatively satisfied that objectives were accomplished. Interactants may be seen as incompetent because they lack motivation to perform competently, knowledge of the competent lines of action in the context concerned, or the communication skills to carry off a deft interaction. Also, interactants may be viewed as incompetent because their partner has unrealistic expectancies for the person or episode. These and other implications are discussed next.

Individual System

I. As communicator motivation increases, communicative competence increases. Very simply, the more a person wants to make a good impression and communicate effectively, the more likely it is that this person will view self, and be viewed by others, as competent. The question then, becomes what constitutes or leads to high levels of motivation. The following propositions address this question.



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Figure 1 A Diagrammatic Representation of Relational Competence

1a. As *communicator confidence increases, communicator motivation increases*. Confidence results from several individual experiences. For example, a person who is nervous meeting strangers is likely to be less confident when encountering a new person from a different culture. Further, the more unfamiliar a person is with a given type of situation, the less confident that person is regarding what to do and how to do it. Finally, some situations carry more significant implications and are more difficult to manage than others. For example, getting directions to a major urban landmark is likely to permit greater confidence than negotiating a multimillion dollar contract for your company. Thus, social anxiety, familiarity with the situation, and the importance or consequences of the encounter all influence an interactant's confidence in a social context.

1b. As *reward-relevant efficacy beliefs increase, communicator motivation increases*. Efficacy beliefs are self-perceptions of ability to perform a given set of behaviors (Bandura, 1982). Basically the more actors believe that they are able to engage in a set of valued or positive actions, the more prone they are to do so. A professional arbitrator is likely to have much higher efficacy beliefs in negotiating disputes or contracts than the average person. However, this arbitrator might not have any greater confidence than the average person in developing friendships with others in a different culture. Efficacy beliefs are therefore usually task-specific, and correlated to familiarity with the task(s) and context(s).

Jr. As *communicator approach dispositions increase, communicator motivation increases*. Approach dispositions refer to personality characteristics that prompt someone to value communicative activity. People who are higher in self-esteem, who consistently seek relatively high levels of sensory stimulation, who believe they have high levels of control over their environment, who are low in social anxiety and who are generally well-adjusted psychologically, are likely to seek out communication encounters and find them positively reinforcing.

Id. As *the relative cost/benefit ratio of a situation increases, communicator motivation increases*. Very simply, every situation can be viewed as having certain potential costs and benefits. Even in no-win

situations (for example, "true" conflicts), the behavior that leads to the least costly or painful outcomes is considered the most preferable or beneficial. Likewise, in a win-win situation the least desirable outcomes are also the most costly. Thus, as the perception of potential benefits increases relative to the potential costs of a course of action, the more motivated a person is to pursue that particular course of action. Obviously, the weighing of costs and benefits must always be done relative to alternatives. Asking directions from someone who does not speak your language may be considered too much effort, but only relative to the alternatives of consulting a map, trial-and-error exploration, seeking someone who speaks your language who might be familiar with the locale, or getting hopelessly lost.

2. *Communicative knowledge increases, communicative competence increases*. A stage actor needs to be motivated to give a good performance to be viewed as a competent actor. However, merely wanting to perform well, and being unhampered by stage fright, are probably insufficient to produce a competent performance. For an actor to give a good performance, it is also important that the actor know the script, the layout of the stage, the type of audience to expect, and so on. So it is with social interaction as well. The more an interactant knows about how to communicate well, the more competent that person is likely to be.

Knowledge of interaction occurs at several microscopic levels (Greene, 19M). As identified in Figure 1, an actor needs to know the interaction function, the basic goals the interaction is to pursue. These interaction behaviors combine to form speech acts, which express content functions such as asking questions, asserting opinions, and so on. To perform speech acts in turn requires knowledge of linguistics—semantics, syntax, and the constituents of a meaningful sentence. Actual performance of these actions requires adaptation of this behavior to the other person. Thus, behaviors need to be adapted to achieve the following functions: management—coherence and continuity of topic, and relatively smooth flow of speaking turns; homeostatic—a relative balance of physiological activity level; and coordinative—individual matching of

verbal and nonverbal components. Several predictions help specify the relevance of knowledge to competent interaction.

2a. *As task-relevant procedural knowledge increases, communicator knowledge increases.* Procedural knowledge concerns the "how" of social interaction rather than the "what." For example, knowing the actual content of a joke would be considered the substantive knowledge of the joke. Knowing how to tell a, with all the inflections, the timing, and the actual mannerisms, are all matters of the procedural knowledge of the joke. This knowledge is typically more "mindless" than other forms of knowledge. For example, many skill routines are overlearned to the point that the procedures are virtually forgotten, as in driving a familiar route home and not remembering anything about the drive upon arrival. You "know" how to drive, but you can use such knowledge with virtually no conscious attention to the process. Thus, the more a person actually knows how to perform the mannerisms and behavioral routines of a cultural milieu, the more knowledgeable this person is likely to be in communicating generally with others in this culture. In general, as a person's exposure to a culture increases, his or her stores of relevant subject matters, topics, language forms, and so on, as well as procedural competencies, are likely to increase.

2h *As mastery of knowledge-acquisition strategies increases, communicator knowledge increases.* A person who does not already know how to behave is not necessarily consigned to incompetence. People have evolved a multitude of means for finding out what to do, and how to do it, in unfamiliar contexts. The metaphor of international espionage illustrates some of the strategies by which people acquire information about others, such as interrogating (asking questions), surveilling (observing others), exchanging information (disclosing information to elicit disclosure from others), posturing (violating some local custom and observing reactions to assess the value of various actions), bluffing (acting as if we know what we are doing and allowing the unfolding action to inform us and define our role), or engaging double agents (using the services of a native or mutual friend as an in-

formant). The more of these types of strategies actors understand, the more capable they are in obtaining the knowledge needed to interact competently in the culture.

2c. *As identity and role diversity increases, communicator knowledge increases.* In general, the more diverse a person's exposure to distinct types of people, roles, and self-images, the more this person is able to comprehend various roles and role behaviors characteristic of a given cultural encounter. Some people live all their lives in a culture within very narrow ranges of contexts and roles. Others experience a wide variety of societal activities (jobs, tasks), roles (parent, worshiper, confidant), and groups (political party, religious affiliation, volunteer organization, cultures and co-cultures)- A person who has a highly complex self-image reflecting these social identities (Hoelter, 1985) and who has interacted with a diversity of different types of persons and roles (Havighurst, 1957) is better able to understand the types of actions encountered in another culture.

2d. *As knowledge dispositions increase, communicator knowledge increases.* Many personality characteristics are related to optimal information processing. Specifically, persons high in intelligence, cognitive complexity self-monitoring, listening skills, empathy role-taking ability, nonverbal sensitivity, perceptual accuracy, problem-solving ability, and so on are more likely to know how to behave in any given encounter. In short, while mere possession of information may help, a person also needs to know how to analyze and process that information.

3. *As communicator skills increase, communicator competence increases.* Skills are any repeatable, goal-oriented actions or action sequences. An actor who is motivated to perform well, and knows the script well, still may not possess the acting skills required to give a good performance. All of us have probably encountered instances in which we knew what we wanted to say, but just could not seem to say it correctly. Such issues concern the skills of performing our motivation and knowledge. Research indicates that there are four specific types or clusters of interpersonal skills, and one more general type of skill.

Before specifying the skills that facilitate intercultural communication competence, an important qualifier needs to be considered. There are probably no specific behaviors that are universally competent. Even if peoples from all cultures smile, the smile is not always a competent behavior. However, there may be skill modes or clusters that are consistently competent according to standards of appropriate usage within each culture. For example, probably all cultures value the smooth flow of conversation, even though they may differ in the specific behaviors and cues used to accomplish such interaction management. Any skill or ability is constrained by its own culturally and relationally appropriate rules of expression. It is in this sense that the following propositions are developed regarding communication skills.

3a. As *conversational altercentrism increases, communicator skill increases*. Altercentrism ("alter" means other, "centrism" means to focus upon) involves those behaviors that reveal concern for, interest in, and attention to, another person. Behaviors such as eye contact, asking questions, maintenance of others' topics, appropriate body lean and posture, and active listening all indicate a responsiveness to the other person.

3b. As *conversational coordination increases, communicator skill increases*. Conversational coordination involves all those behaviors that assist in the smooth flow of an encounter. Minimizing response latencies, providing for smooth initiation and conclusion of conversational episodes, avoiding disruptive interruptions, providing transitions between themes or activities, and providing informative feedback cues all assist in managing the interaction and maintaining appropriate pacing and punctuation of a conversation.

3c. As *conversational composure increases, communicator skill increases*. To be composed in a conversation is to reflect calmness and confidence in demeanor. Thus, composure consists of avoiding anxiety cues (nervous twitches, adaptors, lack of eye contact, breaking vocal pitch) and displaying such behaviors as a steady volume and pitch, relaxed posture, and well-formulated verbal statements. A composed communicator comes across as assertive, self-assured, and in control.

3d. As *conversational expressiveness increases, communicator skill increases*. Expressiveness concerns those skills that provide vivacity, animation, intensity, and variability in communicative behavior. Specifically, expressiveness is revealed by such behaviors as vocal variety, facial affect, opinion expression, extensive vocabulary usage, and gestures. Expressive communication is closely associated with the ability to display culturally and contextually appropriate effect and energy level through speech and gesture.

3e. As *conversational adaptation increases, communicator skill increases*. Adaptation is a commonly noted attribute of the competent intercultural communicator. It typically suggests several characteristics. First, rather than radical chameleonlike change, adaptation implies subtle variation of self's behavior to the behavioral style of others. Second, it implies certain homeostatic, or consistency-maintaining, regulatory processes. That is, verbal actions are kept relatively consistent with nonverbal actions. Similarly, amount of personal altercentrism, coordination, composure, and expressiveness are kept relatively consistent with personal style tendencies. Third, adaptation suggests accommodation of both the actions of the other person as well as one's own goal(s) in the encounter. Rather than implying completely altercentric or egocentric orientations, adaptation implies altering and balancing self's goals and intentions to those of the other person. Thus, the skill of adaptation implies such behaviors as shifts of vocal style, posture, animation, and topic development as the behaviors of the other person vary and as changes in self's goals change over the course of a conversation.

The propositions in this section have examined three basic components of intercultural competent communication. In general, the more motivated, knowledgeable, and skilled a person is, the more competent this person is likely to be. It is possible that a person can be viewed as highly competent if high in only one or two of these components. For example, a person who is very motivated may compensate for lack of knowledge and skill through perseverance and effort alone. Likewise, someone who is extremely familiar with a given type of encounter may be able to "drift" through ("I've

written so many contracts in my life I can negotiate one in my sleep') with minimal motivation and little conscious awareness of the exact procedures involved. Nevertheless, across most encounters, the more of each of these components a person possesses or demonstrates, the more competent this person's interaction is likely to be.

Episodic System

The first three primary propositions entailed factors that increase the likelihood that an actor will produce behaviors that are normatively competent. As such, the actor producing them, and others generally, will tend to believe that the interactant has behaved competently. However, given that competence is an impression, there is no guarantee that a person who has performed behaviors that normally would be viewed as competent, will be viewed as competent by a particular conversational partner in a particular relational encounter. The propositions in this section address this latter issue. These propositions are episodic in the sense that characteristics of an Actor influence the impressions of the Coactor in a specific episode of interaction. The statements concern those characteristics of an Actor that predict a Coactor's impression of the Actor's competence.

4. As *Actor's communicative status increases*, *Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases*. Communicative status is meant here to represent all those factors that enhance this person's positive evaluation. Competence is, after all, an evaluation. Generally as a person's status goes, so goes his or her competence. There are obvious exceptions, but it is instructive to consider those status characteristics particularly relevant to communicative competence.

4a. As *Actor's motivation, knowledge, and skills increase*, *Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases*. The logic of the individual system also applies to the episodic system; the factors that lead a person to behave competently in a normative sense will usually lead to a competent relational performance as well (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). This is true in two slightly different senses. In one sense, norms comprise the majority of people's views and behaviors,

so a person who is normatively competent will usually be viewed as competent in any given encounter. In another sense an Actor who is motivated to interact competently with a particular Coactor, knowledgeable about this particular Coactor, and skilled in interacting with this particular Coactor is also more likely to communicate better and be viewed as competent by this Coactor in a given encounter.

Factors that facilitate motivation, knowledge, and skill in a particular episodic system are likely to be logical extensions of the individual system components. For example, motivation is likely to increase as attraction to the Coactor increases and as positive reinforcement history with the Coactor increases. Knowledge of the Coactor is likely to increase with the duration of the relationship, and the depth and breadth of self-disclosure between Actor and Coactor increase. Skill in interacting with the Coactor is likely to increase as adaptation and refinement increase over the lifetime of the relationship.

4b. As *contextual obstruction of Actor's performance increases*, *Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases*. When forming an impression of an Actor, a Coactor is left to determine the extent to which the Actor's outcomes are due to the Actor's own abilities and effort, rather than the context or other factors. For example, a physically unattractive Actor who consistently makes friends and has dates is likely to be viewed as more communicatively competent than a person who is physically attractive. The reasoning is that the social context is weighted against the unattractive Actor and in favor of the attractive Actor. Thus, the attractive Actor would achieve the same outcomes due to attractiveness rather than his or her competence, whereas the unattractive Actor must overcome the contextual barriers through competent action. In essence, all other things being equal, an Actor's competence is "discounted" if there are obvious alternative explanations for the Actor's good fortune. Similarly, an Actor's competence is "forgiven" if there are many apparent alternative reasons for his or her failure.

4c. As *Actor's receipt of valued outcomes increases*, *& main 'S impression of Actor's competence increases*.

While the discounting effect just discussed influences impressions of competence, it is not likely to outweigh other factors entirely. If an Actor is perceived as consistently achieving positive outcomes, a Coactor is likely to assume that the Actor has something to do with this success (Koplowitz, 1978). The negotiator who consistently presides over significant agreements is likely to be viewed as more communicatively competent as a simple result of the tangible outcomes, almost regardless of extenuating circumstances.

4d. *As Actor's extant-attributed communicative status increases, Coactor's impression of Actor status increases.* An Actor who comes into an encounter with an established high level of status is more likely to be viewed as competent in subsequent interactions. Additionally, an Actor who has established a satisfying relationship with a particular Coactor has, in effect, established a reserve of competence in the Coactor's views. Thus, Desmond Tutu, Boris Yeltsin, or even Lee Iacocca enter any communicative situation with considerable communicative status in tow. In essence then, the impression we initially have of an Actor is likely to be the basis for our later impressions until such time that significant events alter these impressions. Furthermore, certain cultures develop higher regard for other cultures generally. The mutual regard that Americans and Japanese Americans may share is probably quite different than that which South African blacks and whites may share.

5. *Coactor's impression of Actor's competence is a function of Actor's fulfillment of Coactor's expectancies.* Over time, interactants develop expectations regarding how interpersonal interaction is likely to, and should, occur in particular contexts. Not surprisingly therefore, a person's competence in a given relationship is due partly to expectancy fulfillment and violation. Research indicates that expectancies generally develop along three fundamental dimensions: *evaluation, potency, and activity* (commonly referred to as the E-P-A dimensions respectively; see Osgood, May, & Miron, 1975; Spitzberg, 1989). Most contexts are viewed in terms of their valence (good versus bad), power (dominant versus passive), and animation (noisy versus quiet) characteristics. A typical, noncharis-

matic church service is expected to be good, the audience passive and relatively quiet. A typical party, in contrast, is expected to be good, strong, fast and noisy. Upon being fired, an exit interview is expected to be unpleasurable, and the interviewee as weak and relatively passive. The point is that experience with interpersonal encounters produces expectancies and evaluations regarding both anticipated and appropriate behavior. The propositions that follow elaborate on the influence of these cognitions on impressions of competence.

5a. *As Actor's fulfillment of positive Coactor expectancies increases, Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases.* To the extent that a Coactor expects an encounter with an Actor to be positive, the Actor is likely to be viewed as competent to the extent that he or she fulfills these expectancies. Since the expectancies typically form a consistent system in a Coactor's mind, an Actor needs to fulfill each of the E-P-A dimensions. If an interviewer expects interviews to be good (E), his or her own role to be relatively powerful and the role of the interviewee to be relatively powerless (P), and for the encounter to be generally quiet but quick (A), then the Actor is well-advised to behave according to these expectancies. Since the interviewer has developed these expectancies along all three dimensions, they tend to be "set" in relationship to each other. Thus, part of what makes the interview "good" in the interviewer's opinion is that the interviewer's role is typically powerful, and the interviews tend to go quietly and quickly.

56. *As Actor's normative violation of Coactor's negative expectancies increases, Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases.* The logic of the former proposition reverses itself when a Coactor expects an encounter to be negative. Consider the previous interview example from the interviewee's perspective. An interviewee may find interviews highly anxiety-producing, threatening, and difficult. As such, the interview context is expected to be unpleasurable, the interviewee's role as submissive, and the encounter as generally slow and inactive. If the interviewer wants to make a good impression, therefore, he or she needs to violate the interviewee's

PROTOTYPE
CATEGORY

INTERMEDIATE
INFERENCE

BEHAVIORAL
INDICATORS

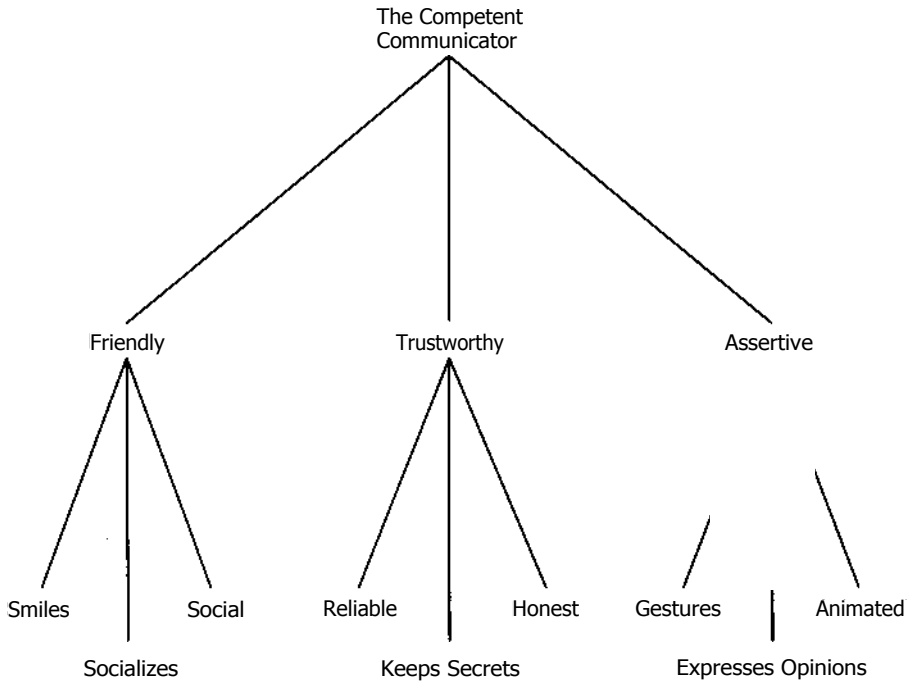


Figure 2 A Simple Cognitive Prototype of a Competent Communicator
(Adapted from Pavitt and Haight, 1985)

expectations in an appropriate manner. Such an interviewer might change the setting to a less-formal lunchroom context, dress more casually, tell some stories and initially discuss topics unrelated to the position, and generally spend some time putting the interviewee in a good mood. Such an encounter violates the interviewee's expectancies, but does so in a way that is normatively acceptable and positive.

Sc. As Actor's fulfillment of Coactor's competence prototype expectancies increases, Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases. A prototype in this usage is basically a cognitive outline of concepts, analogous to a mental map of the competence territory. The prototype of a competent person is likely to consist of several levels of concepts varying in their abstraction. A simplified and hypothetical example of a prototype for a competent communicator is displayed in Figure 2.

At the highest level is the category label that determines what types of inferences are relevant to a

given set of observed behavior. For example, observing someone changing the oil in a car is not relevant to the category of "competent communicator." At the next level are types of inferences or impressions that collectively make up the label of competent communicator. In this hypothetical example, a competent communicator is someone who is believed to be friendly, trustworthy, and assertive. Each of these inferences, in turn, is based upon certain types of behavior. To the extent that these behaviors are observed, the inferences follow. Observed behaviors are matched or compared to those that over time have come to occupy the position of category indicators. If there is a good match, then the inferences and evaluations that define the label of competent communicator. On this case, friendly, trustworthy, assertive) are attributed to the interaction observed. If only some of the behaviors match, then the inference of competence is diminished proportionately. Certain behaviors in any given encounter may also be weighted in their importance

to the impression. When judging whether or not someone is being deceptive, for example, many people would rely most heavily on that person's eye contact, relative to other behaviors, in assessing this person's competence.

5d. As Actor's *normative reciprocity of positive effect and compensation of negative effect increases*, Coactor's impression of Actor's competence increases. Reciprocity implies a matching or similarity of response, whereas compensation suggests an opposite or homeostatic response. Research indicates that across most types of relationships and encounters, interactants are generally considered more competent when they reciprocate positive effect and feel more competent when they compensate for negative effect (Andersen, 1989; Spitzberg, 1989). To the extent that the Coactor expresses positive effect, the Actor's response in kind is likely to produce more positive impressions. When the Coactor expresses negative effect, the Actor is likely to be more competent responding with more neutral or positive effect.

5e. As Actor's *normative compensation of power relations increases*, the more Coactor's Impression of Actor's competence increases. Across most types of interpersonal relationships, complementary power relationships tend to produce higher impressions of competence. This is a sweeping statement, and obviously is an overstatement in many ways. For example, optimal negotiation outcomes tend to result when parties begin in fairly competitive, and end up in cooperative, orientations. Still, this principle is useful in most types of relations.

Specifically, dominance is more competently met with passivity, and passivity with dominance. The validity of this proposition is best illustrated by consideration of its alternative. Imagine, for example, what work relationships would be like if every time superiors gave a subordinate orders, the superior was met with orders of refusal. Imagine married couples in which neither person ever actually offered to make a decision. In other words, relationships and encounters tend to work more smoothly and comfortably when dominant moves are responded to with complementary passive moves, and passive moves are met with more directive moves. This does not imply that people should adopt a role

of passivity of dominance, but that on a statement-by-statement basis, most interaction will be viewed as competent to the extent that its power balance is complementary rather than reciprocal.

This section has examined the episodic system of intercultural competence. Specifically, the propositions in this section have involved those characteristics of an Actor that increase the likelihood that the Coactor views the Actor as competent in a given episode of interaction. The following section concerns an abbreviated excursion into the relational system, in which characteristics that facilitate competence across the lifespan of a relationship are considered.

Relational System

Relationships are not simply sums of episodes over time. Certainly there is likely to be a strong correlation, such that the more competent the average episode of interaction is, the more relationally stable and satisfying the relationship tends to be. Thus, the logic of the individual system and episodic system are also likely to extend to the relational system. However, there are other factors at work, and this section examines some of these features. In this discussion, the phrase "relational competence" refers to the level of communicative quality in an established relationship. It is an index of the mutual adaptation and satisfaction achieved by a relationship.

6. As mutual *fulfillment of autonomy and intimacy needs increases*, relational competence increases. Autonomy and intimacy are two fundamental human needs (McAdams, 1988). Typically, they exist in a form of dialectical tension, in that both "struggle" for dominance over the other at any given time, but both are ever present to some degree. The need for intimacy involves the desire for human contact, connection, belonging, inclusion, camaraderie, communal activity, and nurturance. The need for autonomy, in contrast, is a need for self-control, independence, power, privacy, and solitude. Individuals seem to fluctuate between these two needs over time. And, as with virtually all needs, as each need

is fulfilled, it ceases to dominate the individual's behavior. A lonely person continuously thinks about companionship. Once companionship is found, other needs begin to influence this person's thoughts and actions. It follows that if a relationship is competent over the course of its lifespan, the members' need to fulfill the needs of the other as these dialectical needs fluctuates (Spitzberg, 1993).

7. *As mutual attraction increases, relational competence increases.* This highly intuitive proposition simply indicates that as partners grow more and more attracted to each other, the more this is both likely to reflect, and result in, mutually competent interaction over time (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). This proposition gains support from the consistent finding that attraction is closely associated, at least initially, with interpersonal similarity (Feingold, 1988). Highly similar persons provide a world view of similar values and orientations. These in turn are reflected in a reinforcing and self-confirming manner of symbolic expression. In general, we enjoy interacting with those who are similar because they seem to "speak our language." One implication is that initial interactions with culturally dissimilar others should focus upon areas of similarity that can support sufficient motivation and reinforcement for continued interaction. This is not to imply that differences are always negatively reinforcing. However, differences tend to make the process of communication more effortful and difficult, and thereby, generally less rewarding.

8. *As mutual trust increases, relational competence increases.* Similar to the *fitraVe* proposition, the more partners trust one another, the more competent interaction is likely to be, and the more competent the relationship is likely to be (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989). Trust provides a context in which interaction can be more honest, spontaneous, direct, and open. Over time, such a trusting climate is likely to be mutually reinforcing, and lead to a productive and satisfying communicative relationship.

9. *As access to social support increases, relational competence increases.* Social support is anything offered by another that assists a person in coping with problematic or stressful situations. Types of

support range from tangible (lending money) to informational (offering advice) to emotional (comforting words) forms. Since stresses stimulate personal and often relational crises, anything that diminishes the effects of these stresses is likely to enhance the person's ability to manage the relationship itself. One of the common problems of sojourner couples or families is that the stresses of being in a new culture often cannot be resolved by the social support of a friendship network, since the friendship network has yet to be established in the new culture.

10. *As relational network integration increases, relational competence increases.* When discussing relationships, it is ironically easy to forget that individuals are always simultaneously members of multiple relationships. When two people come together and form a relationship, part of what determines the competence of this relationship is the extent to which each member's personal network integrates with the other person's network of social relationships. Increasingly, as businesses become multinational and move entire management teams to work with labor in other countries, the problems of social network integration will become substantial. The development of common activities and goals that require cooperation or interaction across social networks, and the development of easier access to the network, are likely to facilitate this aspect of intercultural competence.

Conclusions

Before examining the implications of this essay, an important qualification needs to be considered. Specifically, most of the propositions presented here have what can be considered upper limits. Basically, too much of a good thing can be bad. For example, someone can be *too* motivated, use *too* much expressiveness, or be *too* composed. Virtually any piece of advice, when carried to extremes, tends to lose its functional value. This can be viewed as a curvilinearity principle. In essence, as motivation, knowledge, and skill increase, so do impressions of competence, to a point, after which the relationship reverses, and competence impressions decrease.

Sir Karl Popper, an eminent philosopher of science, has warned that theories are only useful if they are in danger of failing. Theories that tell us what we already know must be true, tell us nothing. The point is that theories are only valuable to the extent they make risky predications that may be proved false. It is in this sense that this essay must be viewed with caution.

The predictions offered in this essay represent statements that in the daily interplay of lives are often in danger of being false. None of the predictions should be considered absolutely true, or as an infallible view of the complex canvas of intercultural relations. Nevertheless, progress in the development of knowledge results from such risky propositions, and this essay has attempted to chart a path to progress. In doing so, I have attempted to paint with very broad brush strokes the outline of a theory of intercultural competence. The lines of this theory are strained by their abstraction to the point of no longer resembling the vibrant landscape they are meant to represent. Thus, like any theory or work of abstract art, the key is that the benefactor will find some significant personal meaning in it, and be ever mindful that the symbol is not the thing to which it refers.

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