

Introduction:

The excerpts below are from the chapter "Transcultural Communication Competence" in Stella Ting-Toomey's (1999) book, *Communicating Across Cultures* (see citation below).

Definition of Transcultural Communication Competence:

"Transcultural communication competence (TCC) refers to an integrative theory-practice approach enabling us to mindfully apply the intercultural knowledge we have learned in a sensitive manner. Specifically, it refers to a transformation process connecting intercultural knowledge with competent practice. To be a competent transcultural communicator, we need to transform our knowledge of intercultural theories into appropriate and effective performance... The word "transcultural" conveys the idea that there is an existing body of knowledge and skills in the intercultural communication literature that is designed to help people communicate appropriately and effectively in a wide range of intercultural situations. Culture-specific and ethnic-specific knowledge, in conjunction with a TCC approach, will yield a wealth of interaction skills that permit individuals to cross cultural boundaries flexibly and adaptively."



Transcultural Communication Competence Criteria

The Appropriateness Criterion:

"Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the exchanged behaviors are regarded as proper and match the expectations generated by the insiders of the culture. For example, if you are in China, when you offer your guest some food, you should use self-effacing mode of expression such as 'The food is not too delicious, but try some' And if you are an interculturally sensitive guest, you might say something like 'All the dishes look so good, you must have been working really hard all day in the kitchen. You're being too humble' In another example, a Taiwanese top-notch computer programmer might say, 'I'm not very familiar with this software program. Please don't expect too much' You, as a client, might reply with a compliment: 'Please don't be so humble. I know your firm's great reputation. If you can't fix this problem, no one can!'"

"Appropriate communication can be assessed through understanding the underlying values, norms, social roles, expectations, rules, and scripts of the cultural scene. The criterion of communication appropriateness works concurrently with the criterion of communication effectiveness. When we act appropriately in a cultural scene, our culturally proper behaviors can facilitate communication effectiveness. By signaling to the other party that we are willing to adapt our behaviors in a culture-sensitive manner, we convey our respect for the other's cultural frame of reference."

The Effectiveness Criterion:

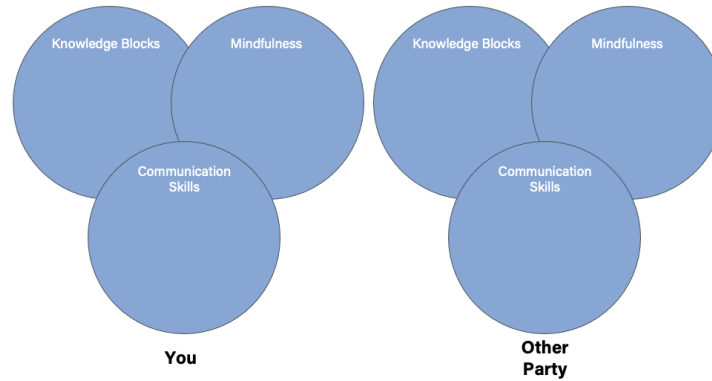
"Effectiveness refers to the degree to which communicators achieve mutual shared meaning and desired goal-related outcomes. An effective encoding and decoding process leads to mutually shared meanings. Mutually shared meanings lead to perceived intercultural understanding. Ineffective encoding and decoding by one of the two communicators can lead to intercultural miscommunications and misunderstandings. In addition to the accurate encoding and decoding of messages on the content level, communicators need to cultivate mindful awareness and sensitivity along multiple levels of effective intercultural understanding."

"In sum, the effectiveness criterion emphasizes the importance of promoting intercultural understanding on content, identity, and relational levels. It is not enough to just understand the content messages that are being exchanged in the communication process. We also have to pay close attention to the identity-based meanings that underlie the exchanged message. By listening mindfully to the exchanged message and its nonverbal nuances, we can gauge whether the speaker is signaling her or his needs for recognition on the cultural or personal identity level and/or gender or ethnic identity level. We can also match proper cultural values with the meaning level to arrive at a culture-sensitive interpretation of how different cultural strangers are viewing the relationship."

The Satisfaction Criterion:

"Identity negotiation theory, in this book, assumes that human beings in all cultures desire positive affirmation from others of group membership identity and personal identity. Individuals tend to be more satisfied in interaction scenes in which their desired identity images are elicited or validated. They tend to experience dissatisfaction when their desired identity images are denied or disconfirmed. Thus, to the extent that the important identities (e.g., cultural or gender) of the intercultural communicators have been positively addressed and sensitively dealt with, they will experience interaction satisfaction. To the extent that important identities of the intercultural communicators have been bypassed or patronized, they will experience interaction dissatisfaction.

"In order to achieve interaction satisfaction, we have to understand the cultural premises and assumptions that surround the use of verbal and nonverbal messages in the communication process itself. We have to realize that cultural values such as individualism-collectivism and power distance frame the culture-specific functions of verbal and nonverbal communication. For large power distance cultures, for example, formal verbal and nonverbal interaction is expected. For small power distance cultures, informal verbal and nonverbal interaction is preferred. Additionally, verbal styles of direct or indirect communication and self-enhancing or self-effacing communication can arouse different levels of satisfaction in different cultural communities. For individualists, interaction satisfaction is related to person-based emotions and personal self-worth issues. For collectivists, on the other hand, interaction satisfaction is closely tied to in-group emotional reactions and group-based self-worth issues."



Components of Transcultural Communication Competence

The Knowledge Blocks Component:

"Without culture-sensitive knowledge, communicators cannot become aware of the implicit 'ethnocentric lenses' they use to evaluate behaviors in an intercultural situation. Without accurate knowledge, communicators cannot accurately reframe their interpretation from the other's cultural standpoint. Knowledge here refers to the process of in-depth understanding of important intercultural communication concepts that 'really make a difference.'"

"Transcultural communicators need to develop greater sensitivity concerning the values, identities, behaviors, and situations that constitute intercultural communication. Additionally, these concepts are mediated by the linguistic symbols of that culture. In understanding the language of a culture, we hold the key to the heart of a culture. By understanding the nonverbal nuances, expressions, styles, and boundaries of a culture, we enter the heart of that culture. Acquiring knowledge is a good first step when we are preparing ourselves to enter into any new culture. Knowledge together with mindfulness can help us to be more in tune with ourselves and dissimilar others in a vulnerable identity-contact episode."

The Mindfulness Component:

"Mindfulness (Thich, 1991) means attending to one's internal assumptions, cognitions, and emotions, and simultaneously attuning to the other's assumptions, cognitions, and emotions. Mindful reflexivity requires us to tune in to our own cultural and personal habitual assumptions in viewing an interaction scene. By being mindful of the 'I'-identity or 'we' -identity cultural value assumptions, we may be able to monitor our snapshot ethnocentric evaluations reflexively. By being mindful of the 'I' -identity or "we"-identity personal variation standpoints, we may be able to monitor our own individual motivations and actions more consciously."

"Mindfulness can help us to arrive at the cognitive and affective 'readiness' stage to interact with people who are different from ourselves. It can help us to put our own ethnocentric motivations in check. It can prompt us to examine the motivational needs and bases from the other person's frame of reference or standpoint. Mindfulness is the mediating step in linking knowledge with skillful practice."

The Communication Skills Component:

“‘Communication skills’ refers to our operational abilities to interact appropriately, effectively, and satisfactorily in a given situation. Many communication skills are useful in enhancing transcultural communication competence.”

“In an intercultural exchange episode, communicators have to work hard to listen mindfully to the cultural and personal viewpoints that are being expressed in the problematic interaction. To understand identity-salient issues, they have to learn to listen responsively to the tones, rhythms, gestures, movements, nonverbal nuances, pauses, and silence in the interaction episode. They have to learn to listen to the symphony and the individual melodies that are being played out in the interaction scene.”

“In order to listen mindfully, transcultural communicators have to learn to use paraphrase and perception checking skills in a culture-sensitive manner. Paraphrase is using verbal restatement to summarize the speaker's message. Perception checking skill is to use eyewitness accounts on a descriptive level to check whether the hearer genuinely understands the message or whether she or he has certain unmet needs or wants.”

“Identity confirmation skills include addressing people by their preferred titles, labels, names, and identities. Addressing people by their desired titles or identities conveys to others our recognitions of their existence and the validity of their experiences. For example, individuals sometimes may identify strongly with their ethnic-based memberships and sometimes their person-based identities. By being sensitive to people's self-images in particular situations and according due respect to their desired identities, we confirm their self-worth. Calling others what they want to be called and recognizing group memberships that are important to them are part of supporting their self-images.”

“Additionally, using inclusive language rather than exclusive language (i.e., ‘you people’), and using situational language rather than polarized language are part of identity confirmation skills. Inclusive language means we are mindful at all times of our use of verbal messages when we converse with both in-group and out-group members in a small group setting.”