Culture, Language & Business Relations:

Recent Research and Practical Implications

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WARWICK

APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Key themes

- Introduction: Business perspectives on language, culture & communication

- 3 Conceptual challenges & recent research

- Practical applications and tools

Introduction: Business Perspectives

Introduction

Perspectives from Kevin Murray

Leadership coach, consultant & author

- *The Language of Leaders*

- *Communicate to Inspire*

Both books finalists in the

Chartered Management Institute's Management Book of the Year Awards.

Introduction

"Leaders who cannot communicate well ... can create organizations which are toxic to work in, filled with turmoil and conflict, going nowhere, achieving little." (p.2)

"You need to be a better communicator if you want to lead." (p.7)

Murray, Kevin (2012) *The Language of Leaders.*
London: Kogan Page.

Introduction

"Successful leaders know that relationships are the engines of success." (p.99)

Murray, Kevin (2012) *The Language of Leaders.*

London: Kogan Page.

Introduction

International business requires a combination of:

- Effective communication;

- Effective relational management;

- Effective handling of cultural factors.

➤ *What is the evidence for this?*

Introduction

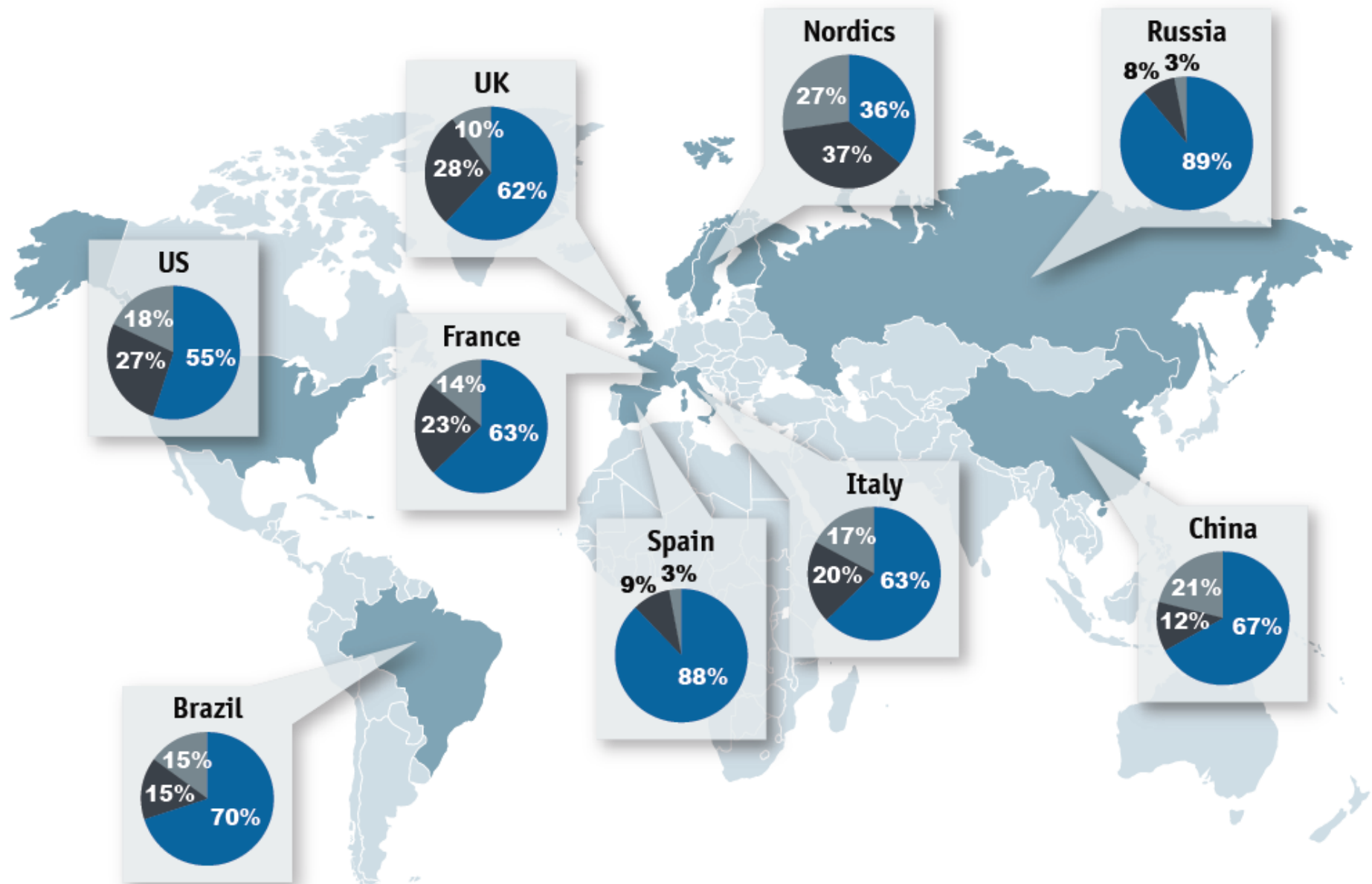## Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Report (2012) *Competing across Borders*

- Survey completed by 572 executives from companies with either an international presence or plans for international expansion;

- In-depth interviews with 8 independent experts/executives from around the world.

Chart 12

Q How do cultural factors or differences such as language and local customs affect your company's plans for international expansion?

● Hampers a lot/somewhat ● Does not affect at all ● Helps our plans for international expansion

UK
10% / 28% / 62%

Nordics
27% / 37% / 36%

Russia
8% / 3% / 89%

US
18% / 27% / 55%

France
14% / 23% / 63%

Spain
9% / 3% / 88%

Italy
17% / 20% / 63%

China
21% / 12% / 67%

Brazil
15% / 15% / 70%

Introduction: 2 Key EIU findings

1. Organisations with international ambitions increasingly expect prospective employees to be fluent in key foreign languages;

2. Misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences present the greatest obstacle to productive cross-border collaboration.
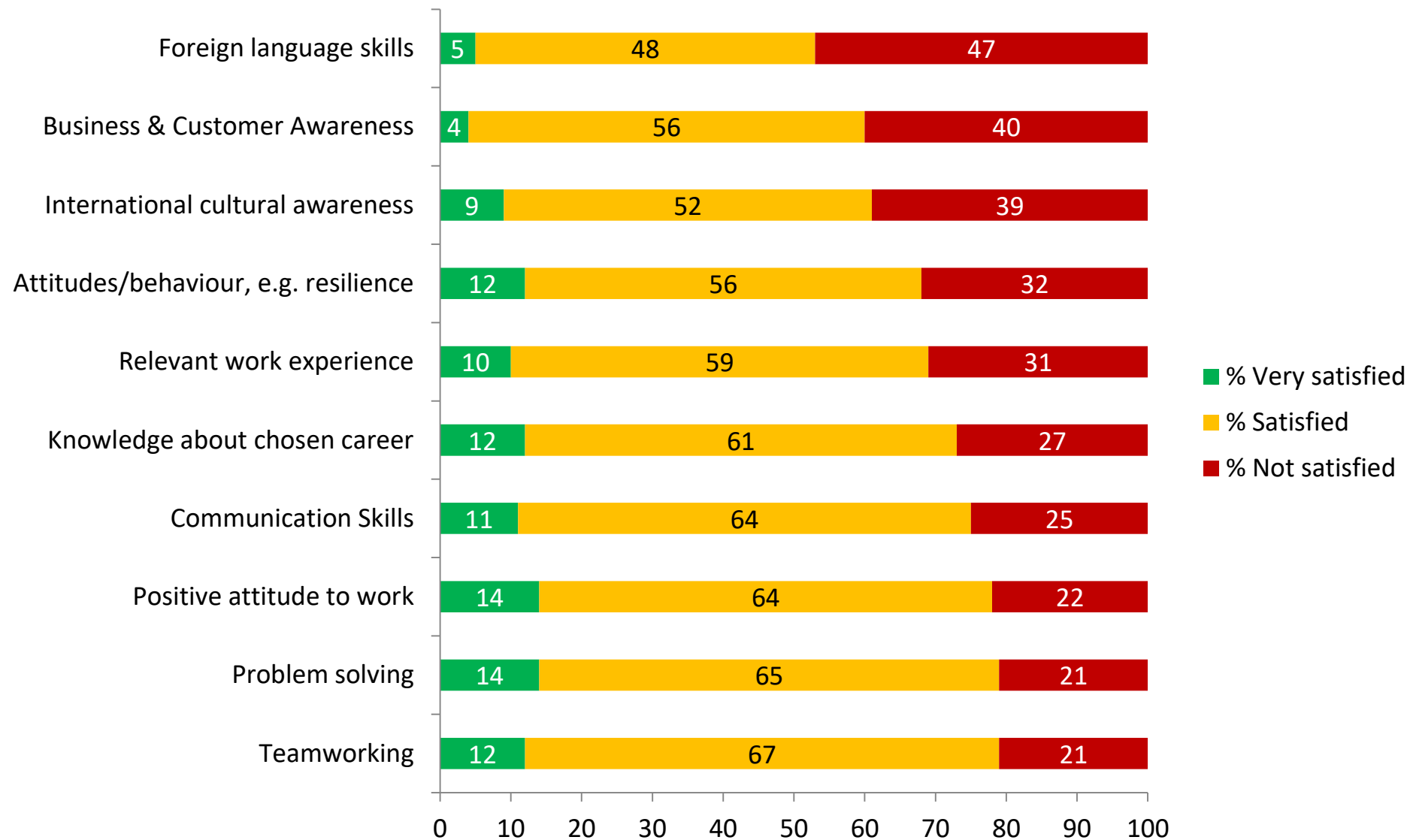
Introduction

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

[based on interviews with 12 leading employers collectively representing 3,500+ graduate recruits]

Introduction

- Key skills often mentioned are
  - Multicultural team working
  - Effective communication across culture and languages

  i.e. Complex mix of skills associated with language, culture and relations.

- Many organisations want to recruit graduates with 'global skills';

➤ *Yet are employers able to recruit such graduates?*

CBI/Pearson Education & Skills Survey 2017

Introduction

Question:

➢ *Why aren't we satisfying employers' requirements?*

Key themes

- Introduction: Business perspectives on language, culture & communication

- # 3 Conceptual challenges & recent research

- Practical applications and tools

Conceptual challenge 1

➤ *What does it mean to be competent in intercultural communication?*
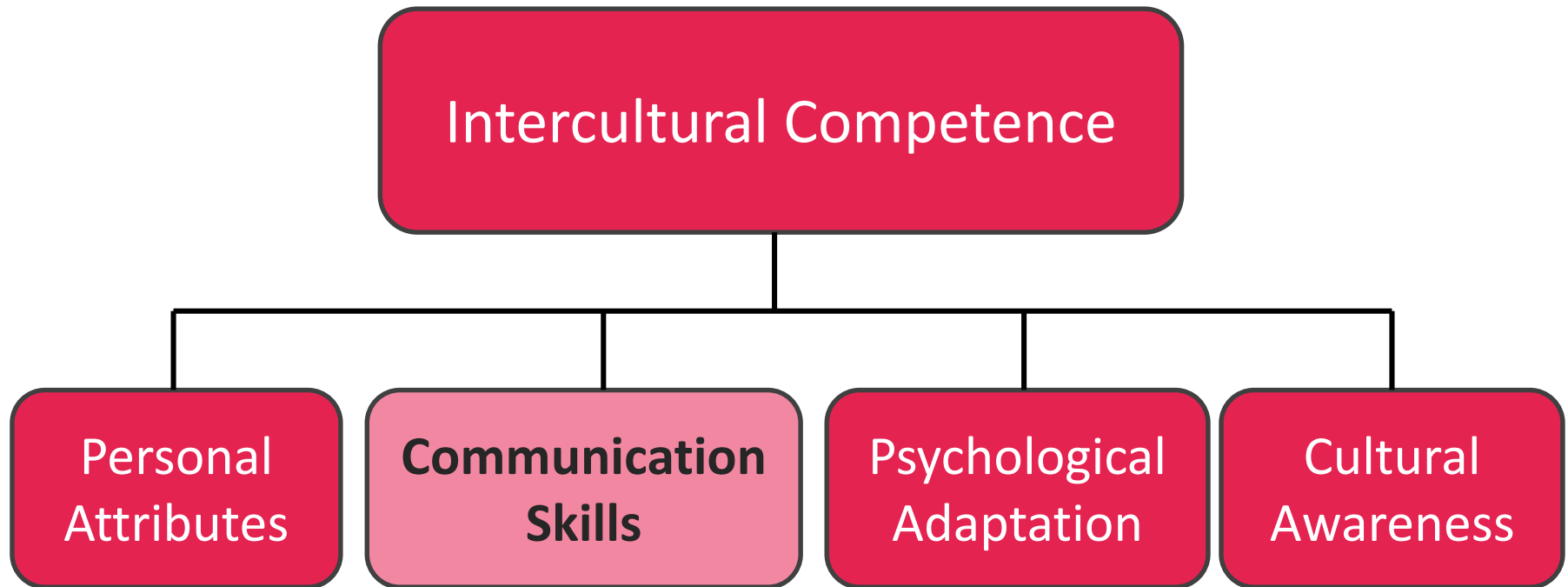
IC Competence Models

3 Key types of IC competence models:

- Compositional – components of competence

- Developmental – stages of progression

- Adaptational – (mutual) adjustment

Spitzberg & Changnon (2009)
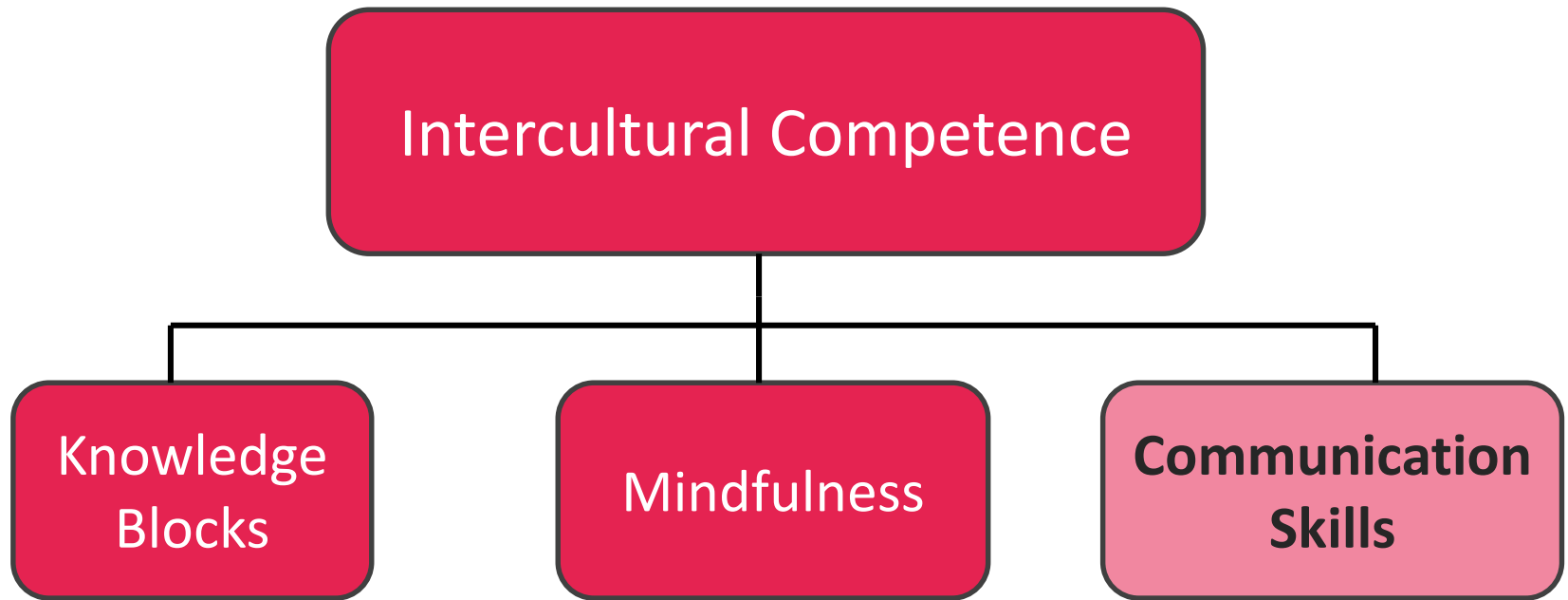
Competence Clusters

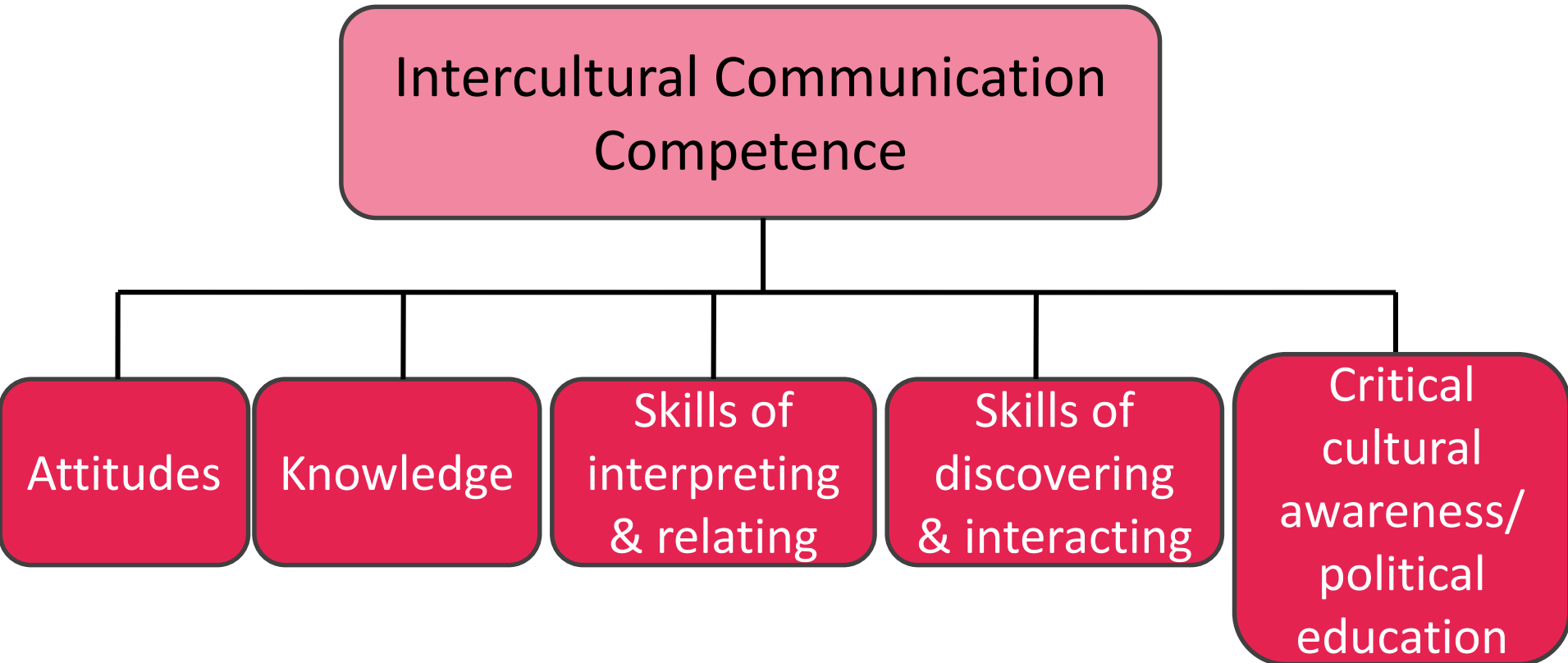**Communication Studies:**

Intercultural Competence

- Personal Attributes
- **Communication Skills**
- Psychological Adaptation
- Cultural Awareness

Chen & Starosta 2005

Competence Clusters

Communication Studies:

Intercultural Competence

Knowledge Blocks

Mindfulness

Communication Skills

Ting-Toomey 1999

Sample frameworks

Foreign Language Education:

Intercultural Communication Competence
- Attitudes
- Knowledge
- Skills of interpreting & relating
- Skills of discovering & interacting
- Critical cultural awareness/ political education

Byram 1997

Competence Clusters

INCA Framework

Intercultural Competence

| Tolerance for Ambiguity | Behavioural Flexibility | **Communicative Awareness** | Knowledge Discovery | Empathy | Respect for Otherness |
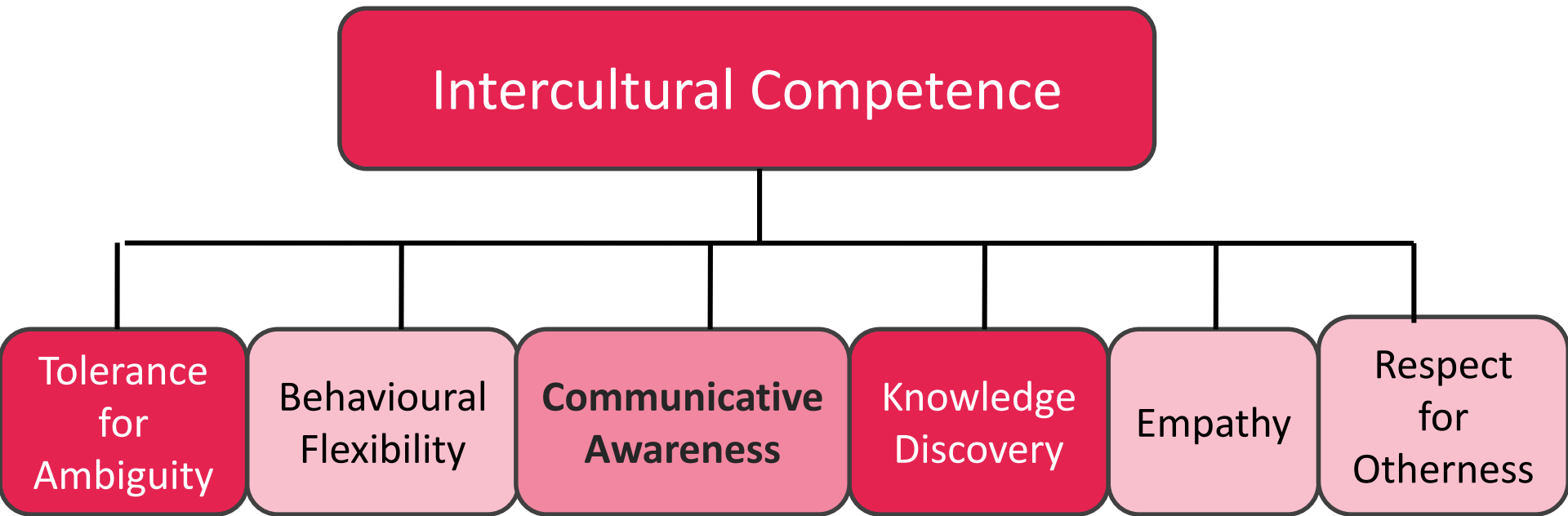
Prechtl & Lund 2007

Deardorff's "Pyramid" Model

Deardorff 2006: 254
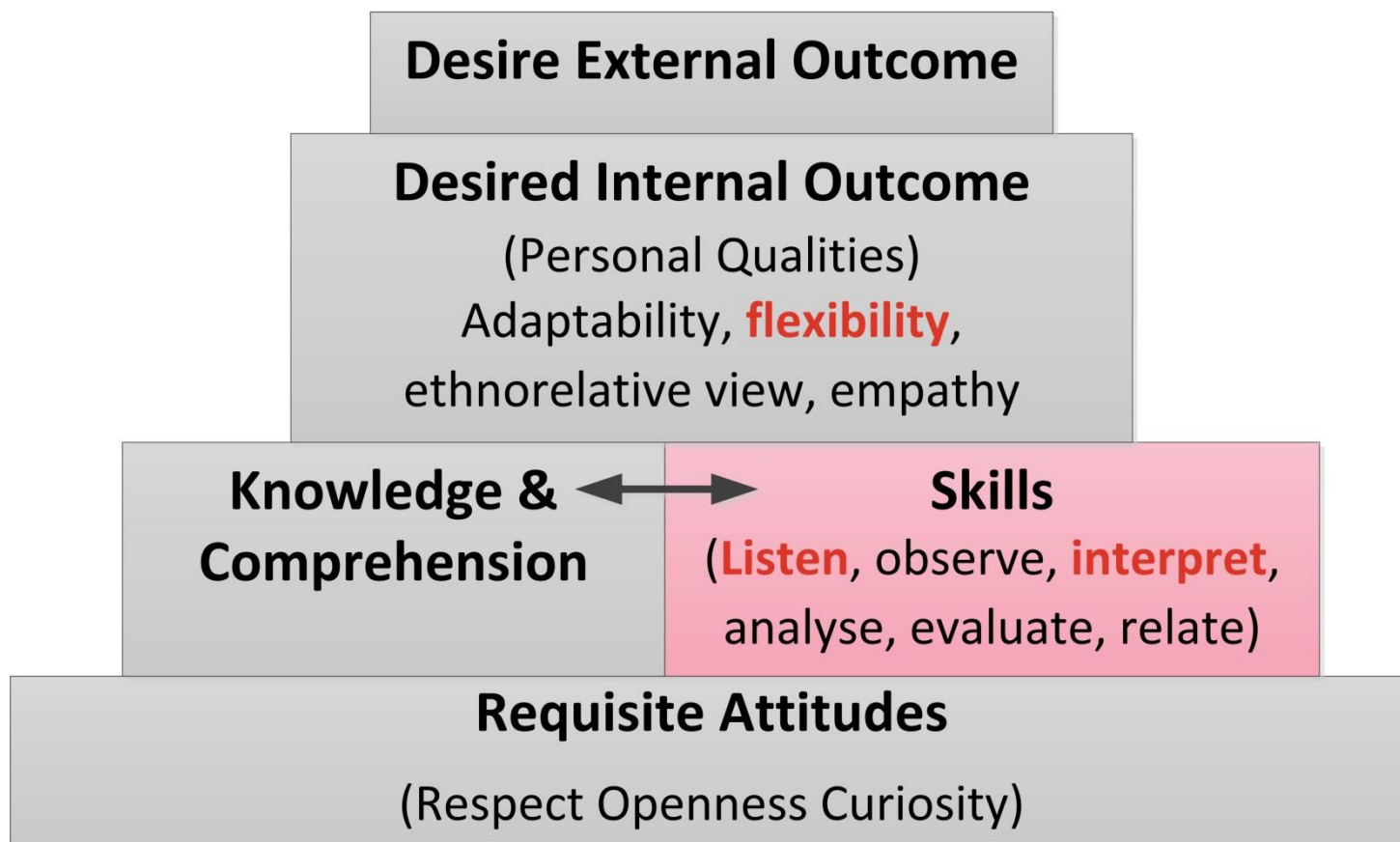
Desire External Outcome

Desired Internal Outcome
(Personal Qualities)
Adaptability, **flexibility**,
ethnorelative view, empathy

Knowledge & Comprehension ←→ **Skills**
(**Listen**, observe, **interpret**,
analyse, evaluate, relate)

Requisite Attitudes
(Respect Openness Curiosity)

Conceptual challenge 1

➢ *What does it mean to be competent in intercultural communication?*

- These frameworks provide <u>very</u> little unpacking of the communication element.

Meaning Construction

Communication is fragile

"Communication is always at considerable risk of failure because we can never make absolutely sure that the communicative act has been interpreted in the context intended by the speaker and in the way intended by the speaker. However, the risk of failure is greater in some types of communication situations than in others."

Zegarac & Spencer-Oatey 2013: 437

Meaning Construction

Intercultural Communication risks being particularly fragile because of potential:

- Differences/gaps in linguistic knowledge/use;
- Differences/gaps in our interpretations of the context;
- Differences/gaps in shared histories (personal, social, cultural).
- Differences/gaps in cultural knowledge, practices and perspectives.

Meaning construction

Lexical 'false friends'

- What do 'unit', 'module', 'course', 'programme' mean?

- What does 'teacher training' mean?

- What does 'research' mean?

- What does 'deliver a course' mean?

Meaning Construction

Intercultural Communication risks being particularly fragile

SO:

- Extra attention needs to be paid to:
  - Meaning interpretation in intercultural communication;
  - Strategies that can be used to support it.

Global People Competence Clusters
International Business/Applied Linguistics

Intercultural Competence

Knowledge & Ideas

Communication

Relationships

Personal Qualities & Dispositions
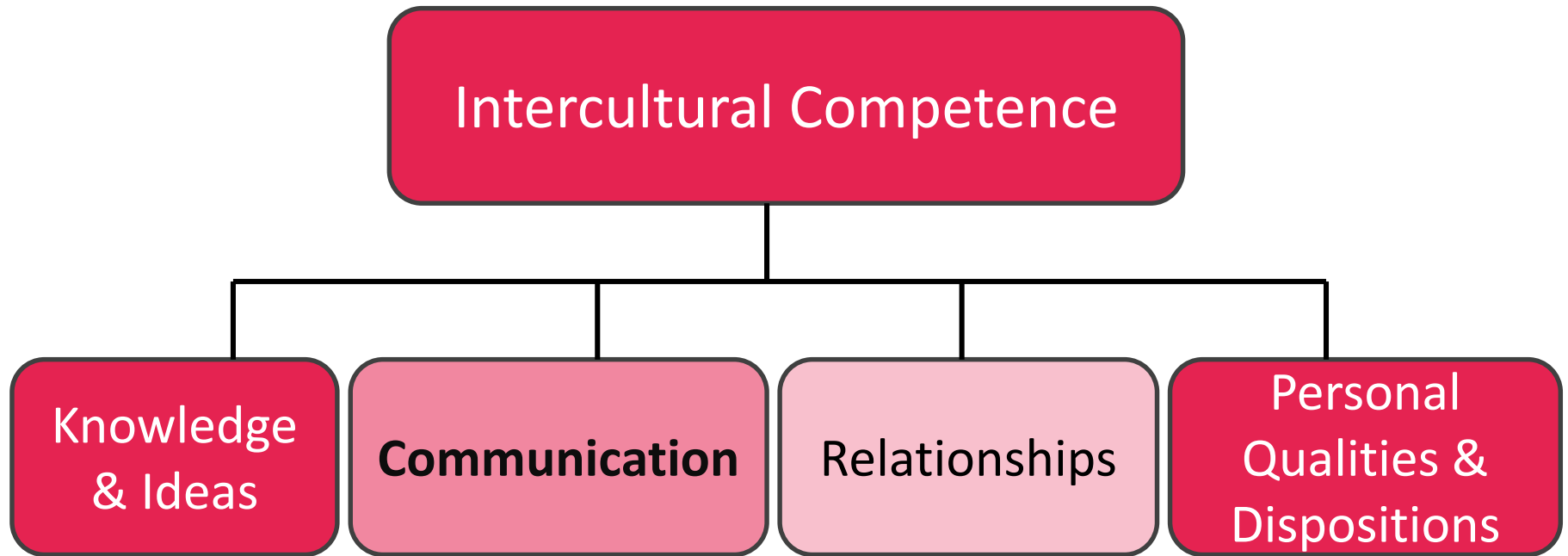
Spencer-Oatey & Stadler 2009

GP Communication Cluster

Communication management	Plans and manages communication issues
Language learning	Motivated to learn and use other languages
Language adjustment	Adjusts language to the proficiency level of the other participant(s)
Active listening	Listens attentively
Message attuning	Picks up indirect signals of meaning
Information structuring	Structures and highlights information, e.g. through use of discourse markers or visuals
Building of shared knowledge	Elicits and discloses key information that is needed for mutual understanding
Stylistic flexibility	Pays attention to different styles and builds repertoire of different styles

Global People

Communication

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

Summary so far …

❖ Companies want employees to have better intercultural skills.

❖ For intercultural <u>communication</u>, this means paying attention to 'meaning construction'.

❖ Students/professionals need training in the strategies that can help achieve mutual understanding.

❖ The Global People website provides a useful framework, with examples.

Key themes

- Introduction: Business perspectives on language, culture & communication

- # 3 Conceptual challenges & recent research

  - Conceptual challenge 1: What does it mean to be competent in intercultural communication?

  - # Conceptual challenge 2

- Practical applications and tools

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Conceptual challenge 2

"There is no framework for conceptualising work relationships."

Murray, 2012, Personal Communication

➢ *Is Murray right? Is there no framework for managing work relations?*

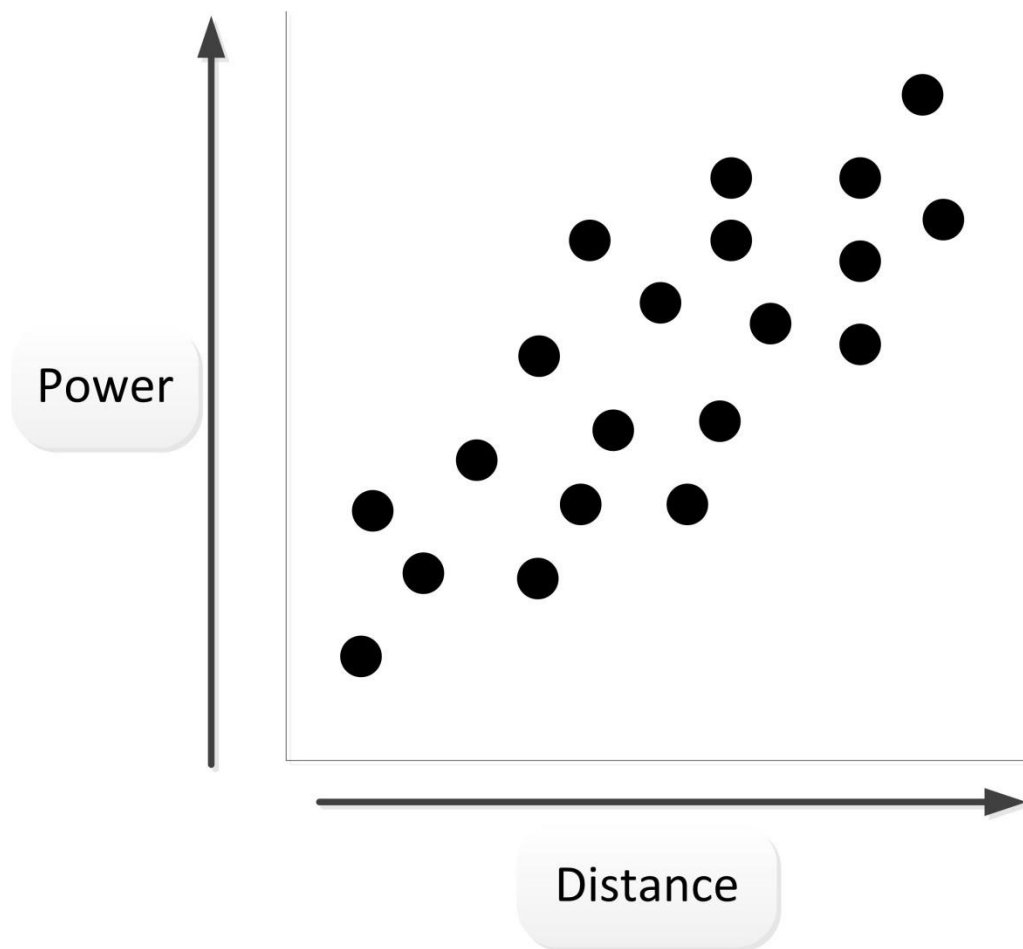➢ *What about managing relations across cultures?*

Conceptualising relations

Relations between interlocutors can be conceptualised in different ways. I suggest two interconnected perspectives:

- ▪ 'Place relations'
- ▪ 'Rapport relations'
- ➢ **Key to effective management is ability to 'read' the (relational) context.**
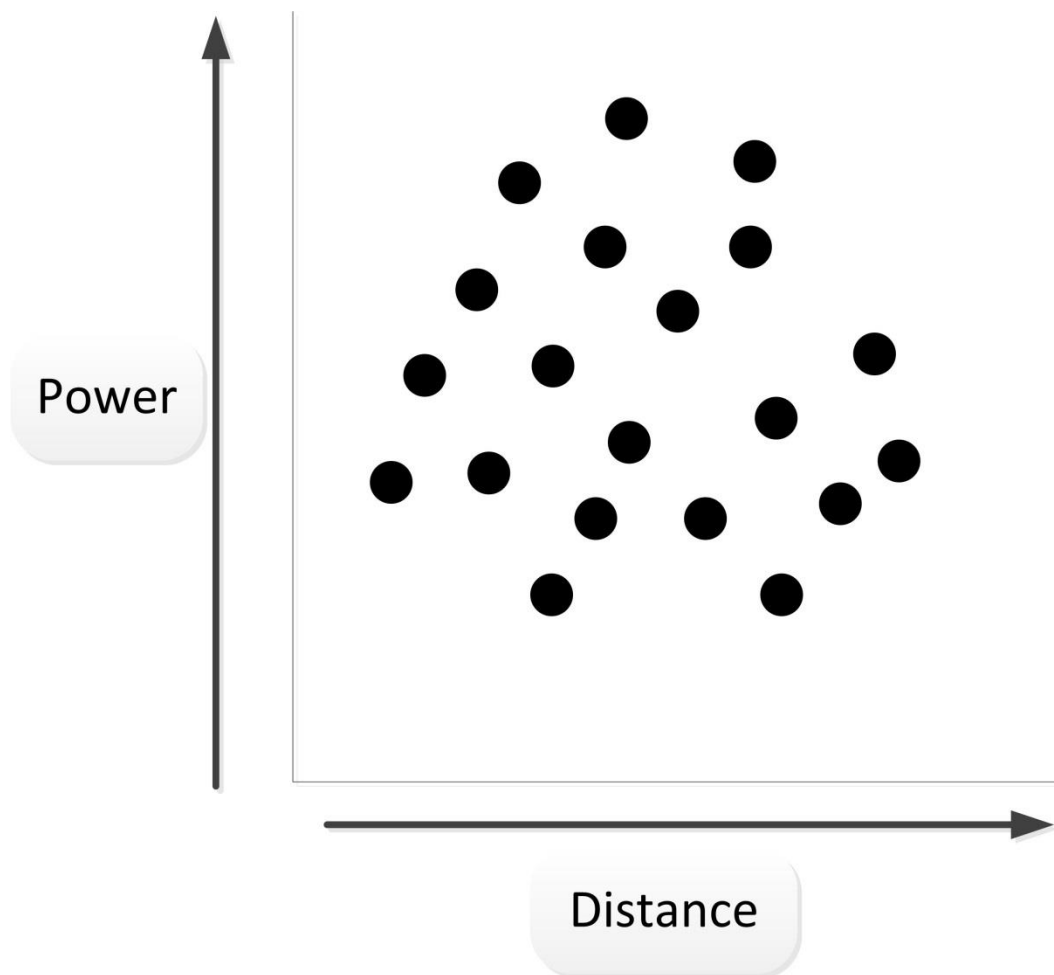- ➢ **So we need to help people do this.**
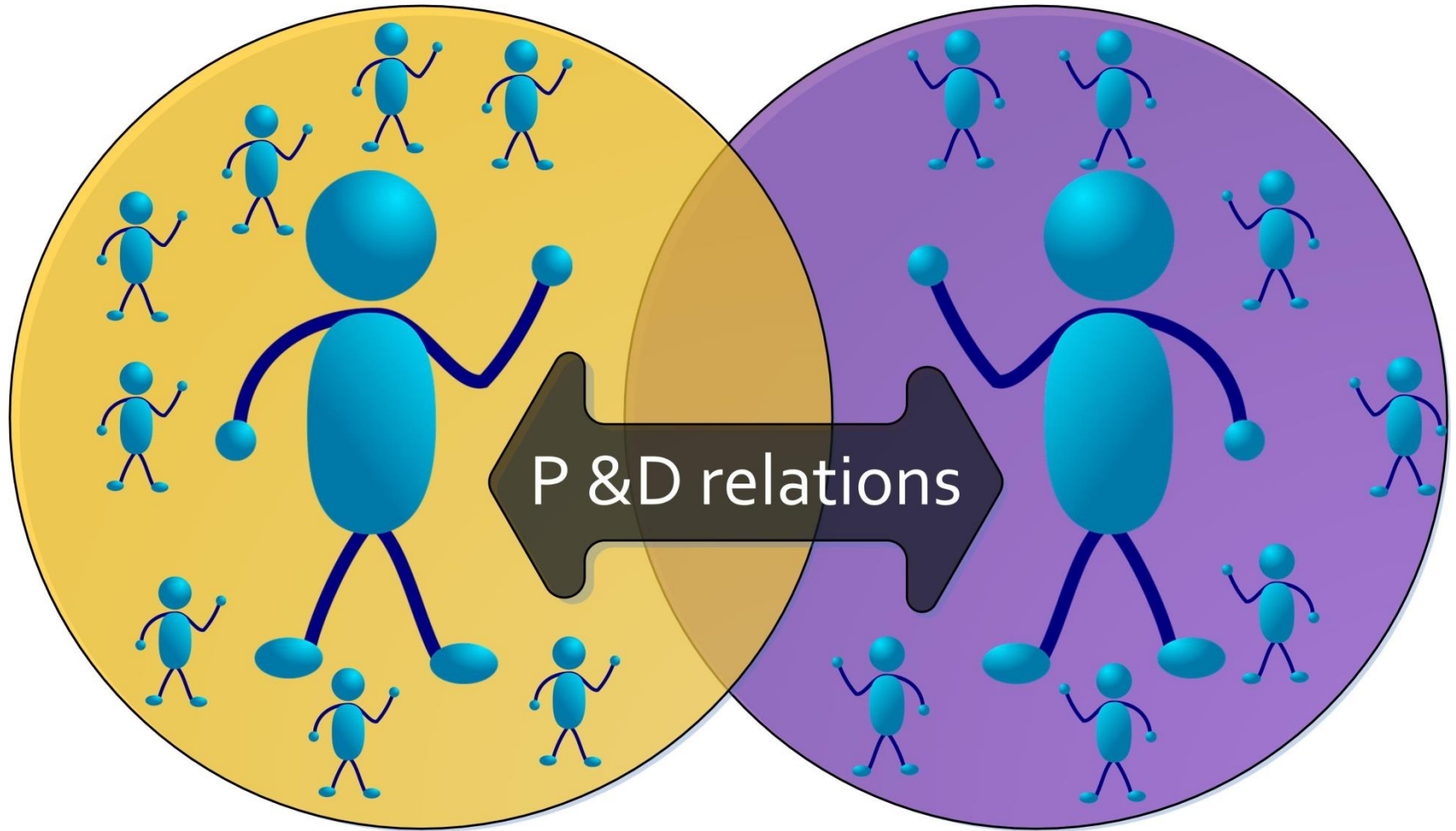
'Place relations'
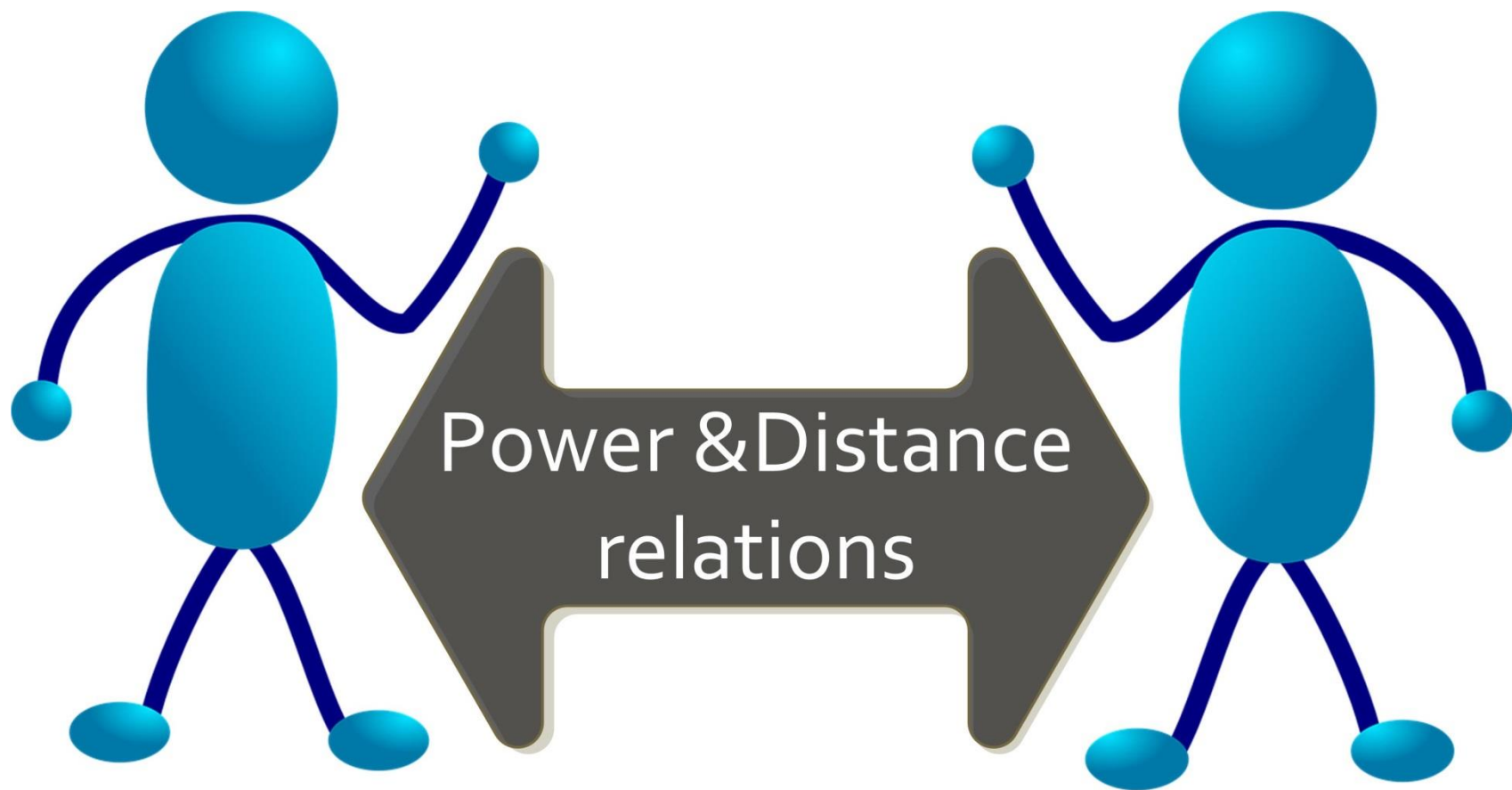
Power &Distance relations

'Place relations'

Power

Distance

'Place relations'

Power

Distance

'Place relations'

P &D relations

Managing 'place relations'

To make appropriate language choices, people need to make judgements of:

- Degree of power differential;
- Level of distance/closeness.
- ➤ Need to sensitise people to these variables + pay attention to
- Potential impact of cultural factors (e.g. email etiquette)

Managing hierarchy

▪ **Communication networks**

Chinese 02: *Sending mass emails is a good way. But when we send such emails, it will infringe Chinese principles. If I send such an email to a person in a higher position, s/he will feel offended. Nowadays we send various materials by email, but Chinese are special, superiors will feel particularly insulted. … Sending emails to superiors is not a good way, because it shows no regard for status differences between people. Some superiors dislike equality, so the best way to communicate with them is to submit a report, either in written or oral form.*
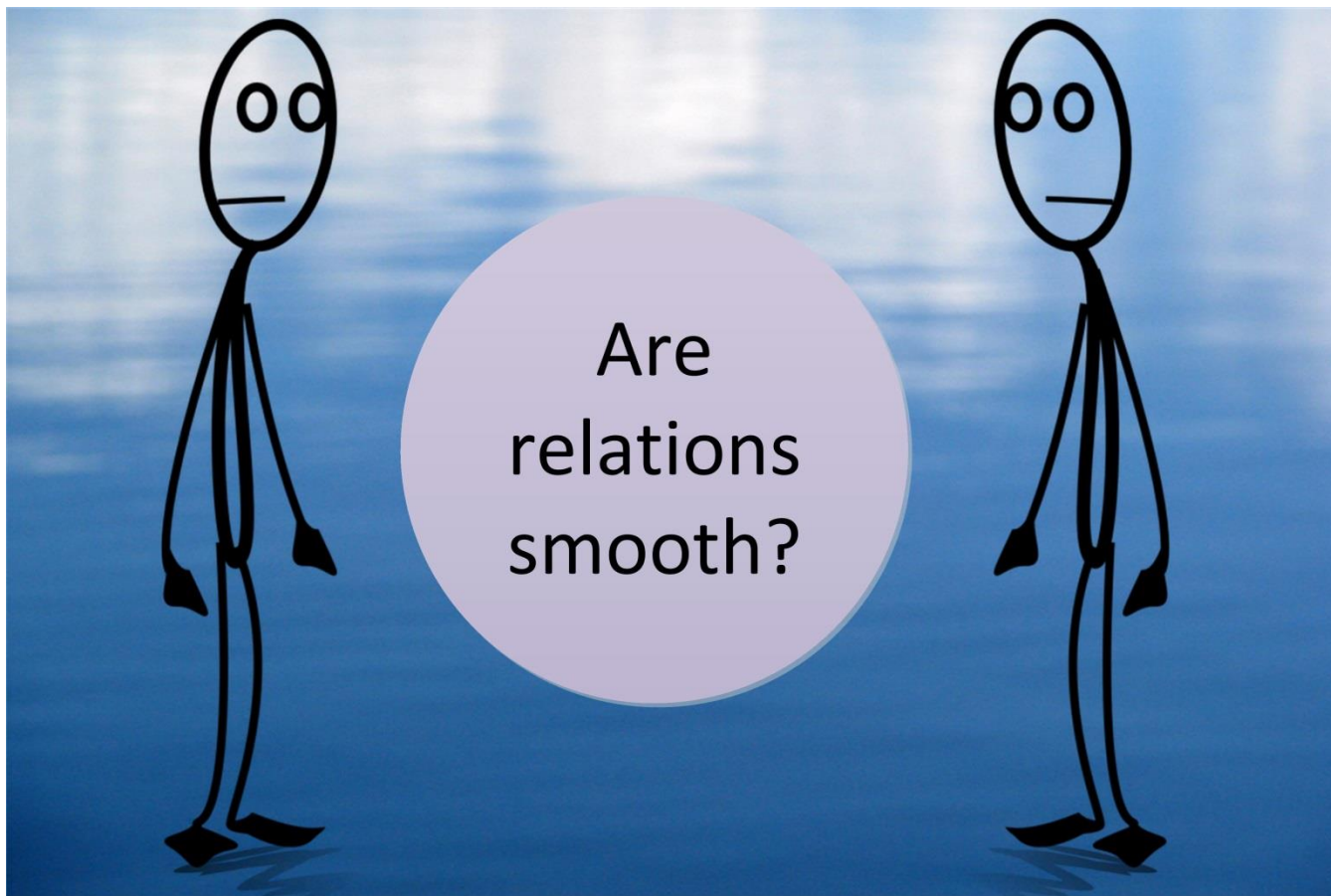
'Rapport relations'
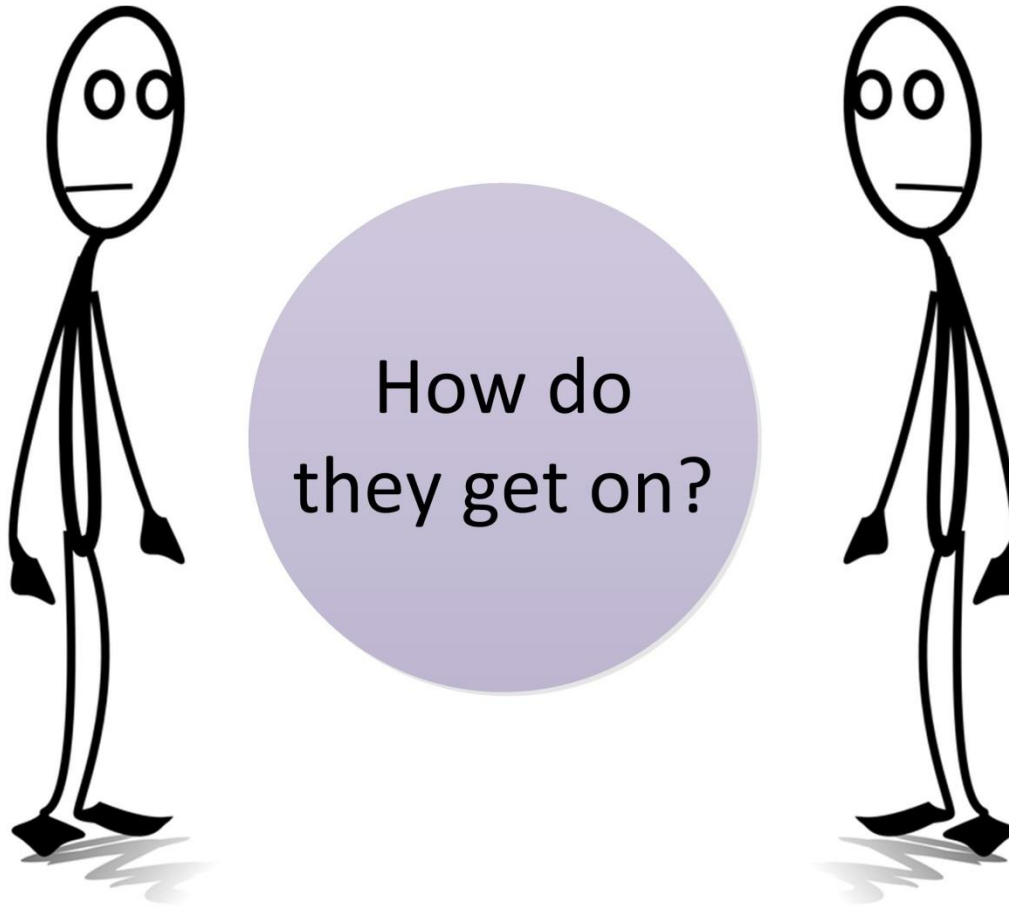
'Rapport relations'
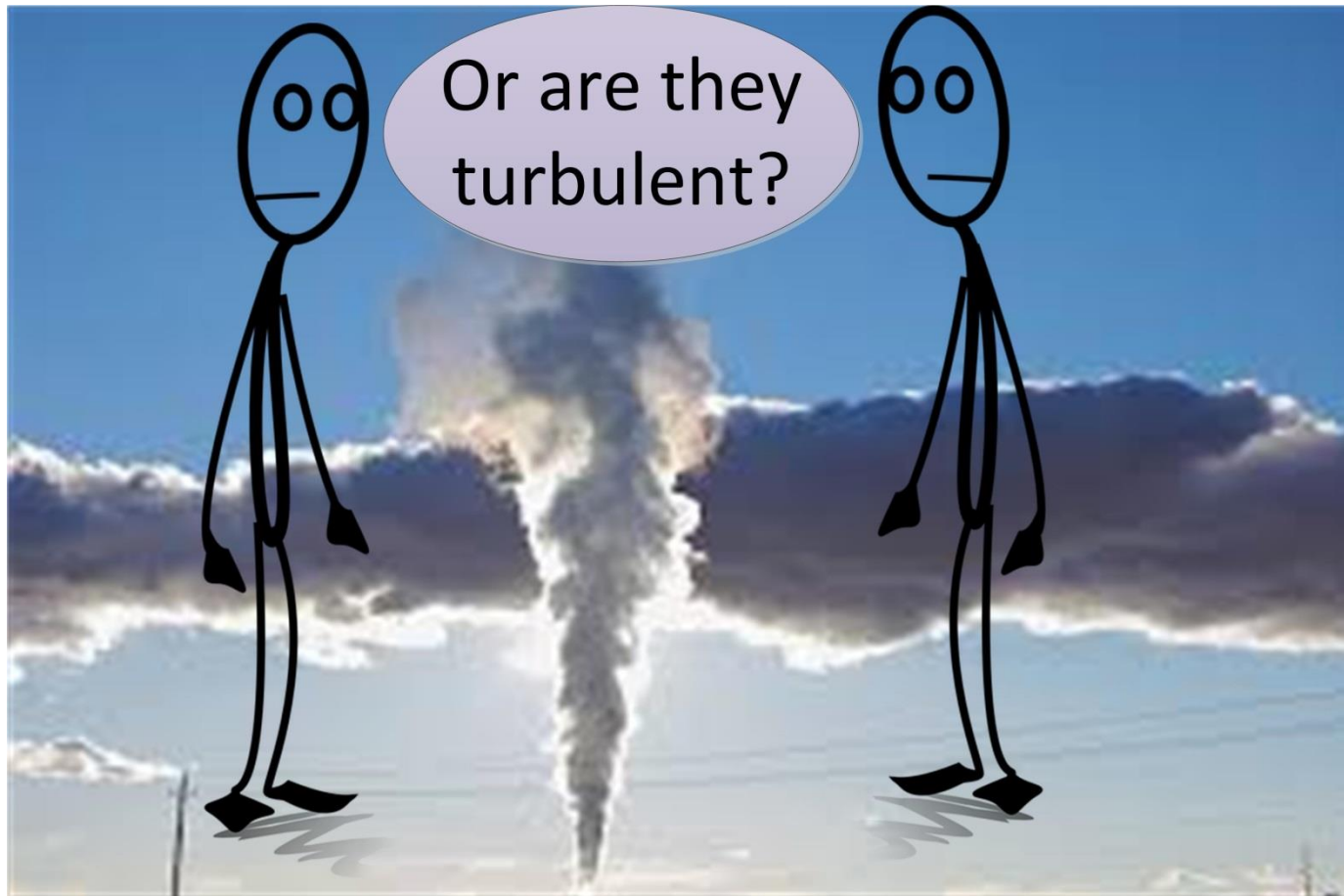
'Rapport relations'

'Rapport relations'

➢ So what factors affect 'rapport relations'?

'**Rapport relations'**
(Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009)

Interactional Goals

BASES OF RAPPORT

Face Sensitivities

Sociality Rights & Obligations
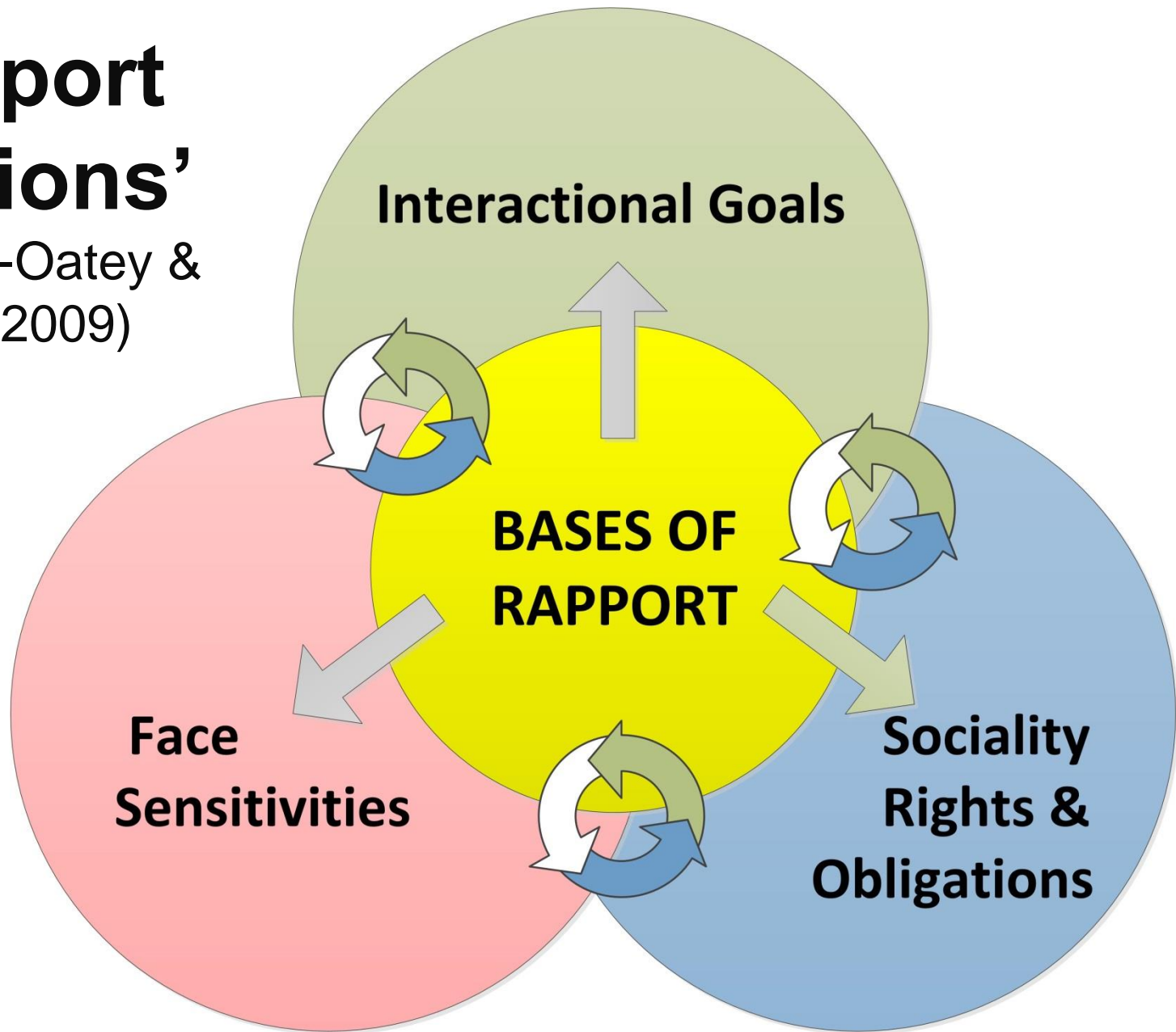
'Rapport relations'

Interactional goals

- What does each person want to achieve in an interaction/meeting?

- What is the relative importance of *task* and *relationship*?

➢ How can we know/find out?

'Rapport relations'

Face sensitivities

- What are others sensitive to?
  - Status?
  - Competence?
  - Group identity?
- ➤ How can we know/find out?

'Rapport relations'

Sociality rights & obligations

- What does the role require & entail?

- What expectations do people hold?

- What contractual requirements are there?

➢ How can we know/find out?

'Rapport relations'

How can we know/find out…?

- Pay attention to the key variables (goals, face, rights & obligations);

- Develop observation skills;

- Develop attuning skills;

- Reflect;

- Find a confidant to discuss with;

- Build up experience.

'Rapport relations'

Welcome meetings

- Handling introductions & introductory speeches in Chinese-'Western' business meetings
  - Who does the introductions?
  - Who gives a speech?
- ✓ E.g. Spencer-Oatey & Xing (2008);
- ✓ E.g. Wang & Spencer-Oatey (2015)

'Rapport relations'

A Problematic welcome meeting

According to our home customs & protocols, speech is delivered on the basis of reciprocity. He has made his speech and I'm expected to say something ... Condescension was implied. ... He had finished his speech, and he didn't give me the opportunity and they each introduced themselves, didn't this clearly imply that that they do look down on us Chinese?

Head of Delegation

Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008: 263

'Rapport relations'

The importance of reciprocity!

Delegate 1: But the HoD did a very good job by making up for our return speech after the floor was open. This implied our firm position.

Delegate 2: Absolutely! The HoD's move indicated our consciousness of <u>this right</u> and fought for <u>our face</u>. This was especially meaningful.

Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015: 59

Summary so far …

❖ Companies want employees to have better intercultural skills.

❖ For intercultural relations, this means being more sensitive to 'place relations' and 'rapport relations'.

❖ Students/professionals need support in learning how to 'notice' these elements & take them into account.

❖ Handling cultural differences can be particularly challenging.

Key themes

- Introduction: Business perspectives on language, culture & communication
- 3 Conceptual challenges & recent research
    - Conceptual challenge 1: What does it mean to be competent in intercultural communication?
    - Conceptual challenge 2: How can we conceptualise work relations?
    - Conceptual challenge 3
- Practical applications and tools

Conceptual challenge 3

➢ *In what ways does culture impact on communication and relations at work?*

➢ *How can we understand and manage it?*

Concept of Culture

Numerous definitions of culture.

Key characteristics:

- Culture is associated with social groupings;

- It is manifested in a range of ways;

- It affects people's behaviour and interpretations of behaviour.

- ➢ All of these elements need to be taken into account in interaction.

Manifestations of Culture

One conceptual approach:

The 3Ps of culture (Moran 2001)

- Products

- Practices

- Perspectives

Used by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, *World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 2015

The 3 Ps of Culture

P =	Products	Concrete or codified aspects of culture; e.g. buildings, clothes, food; language; laws.
P =	Practices	Regularities of behaviour that we display; e.g. driving practices, greeting practices.
P =	Perspectives	Deep-seated and often unconscious values, beliefs and attitudes that we hold about life.

Moran 2001; also American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, World Readiness Standards, 2015

Conceptual challenge 3

➤ *How does culture impact on communication and relations at work?*

- Traditionally, the focus has been on values; i.e. perspectives (e.g. Hofstede's work);

- Yet increasingly recognised there are significant limitations to this.

Limitations

Traditional approach:

- Values (perspectives) applied directly to behaviour, yet there is no one-to-one link;

- Increasing evidence that people's values vary as much within cultural groups as across them.

Limitations

Traditional approach →

- Invalid overgeneralisations that are applied to:
  - all contexts
  - all individuals
- Communication perceived in bi-polar (either/or) terms (e.g. Direct-Indirect).

Limitations

Emerging approach:

- A focus on Practices, including Behavioural patterns (norms) that are
  - contextually based
  - dialectic (i.e. flexible) in nature.

Zones of appropriateness

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

Molinsky, 2013, 17

Dialectic approach

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

- Connection ⟷ Separation

- Certainty ⟷ Uncertainty

- Openness ⟷ Closedness

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Conceptual challenge 3:
Application to intercultural encounters

Research by Wang Jiayi, 2013, 2015

Data collection

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

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

- Shorthand notes from 12 reflective evening meetings;

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

Preliminary findings

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

- Some examples …

Formality-Informality

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

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

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

Evening Meeting #10

Formality-<u>Informality</u>

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

Evening Meeting #6

Animated-<u>Restrained</u>

Consequences of too much animation:

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

Evening Meeting #6

Animated-Restrained

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

Disclosure-Concealment

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

<div align="right">Evening Meeting #1</div>

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

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

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

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

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

Consequences of too much concealment:

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

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

Disclosure-<u>Concealment</u>

Consequences of too much Concealment (contd.):

[...]

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

Key communication dialectics

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

Dialectic approach

Flexibility

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

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

Summary so far …

❖ Companies want employees to have better intercultural skills.

❖ Culture is reflected in common practices (behavioural patterns) not just values.

❖ Behavioural practices vary by context and individual preference, as well as potentially by cultural group.

❖ Facility with dialectic flexibility is key.

Practical applications & tools: Promoting intercultural competence

Key themes

- Business perspectives on language, culture & communication
- 3 Conceptual challenges & recent research
- **Practical applications and tools**

Developing IC competence

Three elements are involved:
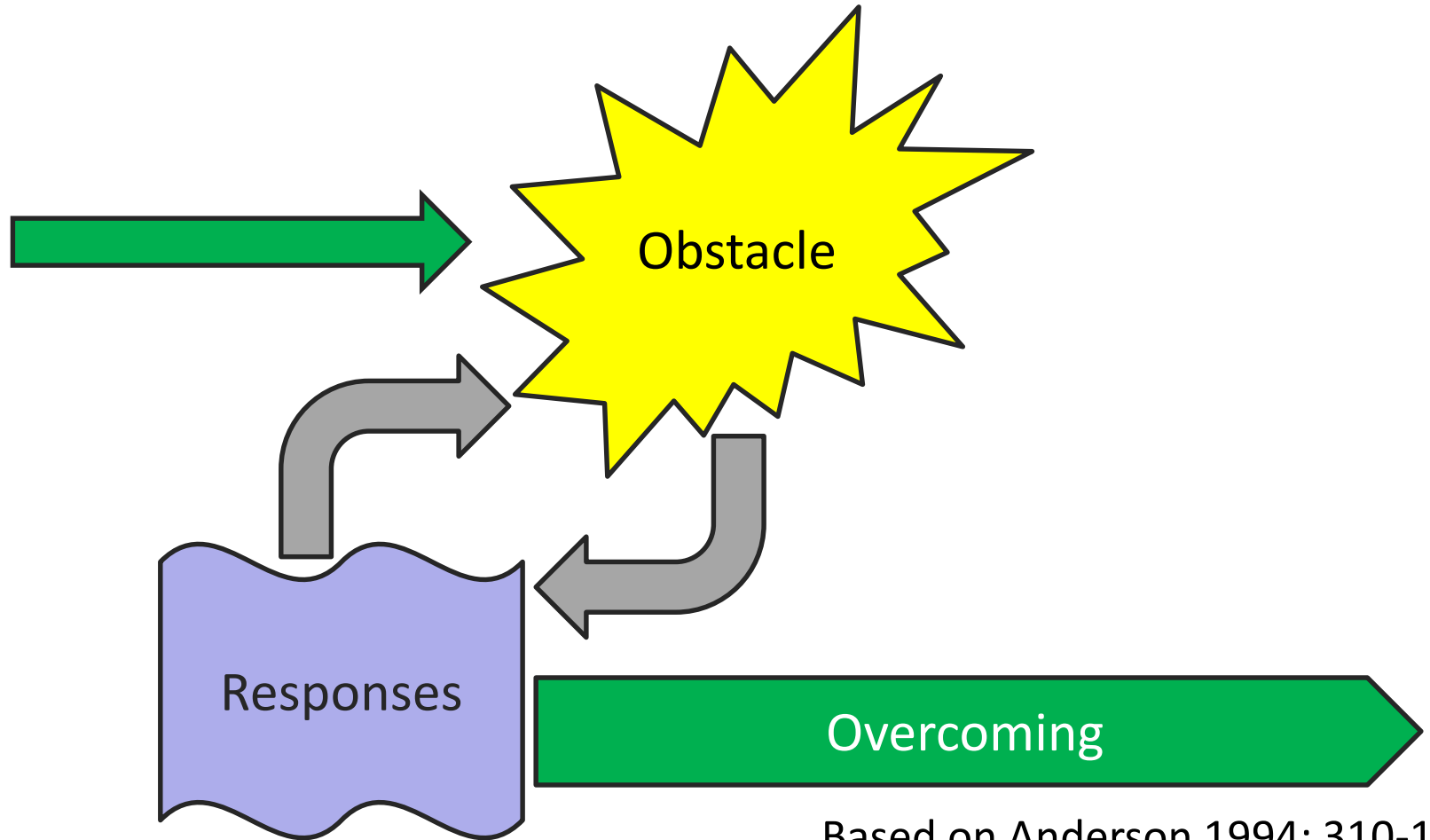
A = Affective

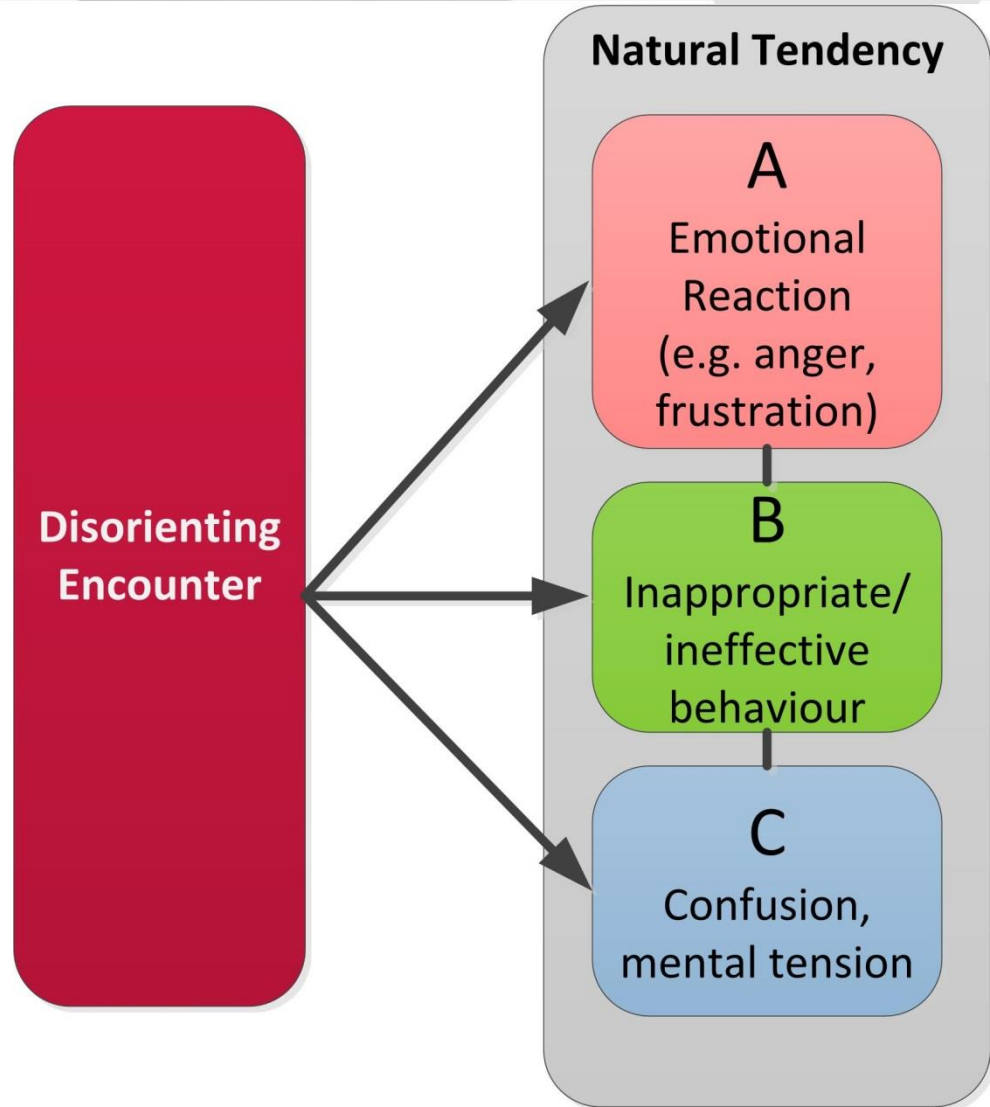B = Behavioural

C = Cognitive

Ward et al. 2001

Two examples

1. Use of 'but' and 'however'
2. What counts as an effective greeting?
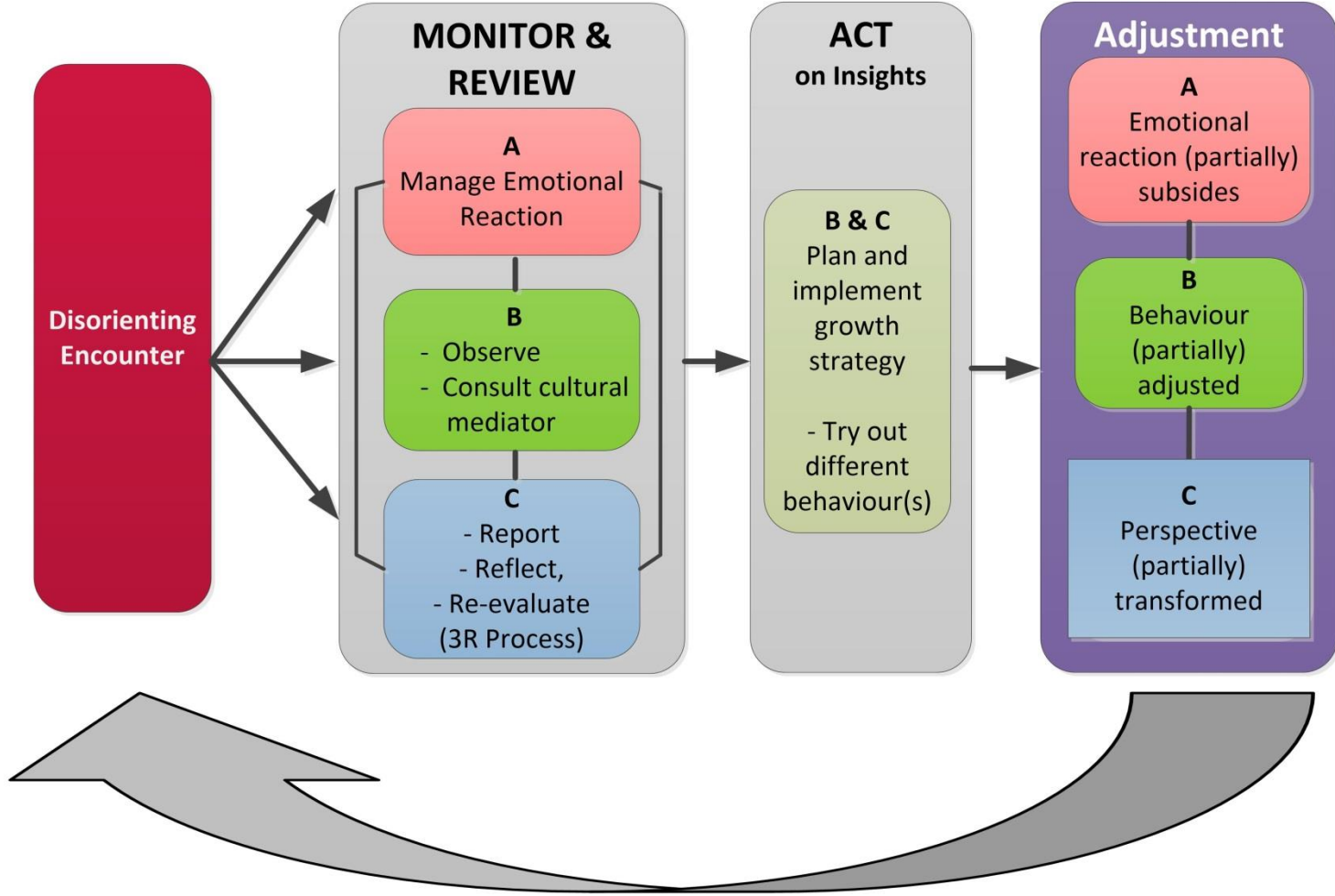
The pattern of sociocultural learning

Obstacle

Responses

Overcoming

Based on Anderson 1994: 310-11

Natural Tendency in Interaction

Intercultural Learning Cycle

Developing IC competence

Global PAD tools to address the ABC of IC development:

- 3R tool (focus on A & C, with elements of B)

- Global Dexterity Stretch tool (focus on B, with elements of A & C)

Available at www.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural

3R Tool

1. **Report**
   - Factual content reporting

2. **Reflect**
   - Premise reflection

3. **Re-evaluate**
   - Alternative Premises

Global Dexterity **Stretch Tool**

DISCo steps:

1. **<u>D</u>iscern** unfamiliar cultural patterns (in specific contexts);

2. **<u>I</u>dentify** your own challenges with any of the unfamiliar cultural patterns;

3. **<u>S</u>tretch** your thinking and behaviour to address your challenges;

4. **<u>C</u>onsolidate** your personal adjustments

Derived from Molinsky 2013

Global PAD intercultural resources

Open source tools at
http://www.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural

- Global people competency framework

- Global PAD 3R (Report, Reflect, Revaluate) tool

- Global PAD Stretch tool

- 'Core concept' papers

Very popular – around 25,000 downloads per month!

Other resources (Current & in development)

For university students:

- GoGlobal 3-stage training (especially for study abroad)
- e-Capsules
  - ✓ Asking questions
  - ✓ Working in groups
  - ✓ … [More under development]
- Global Education Profiler (GE-P) – for both staff and students

Training programmes

GoGlobal 3 Stage Training

Stage 1:

- F2F workshop
- Follow-up e-Course

Stage 2:

- Reflective activities

Stage 3:

- F2F workshop, focusing on reporting skills & qualities in 'employer speak'

Other resources (current & in development)

For professionals:

- ***Culture@Work***
  - *Seeing Culture@Work*
  - *Global Teams@Work*
  - *Global Leadership@Work*

Thank you!

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Reports & Frameworks

ACTFL. (2015). *World readiness standards for learning languages.* Available at https://www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages [Accessed 27 October 2017].

CBI/Pearson (2017) *Helping the UK thrive.* CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey. Available at http://www.cbi.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/helping-the-uk-thrive/   [Accessed 27 October 2017].

Diamond, A., Walkley, L., Forbes, P., Hughes, T., & Sheen, J. (2011). *Global graduates. Global graduates into global leaders.* Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), the Council for Industry and Higher Education (now NCUB) and CFE Research and Consulting. http://www.ncub.co.uk/reports/global-graduates-into-global-leaders.html [Accessed 27 October 2017].

Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) *Competing across Borders.* Available at https://www.eiuperspectives.economist.com/economic-development/competing-across-borders   [Accessed 27 October 2017]

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3R Tool

1. Report

– Content reporting

  • What happened? (Describe objectively)
  • How did you feel?

2. Reflect

– Premise reflection

  • Why did you react in this way?
  • What Cultural Practices and Perspectives (i.e. norms, beliefs, values or assumptions) were you influenced by?

3R Tool

3. __Re-evaluate__

- Alternative Premises
  - What alternative explanations/accounts could there be?
  - What different Cultural Practices & Perspectives might underlie them?
- Process evaluation
  - How careful/objective was my initial observation and how one-sided was my initial reaction?

Why use 3R process?

- Help manage emotions

- Transform perspective/adjust schemas

Global Dexterity Stretch Tool

Step 1: Discern

- Unfamiliar cultural patterns & relevant dialectic(s)
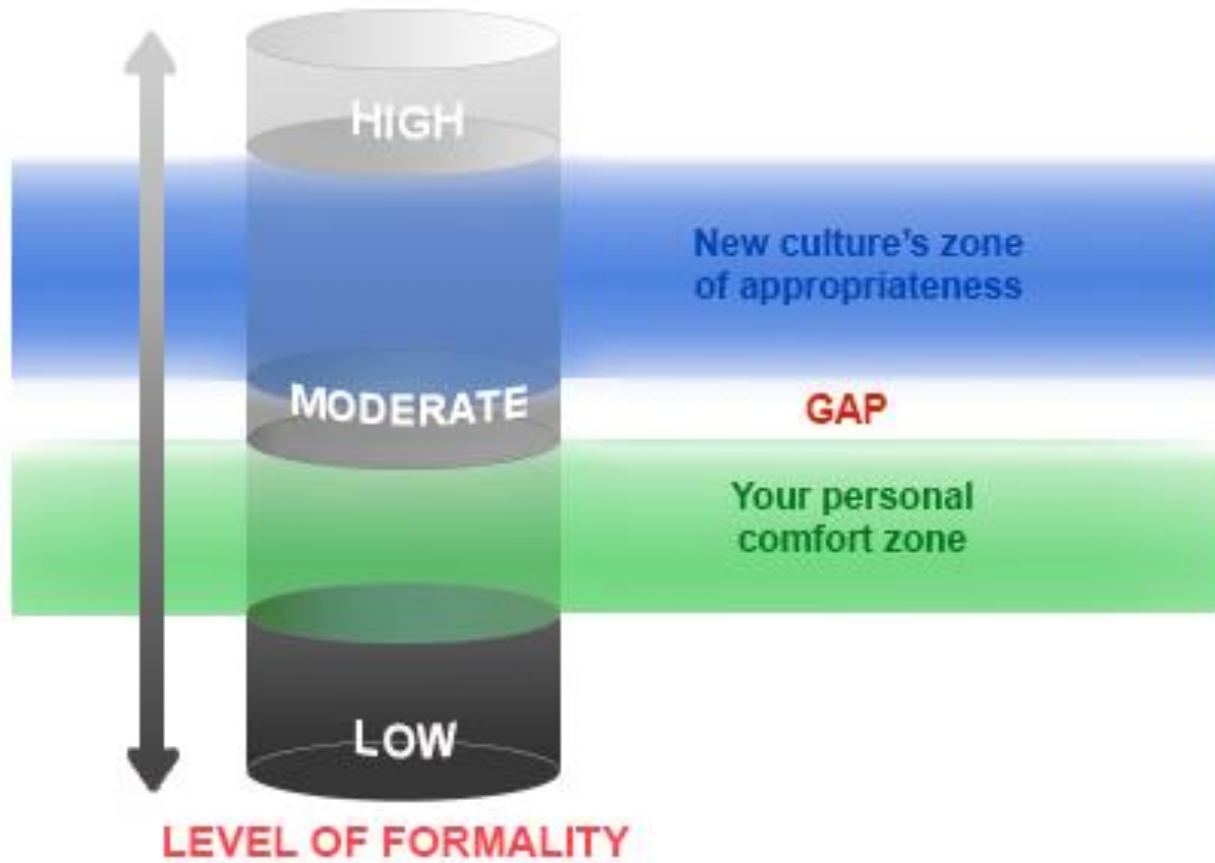- Own personal comfort zone

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

Step 1: **D**iscern

Step 2: **I**dentify Challenges

3 types of challenges:

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

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

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

Molinsky, 2013, 24

Step 2: **I**dentify Challenges

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

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

Global leader interview comment

Cultural Adaptation is more than Behavioural Learning

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

Anderson 1994: 297

Step 3: **S**tretch thinking & behaviour

Stretch/expand personal comfort zone so there is some overlap with new culture's zone
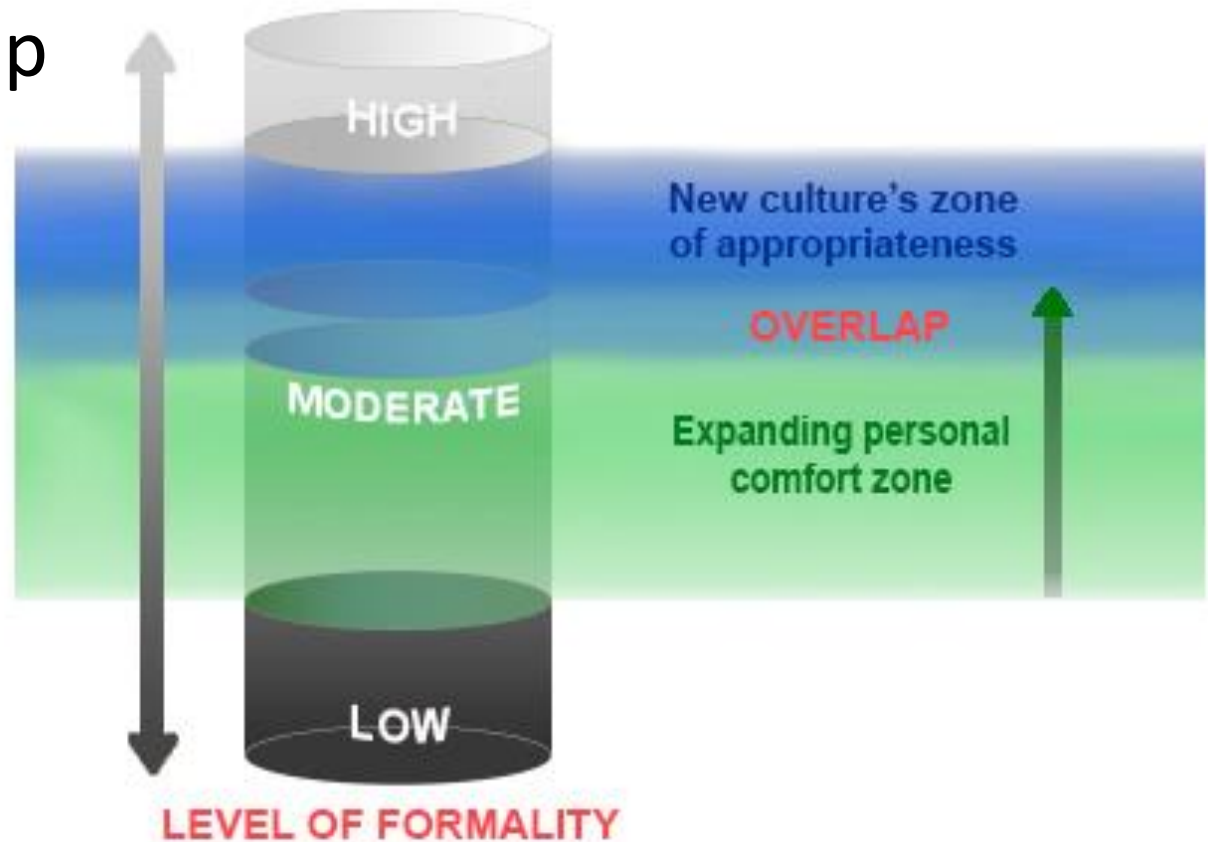
Step 3: <u>S</u>tretch thinking & behaviour

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

Step 4: Consolidate personal adjustments

1. **Rehearse**: observe the new behaviour you wish to adopt & start practising it – maybe with mentors first;
2. Evaluate: seek out feedback & evaluate your attempts;
3. **Consolidate** your adjustments: practice again and again to increase your confidence and expertise.