

## Personality Characteristics as Predictors of Affective Availability to Interact Across Cultures

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate-the effect of the personality characteristics on the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction process. It is specifically focused on exploring the individual's traits that enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural understanding and attitudes of students. The intention is to bring together some of the leading theoreticians' concepts to stimulate new directions in this area and complement this with some conceptual work being conducted by the cross-cultural interaction researchers. The first objective of this study based on theoretical concepts is to introduce the comprehensive model that encompasses the relationships among the individual characteristics and the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction. The second one is to evaluate the influence of the contingency fit of teacher-student relations as moderators of cross-cultural training performance. The availability to interact cross-culturally is defined as a multidimensional construct reflecting individual ability to respond to the differences positively and interact efficiently with the others from a variety of backgrounds. It was described in a three-factor model and structured according to the criteria.

*Key words:* personality characteristics, cross-cultural interaction, availability to interact cross-culturally.

## Introduction

The world is becoming interdependent and interconnected in magnitude. The cross-cultural interaction between people is increasing. According to Hall (1976), the future depends on men exceeding the limits of individual cultures, since technical solutions to environmental problems will never be applied rationally until the man exceed-the limitations imposed by his culture.

Theories and books on the cross-cultural interaction abound (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; House, Javidan, & Gupta, 2004). A theoretical investigation of the cross-cultural interaction process leads to understanding the fact that the participants of the cross-cultural interaction should have abilities to provide its effectiveness (Rich, 1974; Matsumoto, 2001). Therefore, interdependence of the participants' personal traits and effective interaction with people from a different cultural background is the aim of this research.

Various conceptions of the personality across cultures have varying degrees of explanatory or descriptive utility. They all try to define someone whose identity extends significantly beyond the individual's own culture. The terminology describing this kind of personality can be different but it assures that the individual's essential identity is inclusive and comes to grips with a multiplicity of realities (Adler, 1998; Matsumoto, D. & Juang, L., 2008).

The theories representing cultural intelligence (CQ) stress on individual capability to function effectively across cultures. The cultural intelligence approach goes beyond the emphasis on knowledge because it also emphasizes the importance of developing an overall repertoire of understanding, motivation, and skills that enable one to move in and out of lots of different cultural contexts (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Templer, Tay & Chandrasekar, 2005; Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010). Cultural, sociological, and individual dynamics occurs-for each personality in cross-cultural settings.

Another concept, defined as emotional intelligence (EQ), refers to one's ability to interact with effective emotional sensibilities (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Goleman, 1998; Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012).

Some researchers provide support for a strong positive relationship between the key components of TL and the core factors of EQ, including self-awareness, social awareness, empathy, motivation and communication (Barling, Slater & Kelloway 2000; Gardner & Stough 2002; Leban & Zulauf 2004).

A great deal of research focuses on cultural knowledge to function effectively across cultures, considering that cultures differ in norms, habits, and behaviors (Ruben, 1989). These ideas focus specifically on an individual's capability to understand and adapt effectively to a myriad of cultural contexts as an additional and essential skill set needed.

We believe that effective cross interaction is not just emotional or/and cultural intelligence but cross-cultural availability (CCA) to interact across cultures.

Emotional intelligence focuses on ability to interact effectively with people by paying attention to the emotions of self and others, cultural intelligence focuses on the ability to function effectively with people and situations involving different cultural backgrounds. The effectiveness of cross-cultural availability (CCA) considers confusing situations, interactive strategies and appropriate adjustments to how other people understand and relate in the context of different cultures. It involves a complex set of capabilities and processes that comes from the importance of higher education internationalization.

## 1. Three-factor model of cross-cultural availability (CCA)

CCA is based on a tree-factor framework that synthesizes a perspective on successful interaction and adaptation in a host country. It is composed of three qualitatively different capabilities, and each of the factors is interrelated. For cross-cultural effectiveness, the individual needs all CCA capabilities. These factors are *cognitive (gnosiological)*, *emotive-value (axiological)*, and *behavioral (praxeological)*.

### 1.1.1. The cognitive (gnosiological) factor

The *cognitive* factor is the knowledge dimension. It refers to the levels of culture understanding and interacting with the others in cross-cultural contexts: understanding cultural systems (the ways societies organize themselves to meet the basic needs), contexts of culture, and the a set of its norms and values (the ways cultures approach the things like time, authority, and relationships) It includes the abilities to make personal strategies on the basis of culture knowledge that is not explicit in a culture.

### 1.1.2. The emotive-value (axiological) factor

Axiological factor refers to individual attitude towards the value of dialogue interaction and understanding it as a process of value–interchange. It includes the abilities of positive interaction with the others (coordination of attitudes, compromise), low level of ethnocentrism, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.

### 1.1.3. The behavioral (praxeological) factor

The *behavioral* factor as the action dimension of CCA refers to the individual ability to act appropriately in range of cross-cultural contexts (conflict managing, sensitivity, modification of behavior). It involves flexible actions in every specific cultural situation (both verbal and nonverbal).

## 2. Each of the factors is emphasized in CCA criteria:

### 2.1. Efficient participation (cross-cultural competence)

Cross-cultural competence can be defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, knowledge and strategies that come together in a system to function effectively in cross-cultural situations (Davis, 2000). It can be considered as integration and transformation of knowledge about the individuals and the groups of people into some specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings.

Being competent in the cross-cultural interaction means learning new patterns of behavior and applying them effectively in the appropriate settings. It indicates having the capacity to function effectively in other cultural contexts (Lindsey & Terrell, 2003).

The scholars writing about cultural competence have identified five essential elements that contribute to a system's ability to become more cross-culturally competent. The system should value diversity, have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, institutionalize cultural knowledge, and develop adaptations to host culture reflecting and understanding the difference between and within the cultures. They should be reflected in attitudes, structures and strategies.

Cross-cultural competence as a set of individual traits can be applied according to the three factors mentioned:

*The cognitive (gnosiological) factor:* knowledge of the cross-cultural interaction.

*The emotive-value (axiological) factor:* understanding of interaction as the process of value interchange.

*The behavioral (praxeological) factor:* effective solving the tasks of the cross-cultural interaction.

### 2.2. *Positive interaction (cross-cultural sensitivity)*

It applies to the ability to acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and accept cultural differences. The individual who is sensitive to other cultures not only notices some cultural differences but also appreciates, tolerates, and accepts the cultural differences apparent in the cross-cultural interaction (Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk, 1992; Engle & Engle, 2004; Huber, 2003; Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Owen & Sweeney, 2002).

Higher education plays a key role in preparing people to function in the world of cultural diversity and it cannot be a temporary measure. It is considered as an attitude and even a state of mind with regard to the situation that is going to endure.

Individual characteristics determined according to the factors:

*The cognitive (gnosiological) factor:* knowledge of cultural diversity.

*The emotive-value (axiological) factor:* understanding of multiple realities, empathy, coordination of attitudes, compromise, positive self-reflection, understanding, accepting and interpreting of others, and tolerance of ambiguity.

*The behavioral (praxeological) factor:* socio-accentuated actions based on accounting of interaction's cultural specificity, and managing conflict situations.

### 2.3. *Compatibility with other cultural setting (cross-cultural transformation)*

Individual-level factors (personality, self-monitoring, and self-efficiency) are important predictors of cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri, 2000). Cross-cultural adjustment is defined as the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity an individual has for the new environment. Black (1999) defines overall adaptation to living in the foreign culture as general adjustment and suggests that interaction adjustment is the most difficult to achieve, as differences in mental maps and rules reveal themselves in interactions with host culture. Adjusting to a new culture, means gaining a new repertoire (or set) of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The individual becomes a different person through transformation, or a person with more choices (Kim, 1992).

The transformation is seen as any shift in the values and norms or in the basic assumptions of the person leading to individual growth.

According to CCA factors, the personality abilities and skills needed for transformation in cross-cultural settings can be determined:

*The cognitive (gnosiological) factor:* knowledge about of cultural context, language conventions, and cultural selectivity.

*The emotive-value (axiological) factor:* understanding of the process of cultural adaptation/readaptation, drive to adapt cross-culturally, and low level of ethnocentrism.

*The behavioral (praxeological) factor:* planning of appropriate strategies of behavior in new cultural setting, managing transition shock, and modification of own behavior according to cross-cultural situations.

### 2.4. *Teacher-student relations as moderators of cross-cultural training performance*

It is important to underscore some points: 1) *representation of the cross-cultural interaction model by educators*; 2) *interdependence of learning style and teaching modes in training performance*; 3) *egalitarian teacher-student relations in teaching performance*.

#### 2.4.1. *Representation of the cross-cultural interaction model by educators in class.*

Learning how to instruct the students in the art of cross-cultural interaction is a necessary objective for the effective educators. The teachers should take the lead and develop the strategies to provide that their students will learn the cross-cultural interaction skills. It is extremely important for the educators to elicit academic performance from the students based on these

skills. It is the educator's responsibility to ensure the students' support of cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity and communication competence.

Lindsey and Robins have devised a "cultural proficiency continuum" to depict how the educators respond to the needs of internationalization. It includes honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully across cultures (Lindsey & Roberts, 2005).

#### *2.4.2. Interdependence of learning styles and teaching modes in training performance.*

According to the contingency theory of human resource training, the fit between teaching (training) and learning is critical to achieving better training effectiveness (Kolb et al., 2005; Madsen & Ulhøi, 2001; Trappey & Ho, 2002;). Luthans et al. (1998) contended that a great deal of training research has been conducted based on various theories of learning from learners' perspectives. However, the application of these theories to the educator's perspective is rare and needs further validation.

Learning style depends on how information was processed and perceived. The educator's teaching method and the students' learning style can moderate the relationship between the perceived need for student training and teaching effectiveness. This conceptual framework was developed based on a thorough review of the relevant literature and an integration of previous study results.

#### *2.4.3. Participatory teacher-student relations in educational process.*

Linkage arrangements among universities, increasing the teachers, researchers and students communication in cross-cultural context lead to globalization or internationalization and have impact on the curriculum development process. The staff and communities are committed to have an active role in this process. The participatory approach to curriculum, as an interactive one, gains wider acceptance in the world.

Educational framework has two completely different models: classical and participatory. The first one refers to rational approach and follows the "objectivistic" paradigm. Its aims and tendency are established by the educators having the knowledge and common educational goals to produce a desired product without building any consensus with the students.

The participatory model can be characterized as a "subjectivistic" interactive approach. The educators and universities that practice this approach believe that the knowledge should be created through interaction rather than being just reproduced. Thereby the knowledge is socially reconstructed on the basis of the teachers/students' past experiences.

This process-orientated paradigm emphasizes the participation and interaction of all various stakeholders. The participatory-based educational process makes learners realize the important role they play in formulating their own curriculum to make it compatible and modified. It stimulates them to take an active part in education process turning it into an interactive form. The basis of the participatory model is to consider the learning-teaching process as the way of exchanging the ideas to form new knowledge.

The use of this approach in cross-cultural education (training) can create an atmosphere of cooperation in which the students can get an opportunity for effective learning by exposing their creative skills, expressing their opinions freely, and exchanging their ideas with each other as well as with their teachers.

Consequently, they avoid their learning-related fear and become more confident by getting a chance to show their creative power.

The three factors specify the effective teacher-student interaction as a moderator of cross-cultural training performance:

*The cognitive (gnosiological) factor:* knowledge of dialogue forms of interaction, and educators' cultural proficiency.

*The emotive-value (axiological) factor:* drive to dialogue interaction, openness, and self-efficacy.

*The behavioral (praxeological) factor:* involvement, participatory, and collaboration.

### Conclusion and Discussion

The suggested theoretical model is aimed to give an overview of the complexities of the personality characteristics necessary for the effective cross-cultural interaction.

The theoretical foundation of this study should be interesting for the scholars and educators alike who are interested in how to make the cross-cultural interaction successful in a global environment and, more importantly, how to gain it. As this study illustrates the influence of the participants' personality characteristics on the effectiveness of the cross-cultural interaction, it should help lend greater weight to various ways of the students' individual characteristic development in the process of their interaction across culture. This study also adds to the body of the literature shedding light on the importance of the individual personality characteristics and the teacher-student interaction as the cross-cultural training performance moderator. We believe the present study contributes to research and practice in this field.

However, further research is needed to develop an interactive model of cultural transformation to explain the shifts in cultures we are experiencing today across cultures. There is also a need for further research into different theories of cross-cultural exchange; in addition, the appropriateness, usefulness and relevance of the developed theories should be tested empirically. It is an almost unlimited human capacity for adaptation and self-organization that makes the area of cross-cultural encounters and cultural convergence so interesting. And considering the further development of cross-cultural connectedness, the field for further research seems endless.

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