Relational Concerns in Intercultural Workplace Teams: Theoretical Insights from the Study of Emotions

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Background

Key Features of Workplace Projects

- Task-focused, with limited timeframe and budget;

- Project members may not know each other (well) initially;

- Relational management is critical (Canney Davison and Ward 1999; DiStefano and Maznevski 2000)

Overview

- Pragmatics & Interpersonal Relations: Controversial Issues
  - The 'What' and 'Who' of Relations
  - The 'Why' of Relational Sensitivity
  - The Role of Emotions
- A study of Metapragmatic Emotion Comments
  - Research Design & Data Analysis
  - Findings
- Discussion and Implications

- Pragmatics & Interpersonal Relations:

- Controversial Issues

The 'Relational' Turn

Politeness has always been concerned with (dis)harmony in interpersonal relations

- Need to 'disarm potential aggression' (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- Minimisation of risk of confrontation (Lakoff 1989)

- 'Feelings' attached to face (Goffman 1967)

The 'Relational' Turn

Recently been an upsurge of focus on the 'relational', using various terminology:

- Relational Practice (Holmes & Marra 2004, Holmes & Schnurr 2005);

- Relational Work (Locher and Watts 2005, Locher 2010)

- Relational (Arundale 2006, 2010)

- Rapport management (Spencer-Oatey 2000/2008, 2005)

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The 'Relational' Turn

→ Some terminological/conceptual confusion

→ 4 key conceptual questions:

- The 'What' of the relational
- The 'Who' of the relational
- The 'Why' of relational sensitivity
- The role of emotions

→ One key research design question

- How to obtain the perspectives of the participants

The 'What' of Relations
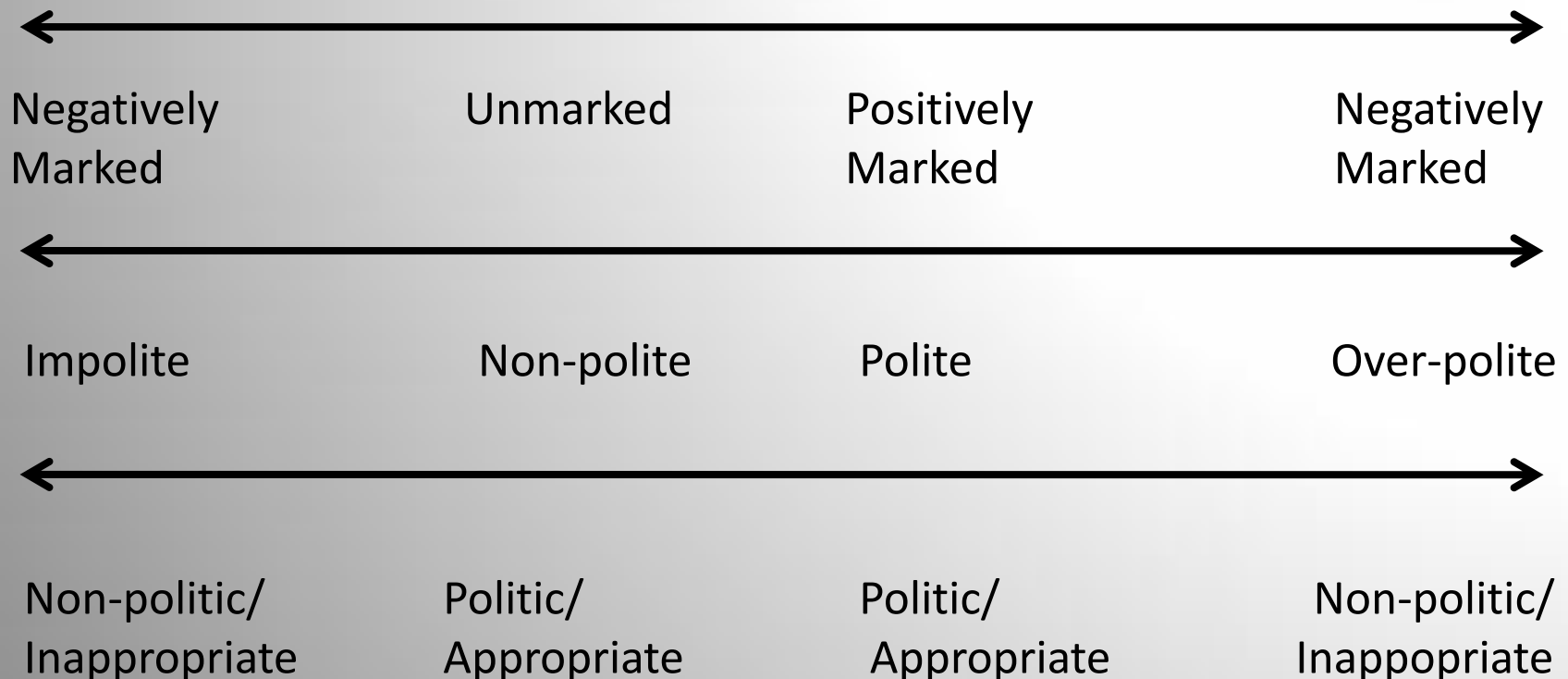
Relational Work (Locher and Watts 2005)

"Relational work refers to the 'work' individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others. [...] [it] can be understood as equivalent to Halliday's (1978) interpersonal level of communication, in which interpersonal rather than ideational meaning is negotiated."

Locher and Watts 2005: 10–11

The 'What' of Relations

Relational Work

<--->

| Negatively Marked | Unmarked | Positively Marked | Negatively Marked |

<--->

| Impolite | Non-polite | Polite | Over-polite |

<--->

| Non-politic/ Inappropriate | Politic/ Appropriate | Politic/ Appropriate | Non-politic/ Inappopriate |

The 'What' of Relations

Locher & Watts' Relational Work:

Debatable Questions

➢ Do participants perceive their interactions primarily in terms of these categories?

➢ What evidence is there for this?

❖ I would suggest that in workplace teams there may be some, but it's not extensive

The 'What' of Relations

Face as Relational (Arundale 2006, 2010)

"The terms 'relational' and 'relationship' are used in this paper […] indexing the dyadic phenomena of relating as they emerge dynamically in person-to-person communication."

Arundale 2006: 202

The 'What' of Relations

Face as Relational (Arundale 2006, 2010)

"Participants […] achieving connection and/or separation in their relationship."

Arundale 2010: 2096

The 'What' of Relations

Arundale's 'Relational':

Debatable Questions

➢ Is the dialectic connection/separation rich enough to capture all the key features of relating at work?

❖ I would suggest that it is too narrow, and leaves out the emotional element.

The 'What' of Relations

Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management

"We use the term 'rapport' to refer to people's subjective perceptions of (dis)harmony, smoothness-turbulence and warmth-antagonism in interpersonal relations, and we use the term 'rapport management' to refer to the ways in which this (dis)harmony is (mis)managed."

Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009: 102

The 'What' of Relations

Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management

➤ Emphasises affective quality of relations.

➤ Can a study of emotions in interpersonal relations throw light on 'relational' theory?

The 'Who' of Relations

Traditional perspective:

- Self and other

e.g.

   – Self and hearer's face (Brown & Levinson 1987)

   – Self & other in politeness maxims (Leech 1983)

The 'Who' of Relations

Arundale's (2006, 2010) interactional achievement perspective:

"… the much-used distinction between 'self-face' and 'other-face' is problematic […]. A relational view holds that self and other are dialectically linked because both persons comprise the other to the self, and as such mutually define one another in their communication."

Arundale 2006: 207

The 'Who' of Relations

Arundale's (2006, 2010) interactional achievement perspective:

"the on-going, conjoint co-constituting of connection with and separation from others in relationships."

Arundale 2010: 2079

The 'Who' of Relations

Spencer-Oatey's (2007) multiple levels perspective:

- Individual level (self and other)

- Relational level (mutuality and connection/separation)

- Group level (group membership)

The 'Who' of Relations

Controversy 1:

When studying interpersonal relations, should we be examining:

- Issues associated with self and other?

- Issues associated with the dynamic processes of relating?

- Both?

The 'Why' of Relational Sensitivity

Face

- 'Attribute' approach (e.g. Ruhi 2007, Spencer-Oatey) – face is associated with positively-evaluated attributes;

- 'Relational' approach (e.g. Arundale 2006, 2010) - a purely relational phenomenon that is interactionally achieved through the dialectic of connection/separation.
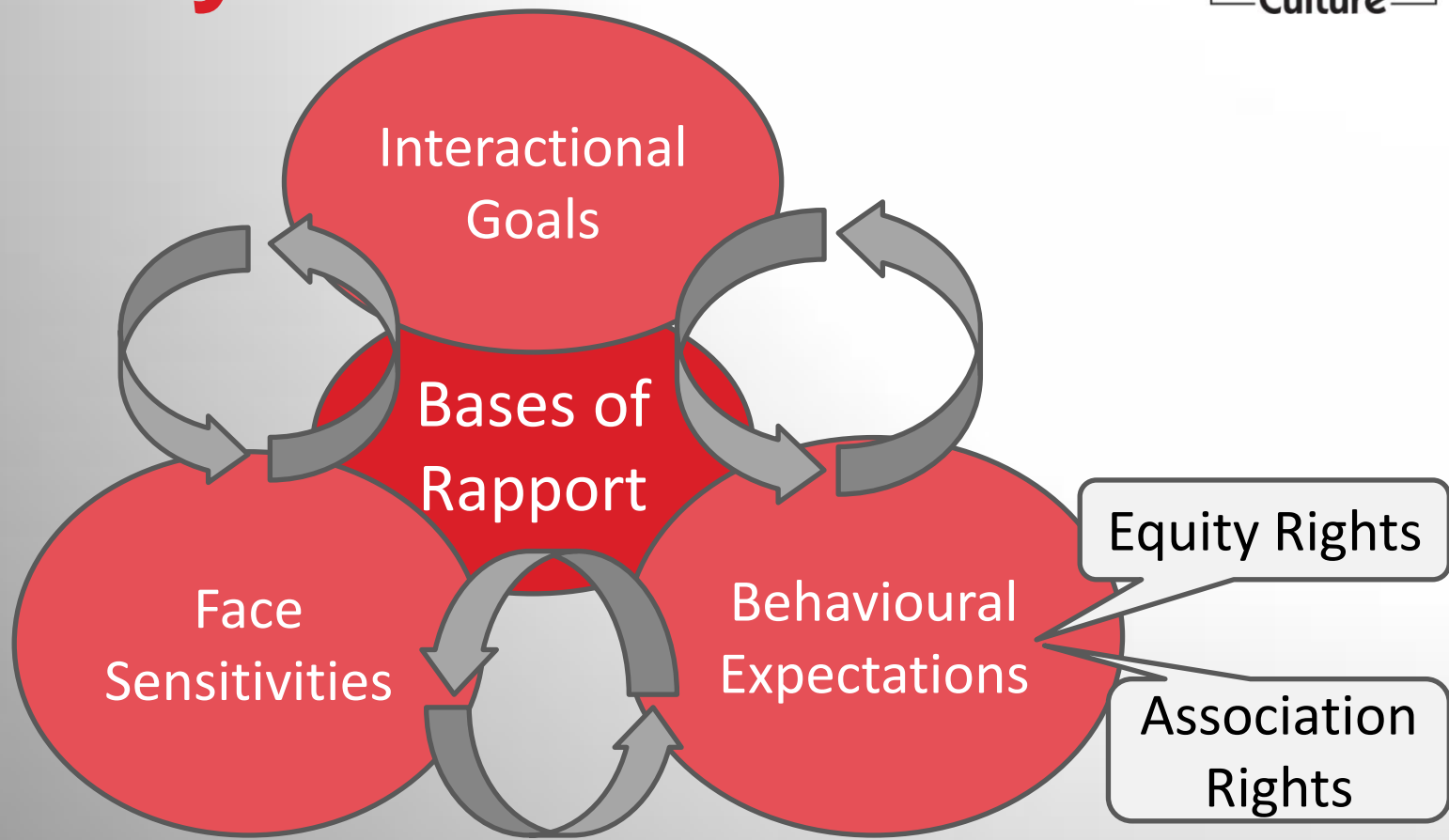
The 'Why' of Relational Sensitivity

Social Norms/Behavioural Expectations

- e.g. Fraser 1990, Locher 2004, Spencer-Oatey 2005.

Politeness Maxims/Sociopragmatic Principles

- e.g. Leech 1983, 2007.

The 'Why' of Relational Sensitivity

Controversy 2:

When studying interpersonal relations, what are the key influencing factors?

- Face (individual attributes or interactional achievement)?

- Norms/Behavioural expectancies?

- Maxims/Interactional principles?

- Goals?

- Combination?

The Role of Emotions

Emotions – implicit thread in politeness theory

- Feelings attached to face (Goffman 1967)
  - ✓ feeling good, bad, hurt, ashamed, embarrassed and chagrined

- Aggression – anger? (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- Confrontation – anger? (Lakoff 1989)

➢ Yet relatively little research on this aspect (Culpeper 2011, Ruhi 2009). Neither Locher & Watts (2005) nor Arundale (2006, 2010) develop this.

The Role of Emotions

Rapport-sensitive Incidents

- Spencer-Oatey 2002

Impolite Incidents

- Culpeper et al. 2010

Listed possible emotions to help people identify type of incidents being asked for: e.g. annoyed, insulted, embarrassed, proud, happy

Studies of Embarrassment

- Linked with face (Chang and Haugh 2011)

The Role of Emotions

Under-researched Area:

- How can we research it?

- What insights can it reveal?

- How can it inform our theorising about interpersonal relations?

Design Issues

Key Principle

Data analysis should be grounded in the perspectives of the participants rather than those of the analyst.

➢ How can we best achieve this?

Design Issues

Different Viewpoints

Conversation analysts/ethnomethodologists:

- Through analysing the unfolding discourse.

BUT ... Is discourse data sufficient?

- Ethnographers – additional contextual data can add rich insights

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Design Issues

Observation/Video recording

e.g. Chang & Haugh 2011 on embarrassment (e.g. fidgeting body movement)

Incident record sheet

e.g. Spencer-Oatey 2002, Culpeper et al 2010

Post-event Interviews/Playback

e.g. Spencer-Oatey 2008, 2009

Design Issues

Interview data

- May be too face-threatening! (Change & Haugh 2011)

- Beware the influence of the interviewer!

Data Collection

Series of interviews with participants of four different workplace project partnerships

- International programme in which British and Chinese universities collaborated on developing e-learning materials;

- 'Arranged marriage' style partnerships; i.e. needed to get to know each other as well as plan their projects.

Data Collection

Two rounds of confidential in-depth Interviews

- 1st round after 6-9 months of collaboration;
- 2nd round after 21-24 months of collaboration.
- Purpose was broad and project management focused: e.g.
  - members' roles in the project & reasons for becoming involved
  - goals of the programme & personal goals for involvement
  - factors affecting the achievement of goals
  - contact with members of other projects in the programme
  - communication methods and strategies
  - challenges faced and benefits gained.

Data Collection

Data collected

- 31 Chinese and 21 UK team members interviewed; mostly individually, a few in groups;

- 60 – 90 minutes each;

- In English and Chinese;

- Transcribed and translated;

- 296,000 words of running text.

Data Collection

Principles

- Discussions of progress is natural among a team; reflections and reconstructions are 'normal' part of team-life;

- Interviewers were both 'insiders', and interviewees were relaxed;

- Lapse of time has provided 'distance', helping ensure a 'fresh' perspective and reducing risk of taking things for granted.

Analytic Procedure

NVivo

- Numerous reading of transcripts

- Iterative coding

- Main categories: communication, goals, positioning, collaboration, emotion

- Emotion: identified uses of emotion 'labels' (i.e. not emotional talk)

- Associated with rapport? If yes, coded as 'rapport'; if no, not coded further

- Iterative coding allowed me to get good sense of context

Analytic Procedure

Emotion labels

- Classified into categories using Shaver et al.'s (1987) cluster analysis of 135 emotion names:

- Shaver et al. (1987) identified 5 basic clusters of emotions which they called 'prototypes'.

Analytic Procedure
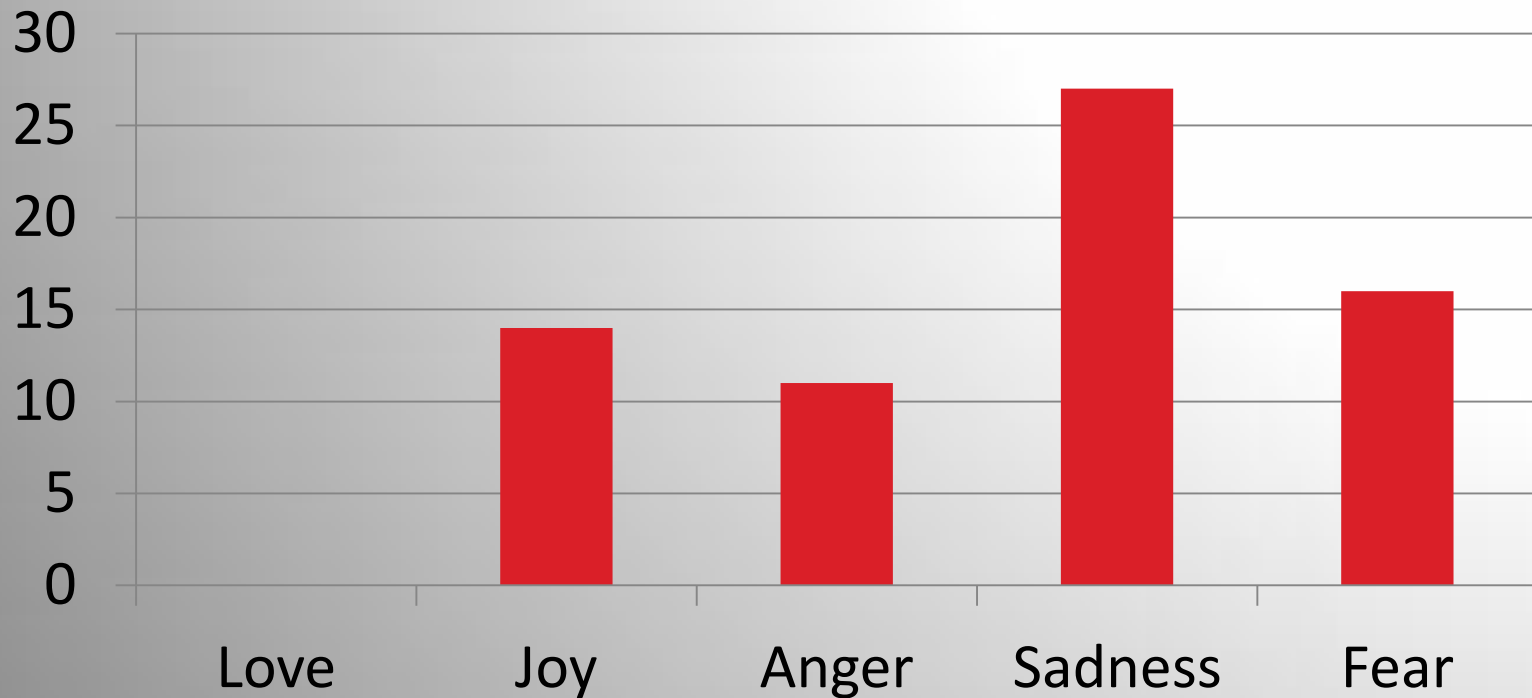
Core Prototype Categories of Emotion

- **Love**, e.g. adoration, attraction, caring, longing

- **Joy**, e.g. amused, delighted, happy, excited, proud

- **Anger,** e.g. annoyance, frustration, hate, bitterness

- **Sadness,** e.g. hurt, depressed, disappointed, embarrassed

- **Fear,** e.g. alarmed, anxious, worried, uneasy

Shaver et al. (1987)

Findings

Fig. 1: Frequency of Core Prototype Emotion References

Key Findings (1)

<u>Lack</u> of Communication was a Problem

Anger Cluster

Things have to be discussed at a certain level, and then they have to come back down again and weeks can go by until we get any feedback on what is happening and that can be <u>very frustrating </u> and difficult if you've got deadlines to meet, and you're still waiting for decisions to come back.

[BF02]

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Key Findings (1)

Lack of Communication was a Problem

Sadness Cluster

I feel a bit unhappy with [Name 1]'s management, because he didn't even consult with me.

[CM26]

Key Findings (1)

Lack of Communication was a Problem

Lack of communication:

- Didn't occur in face-to-face context nor in single speech event

- Occurred over time

➢ **Suggests that analytic approach proposed by Locher & Watts (2005) and Arundale (2006, 2010) would fail to pick up these relational communication problems.**

Key Findings (2)

Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals

a major source of emotional volatility

Progress → positive emotions

Joy

SharePoint, our internal Bulletin Board System, has performed as a team work diary, since we not only put up notices, memos and meeting information on it, but also things like pictures of our dinner party, our feelings like we felt <u>happy</u> when we finished a certain design. It was quite <u>pleasing</u> for team members to see those things.

[CM16]

Key Findings (2)

Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals

a major source of emotional volatility

Progress → positive emotions

Joy

To work in a team where you solve problems and are not discussing "issues" is just a <u>marvellous</u> experience.

[BM16]

Key Findings (2)

**Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals
a major source of emotional volatility**

Hindrances → negative emotions

Anger

In China, we always put ourselves at the head's disposal. Thus we begin the work with the assignments given by the head. So we hope very much to get a clear description about what is expected to be done from the lead. It is an annoyance to us when we were not given any specific jobs to do, as we have no idea what to direct our efforts at. The British had the knowledge that we should have a job description before we did the job. However, we didn't have such a description for the project and everything was just under discussion. [CF18]

Key Findings (2)

Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals

a major source of emotional volatility

Hindrances → negative emotions

Sadness

She worked very hard for the project, but the different goals of our two sides <u>discouraged</u> her. This issue pleased nobody.

[CM07]

Key Findings (2)

Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals

a major source of emotional volatility

Hindrances → negative emotions

Fear

Once I got an email from one of the technicians from [name of university]. He told me that he wouldn't be responsible for the flash. Thinking [name of university] wouldn't take that job, I worried a lot and suggested a videoconference to discuss the issue.

[CM17]

Key Findings (2)

Achievement of Project-related Tasks & Goals

a major source of emotional volatility

➢ Suggests that Task/Interactional Goals is an affectively-sensitive factor, at least in workplace contexts.

➢ Supports Spencer-Oatey 2008, Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009.

Key Findings (3)

Discomfort/Embarrassment re Issues of Competence

Own level of competence

Sadness

Although our UK colleagues were extremely hospitable and inclined to facilitate my work at any time, I still felt somewhat [uncomfortable and embarrassed](#), as the access to materials was not as easy as it was in China. I spent a quite a lot of time searching for materials on the Internet, but still could not find enough. Really strenuous but less efficient.

[CF13]

Key Findings (3)

**Discomfort/Embarrassment
re Issues of Competence**

Criticism of other's competence

Sadness

On some of the stuff that you were reading, you're like "well, excuse me, but this isn't right, [name]!" So he wasn't keen on that. But I think we just felt very very uncomfortable, all of us, about being put in that position.

[BF06]

Key Findings (3)

Discomfort/Embarrassment
re Issues of Competence

Indicates that:

- Criticism is an FTA →Embarrassment

- Criticism can be overheard & be embarrassing

- Criticism can be anticipated & be embarrassing

➢ This does <u>not</u> support Arundale's viewpoint that face is always conjoint construction of interaction;

➢ People were uncomfortable about their person-centred attributes.

Key Findings (4)

Team-level Relations

Belonging as a source of joy, anger and sadness; e.g.

I joined the project because I trusted [Name of Course Leader]. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, I had some expectations on the project, but the absence of legitimacy in doing the project is annoying.

[CF04]

[Note: CF04 had not been given a formal contract.]

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Key Findings (4)

Team-level Relations

Equity and fairness as a source of anger and sadness; e.g.

[Name]has done so much work for the project particularly in the later stage, but no one from our side spoke a word at the presentation, we looked like extra personnel. [...] I feel it so weird. I don't know what they were thinking about. Mmm...I don't think that it was a fair academic exchange, so my participation became less and less. I am feeling kind of <u>depressed</u> *now.* [CF08]

Team-level Relations

Questions:

➢ How can the dialectic of connectedness-separateness be rich enough to account for or to yield insights on concerns over participant equity and participant association?

Conclusion

1. Studies of emotional aspects of interpersonal interaction could yield valuable insights;

2. Discourse data alone is too limited and won't pick up some key relational issues;

3. Applied relevance: our conceptual frameworks should be meaningful and relevant to practising managers.

Thank you!
Any Questions?