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LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE REALITY: A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES

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Intercultural competencies are more important for people in business than ever before. In this article, the authors present an approach they designed and used for developing “negotiating reality” as a key intercultural competence at an international business school in Europe. They outline the theoretical underpinnings from intercultural communication and action learning, on which their approach is based. Then, they describe the iterative process through which they guide students in group work, starting by analyzing a difficult intercultural situation they experienced and leading to role-plays in which they experiment with alternative responses. The teaching materials are in the text and appendices.

Keywords: *intercultural competence; international management; action science; conflict; intercultural communication; ladder of inference*

The global business environment requires managers to work with people who have different values, behavioral norms, and ways of perceiving reality. Furthermore, an increasing proportion of work is conducted in multicultural project teams with people with diverse backgrounds (Berthoin Antal, 1995; Davison & Ward, 1999). Unlike expatriate managers who have years to learn about a certain country, people whose work often entails short-term intercultural interactions with multiple partners have little or no time to

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acquire knowledge about the cultures that the others come from. Consequently, intercultural competencies are important for more people in business than ever before (Barham & Berthoin Antal, 1994; Lane, Maznevski, Mendenhall, & McNett, 2004).

Effectiveness in this global environment requires a core intercultural competence that we call "negotiating reality"—a process whereby people become aware of their culturally shaped interpretations to a given situation, openly inquire into the interpretations of others, jointly test their interpretations, and design action strategies that make sense to all parties (Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005, 2006). We use "negotiating" in the general sense of conferring with others so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter. This competence is useful in intercultural interactions in which actors experience uncertainty, surprises, or conflict. Negotiating reality enables managers to recognize and use cultural differences as a resource for learning and for the design of effective action in specific contexts.

This article contributes to teaching approaches that frame intercultural competence in terms of an active, reflective, social construction of reality (Blanton & Barbuto, 2005) and that take into account the uniqueness and complexity of cross-cultural situations (Weiss, 2003). It provides a means for overcoming what we consider to be potential limitations of common approaches to dealing with cultural difference. Bennett (1998) specified six such approaches: (a) denial, (b) defense, (c) minimization, (d) acceptance, (e) adaptation, and (f) integration. We consider denial, defense, and minimization inappropriate because international managers are expected to deal constructively with cultural differences. Furthermore, we believe that all human beings are of equal importance and worthy of equal respect, and that the cultural repertoire of no individual or group merits *a priori* superiority or right to dominance. Integration means that people are capable of reconciling cultural differences and of forging a multicultural identity. However, integration can only be achieved through long-term immersion in a culture and is not realistic for short-term cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, adaptation is the approach the literature generally recommends to managers (Adler, 2002; Chaney & Martin, 2000; Earley & Erez, 1997; Mead, 1998; Oddou, 2005). Bennett (1998) defined adaptation as knowing enough about different cultures to "intentionally shift into a different cultural frame of reference" and to modify behavior to fit the norms of another culture.

Notions of culturally appropriate behavior are often based on models, such as those of Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), that treat national culture as an overarching unitary phenomenon whose influence on its members is quite deterministic (Anakwe, 2002; Blanton & Barbuto, 2005). This knowledge can be useful, but it can also be misleading in specific intercultural interactions because individuals are culturally complex beings, not standardized products of a national culture, so they are likely to think and behave in ways that vary from a general model (Adler,

2002; Rohner, 1984; Schneider & Barsoux, 1997; Weiss, 2003). Furthermore, it is not clear what frame of reference would be appropriate in multicultural situations, such as a team composed, for example, of Germans, Chinese, Indians, Moroccans, and Brazilians (Weiss, 2003). Adaptation approaches often focus on developing sensitivity to cultural differences but do not directly address the question of how these differences can be resolved (Oddou, 2005; Tchaicha & Davis, 2005). Finally, we have frequently observed adaptation being interpreted as a form of manipulation in which people believe they can gain the upper hand over others by reading their minds or mimicking foreign behaviors.

Research comparing more successful international managers with their less successful peers has shown the importance of treating each interaction as unique (Ratiu, 1983). Negotiating reality provides a systematic method for enacting the recognition that individuals are culturally complex beings and that each intercultural situation presents a potentially unique mix of expectations, values, and behavioral repertoires. It begins by creating awareness of one's own contribution to this mix by critically reflecting on three questions: (a) How do I perceive the situation? (b) What do I wish to achieve in this situation? (c) Which action strategy do I intend to employ to achieve my goals? The next step is to explore the same questions with others to understand how their cultural repertoires are affecting their perceptions and behavior. This process enables all parties to openly test their perceptions of reality against those of others and to jointly make conscious choices about the definition of the situation, goals, and strategies for achieving the goals (Morgan & Dennehy, 2004).

Negotiating reality is largely based on the application of "action science" to cross-cultural interactions (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; Friedman, 2001; Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005). Action science is a way of thinking and acting that has been applied to facilitate interpersonal learning and effectiveness at the interpersonal (Rudolph, Taylor, & Foldy, 2001) professional (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Rudolph, Simon, Dufresne, & Raemer, 2006) and organizational levels (Argyris, 1993; Argyris & Schön, 1996). This approach speaks to our personal experience and understanding of intercultural competence, the limits of adaptation, and the importance of acknowledging and exploring differences as a resource for learning.

Posing questions about one's own cultural underpinnings does not come naturally because culture is taken for granted. *Cultural* competence is in essence the ability to generate appropriate strategies of action unconsciously, but *intercultural* competence is the ability to consciously explore one's ways of thinking and acting so as to actively construct an appropriate strategy. However, research has shown that people rarely openly test out their reality images or inquire into those of others (Argyris, 1982). When people encounter different ways of perceiving and acting, as often happens in intercultural situations, they tend to regard these alternatives as strange, inappropriate, or even stupid. Trying out new ways of seeing and doing things feels risky.

Learning to Negotiate Reality

Learning to negotiate reality entails becoming aware of and unlearning (Hedberg, 1981) engrained cognitive processes and behavioral responses that serve us well in certain contexts but impede fruitful interaction in intercultural situations. Recognizing that students need time and a safe environment to engage with an approach that feels new and risky, we designed a 22-hour course to lead students through a conscious process of analysis and experimentation. We have been fortunate enough to run the course as an intensive process of three and a half days, thereby making it easier for the students to shift gears from the factual intellectual performance that is characteristic of most of their other courses into the reflective and behavioral kind of learning that negotiating reality requires. The days are organized as a flow between plenary sessions in which we present models and concepts, small group work in which students apply the concepts to personal cases, and plenary sessions for presenting and discussing the outcomes of the group work. We taught this class for eight semesters at the Leipzig Graduate School of Management (Handelshochschule Leipzig) in Germany.

Our intention is to create a challenging *and* supportive learning environment for the duration of the course. We put our expertise and experience at the service of the students and draw on their expertise and experience to enrich the learning. We run the course together to bring our different cultural and professional backgrounds to bear on the intercultural learning process. Ariane is a French-American woman who studied in the United States, lives in Germany, and works with international business teams in Europe and Asia. Victor is an Israeli Jewish man who grew up in the United States, spent his early career working in Arab-Jewish relations in Israel and Tunisia, teaches in a highly multicultural environment in Israel, and has worked in Europe and Australia. Our combined areas of expertise include anthropological and sociological theories of culture, organizational psychology, international management, individual and organizational learning, reflective practice, action science, and conflict resolution. When one of us is presenting a theory or model in a plenary session, the other adds illustrations and observes the participants for signs that ideas are (not) being understood. During small group work, we circulate among groups to help them when they get stuck by clarifying ideas, stimulating them to take the analysis deeper, and modeling the use of the concepts and desired learning behaviors. We leave much of the control of the learning process to the group members.

The composition of teams is particularly important for supporting students in the process of exploring territory that feels risky. In their business school context, students already have a great deal of experience working in groups or teams, but group formation has not necessarily been learning oriented. In most cases, groups are either assigned by the professor, which many students have often found frustrating, especially in intercultural situations,

or formed by the students themselves, who usually choose friends whom they know well already. Instead of these approaches, we ask students to find four other people with whom and from whom they believe they are likely to learn the most in an intercultural setting. In other words, we seek to create a setting that offers the psychological safety that is critical for the learning process (Friedman & Lipshitz, 1992; Lipshitz, Popper, & Friedman, 2002; Schein, 1993) while at the same time ensuring a diversity of perspectives on reality. The students respond well to this approach, seeking out people from different backgrounds. They maintain these learning groups throughout the course, working through the personal cases in turn, so that each student shares his or her experiences with the group, receives challenges to his or her interpretations and behavior, and tries out new ways of seeing and doing things.

The Personal Cases: The Springboard for Learning

The design of the seminar is based on the understanding that people learn through experience, but only if experience is reflected on and if assumptions are explored and tested (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Simply having an experience is no guarantee of learning to behave more effectively in a similar situation. The pressure to act often short-circuits the learning cycle, leading to the repetition of engrained behaviors and the maintenance of existing patterns of thought rather than to learning from experience (Kolb, 1984). We therefore structure the course around work on a "personal case" that brings each student's own experience into the seminar room, where it functions as the main "database" for inquiry and learning.

A week or two before the seminar, each student writes and submits a personal case describing a problematic situation or conflict involving cross-cultural elements in which they were directly involved (see Appendix A for a description of the assignment). Over the years, we have received a wide variety of cases illustrating the range of situations in which intercultural differences play a role. Many students choose to write about difficulties they encountered in internationally mixed teams, either at the university or in companies. Some bring in examples of negotiations with foreign clients or suppliers. Others describe problems with superiors, colleagues, or subordinates from different cultures. Quite a few cases come from situations outside work, such as conflicts with roommates from different cultures, or misunderstandings that occur at social events.

We also allow students to invent a case (including the dialogue) dealing with a situation they expect to face in the future. We have found that invented cases provide valid data about how students think and act when facing a problematic situation. Furthermore, inventing future cases gives them opportunities to prepare and rehearse handling difficult situations they are likely to encounter.

The heart of the personal case is the dialogue, which is written in a “two-column” format, based on the learning approach used by Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978, 1996). In the right-hand column, the students write what they and the other participants *said*—as best as they can recall. In the left-hand column, they write the unspoken thoughts and feelings that they had during the interaction. At this stage we are not aiming at building empathy. We want the students to first become aware of their own thoughts and feelings that influenced their behavior. We encourage them to learn how to draw the information out into the open rather than guessing at how the other person is thinking and feeling culture.

The personal case provides the students a rich basis for discovering how quickly they make assumptions, interpret situations, and then act on their assumptions and interpretations in ways that inhibit them from learning and, often, from achieving their goals. No matter how old the case, the intensity of the feelings generated at the time usually resurges, making the situation very real for them all over again. When students revisit their personal case experiences, they slow themselves down, opening each step of the process up for questions. By comparing and contrasting their goals, strategies, spoken words, and unspoken thoughts and feelings, students can discover gaps or contradictions between how they wanted to behave and how they actually performed. Working through the case with other students in an iterative process, punctuated with the introduction of concepts and models from the literature on culture and learning, permits the students to consider alternative ways of defining and approaching the situation, to design a different approach, and test it out in role-plays.

For illustrative purposes in this article, we have chosen a case written by a German student, Peter, who described a situation from his semester as an exchange student in a top Japanese university. Peter wrote that his *intention* in going to Japan was to “get to know deeply as many Japanese as possible” to learn about the country and the Japanese way of life. His initial strategy was to be very modest and polite and ask questions and to pretend to understand even if he was not satisfied with the response because he thought that it “would be the way Japanese communicate with another and would help me to get to know them.” Peter, however, was not happy with the outcome of this adaptation strategy. After two months, he still felt like an outsider. He was frustrated and began to lose interest in learning about, and adjusting to, Japanese culture. He decided to change his approach, focusing more on simply having a good time rather than learning about Japan. He reported that he began to act just like he did at home, especially when he was with other European exchange students.

To illustrate his predicament, Peter reconstructed the following interaction that occurred between himself, Peter (a German male exchange student), and Ryoko (a Japanese female student). (The text of the dialogue has been slightly shortened and edited grammatically):

*What I Felt and Thought**What Was Said*

I agree. In Germany the level is much higher. It will be interesting to hear her opinion.

Don't lie. I have been there. I think this is a good example. What do you say now?

Don't give me this "I know somebody" proof. You don't have to defend your country or take it personally.

Maybe at least she will agree that the system is not good.

This must make it clear to everybody that there is something wrong. In Europe you can always ask for directions in English.

What kind of explanation is this?

I definitely agree.

Maybe now I am too upset.

Why is she saying this? Can Japanese never stand an opinion?

Peter: I am tired of the university here. The classes are boring and nobody cares at all about learning. I don't know what the Japanese go to university for.

Ryoko: I know that you do not like your classes in the exchange program. But the regular classes are really different.

Peter: Come on Ryoko, I went to a regular class and there was no difference. The students were sleeping or writing diaries during the class and no one asked a single question. I think in Japan students only want free time.

Ryoko: That is not true. Some are really serious. For example, my friends are studying hard.

Peter: But honestly 90% are not interested in their lectures. And even if they liked to study, it is impossible because most classes are on a high school level. Think about the English skills of the students. They had it for 6 years in school and they still have problems asking simple questions.

Ryoko: The focus is more on grammar and reading.

Peter: What do you learn grammar and reading for when you can't speak? All in all the university in Japan is useless. The students are paying \$8,000 per year for nothing.

Ryoko: So what did you come to Japan for?

Peter: I wanted to get to know Japan and to see something different.

The process of writing the personal case stimulated Peter to undertake some self-critical reflection about his performance in this interaction. He wrote that, even though his objective was "to learn something," he was actually "complaining" and "generalizing from very limited information." He was "not willing to listen," he "did not think deeply about what was already said," and "did not give Ryoko enough time to respond." Looking back, he felt that he should have asked more open questions instead of confronting Ryoko, admitting that, "I can imagine that she felt pushed in the end and had an arrogant impression of me."

Peter's case illustrates some of the central difficulties in developing intercultural competences:

- *Good intentions are not enough.* There was a puzzling gap between Peter's intentions and what he was actually able to produce in practice. Peter wanted to learn about Japanese culture, but he ended up imposing his own cultural perspective on the Japanese.
- *Adaptation is easier said than done.* Peter did his homework by learning about Japanese culture in advance. He wanted to adapt to what he believed

were Japanese behavioral norms, because he believed that this would be the best way to learn about the culture from the inside. However, his attempts to mimic Japanese cultural norms neither gained him the acceptance he sought, nor did they help him to learn much. He eventually became frustrated and ended up acting just as he would at home in Germany.

- *There is a difference between knowing what to do and being able to do it "online."* In retrospect, Peter regretted his behavior in the interaction with Ryoko and was well aware of how he *should* have acted. The question is why he was unable to act on this knowledge in the first place? How could Peter be so reflective and self-critical *after the fact*, but so "pushy and arrogant" during the interaction itself?

The course proceeds by building up the students' understanding of and ability to apply concepts in a series of steps. Table 1 provides an overview of the steps, summarizing our objectives and identifying the concepts and activities we use. We describe and illustrate each step in some depth below.

Step 1: Understanding How Cultures Influence Thinking and Behavior

The first plenary session on culture introduces key concepts and models drawn from anthropological and sociological theories (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Swidler, 1986) and research on managers in different cultures (Adler, 2002; Hofstede, 1980; Laurent, 1983; Ratiu, 1983; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). We find the "iceberg" model of culture a helpful way of illustrating that only behavior is visible. Basic assumptions about how the world works and the role of individuals within it are located deep below the surface, along with norms and values that shape expectations about appropriate ways of behaving and thinking. The danger in intercultural interactions lies in interpreting the behavior of others in terms of the assumptions underlying one's own cultural iceberg. This tendency leads to what we call a "clash of icebergs" (see Figure 1). Negotiating reality in cross cultural situations means engaging with the other person in such a way as to seek to understand what might be driving his or her behavior and by helping that person to understand my behavior and expectations (see Figure 1). As Peter noted, "I was using Germany . . . as a yardstick" and "if something was different from Germany, I suspected that something must be wrong."

After explaining these concepts, we lead a plenary discussion to stimulate the students to apply the concepts to their own experience, first by identifying the various cultures (national, regional, religious, organizational, professional, etc.) that have shaped each of them, so that they perceive themselves and others as culturally complex beings (Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005). We have also found it useful to get the students to apply the concept of culture to compare their business school in Germany with the

TABLE 1
A Stepwise Process for Learning to Negotiate Reality

<i>Step</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Concepts and Activities</i>
Step 1	Understanding how culture influences thinking and behavior	Iceberg model of culture Students analyze their own cultural makeup
Step 2	Exploring how people construct "reality images" or "mental models"	Exercise: Unintended inference test Ladder of inference Small groups case discussion Listening to our "left-hand column" Discovering the ladder of inference Going down the ladder
Step 3	Grasping how their behavior is guided by mental "theories of action"	Espoused theories and theories-in-use Small-group case discussion-identifying gaps and contradictions between the espoused theories and theories-in-use Inquiring into the gaps
Step 4	Combining action strategies of high "inquiry" with high "advocacy" in intercultural communication	Kolb's Learning Cycle Advocacy-Inquiry Matrix Small-group case discussion-analyzing the action strategies and their consequences
Step 5	Exploring different ways of framing conflict	Resource, goal/interest, identity frames Small-group case discussion Identity the conflict frame Designing an appropriate strategy to deal with conflict in that frame
Step 6	Experimenting with different ways of responding to their personal case	Designing new action strategies and putting them into practice Small-group case discussion-combining advocacy with inquiry Crafting interventions Iterations of role-playing, feedback, and redesign
Final assignment	Engaging in the full learning cycle	Groups choose one case to reanalyze fully Presentation and role-playing in plenary Feedback and recrafting

"corporate culture" of other educational institutions they have experienced. This discussion lays the groundwork for later analyses of their experiences, such as those described in Peter's personal case, which occurred in those "strange" business school cultures where students deviated from their own norms of "appropriate" learning behavior.

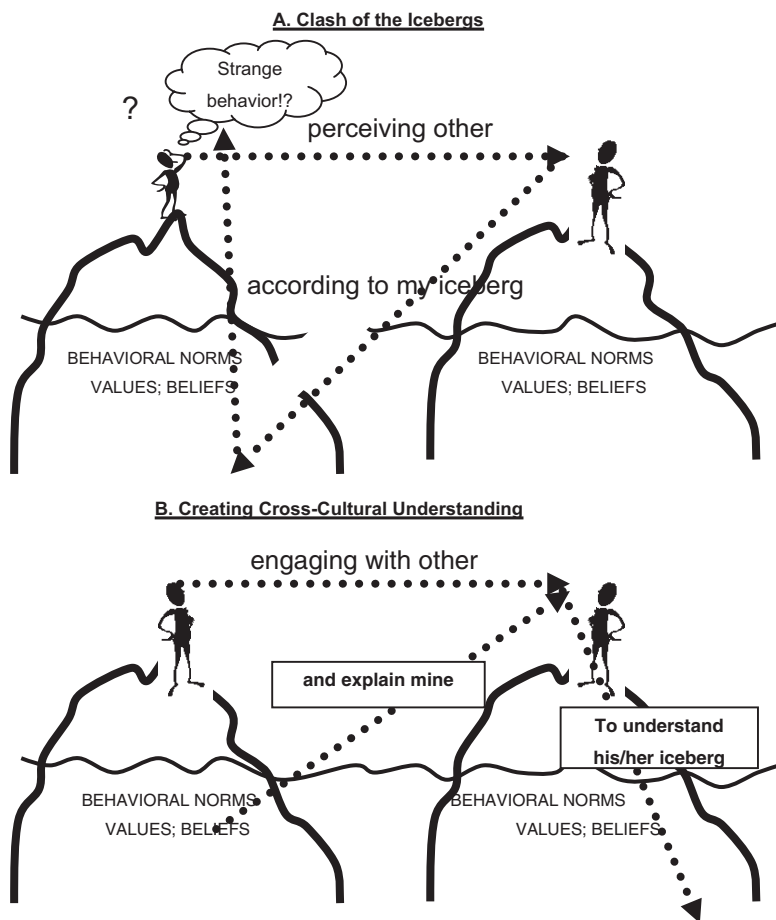


Figure 1: Applying the Iceberg Model of Culture

Step 2: Exploring How People Construct Reality Images

We introduce the concept of mental models (Senge, 1990) or reality images (Friedman & Lipshitz, 1992) with the “Uncritical Inference Test,” an exercise created by William V. Haney (n.d.) about 50 years ago and now freely available on the internet (The Uncritical Inference Test). Students read a short text and then have to determine whether a series of statements about the story are “true,” “false,” or “not possible to know.” The text is extremely ambiguous, so the correct answer for most questions is “not possible to

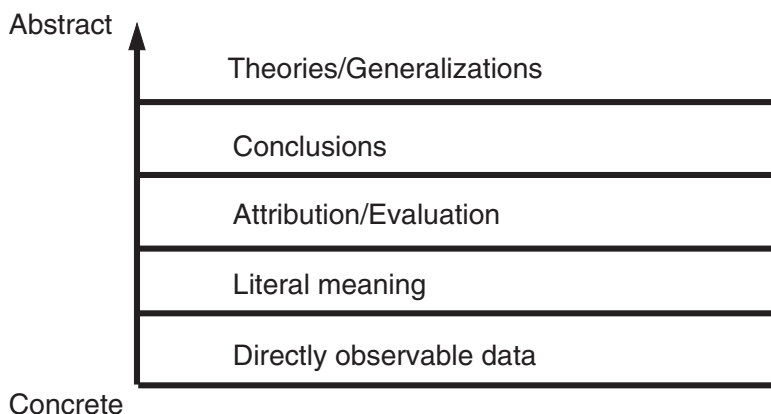


Figure 2: The Ladder of Inference

know.” The students always choose “true” or “false” more frequently than the data warrants. In reflecting on the reasoning processes that led to these errors, most students report having almost instantaneously constructed a mental image of the story, like a film in their heads. This exercise helps the students become aware of the speed with which they interpret a situation and the potential for error in doing so. They also become aware of not being aware of what they were doing. We also help the students see connections between the processes they experienced in the exercise and in actual intercultural interactions.

Once the students have grasped how their minds build reality images, we give them a first tool with which to start analyzing their personal cases: the ladder of inference (Argyris et al., 1985; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994, pp. 242-252). This tool portrays reasoning processes as a series of inferential steps, like rungs on a ladder, from the most concrete, observable data (e.g., the words that were spoken or the actions taken) to increasing levels of abstraction such as attributions and evaluations, conclusions, and theories (see Figure 2). Although people climb up the ladder (i.e., make judgments) almost effortlessly, they experience extreme difficulty in trying to go down (i.e., testing or disconfirming their judgments). A central skill in negotiating reality is going down the ladder, that is, connecting one’s interpretations of a situation to the directly observable data and tracing the inferential steps that led to the interpretation.

After we have presented and discussed the ladder of inference, the students work in their learning groups for the first time. We ask them to select one of the member’s cases, knowing that each case will be addressed

Abstract

Theories/Generalizations: University in Japan is useless.

Conclusions: Nobody cares about learning.

Attributions/Evaluations: Japanese students are not interested in their lectures, they only want free time.

Literal meaning: Many students are not involved in what is going on in class.

Directly observable data: Students sleep, write diaries, and do not ask questions in class in Japanese university.

Concrete

Figure 3: Peter's Reality Image (Ladder of Inference)

during the course. In each group session, we recommend that group members assume different roles: the case writer who "owns" the process, two members who act as coaches to help the owner through the analysis, and one member who observes the overall process and notes what happens during the discussion. The coaches must resist two common tendencies: trying to quickly "solve" the case better than the owner did or empathizing and identifying so intensely with the owner that no alternative view on the situation can emerge.

The groups start by having someone read aloud the left hand column, in which the writer expressed his or her thoughts and feelings during the interaction. This permits the writer to "listen to himself or herself think" before applying the ladder of inference. The group task is to help the writer reconstruct the thought processes and identify the leaps made from the directly observable data to the (often very broad and harsh) judgments about the situation and the behavior of others. The output of the group work is an illustration of the ladder of inference for the case, presented on a flip chart or transparency to the plenary (see Figure 3).

In the course of this exercise, the students become aware that other people do not draw the same conclusions from the data, especially if they come from different cultures, and therefore they see the same situation very differently. They may also realize that some of their inferences were unreasonable or that the other person's inferences make more sense for this particular situation. Peter, for instance, saw how he treated the reality image he had constructed as if it were the whole truth. He realized that he had made

inferential jumps from limited “data” (e.g., sleeping students) to some very judgmental and far-reaching conclusions (“nobody cares about learning”). Although there was some logic to his reasoning, it left little room for alternative interpretations or for a more fine-grained understanding of the situation. For example, one of the reviewers of this article suggested that the students may not have been sleeping but rather listening with their eyes closed, which is actually a sign of respect in many circumstances in Japan. Either interpretation could be accurate or mistaken. The intention here is not to generate a “more correct” image of Japanese students in general, but rather to develop the course participants’ skills in engaging with people whose behavior they do not understand in a specific situation. Ryoko could have been an informant for Peter, helping him test out his culturally conditioned interpretations, but he was unable to take advantage of this potential.

Step 3: Grasping How Behavior Is Guided by Mental “Theories of Action”

What prevented Peter from doubting or testing his reality image even though his stated goal was to learn as much as he could about the Japanese? We explain his behavior as resulting from mental “theories of action” that guide people’s behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Theories of action are similar to “programs” that indicate in situation *X* (conditions), do *Y* (strategy) to achieve *Z* (goal). Theories of action are developed, through socialization, cultural conditioning, and life experience. They enable people to interpret situations and respond almost automatically in ways that are usually quite effective, especially in routine interactions. However, theories of action developed in one context may be quite inappropriate in a different cultural context.

There are often gaps between people’s “espoused” theories of action (inferred from what they say, do, or intend) and their “theories-in-use” (inferred from what they actually do), but people tend to be unaware of this distinction (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978, 1996). The personal cases provide students with rich data for discovering the gaps, and even contradictions, between their espoused theories and their theories-in-use.

The task of the group is to choose another group member’s case (different from the first one), analyze it for the ladder of inference as they did in the first case, and then identify the espoused theory and the theory-in-use (see Figure 4). When this analysis reveals gaps and contradictions between the theories, the student coaches help the case writer recognize this fact and explore what might be behind the discrepancies. Each group records its analysis and presents it to the plenary. The analysis enables the students to see both the power and the potential pitfalls in their automatic behavior. Furthermore, they become aware of puzzling gaps and contradictions in their behavior that they had not seen before.

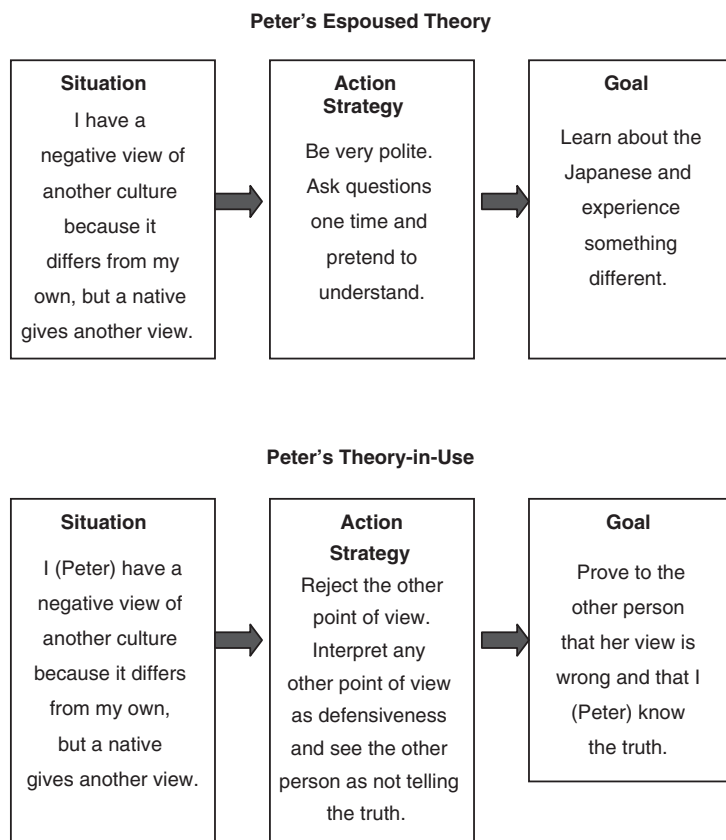


Figure 4: Peter's Theory of Action

Peter, for example, knew that in Japan he would be confronted with points of view that were very different from his own. His espoused goal on encountering these situations was to be open and to "learn about the Japanese and to experience something else." The strategy he originally wanted to employ to achieve this goal was to "be modest, polite, ask questions only once, and pretend to understand." We do not know whether Peter actually ever put this espoused strategy into practice. However, the data in this specific instance clearly illustrate a different "theory-in-use." In practice, he made negative judgments. When a Japanese person disagreed, Peter's implicit goal was to prove that his judgments were correct and that the Japanese person was wrong. His strategy for achieving this goal was simply to reject any argument or data that did not match his point of view and to attribute any disagreement to the other person's defensiveness.

Discovering gaps between Peter's espoused strategy and his actual behavior could help him ask himself what he really wanted to accomplish. Did he want to prove that he was right, or did he want to learn something about Japanese culture? He could reconsider his espoused strategy: Would asking questions only once and pretending to understand really help achieve the understanding of Japanese culture that he was seeking? Finally, depending on how Peter chose to answer these questions, he could design new action strategies to achieve his goals.

Step 4: Combining Advocacy With Inquiry

At this point in the seminar, we present Kolb's (1984) learning cycle to prepare the students to make a shift from analysis into redesigning behavior and action in the form of role-plays. To guide redesign, we also present the advocacy-inquiry matrix (see Figure 5). Advocacy means clearly expressing what one thinks and trying to make the ideas and reasons clear to others. Inquiry means posing curiosity-driven questions and suspending judgment so as to explore and take seriously the perspectives and logics of others.

The group work assignment at this stage is to analyze a third student case in terms of four possible advocacy-inquiry strategies. Peter's case illustrates how he moved from the lower right cell in the matrix clockwise to the top left cell through three cells, none of which contributed to his learning. He labeled his initial espoused strategy "the explorer," which is a form of high inquiry and low advocacy because he originally expected that simply asking questions politely would help him to understand Japan and be well accepted. Not satisfied with the outcome of this strategy, he began avoiding difficult questions and topics. As he put it, "I thought this strategy would save me from disappointments, and I focused more on having a good time by doing sports or singing Karaoke than having a serious discussion." In other words, he took a low-advocacy, low-inquiry stance. The third strategy Peter used was one of high advocacy and low inquiry: He regarded his point of view as the "truth," rejected any other point of view, and showed no curiosity or interest in listening to Ryoko. His reproduced dialogue phrases ending with question marks were purely rhetorical challenges to her.

Few students document having employed high advocacy and high inquiry in their cases, the approach that we believe provides the highest potential for learning. For Peter, a high-advocacy, high-inquiry approach would have meant seeking Ryoko's help in making sense of the observations he and his friends had made about students and the university system. Unlike his original strategy of high inquiry and low advocacy, he needed to explain what he had been seeing in his classes and why this surprised him in comparison to what he had expected, based on his experience in Germany and his previous knowledge about Japan. Instead of pretending he understood (as he had in his

High Advocacy – Low Inquiry • Expresses strong opinions clearly and unambiguously • Ignores or hides information that does not support one's position • Does not listen or listens only to refute • Overpowers defensiveness	High Advocacy – High Inquiry • Treats opinions like "hypotheses" • Expresses clear opinions and provides the reasoning behind them • Invites questions into one's own reasoning • Asks questions and listens in order to understand the reasoning of others • Seeks data that might disconfirm one's own opinion • Engages defensiveness
Low Advocacy – Low Inquiry • Asks leading questions • Gives hints and double-messages • Camouflages threatening information • Ignores or hides information that does not support one's position • Attempts to circumvent defensiveness	Low Advocacy – High Inquiry • Asks questions • Listens and tries to understand • Refrains from judging or expressing opinions • Attempts to avoid raising defensiveness

Figure 5: Combining Advocacy and Inquiry

original strategy), employing a high-inquiry and high-advocacy strategy would entail pursuing questions he wanted to get better answers to by providing more information about his observations, current interpretations, and puzzlement.

In the next phase of the learning process, we take the students into the exploration of conflict, because many intercultural interactions involve conflict.

Step 5: Exploring Different Ways of Framing Conflict

We provide the students with a model suggesting that these conflicts can be "framed" in terms of competition for resources, conflicting goals or interests,

and/or threat to one's identity (Rothman, 1997; Rothman & Friedman, 2001). Students can use this model to analyze the conflict and choose the most appropriate frame for dealing with it.

Conflicts may fall into a single frame or involve all three, but intercultural conflicts often entail identity issues (Rothman, 1997). For example, many personal cases involve different expectations regarding punctuality and the best way to schedule time in carrying out a project. These conflicts may simply be about determining how much each individual should invest (resource), how best to use time (goals, interests), or about people's sense of dignity, recognition, respect, safety, control, purpose, and efficacy (identity). If the conflict is framed only in terms of resources or goals, as is often the case, the parties are not likely to understand what is at stake, resolve it, or learn from it. Identity conflicts call for interventions in which parties clarify for themselves and for each other not only *what* but *why* these needs and values are so important to them.

The group assignment is to take another case, analyze the conflict frame, and design a new strategy accordingly. Peter's case can be framed as an identity conflict because he felt unsure of himself and ineffective when interacting with Japanese people. These feelings were difficult for Peter to bear and eventually he reacted by falling back onto his native cultural patterns. Ironically, his strategy for regaining his own sense of dignity and self-efficacy was to attack Japanese culture, denying Ryoko the very same dignity, recognition, and sense of self-efficacy that were essential for him. It placed Ryoko in a position in which she felt she had to defend both the system and herself. Peter could have used this conflict as an opportunity for learning about the Japanese and about why it was so difficult for him to crack the cultural code and to feel accepted. Such an inquiry might have helped Peter develop the insight and patience necessary for learning about another culture from the inside.

Step 6: Experimenting With Different Ways of Responding

Analysis and insight are crucial, but the real test of learning is putting insights into effective practice. Equipped with the conceptual framework, the students invent and role-play alternative strategies to those they employed in their personal cases. At this point in the seminar, we usually encounter the highest degree of resistance. The switch from intellectual discussion to practical role-playing raises students' anxiety levels. Not surprisingly, they often find it easier to admit and analyze their errors than to try systematically to design and implement a new type of strategy. Furthermore, it is an unaccustomed situation for them because although they may have engaged in role-plays in other courses, they are rarely asked to role-play *themselves*. Early in our

coteaching, one of the authors felt that it was important to model the target behaviors by role-playing. Over time, we learned that this was neither advisable nor necessary. It was not advisable because getting the professors to play the role can be another way of avoiding taking on the risk themselves; furthermore, it can even raise the barrier to role taking if the professor is perceived to exhibit a level of expertise the student cannot yet aspire to putting into practice. It was not necessary because throughout the course we were consciously modeling the behaviors, both in our work with the small groups and in the plenary discussions, particularly when skeptical students challenged us about the relevance or feasibility of the concepts or behaviors we were proposing. The ways in which we engaged these challenges—combining advocacy and inquiry, reframing, being willing to admit our own errors when we made them—provided opportunities to model the target behaviors. By the time we got to the role-play, the students did not need us to show them how to do it because they had been watching us all along.

The following dialogue represents a redesign of Peter's theory of action.

<i>What I Felt and Thought</i>	<i>What Was Said</i>
I agree. In Germany, the level is much higher. It will be interesting to hear her opinion.	Peter: I am tired of the university here. The classes are boring and nobody cares at all about learning. I don't know what the Japanese go to university for.
Don't lie. . . . Hold on. . . . Rather than judge, let me see if I can try to understand. Ryoko's statement does not fit with what I have seen in regular classes. What does she mean by "different."	Ryoko: I know that you do not like your classes of the exchange program. But the regular classes are really different.
OK. So it's not true for all of the students, but still I cannot understand how students learn anything here. It's so different from my experience in Germany.	Peter: Ryoko, what do you mean by "different"? I have been in regular classes and seen students sleeping, writing in diaries, and not asking any questions. I don't see a difference. Can you help me understand?
It's really hard for me to resist telling her that she's wrong, but if I want to learn anything about Japan, I had better learn to listen. . . .	Ryoko: Yes, that is true for some of the classes, but not all of them. It depends on what the students are studying. Engineering students, for example, are very serious.
	Peter: I understand that some of the subjects and students are very serious, but my experience of the university here is very different than in Germany. My impression is that most of the students don't have to work very hard in order to get through. Is that true?
	Ryoko: Well, again, it depends on the individual, but in Japan we. . . .

The goal of the role-play is to help students interrupt automatic reactions and craft more effective strategies. Peter had the opportunity in the role-play to try stopping himself from rejecting Ryoko's point of view, and to consciously orient himself toward seeking to understand. Importantly, he did not simply abandon his point of view or uncritically accept Ryoko's explanations. Rather, he made his observations and thoughts clear (high advocacy), at the same time testing them out and trying to make sense of Ryoko's point of view (high inquiry). Students usually discover that it is more difficult to change behavior than they expect, because they tend to slip back into deeply embedded behavioral patterns. We stop the role-plays when they get stuck, so they can reflect on what they are trying to do and where they are experiencing difficulty. The role-player's performance is evaluated by the other role-players and by the students observing the role-play. We help role-players recraft and test out their action strategies again and again until they achieve some degree of success. As a result, they discover that these situations are not hopeless and that they can achieve better outcomes by changing their own behavior.

Final Assignment and Grading

Each student's case is analyzed at least once by the group during the learning process with a focus on particular aspects of the model. As the course proceeds, these group analyses utilize and reinforce the conceptual framework that has been laid down in previous steps. At each stage students have opportunities to revisit their cases with the group or in the plenary.

For the final assignment, the group selects one of the cases for a full analysis, including a redesign and a role-play. The first objective of the case presentation is to determine whether the students understand and can apply the various elements of the conceptual framework. The second, and more important, objective is to give the students an opportunity to experiment with negotiating reality in action. To ensure that the role-play is spontaneous and not simply scripted, we randomly select students who are not in the presenting group to play opposite the case writer. We emphasize that the goal of the role-play is not a virtuoso performance, but rather to demonstrate a real attempt to apply their new knowledge.

Grading is probably the most unsatisfying part of teaching, especially in a behaviorally oriented learning course such as this one. We would prefer to run the course on a pass or fail basis, but the business school requires a well-documented grading procedure and we recognize that many students tend to take courses with grades more seriously than those that are pass or fail. To reflect the importance of the personal case and of active and constructive participation throughout the plenary and group work sessions, we calculate grades in equal parts for the personal case, oral participation, and the final group presentation (see Appendix B for the grading criteria).

Conclusion

People who want to teach negotiating reality must be willing to engage in it. Using students' personal cases as the springboard for learning means that the instructors cannot know in advance exactly what problems will arise. Instructors may be faced with intercultural situations for which they themselves do not have adequate answers. Instructors are under constant observation by students who are accustomed to seeing professors allay their uncertainties, so there is a strong temptation to provide answers based on the literature or experience. However, doing so would be tantamount to slipping into high advocacy and low inquiry, contradicting the very core of the course. Furthermore, students often become defensive when confronted with their errors or misunderstandings, so instructors require an ability to accept and engage defensiveness as opportunities for learning. The role-modeling function is central to the learning experience. If students see that faculty members espouse, but do not practice, negotiating reality, they are unlikely to take the risk themselves. Coteaching with a trusted colleague can provide the kind of support necessary for risk taking and serve as a source of honest feedback when one gets stuck.

No single course can bring students to a high level of competence in negotiating reality. Rather, the objective is to bring them to the point where they (a) experience enough of the concept to make an informed choice about making it a part of their personal repertoires and (b) have the basic components for deepening the learning by practicing on their own. We do not yet have a good strategy for helping them take the next steps. We advise them to choose a context in which they can experiment and practice where they feel comfortable making errors (with friends or peers in situations where the stakes are relatively low). As their level of competence grows, they can begin to increase the level of risk.

Learning to negotiate reality entails a learning process to which business school students and managers are not accustomed. The fact that the subject matter is not "the foreigners" or "culture" but their own reasoning and behavior tends to surprise and unsettle learners at first. However, it is quite liberating when they realize that the key to effective intercultural interactions is not a large armament of knowledge about the world's diverse cultures but rather learning while engaging. Rather than being at the mercy of cultural norms and values they cannot fathom, they can make conscious choices about how to interpret and respond to situations that are frustrating or confusing.

The stepwise process for learning to negotiate reality we have described here is the result of ongoing design, testing, revision, and fine tuning, and we believe it is worth continuing to develop the approach. For example, if scheduling does not permit a block seminar, the process could be adapted to weekly sessions. Sessions of 90 minutes would allow a half hour for presenting a

concept and an hour for group work. The subsequent session could then be devoted to presenting the results of group work and discussion in the plenary. Stretching the course during a longer period of time could have a number of advantages: assigned readings between sessions, time for incubation, out-of-class assignments to reinforce learning, application of these skills to situations outside of the classroom, and reports on the results.

The process of learning to negotiate reality can be adapted to workshops with managers and other professionals. It can also be designed as interventions to help managers deal with “live” cases, such as ineffective multicultural project teams or negotiations with a client or supplier that are threatening to derail. In this respect, negotiating reality represents an approach to intercultural competence that combines learning, consulting, and action research.

Appendix A

The Personal Case Writing Instructions

Cross-Cultural Management Competences

Written Assignment: The Personal Case

What is a personal case?

A personal case describes a problem or a conflict in which you were personally involved, and for this course, which involves a cross-cultural element. The purpose is to help you learn how to become more effective by obtaining fresh insights into a situation. You could also choose a situation that you have to face in the future in order to help yourself prepare for it. In this sense, writing the case gives you an opportunity to “practice” handling a difficult situation.

Every student is required to write a personal case for this course. The case will be graded and it will be analyzed in groups during the class in order to share the insights into such processes. The grade will take into account how carefully, openly, and reflectively you present the thinking in the situation you choose, so that it can serve to stimulate learning insights.

Steps for writing a personal case:

1. Begin the description with a paragraph about the situation itself: the setting, the problem, the people involved, your role, events leading up to this incident, and any other important background information.
2. Next, write a few paragraphs about your intended strategy. What were your objectives, how did you plan to achieve them, and why did you select these goals and strategies?
3. Then, write a few pages of dialogue (what was actually said in the situation, or, if you choose to write about a future event, what you expect to be said). Use the format described below:

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

Divide the page into two columns:

On this left hand side of the page, write what was going on IN YOUR MIND while each person in the dialogue (including yourself) is speaking.

On this right hand side of the page, write what each person, including yourself, ACTUALLY SAID (or what you expect will be said in a future event).

4. Briefly describe the outcome of the case and your evaluation of your own performance and effectiveness.

The paper should be ca. 7-10 pages long (typed!), of which the dialogue should be at least 2 pages.

Appendix B Grading Criteria

The grade for this course is based in equal parts on the personal case, class participation, and final presentation.

The purpose of writing *the personal case* is to provide you with directly observable data about your thinking and behavior in a challenging intercultural situation. Therefore, the cases are graded according to two criteria:

1. The extent to which you followed the directions, fully addressing each component of the case (background, dialogue, self-evaluation).
2. The depth and thoughtfulness with which you described and evaluated your own thinking and behavior.

In *class participation* we look for evidence of your openness to actively engaging in learning—your own and that of your fellow students:

1. To what extent do you question your thinking and behavior and expose it to critical examination?
2. To what extent do you seek out and accept feedback from your peers and from the faculty?
3. To what extent do you uncover sources of ineffectiveness in your own thinking and behavior, especially those of which you had been unaware?
4. To what extent do you engage in designing and testing out more effective ways of thinking and acting?
5. To what extent do you provide feedback (as opposed to advice or criticism) to your peers and to confront the faculty in a constructive way?

The purpose of the *final presentation* is to show that you have grasped the essence of the concepts in the course and are willing to experiment with

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

them to expand your range of potential interpretations and behaviors in an intercultural situation.

1. To what extent does the presentation demonstrate an understanding of the concepts by applying them correctly?
2. To what extent do you show a willingness to take risks and push the boundaries of your learning by choosing a challenging case and deal with difficult problems? (We are not looking for polished or virtuoso performances but for learning by experimentation!)

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