Communication, Flexibility & Intercultural Competence in Business and Professional Contexts

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Outline

- Introduction: Business need for excellent IC communication skills
- Communication in IC competence models
  - Frameworks
  - Limitations
- Some data
- Conceptualising the data: a dialectic approach
- Applying the findings

Introduction

Introduction

- Universities worldwide are internationalising and wanting to produce 'global graduates';

- Organisations are wanting to recruit graduates with 'global skills;

- Two elements emerge time and again: need for
  - Effective communication
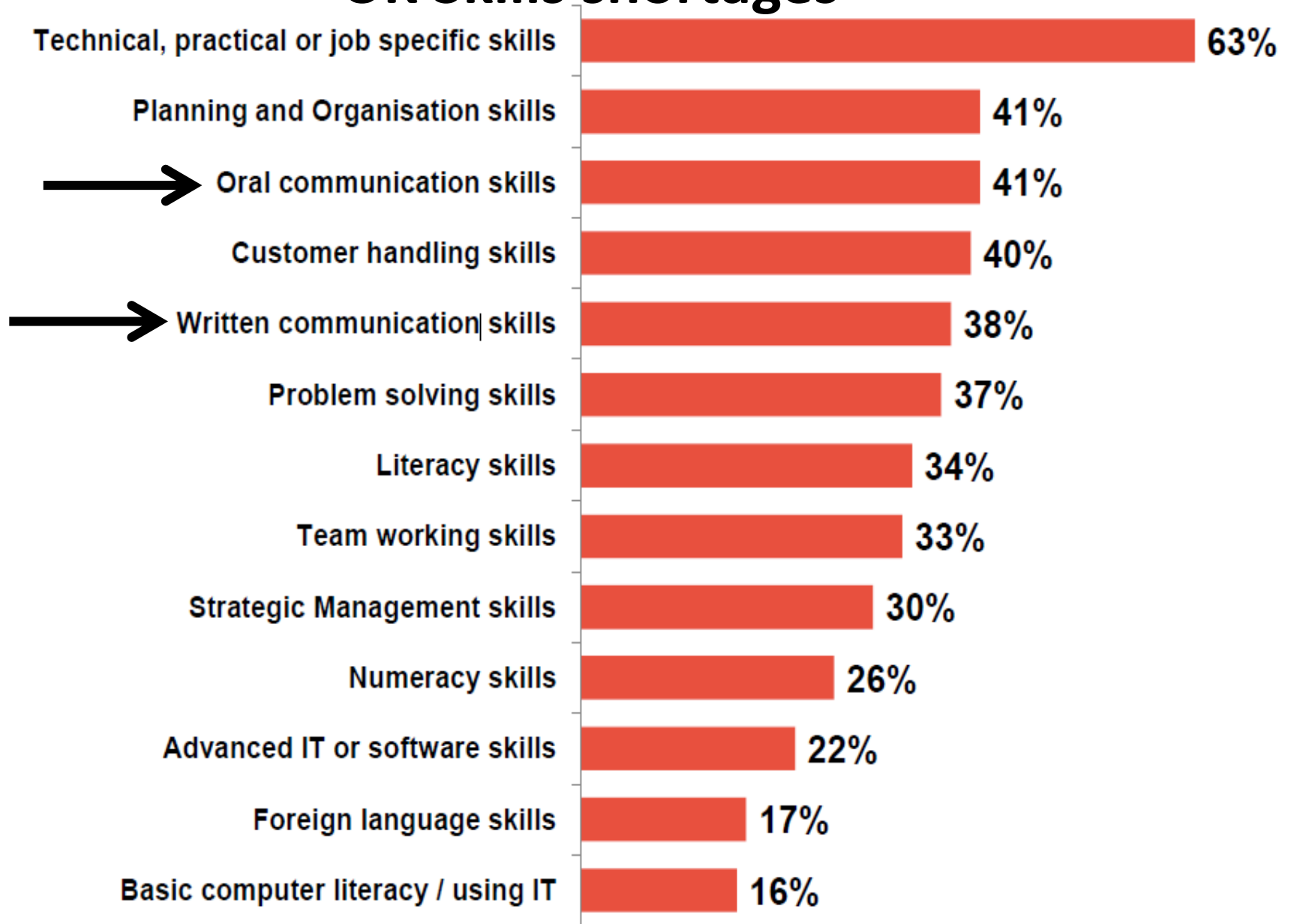 - Ability to work well in multicultural contexts

Introduction

UK Commission for Employment and Skills

2013 survey :

- "there has been an increase in the proportion of skill-shortage vacancies resulting from a lack of communication skills, particularly oral communication (41 per cent, up from 37 per cent in 2011)." p.31

UK Skills shortages

Skill	Percentage
Technical, practical or job specific skills	63%
Planning and Organisation skills	41%
→ Oral communication skills	41%
Customer handling skills	40%
→ Written communication skills	38%
Problem solving skills	37%
Literacy skills	34%
Team working skills	33%
Strategic Management skills	30%
Numeracy skills	26%
Advanced IT or software skills	22%
Foreign language skills	17%
Basic computer literacy / using IT	16%

UK Commission for Employment & Skills 2013 Survey

Introduction

Global Graduate report, 2011 (agr, CIHE, CFE)

Introduction

How can we help develop such skills?

We need:

- Good conceptual understanding of what it entails;

- Range of authentic examples to use as illustrations;

- Effective techniques for helping our students/clients to learn.
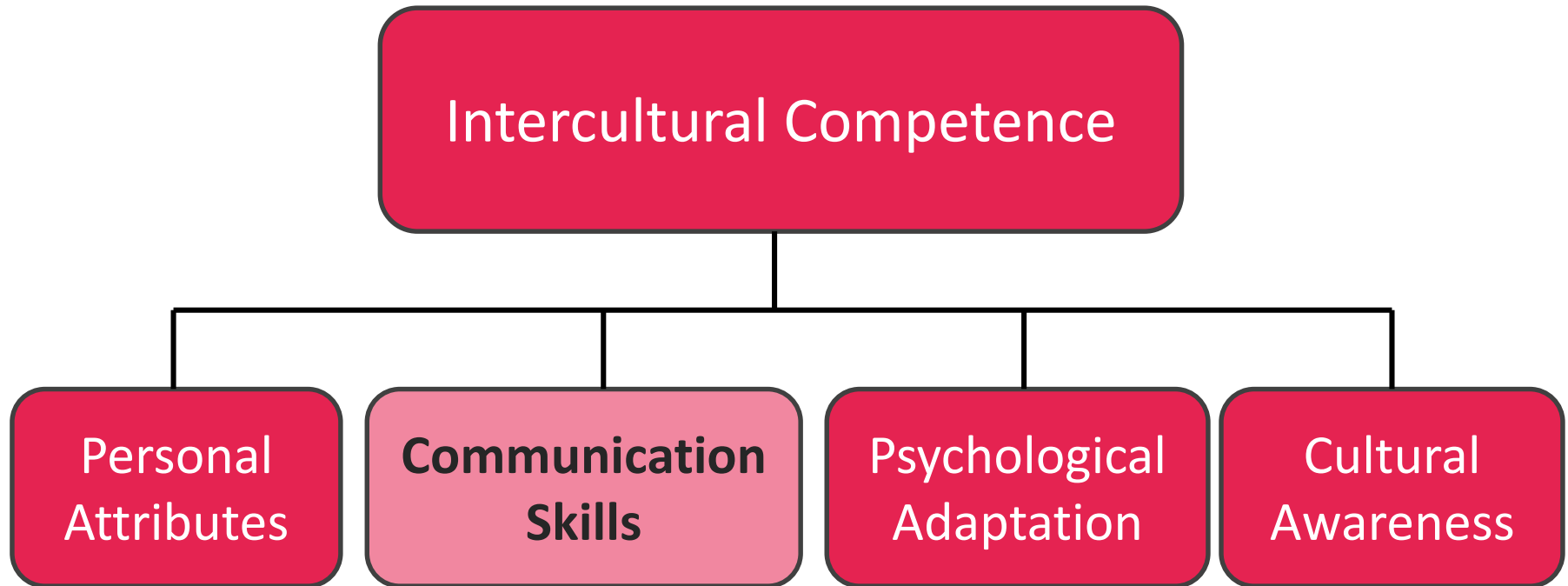
Communication in IC Models: Frameworks

Communication in IC Models

Current situation:

- Communication skills frequently included in IC compositional models;

- Flexibility quite often included;

- Communication and flexibility rarely combined.
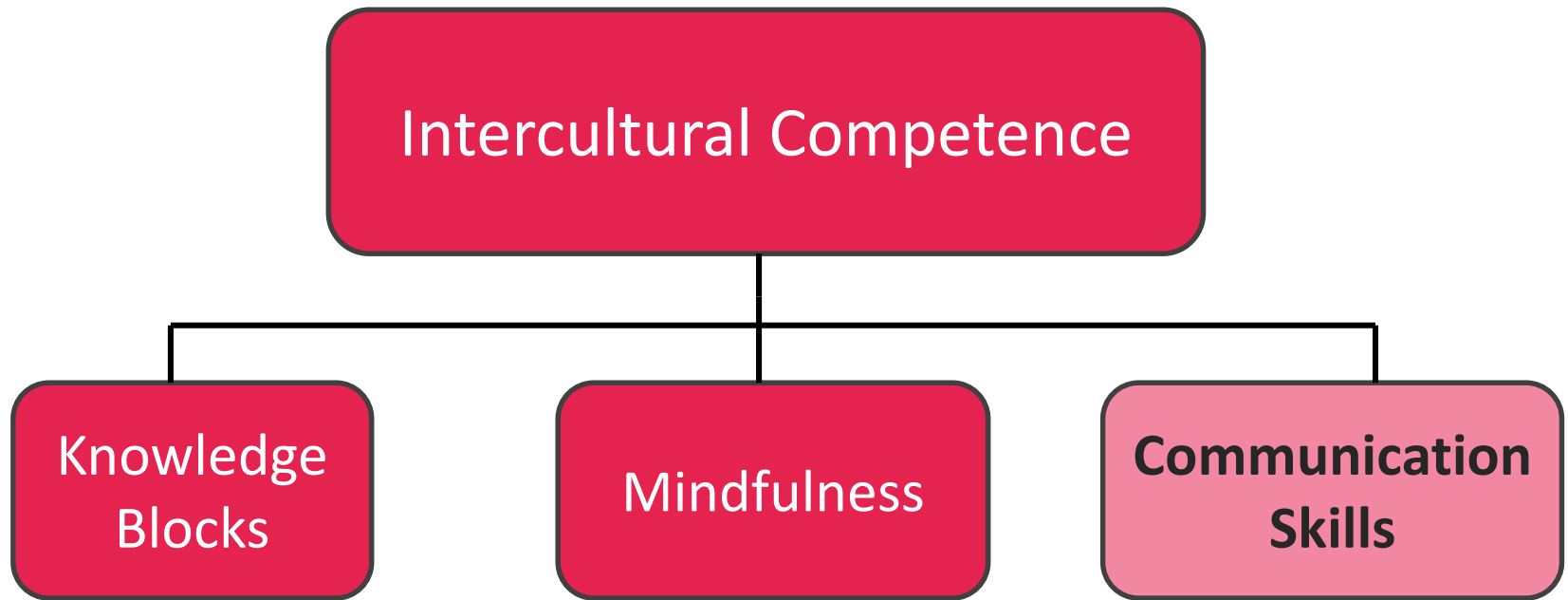
Competence Clusters

Communication Studies:

Intercultural Competence

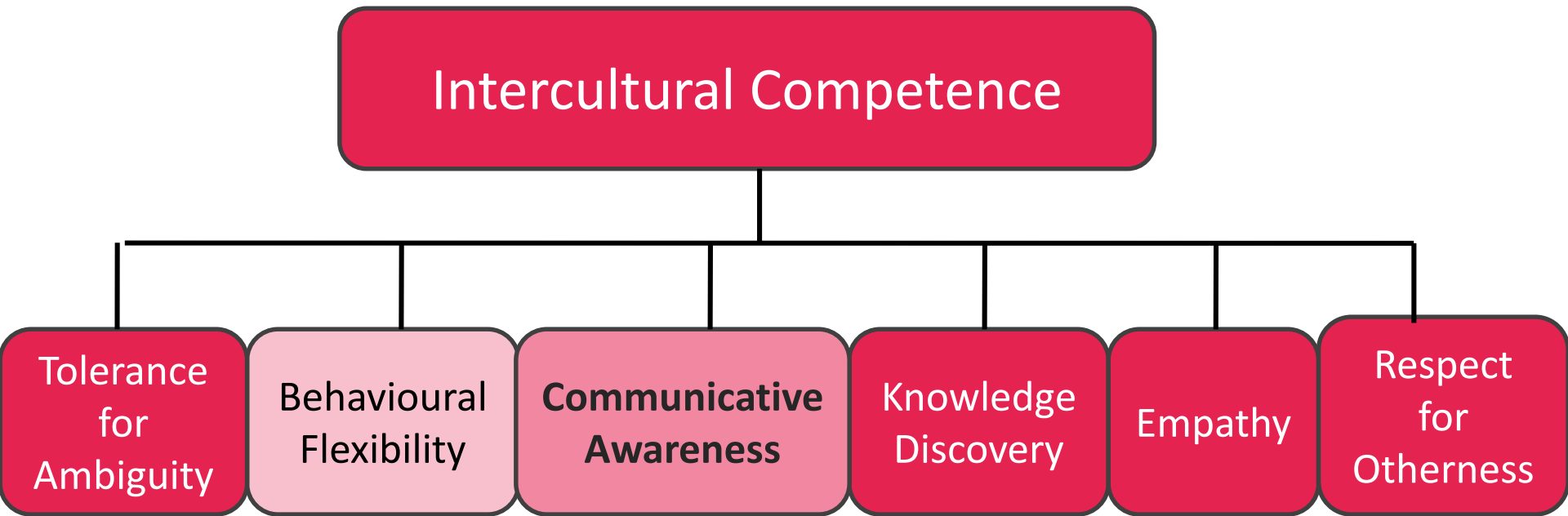Personal Attributes | Communication Skills | Psychological Adaptation | Cultural Awareness

Chen & Starosta 2005

Competence Clusters

Communication Studies:

Intercultural Competence

Knowledge Blocks

Mindfulness

Communication Skills

Ting-Toomey 1999

Competence Clusters

INCA Framework

Intercultural Competence

| Tolerance for Ambiguity | Behavioural Flexibility | **Communicative Awareness** | Knowledge Discovery | Empathy | Respect for Otherness |

Prechtl & Lund 2007

Competence Clusters

International Business/Applied Linguistics

Intercultural Competence

Knowledge & Ideas

Communication

Relationships

Personal Qualities & Dispositions
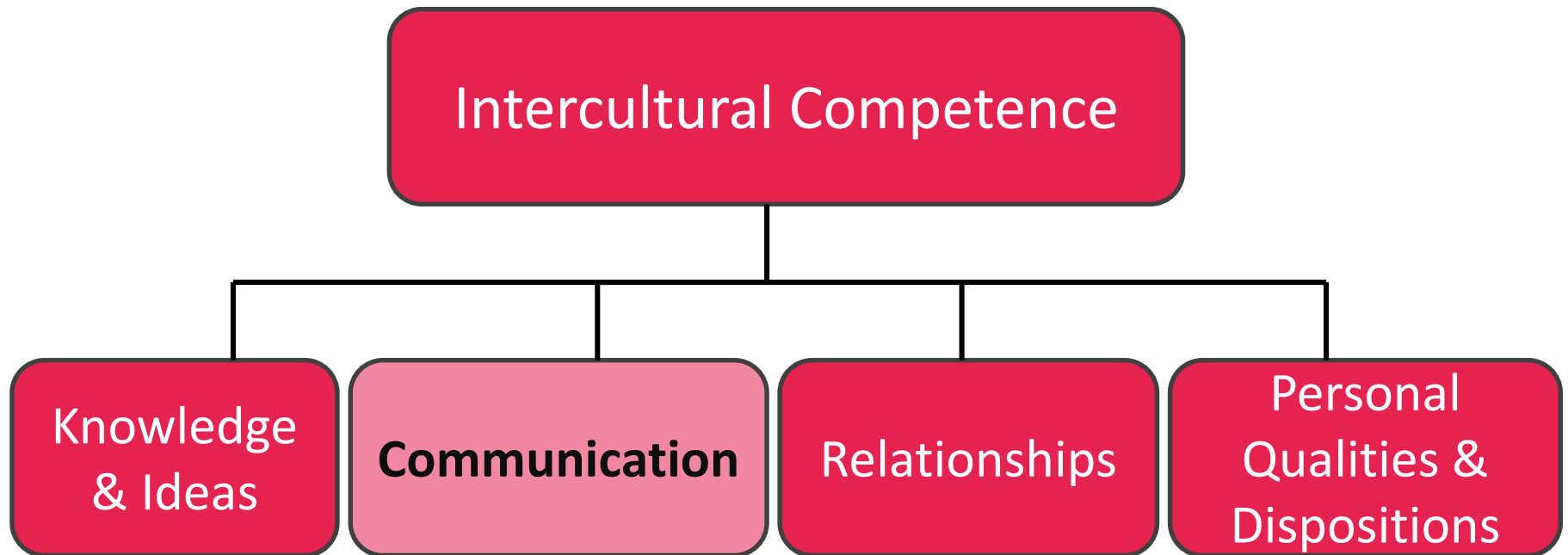
Spencer-Oatey & Stadler 2009

Deardorff's "Pyramid" Model

Deardorff 2006: 254

Desired External Outcome

Desired Internal Outcome
(Personal Qualities)
Adaptability, Flexibility,
Ethnorelative view, Empathy

Knowledge & Comprehension

Skills
(Listen, Observe, Interpret, Analyse, Evaluate, Relate)

Requisite Attitudes
(Respect, Openness, Curiosity)

Limitations of current
IC Models

Limitations of IC Models

Poor level of detail

- Most models provide insufficient detail
  - Deardorff … (almost) none
  - INCA … very limited
- An exception: Global People

Global People

Communication

Communication	Communication Management	◦ Attends to the choice of working language(s) ◦ Chooses modes of communication that suit the particular communicative purpose ◦ Establishes suitable communication networks ◦ Establishes and agrees communication protocols ◦ Takes steps to deal with communication problems
	Language Learning	◦ Motivated to learn and use other languages, and willing to invest time and effort in this ◦ Confident in ability to pick up and use foreign languages ◦ Tries out words and expressions in unfamiliar languages
	Language Adjustment	◦ Adapts use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) so as to maximise comprehensibility ◦ Pays attention to, and adapts where necessary, aspects such as: ✓ Speed ✓ Frequency and length of pausing ✓ Complexity of sentence structure ✓ Complexity of vocabulary ✓ Use of idioms and colloquialisms ✓ Use of local accents and dialects
	Active Listening	◦ Listens attentively ◦ Signals that listening is taking place ◦ Regularly checks and clarifies the meaning of important words and phrases, to ensure that all participants attach the same meaning to them, even when they are well known

Limitations of IC Models

Artificial examples

- Artificial examples with over-generalised analyses

Simplistic explanations

- Simplistic explanations – e.g. much explained just in terms of Individualism-Collectivism.

So we need:

- Better conceptualisation;

- More authentic examples;

- An effective development approach.

Some Data

Empirical Study

Project Focus:

Global Leaders and Employees:

Keys to Intercultural Effectiveness

Overarching aim is to understand:

- What kinds of interactional situations do staff find demanding or challenging to deal with when in culturally unfamiliar work contexts?

- What behavioural/communication dilemmas do they face?

Research by Wang Jiayi, 2013, 2015

Data collection

- 20 Chinese government officials on a 3 week delegation visit to their counterpart ministry in the USA;

- Video and audio recordings of the meetings and the welcome lunch banquet (total = 20 hours of video & 2 hours of audio);

- Shorthand notes from 12 reflective evening meetings;

- 41 Post-event & post-trip interviews with the 20 delegates.

Analysis

- Transcripts imported into MaxQDA;

- Sections identified for more detailed analysis:

  - Comments on challenges;

  - Comments on dilemmas;

  - Comments on strategies chosen and the consequences.

Preliminary Findings

Findings

- Many participants had difficulty balancing a number of tensions or dialectics.

- Some examples …

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

Deputy Head of Delegation: Come back to the American customs. I noticed that there might be unexpected things or situations we could not understand. <u>We'd better note them down and bring them to the evening discussions rather than raising them with the Americans upfront in public</u>.

Evening Meeting #1

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

[Background: The interpreter interrupted the American speaker & asked her to speak in full sentences]

Delegate DP: […] She was not polite. <u>We'd better not mention it to the organizer and the interpreter</u> herself. She will still work for us till Chicago, right? […]

Head of delegation : … She seemed condescending in doing that. But since she is not our colleague and actually is from the American side, <u>we'd better not ask her </u>why she did that. This may embarrass her and us, and may affect our relations with the American side. Just let it go. Do not mention it again.   Evening Meeting #4

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

Consequences of too much concealment:

[Background: The delegation asked for a change in schedule & the American host refused saying "No, we can't do that because it is such short notice."]

Delegate XD: Till that moment, I rated the [name of organization] as the best individual hosting agency. Suddenly however she refused our request so firmly. Everything began to fall apart. All the efforts that morning till that moment were almost in vain. Our relations fell down to the level at the starting point.   [Contd.]

Disclosure-Concealment

Consequences of too much Concealment (contd.):

[...]

Deputy Head of Delegation: That's correct. <u>We didn't give her the compelling reason that we were so exhausted. We were only making a tentative request withholding the cogent argument.</u> It was already a concession and we were putting ourselves in their shoes. Otherwise, we would tell her about our long journey and previous intensive activities. If I were the host, I would put the guest's need first.   Evening Meeting #10

Formality-Informality

Delegate G: Delegation Head, they even didn't ask you to give a return speech, am I right? That's so impolite.

Delegate H: Indeed <u>it was extremely impolite on such a formal occasion</u> where we were all equals. But our HoD did a very good job by making up for our return speech after the floor was open. This implied our firm position.

Delegate F: Absolutely! HoD's move indicated our consciousness of this right and fought for our face. This really was a meaningful action.

Evening Meeting #10

Formality-Informality

Delegate F: In the late morning, the informal discussions were informative. They just let us ask whatever questions we wanted and returned with their questions. The officials of the office were all easy-going and casual. They answered our questions in great detail and even went to find out the files […]. Though the meeting was less formal than I expected but their casualness and sincerity touched me.

Evening Meeting #6

Animated-<u>Restrained</u>

Consequences of too much animation:

Head of Delegation: Formality and solemnity are the right tone for [name of building]. I could understand the awe that everyone experienced. [...] but <u>taking photos continuously before the meeting was not polite and lost part of our face</u>. Fortunately the research director was patient enough to look at us taking photos for 5 minutes. I did not stop you because we had the interpreter employed by the American who could understand Chinese. I didn't want to make you lose face and moreover I didn't want to lose our delegation's face. Such behaviour was detrimental to our delegation's image. If we were in a scenic spot, just do it, but we were in a formal setting dealing with American counterparts and we must consider our image. Everyone's behaviour will impact our group's image.

Evening Meeting #6

Animated-Restrained

Deputy Head of Delegation: I also felt that the farewell lunch lacked the due atmosphere of a successful completion of a visit. It should be a jolly, warm and exciting event where people talk animatedly, emphasize how successful the trip has been, indicate the possibility for future cooperation and exchange visits, and show greater care for each other's work and life, and so on. Most of our expectations fell short. No liquor and no animated talk. It was too formal and too quiet for a farewell lunch and it was a little bit disappointing.   Evening Meeting #11

A Dialectic Approach

Dialectic approach

Traditional IC view:

- Communication perceived in bi-polar (either/or) terms (e.g. Direct-Indirect);

Dialectic view:

- Communication perceived in dialectic (both/and) terms.

Dialectic approach

Baxter and Montgomery (1996), Communication Studies theorists, studied romantic relationships and identified three core dialectic tensions:

- Connection ⟷ Separation

- Certainty ⟷ Uncertainty

- Openness ⟷ Closedness

Dialectic approach

"Social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies."

"Contradiction refers to the dynamic interplay between unified opposites."

Baxter and Montgomery 1996: 3,4

Dialectic approach

"The conflicting forces can't be resolved by simple 'either/or' decisions. The 'both/and' nature of dialectical pressures guarantees that our relationships [communication] will be complex, messy and always somewhat on edge."

Griffin 2012: 155-6

Key communication dialectics

Expression ⟷ Non-expression
Disclosure – Concealment
Explicitness – Implicitness
Formality – Informality
Emotional display – Emotional restraint

Dialectic approach

Flexibility

- We need to be flexible in handling each of the dialectics;

- Conceptualising the dialectic continua help us understand what aspects of flexibility in communication we need to pay attention to.

Developing IC Competence:
Molinsky's Global Dexterity Steps

Developing Global Dexterity

DIARy steps:

1. **Diagnose** the new cultural codes (in specific contexts);

2. **Identify** your own challenges with any of the new cultural codes;

3. **Adjust** your behaviour to address your challenges;

4. **Rehearse** what you have learned until it becomes '*yours*'

Molinsky 2013

Step 1: <u>D</u>iagnosis

Identifies 6 behavioural dimensions that can vary across cultures:

1. Directness
2. Enthusiasm
3. Formality
4. Assertiveness
5. Self-promotion
6. Personal disclosure

Step 1: <u>D</u>iagnosis

Zones of appropriateness

For any given context, there is a range of appropriateness for the various dimensions.

**Personal Comfort Zones**

People also have personal comfort zones.

Step 1: <u>D</u>iagnosis

Zone of appropriateness:

"When adapting our behaviour across cultures, we often mistakenly believe that there is one very specific way of acting in that new setting. [...] But that's simply not true. Instead, there is a zone – a range – of appropriate behaviour, and your job is to find a place within this zone that feels natural and comfortable for you: somewhere within your personal comfort zone".

Molinsky, 2013, 17

Step 1: Diagnosis
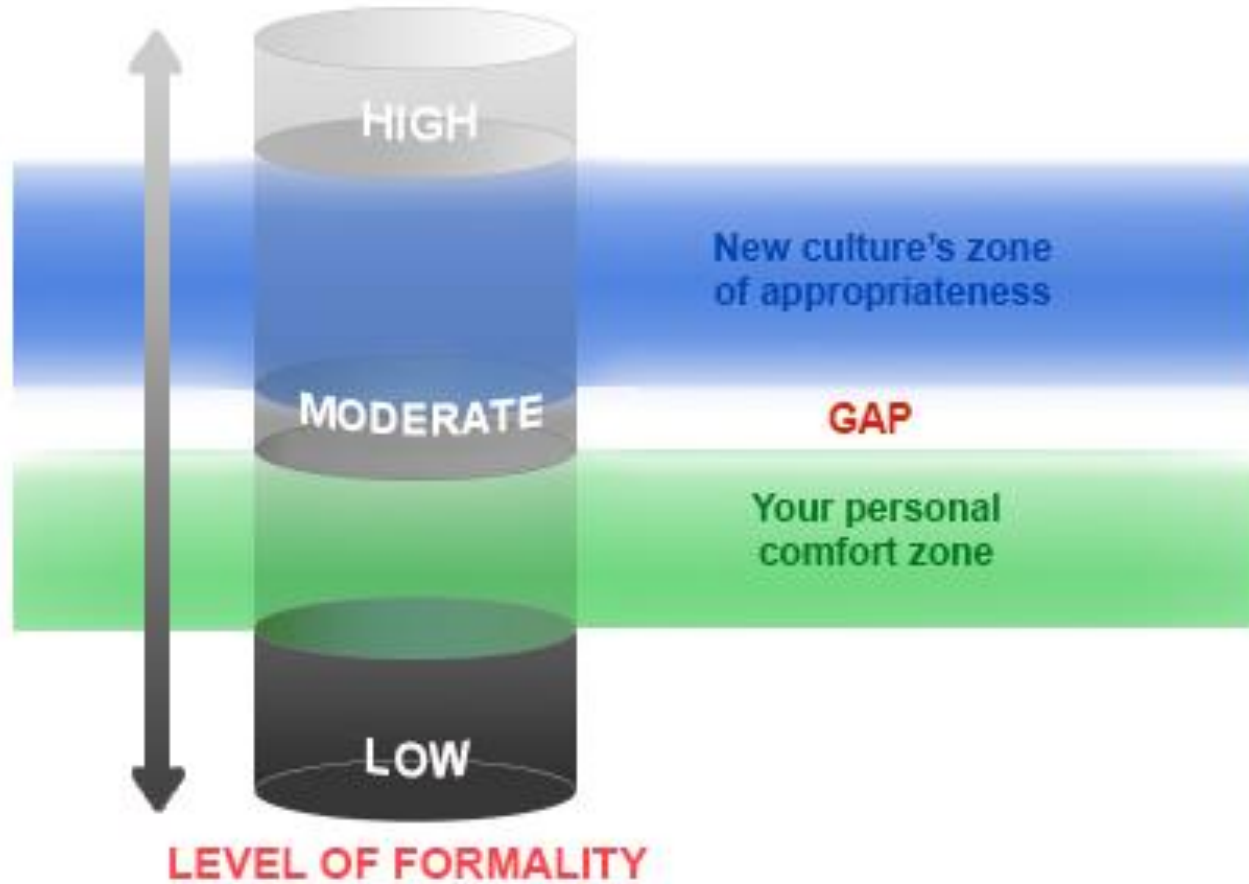
Molinsky 2013

Step 2: Identify Challenges

3 types of challenges:

Authenticity challenge: feeling that the new behaviour is in conflict with own values and beliefs.

Competence challenge: feeling that own knowledge & skill not up to the task of adapting.

Resentment challenge: feeling that adapting behaviour is a burden & an imposition.

Molinsky, 2013, 24

Step 2: Identify Challenges

e.g. Competence challenge (high context/indirect communication):

"How do I demonstrate relatively early on that although I'm not openly addressing this issue, that I'm not a fool, that I'm aware of the issue? [...] That there is a level of sophistication [...] without actually openly saying [...] "I understand this issue and I understand that it's going to be difficult for us to talk about it openly." That's a challenge. I don't have the answer yet, but I'm clear about attempting [to get one]."

Global leader interview comment

Cultural Adaptation is more than Behavioural Learning

"Adapting involves more than making the unfamiliar familiar: it means accepting the unfamiliar, accepting the uprooting and alien values, and the loss of loved objects and people, a much harder task."

Anderson 1994: 297

Step 3: <u>A</u>djust behaviour

Expand personal comfort zone so there is some overlap
with new
culture's
zone
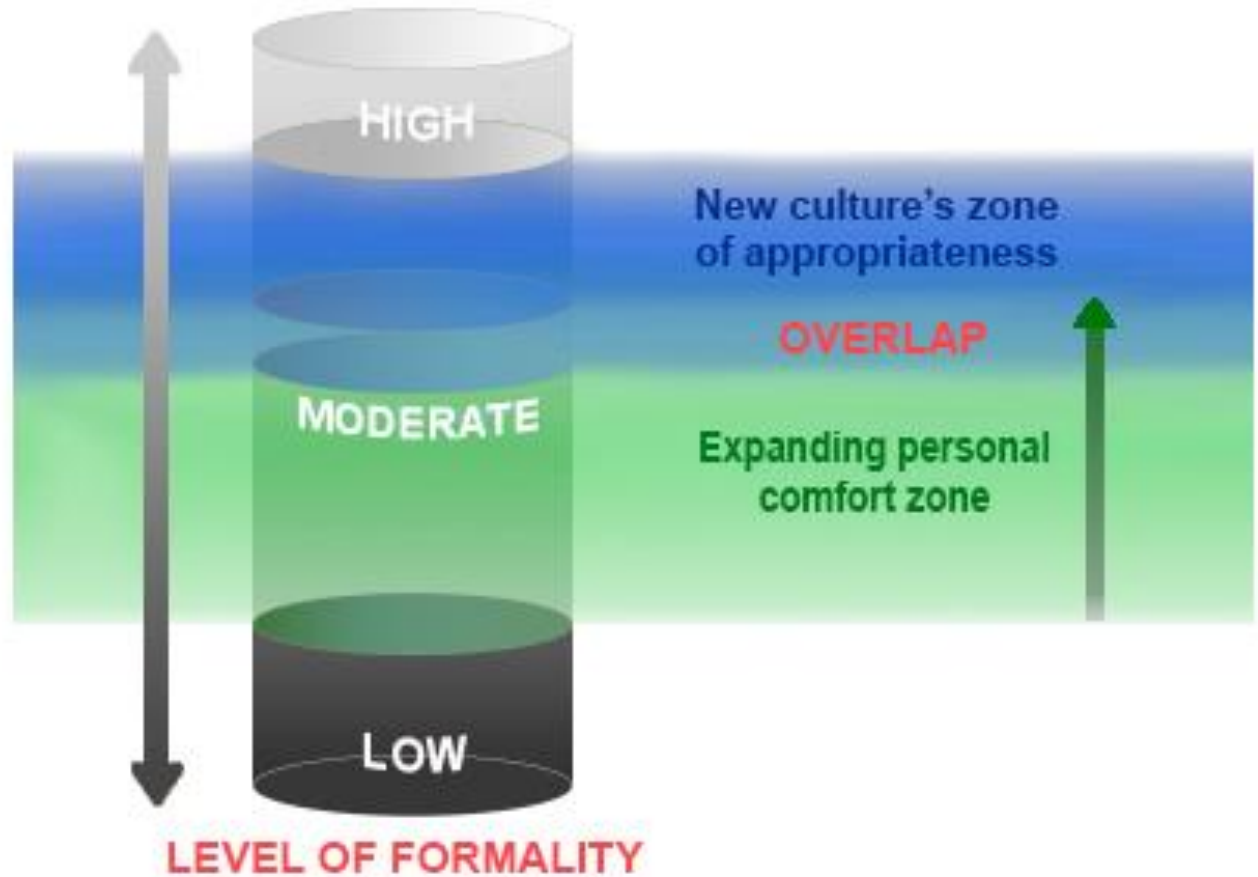
Step 3: <u>A</u>djust behaviour

1. Make small but personally meaningful changes in what you say, how you say it etc.
2. Make the behaviour feel more acceptable by:
   - connecting it to your personal goals and values;
   - embracing the new culture's logic.

Step 4: <u>R</u>ehearse till it's '<u>y</u>ours'

1. **Rehearse**: observe the new behaviour you wish to adopt & start practising it – maybe with mentors first;

2. Evaluate: seek out feedback & evaluate your attempts;

3. Make it *yours*: practice again and again to increase your confidence and expertise.

Conclusion

Concluding comments

- Need to think in terms of dialectic tensions rather than bi-polar categories; i.e. reflective, flexible communication;

- Need to gather and share more authentic intercultural communication examples;

- Personal growth comes through DIARy steps:
  - **D**iagnosis of key cultural codes affecting the contexts one's communicating in;
  - **I**dentification of challenges;
  - **A**djustment of behaviour
  - **R**ehearsal

Thank you!

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