Achieving Understanding in Intercultural Interaction:
An Intercultural Competence Perspective

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Overview

- Introduction: why intercultural competence?
- Case study: the eChina-UK Programme
- Conceptualising Intercultural Competence
- Global People Project
- Further Developments

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Introduction: Why IC Competence?

1. Developing IC Competence

➢ Developing 'global people' is more challenging than setting up a global business or global partnership, yet is vital.

2. Impact of a focus on Task

➢ A focus on task can distract us from attending to intercultural aspects

2. Impact of a focus on Task

Key Aims of the eChina-UK Programme

1. Strengthen collaboration between China and the UK in the use of ICT, and support HE staff in developing their competence in the use of internet-based learning and teaching;

2. Develop & pilot innovative online teacher training courses for teachers at secondary and tertiary levels;

3. Disseminate generic insights on a range of issues, including perspectives on pedagogy and the benefits & challenges of working interculturally;

4. Inform the development of national policy on e-learning in HE in both countries.

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2. Impact of a focus on Task

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3. Beliefs about Culture

Recent claims:

"Professional cultures are global and transcend national differences."

"The idea of there being a need to adapt to Chinese culture can be a barrier to successful discussions."

Peter Brady, Times Higher Education

22 January 2009

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3. Beliefs about Culture

How do we perceive cultural differences?

Minimise ⟷ Exaggerate

- Excessive minimisation or exaggeration both unhelpful

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Does this matter?
Case Study:
The eChina-UK Programme

eChina-UK Programme

- Set of Sino-British collaborative projects on eLearning in education

- Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (£4 million) & supported by Chinese Ministry of Education

- Involved British and Chinese universities working in partnership

- 4 initial projects, 3 follow-up projects, with each project having core team of about 16 to 35

Key Parties in the Programme

Stakeholder/ Management

HEFCE

MoE

Lead Universities

U of Nottingham

BNU

BFSU

WUN

Open/ Cambridge

Tsinghua U

Team Members

Senior Management

Academics

Technical Staff

Trainees

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Management

Chinese 23: *"Great differences exist between the working mechanisms in China and in the West. …*

Our working procedures, overall circumstances, thinking style and decision-making processes etc. are not all the same."

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Communication: Language

English or Chinese?

Chinese 16: *"I think we should show consideration for each other in terms of language. China is now developing very fast; they should know some Chinese to communicate with us. … We have learned a lot of English; it's their turn to learn some basic Chinese, as it's two-way communication. I find it weird that they don't know even a word of Chinese."*

他们应该懂中文

Communication: Language

Chinese or English?

Chinese 21: *The working language was English. Due to the language problems, when we couldn't express ourselves clearly, it seemed that we were disadvantaged.*

Communication: Language Use

Meaning needs to be negotiated

British 09: *When I first joined, I spent weeks if not months on a simply practical confusion as to what is a unit, a module, what was the other one?*

British 06: *Activity*

British 09: *There was no standard definition, so I was like blocked at the first hurdle, and so I wasn't quite sure how much material I'd got to write … I thought I don't understand this, I can't do this.*

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Communication: Management

Management of Channels of Communication

Chinese Researcher: *In your opinion, was the communication effective?*

Chinese 20: *No, it wasn't. Though both Chinese and British sides had their own project managers, they couldn't do all the communications on their own. We should have embedded different communication mechanisms in the project at different levels.*
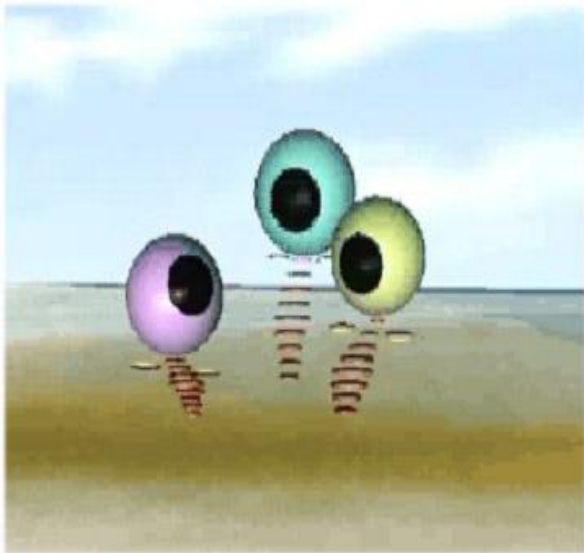
Communication: Management

Attention to Communication Protocols

Chinese 06: *The UK colleagues are more likely to raise issues directly. Their logic is that issues should be raised first, then they'll try their best to find solutions. … Sometimes the UK project manager sent some suggestions to us. When we got the suggestion, we usually got nervous and wondered 'must we do it immediately?' or 'are they commanding us to do this?' But working together with them for a while I gradually realised that I could voice my opinions too and take time to think. It wasn't a problem.*

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Relationships

Attention to Relationships

British 06*: Whilst it is recognised that building social relationships serves to strengthen developing working relationships, it should likewise be acknowledged that this relies heavily on the willingness of team members to give of their free time, outside the boundaries of any given project. The value of this 'voluntary' input outside formal working time should not be underestimated, nor remain unacknowledged. There is a social dimension to effective team building that should ideally be built into the project.*

Personal Qualities

Need for Self-Awareness

Brit 17: *Can we step back a bit because we're getting a bit detailed?*

Brit 18: *Am I losing you?*

Ch 20: *Well to me it's a bit too detailed, can you give me an overall picture?*

Need for IC Competence

Research indicates we could all have benefited from better preparation in:

- Managing across cultures
- Communicating across cultures
- Building relationships across cultures
- Developing qualities for working across cultures

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Conceptualising Intercultural Competence

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IC Competence: Definitions

We conceive of intercultural communication competence as 'the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment.'

Chen & Starosta 1998: 241-2

Intercultural communication competence is the effective identity negotiation process between two interactants in a novel communication situation.

Ting-Toomey 1992: 73; cited by Gudykunst et al. 2005: 18

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IC Competence: Frameworks

See handout.

Gudykunst (1998):

- Generalised comments (see quote on handout)
- No discourse examples

Byram (1997):

- Provides detailed information on objectives relating to intercultural competence
- No discourse examples

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Global People Project

Global People: Background

- Global People Project forms Phase 3 of HEFCE's £4M eChina-UK Programme

- Phases 1 & 2: British & Chinese universities worked collaboratively on range of eLearning in education projects

- Phase 1: 2003-2005

- Phase 2: 2005-2007.

Global People: Background

Two of HEFCE's Key Goals for the eChina-UK Programme:

- Strengthen collaboration between China and the UK

- Disseminate generic insights on a range of issues, including the benefits & challenges of working interculturally

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Global People: Background

Phase 3 (Global People): 2008–2009

Key Aims:

- Draw out learning from the eChina-UK Programme on working interculturally

- Identify generic frameworks and models (i.e. not country specific)

- Develop resources that are of practical value to those working in international projects (especially in HE)

Global People: Background

Phase 3 (Global People): 2008–2009

Procedure:

- Review the literature on intercultural competence and on working across cultures

- Analyse data from the eChina-UK Programme & Projects from an intercultural perspective

- Collect new interview data from eChina-UK project members

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Frameworks & Models

http://www.globalpeople.org.uk/

- Life cycle model of intercultural partnerships

- Learning process model

- Competency framework

The Competency Framework

- Intercultural collaborations are a delicate balancing acts

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- Our Competency Framework was developed to help raise awareness of competencies that facilitate intercultural work

The Competency Framework

- Identifies four competency clusters
  - Knowledge and Ideas
  - Communication
  - Relationships
  - Personal Qualities and Dispositions
- Explains each competency and discusses why it is important for intercultural effectiveness
- Illustrates each competency with a case study example from the eChina-UK Programme (some of them supported by audio clips)
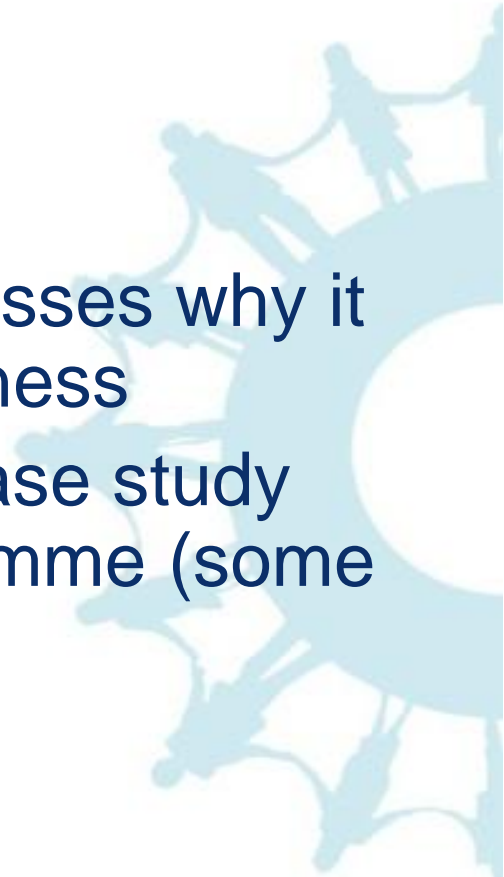
Sample data

➢ Introductory meeting during an exchange visit

➢ Purpose: to discuss research interests and potential for collaboration.

Communication Competency Cluster

- Communication management
- Language learning
- Language adjustment
- Active listening
- Attuning
- Building of shared knowledge & mutual trust
- Stylistic flexibility

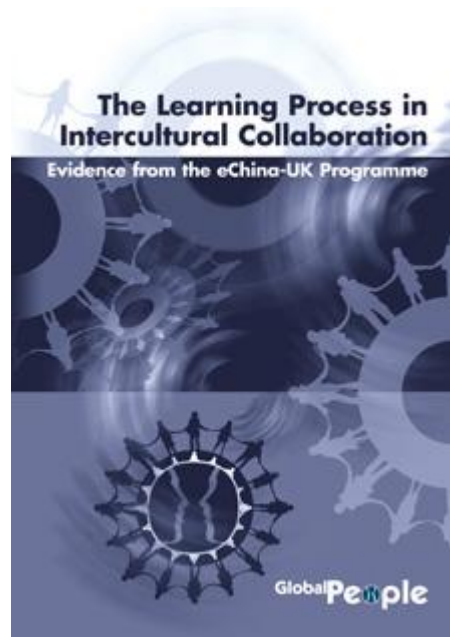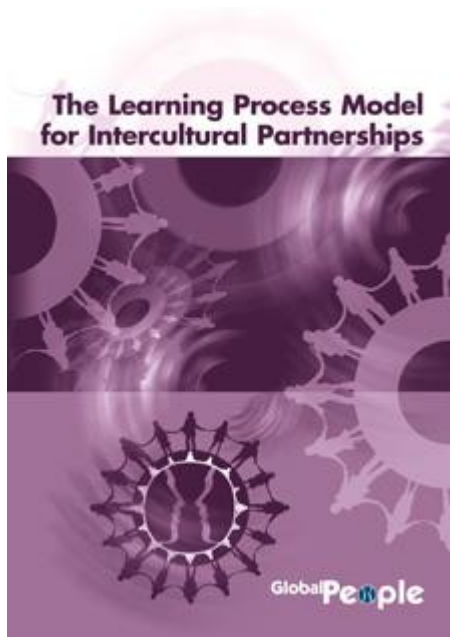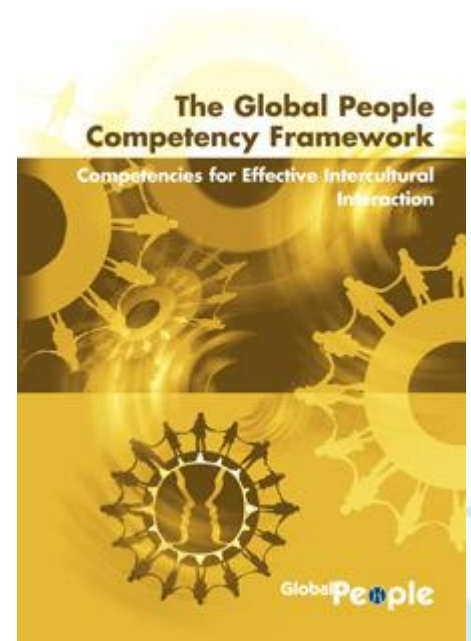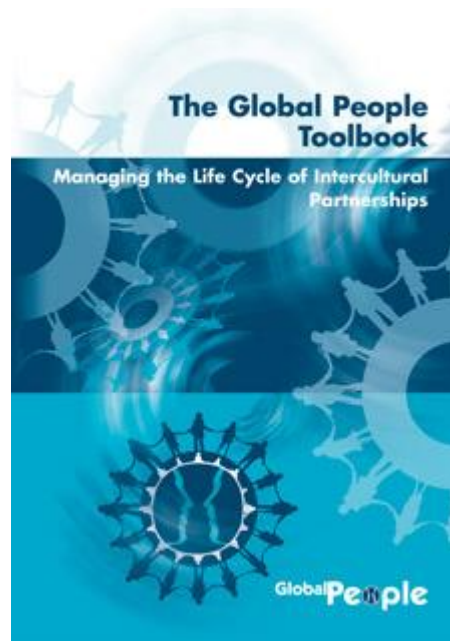**Case Study Example: Language Adjustment at the start of a meeting**

Adjusting one's use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) is vital for effective communication; however, it is sometimes easier said than done. Consider the following interaction that took place at one of our meetings:

◀ ❯ ▶

Chair:	*[…] I'm going to ask everybody to speak very clearly and uh without heavy accents if possible*
Everyone:	*Laughter [as the Chair speaks with a Scottish accent]*
Chair:	*and we may take some pauses just to make sure everybody uhm uh is keeping up with the conversation cause we can sometimes each of us speak very quickly when we get excited. Uh this afternoon is a chance for us really to explore the research issues ## tell each other what we're doing ## tell each other what we hope to achieve what we're aspiring to ### and it would be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning ## if that was of interest to you ##### so what I I'd like to do is I think it would be very helpful for one of our colleagues to volunteer to <as we say in Scotland: start the ball rolling cause we really love football>. Uh I think I think it would be fair to ask one of our colleagues to start the ball rolling and (name of British colleague) if you would like to kick off for us.*

This excerpt demonstrates a number of adjustment practices. The Chair clearly shows a high level of awareness of this competency, by asking participants to speak clearly, to avoid accents, to avoid fast speech and to pause regularly in order to ensure that all participants have the chance to follow the conversation. The Chair then goes on to put her insights into practice, speaking slowly and clearly, by pausing regularly (signalled by #) and trying to avoid the use of a heavy Scottish accent. However, only seconds later she speeds up (signalled by < >), falls into a heavy Scottish accent, uses an idiomatic expression ('to start the ball rolling') which leaves all but one of the Chinese participants with blank faces, and then goes on to repeat the idiom and to use complex vocabulary ('kick off'), which is unlikely to be understood and could easily have been replaced by a more simple word, such as 'start' or 'begin'.

The Global People Landscaping Study
Intercultural Effectiveness in Global Education Partnerships
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The Global People Toolbook
Managing the Life Cycle of Intercultural Partnerships
Global People

The Global People Competency Framework
Competencies for Effective Intercultural Interaction
Global People

The Learning Process Model for Intercultural Partnerships
Global People

The Learning Process in Intercultural Collaboration
Evidence from the eChina-UK Programme
Global People

Sino-British Interaction in Professional Contexts
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Further Developments

Further Developments

Plans (subject to funding)

- **Further analysis** – more detailed analyses of our video data.

- **Further research** (e.g. with different countries, different types of projects, different types of partnerships)

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