

Identifying intercultural competences

- *a research report on the field research performed in the Interculool project*

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1. Introduction to intercultural competences

Research into intercultural competences started in the 1950's, first triggered by the experiences of expatriates or Peace Corps volunteers. The questions mainly concerned the cross-cultural adaptation, adjustment or transition of the westerners sojourning abroad – often outside of the “western world”. Still in that perspective, in 1954 Oberg coins the term “culture shock” to describe the often dramatic process of learning to handle a new cultural environment. An important shift occurs when attention turns to migrants arriving to Europe or North America, with an intention to stay. This gives rise to inquiries into acculturation processes and bicultural competence: how does cultural identity change, how will it be possible for migrants to juggle with several (sometimes contradictory) cultural references? However, an even more recent shift of interest is the most interesting of all. It is an opening, a mainstreaming of “intercultural competences” which now do not only refer to the migrants (be they short term or long term) but to society as a whole, recognising that today's world is a “globalised” one, with societies that are more and more multicultural. Intercultural competence thus becomes a key competence even if we do not leave our home country. This shift is marked by the OECD's DESECO project, which identified “cooperating in heterogeneous groups” as one of three key competence areas.

Our research is based on such a mainstreamed approach to intercultural competences. In our view, to master intercultural competences is not the exclusive task of immigrants or migrants in general. More and more professionals need it in their daily work, even if they themselves are not participating in foreign assignments just because the workforce, clients and other stakeholders are reflecting a more and more the diverse society. To ignore that diversity is a type of blindness that may be in accordance with universalist political correct discourses, but surely misses any opportunity to benefit and learn from diversity.

2. An approach to competences

The concept of “intercultural competences” is often questioned by researchers. In her review, Ogay argues that the concept of “competences” was adopted without any precise scientific definition and without any reflection on the presuppositions it implied - presuppositions that are often in contrast with the dynamics of interculturality. Probably the most critical of these is the focus on individualism, and the idea that a competent interaction can be defined a priori.

2.1. Individualism: it takes two to tango, and more

Inquiring about intercultural competences is indeed based on an interest in the individual’s capacities and skills, which seems to imply an underestimation of the role of context and situation, and an overestimation of the individual’s role and agency in an interaction. For instance, the same expatriate can have very different experiences on two assignments. He may have many friends from the host society in one country, and none in the other. He may find it easy to interact with one local, but not another. Indeed, the result of the interaction is first of all the result of a joint action that cannot be understood or evaluated from only one side.

Moreover, there are many factors outside of the interaction partners’ capacities that influence the interaction outcome: the newness of the situation, the historic / power relations between their groups, social status differences, the timing, the place, the reason of the encounter etc. By focusing on individual differences, we may disregard how important the context is.

At the same time, the individuals are not entirely redefined in each interaction, and mostly they are not blank, but they enter the interaction bringing already existing skills, competences, experiences, expectations etc., and this baggage has great importance in determining the individual’s subjective experience of the encounter.

2.2. How to measure what is competent interaction?

A conceptualisation of intercultural competence seems to require the identification of endstates which benchmark the idea of competence. For instance, in early definitions of intercultural communication, competence was equated with communication efficiency. But how is it possible to define communication success or failure? As discussed above, the outcome of an interaction cannot be judged on one side only. In fact, later definitions took into account that competence can only be a “social judgement” requiring evaluation from all parties. In such an enlarged conceptualisation, an interculturally competent person realises his her objective, in a way that is appropriate to the context and for the relationships. A similar idea is proposed by Cohen-Emerique, who adopts a negotiation principle from Canada: to reach the maximum of the objectives with a minimum threat of the identities of those involved.

These conceptualisations, although theoretically more complete, are very difficult to operationalise. Indeed, they imply moving targets – continuously changing communication objectives, that are impossible to pin down. For instance, in some cases the competent behaviour would be a display of assertiveness while in another the withdrawal of assertive self-presentation.

A way to cut short the complications is to shift focus from the definition of successful communication outcome criteria to the process. This is the approach that our research team has adopted. Moreover, to avoid the need to define a priori a successful interaction process, we used as a point of departure the *demand-led* approach to competences proposed by the

OECD's DeSeCo project. In this perspective, the focus is not on some pre-defined endstates or qualities, but on the *demands* that individuals have to face in their social or professional life

Key competencies are not determined by arbitrary decisions about what personal qualities and cognitive skills are desirable, but by careful consideration of the psychosocial prerequisites for a successful life and a well-functioning society.

This demand-led approach asks what individuals need in order to function well in society. (DeSeCo 2003:)

Accordingly, in our starting definition, we understood intercultural competences as the ability to mobilise different psychosocial resources (knowledge, skills, emotions etc.) to answer intercultural situations. Our task was then to map these intercultural situations, in order to understand what types of demands their procedure implies.

3. An approach to interculturality

3.1. Between universalist Scylla and particularist Charybdis

Any inquiry into intercultural competences and intercultural relations in general must often justify its questionings and assumptions against a universalist discourse eager to deny all consequences and manifestations of cultural differences. Such universalist discourse is nicely illustrated by a partner organisation summarizing comment from the respondents:

“in general: the feeling among most of them is that we shouldn't think in terms of cultural differences. The feeling is that we are all people and that's the way we should regard each other”.

In its naïve form, the universalist discourse is sustained by the fear that by acknowledging cultural differences we threaten specific individuals' right to belong to a 'general humanity', and equality is breached. Often – as in the comment above – the universalist discourse reveals a deep-rooted ethnocentrism: if we see the others in their cultural differences, we cannot see them as humans anymore.

Individuals – or even states – subscribing to this discourse believe that it is worth sacrificing the right to be different for the right to be equal, but they confuse equality with uniformity. They fail to see that in a condition of formal equality cultural differences can lead to effective inequality. Furthermore, by hindering inquiry into the forms and manifestations of differences, they fail to analyse and counter existing forms of discrimination and inequality, let alone benefiting from plurality.

If the universalist discourse still persists, it is partly as a reaction to the opposing position: cultural particularism, the belief that 'cultures' and 'cultural groups do bear some specificities. In the extreme form a particularist perspective an individual's behaviour and actions are exclusively explained through culture, ignoring all personal and situational factors, thus often leading to attribution mistakes. Particularist positions run the risk of 'essentialising' the notion of culture, i.e. depicting it as static, closed, making a clear-cut correspondence between cultural patterns and cultural groups, ignoring its inherent variety and openness to other culture's influences. A further danger is the 'ethnicisation' or 'culturisation' of issues rooted in economic, political, social or other factors, which deviate attention from the real sources of the problem and can lead to reifying stereotypes and discriminating specific groups.

How can an intercultural approach navigate between the Scylla of universalism and a particularist Charybdis?

The first manoeuvre is the separation of the moral discourse ('how we *should* regard each other') from the view on whether or not cultural differences exist. Intercultural approaches should be based on a clear, scientifically based and continuously updated vision

on the range of cultural variations. Several disciplines serve this endeavour in particular cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, both equipped with very different scientific methodologies.

The second manoeuvre is the denaturalisation of the link between cultural patterns and cultural groups. This allows focusing the research on specific cultural phenomenon (e.g. way of thinking) and not on specific groups (e.g. knowing 'how the French think'). Indeed, the relationship between any cultural pattern and a cultural group is a statistical tendency, a correlation which is never total. No cultural pattern is innate, or inherent to any group, or any individual born into that group. Socialisation processes take place in an ever changing social context which is permeable to new cultural influences and personal reinterpretations.

Finally, 'intercultural interactions' are not essentially different from intra-cultural interactions; in fact they are the two end points of the same continuum varying along the cultural distance of the interaction participants. It is less and less likely that the cultural baggages of two individuals are totally identical, as they have been probably exposed to different cultural influences. What becomes crucial; however is to understand how the cultural variable influences the interaction. Exploring this variable is the very ambition of Intercultool project as well.

3.2. Why culture matters: definition and the range of cultural differences

One of the early precursors of a new scientific definition of culture was proposed by Tylor in 1871:

"Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Tylor 1871: 1)

More than a century later in an effort to find a consensual scientific definition of culture, Kroeber and Kluckhohn gathered an inventory of 162 existing definitions (Kroeber Kluckhohn 1952). According to Clanet the main source of difficulty lies in finding the middle point between a too restrictive definition and a too extensive one. Narrow definitions usually depict culture as some knowledge transmitted by institutions and valorised by a particular group. Such notions of culture reflect well the usage in common language, where it is synonym of art, of cultural product. On the other hand, wide definitions depict culture as the integrity of human actions and productions. For Clanet, as well as other researchers such as Geertz or Camilleri, the optimal middle way is a cognitive definition, focusing on the creation of meaning:

"... an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973).

If cultures can be approached as patterns of meaning, the procedures of meaning-making and transmission are also susceptible to show differences across cultures. Indeed, the accounts coming from the disciplines of cultural anthropology and cross-cultural psychology have pointed to cultural differences in areas of human activity that were thought of as universal. Some examples:

- Cross-cultural differences in cognitive functioning were observed in activities such as memorising, recalling, classifying, counting (e.g. Rogoff 1993, Cole 2005) as well as in the perception and use of time and space (e.g. Hall)
- Interaction rules also vary substantially between cultures. Communication styles can differ according to: rules of politeness, the role of contextual communication (see high vs. low context communication), preferred reasoning logic to name just a few.

Moreover, non-verbal codes also differ: the vocabulary of gestures, the role of gestures, the use space, rhythm, and physical contact can differ substantially (see Lustig, Koester 2006:173-257).

- Not independently from interactions, the rules governing social relations are also a cultural variable. One of the most cited distinctions is the one between collectivist vs. individualist patterns, also referred to as cultures valuing mutual interdependence or autonomy. Other factors influencing social relations are the rules of face-work, the role of hierarchy, the rigidity of social organisation (class system, division of roles etc).
- Worldviews and value systems can also differ along a variety of dimensions, such as role of transcendent beliefs.
What remains is to see how these differences play out in contact zones between cultures, that is, in intercultural interactions.

3.3. What makes intercultural interaction special?

Several researchers question the relevance of separating the field of intercultural communication from communication research. Ogay for instance proposes that if intercultural communication research becomes a separate discipline, it is not so much for scientific reasons than institutional ones. Indeed, many have asserted, that intercultural communication is not fundamentally different from any communication process. (e.g. Gudykunst 2005) In fact, it can be argued that pure intra-cultural communication is very rare, if it exists at all. In the 21st century Europe, all communication is intercultural in the sense that the interaction partners' cultural baggage is not identical. Even if they are from the same country, or nation, or even the same village, at one point or another they most probably were immersed in different groups, whose culture they integrated in their own individual way: education institutions, professional culture, army, musical subculture etc. are all such cultural groups.

Cultural differences can play out in intercultural interaction in two ways: directly through the manifestation of differences in practices, ways of thinking or doing things, and indirectly, mediated by the dynamics of social identity. Usually the two forms tend to exert their influences together, making the situation more difficult to understand and manage.

The model below illustrates the intercultural process, and points to what makes it different from "intra-cultural" processes. It attempts to describe the process of an intercultural interaction: a situation of group cooperation, dyadic interaction, or staying abroad.

We'll go through the figure starting from the top left corner.

1. Top section: setup

- **Direct effects of diversity: manifestation of differences**

Direct effects of diversity are showing whenever there are differences between the participants in terms of practices, ways of thinking, ways of doing things, and these become explicit through the interaction. For instance differences of greeting codes will become explicit if one participant will offer her cheek and the other her hand as a form of greeting. As seen in the previous section, there were many attempts to create inventories of all the dimensions of the differences: the use of space, use of time, relation to hierarchy, relation to gender, formality vs. informality, rules for turn-taking are a few of the many differences that can manifest in an interaction.

The first consequence of these differences is that participants' expected scenarios are broken; things are not going as they usually go. People can experience surprise, misunderstanding, tension, and other symptoms of "culture shock". In any case, the smoothness of the interaction ceases, and participants must direct their attention to the process of communication.

It is important to note, that the direct effects are not exclusively negative. The effects are positive, when the plurality of perspectives, life experiences or ways of thinking can transform into creativity and become a value added. This positive effect is supported by many research results in the field of small group research and diversity management. (e.g. Cox et al 1991, McLeod et al 1996, Earley & Mosakowski 2000 etc.)

- **Indirect effects: identity dynamics**

Indirect effects of diversity happen when there aren't necessarily any actual differences in cultural practices, but participants categorise each-other into different groups according to some explicit criteria of differentiation, either visible (through skin or hair colour, dress code, symbols, etc.) or verbal (group memberships are told). Studies of impression formation showed that a first automatic categorisation takes place in less than a second, to identify the ethnicity, age and gender of the interaction partner. This categorisation also identifies the other as an in-group or out-group member, always in relation to a context.

Beyond gender, age and ethnicity there is a wide variety of factors that can serve as a basis for differentiation: social status, physical handicap, musical subculture membership, to name just a few. In fact, in one of the basic experiments of social identity the criteria participants used for categorising themselves and the others was a purely artificial and fake one given to them by the experimenter (allegedly under- or overestimating the number of dots in a picture), furthermore participants have never met their in-group or out-group members, yet the dynamics of social identity played out as if the groups had 'real' meaning (see Tajfel's minimal paradigm experiments 1981).

Indirect effects of diversity usually hinder the process of creativity. Indeed, research showed that in groups characterized by moderate diversity – where there is limited number of groups represented and several members represent the same groups – participants tend to divide according to demographic faultlines, and prevent the formation of a common cooperation culture, as members are more motivated to keep the initial divisions than to overcome them. (Lau 1998, Earley and Mosakowski 2000)

- **Intercultural competences of interaction partners**

The participants of the interaction enter with their previous experiences, their expectations and bring all their personal skills, attitudes, representations into the situation. All these will influence how the interaction unfolds.

- **Background context**

Last but not least, as we have seen in section 2., the intercultural competences cannot be considered without taking into account the elements of the context that can influence the interaction. These elements of the context are well elaborated in Cohen-Emerique's scheme. She distinguishes the relations of the involved groups (whose members are in interaction) such as: power relation, economic relations, colonial history etc. (2002), the place of the encounter (whose country, city, office etc.), the total number of participants in the situation, the reason of the interaction. All these elements will influence how the participants perceive the situation and each-other.

2. Central section: the process

Understanding the process of the intercultural interaction was the main ambition of the present research. Our starting point was to assume that intercultural interaction is not fundamentally different from any interaction, and that the underlying processes are ultimately the same, but altered by the presence of direct and / or indirect diversity. Both potentially hinder the interaction process by a) causing difficulties in the manner of communication b) motivating for separation through the dynamics of social identity. At the same time, the openness to the other, to the unknown, to difference is as much “natural” to humans as the fear and resistance from it. Accordingly at the heart of our model unfolds a negotiation process between openness and closure. Our research will aim at exploring the factors of the capacity and motivation behind this dynamics.

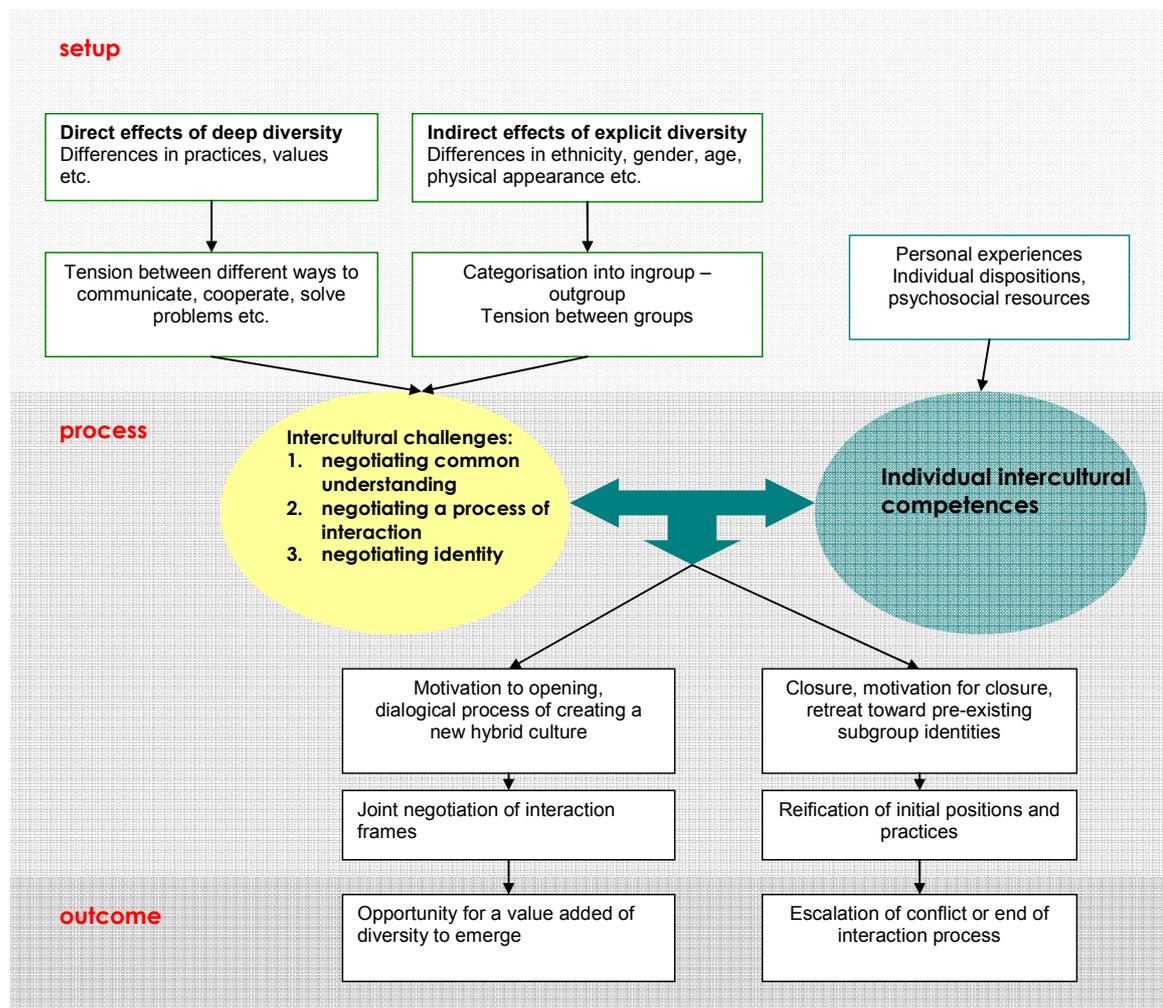


Figure 1 Process of intercultural interaction

The central role of motivation

Both direct and indirect diversity can imply threats to the identity and the self system. For French social psychologist Cohen-Emerique, all intercultural encounters are potential identity threats (2002). Identity threats occur, when we are unable to satisfy basic needs or principles related to identity such as distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, relatedness etc. (Breakwell 1988). For instance self-esteem may be threatened when a novice client in an Asian restaurant drinks the rose water brought for cleaning the hands, and becomes object of smiles. The motive of relatedness is threatened, when in a meeting two colleagues of the same nationality seem to share an insider joke, leaving the third one feeling excluded.

Whenever such threats take place, there is a risk that the person will want to re-establish equilibrium by leaving the situation.

When participants have the motivation and the capacity to maintain the interaction process despite the difficulties, they have to face three challenges: they have to find or negotiate some basic shared understanding. For example when asked by a foreigner for directions without a common language, it will take some time to understand *what* the person wishes to know. Then we have to negotiate a way of communication: without a common language, will it be gestures, or maybe drawing? Interlocutors find out what channels they have for communicating in the given circumstances. While this is happening, the interaction partners also negotiate their respective identity positions. The mere fact of being addressed by the foreigner for help already puts the addressee in a position of host and helper. Most people when put in such a position will do their best to give the good instructions. Some people will accept the position of “helper” and “expert” even when they do not actually have the answer, and prefer risking giving wrong directions than changing position and admitting that they are no expert of the question. And a small minority may categorically refuse the help, because it is incompatible with their identity of xenophobes.

Most interactions are much more complex than the one described above, but the basic processes are quite similar. For instance a multicultural work team will also face the challenge of negotiating common grounds about what their project is about. They will also need to create common rules for cooperation, decide for rules of decision-making, turn-taking, division of task, the level of formality of the discussion etc. In the process the respective identities of the participants are also negotiated. Participants may display quite some effort in obtaining identity positions that are perceived as valued for the group (e.g. “the creative”, “the humorist”, “the leader” in the team). Moreover, teams actually negotiate a common team culture. Early and Mosakowski, researchers of group dynamics (2000) refer to this process as the creation of hybrid team culture.

3. Bottom section: outcomes

In their research on multicultural teams Early and Mosakowski show, that when team members manage to create a hybrid team culture, they can actually outperform homogeneous teams and start profiting from diversity. On the other extreme, when people remain divided along demographic or any cultural faultlines, the process of negotiation will not take place and people will remain at their original positions.

The same logic applies to dyads: when an interaction partner’s fear, need for closure or separation is stronger than his relational motivation to cooperate with the other, they will not manage to solve the question they are dealing with.

The aim of the research is to explore what are the capacities mobilised in this process, on different levels of psychological functioning: on the affective, behavioural, cognitive levels. How do people cope with the difficulties, and what personal factors facilitate for them to benefit from interculturality?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

A total of 135 professionals participated, coming from three different sectors (business, NGO, public) and additionally the field of vocational education and training (VET). We distinguished two conditions: intercultural experiences in the home country, and abroad. In the condition of diversity within the home country there wasn't a strict operationalisation of "diversity" and "interculturality", because of the differences in the national contexts: for instance while in UK the main source of diversity maybe migration, in Hungary it is the presence of ethnic and national minorities residing in Hungary for more than 100 years. Accordingly, we left it to the respondents to qualify their environment as "multicultural". For experiences abroad, international mobility was the criteria for diversity.

Respondents took part in an interview consisting of three components: their exposure to cultural diversity within their professional life, their representations of cultural diversity and intercultural competences and finally their concrete lived experiences relating to working in diversity. See interview guide in annex. The sampling followed the specifications bellow:

SECTOR	INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE	
	"IN HOME COUNTRY"	"ABROAD"
BUSINESS	Criteria for 3 persons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ From different companies ▪ Possibly from different fields of activities 	Criteria for 3 persons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ They have been "expatriates" (different from 'economic migrant' in that he / she had a job contract before starting the trip) ▪ Different companies ▪ Having expatriate experience in different geographic regions
NOT FOR PROFIT Def: independent NGOs, international non-governmental NGOs	Criteria for 3 persons: All working in different organisations with social / assistance profile	Criteria for 3 persons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All working in organisations with social / aid / development profile ▪ Having expatriate experience in different geographic regions
PUBLIC Def: "publicly" founded by states or a set of states	Criteria for 3 persons: Working in different institutions performing service delivery for a heterogeneous client population, eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immigration offices ▪ Public housing programs ▪ Municipality of culturally mixed districts 	Criteria for 3 persons: Working in different institutions performing service delivery for a heterogeneous client population abroad eg: consulates, international organisations. Working in different geographic areas.
VET Vocational Education Institutions and further training centres	Criteria for 3 persons: Teacher or trainer in different organisations, possibly different subject areas	Criteria for 3 persons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Different organisation ▪ Different subject area ▪ Different geographic area

Table 1 Sampling

4.2. Interview grid

An interview grid was given to all interviewers. There were 35 questions, oriented towards

- a) the representations of cultural diversity
- b) the representations of intercultural competence
- c) concrete cases, experiences of critical incident (on how cultural diversity can influence the work process)

4.3. Data processing

The interviews were recorded by partner organisations in their own language. Part of the processing tasks was distributed to partner organisations. The reasons for that choice (i.e. instead of asking complete translations of the transcriptions) was to make partners more involved with the materials they gathered, and also efficiency concerns (i.e. avoiding transcribing and translating parts not absolutely necessary).

Partners were asked to register the data into a “coding table” consisting of three parts. In part one partners were asked to record simple answers such as lists given by the respondents (e.g. “5 aspects of the new environment most difficult to adjust to”) as well as the personal / demographic data of respondents.

For part two partners were asked to translate and record parts of the interviews i.e. answers given to specific questions. See the instructions below in table 1.

Textual analysis.

This part refers to the following question within the interview guide:

- 1.1. What comes spontaneously to your mind when you hear the expression “cultural diversity”?
- 2.2. What representations of cultural diversity exist within your workplace/organisation?
- 3.1. If experience based on living/working abroad - and subquestions from 3.1.1. to 3.1.8.
- 4.2. how cultural differences affect your professional activities. Please take a moment to think of such a situation
- 4.3. Now can you recall a concrete situation when you felt a value added of cultural diversity?
- 4.4. What are the key points, common characteristics between all these situations – if there are any?
- 5.1. Have you changed or grown through this experience in ways that you are proud of, or in ways that you find useful for other types of activities?
- 5.2. What are the possible advantages and opportunities presented by cultural diversity?

Please have transcribed the answers given to these questions

The integrity of these answers will constitute our text material

We deal with these parts separately because the complexity and wideness of the questions often triggers long answers from the respondent, who often deviates from the question asked - probably coming back to a questions asked before etc.

In order to get the most from each interview, we create a long narrative by summing up these answers, that we can use for a different kind of scrutiny.

Table 2 Instructions for textual analysis.

The texts extracted through this process were used for

- a) Choosing and translating parts referring to the perceived challenges and perceived resources.
- b) Translation of entire answers. (see table 3 for instructions).

Please translate the transcription of the answer to the following questions within the interview guide:

1.1. What comes spontaneously to your mind when you hear the expression “cultural diversity”?

2.2. What representations of cultural diversity exist within your workplace/organisation? If the respondent was able to recollect concrete situations as asked in 3.1.7. and 4.2. then please translate / summarize the cases.

Moreover, should you consider that an answer of your respondent is particularly interesting (apart from the answers mentioned above) please feel to mention them, and translate the answer.

Table 3 Instructions for excerpts

4.4. Data analysis

First, open coding was applied on the interview excerpts dealing with the intercultural situations.

In part „interview excerpts” answers to question 3.1.7 and 4.2 were considered. units of answers to specific subquestions were considered segments. Two researchers identified independently in each segment what are the elements that causes difficulty / surprise etc.

Codes included: identity treat / communication inefficiency / context: intergroup conflict etc...

After a second reading the codes were then categorized into 9 categories of areas in which intercultural contact becomes observable.

After the process of categorisation the codes were revisited and refined and a new reading was done on „excerpts” and „textual analysis” to verify whether we had the total range of codes that explain the specificity of intercultural situation.

After a new reading the categories were revisited and further changes have been made to give the final set of dimensions: Relatedness – referring to creating relations with others was put under ‘interaction’. The category ‘physical basics’ was created as a separate category. Even though we still consider issues related to embodiedness as essential in the intercultural experience, we do not consider these experiences (the experience of having a body) as a separable issue from the general aspects of human interaction, identity, worldviews etc. Instead we propose to consider all categories (e.g. interaction, identity, values etc.) to embrace aspects related to physical / body experiences: what referred to own physical appearance was placed under identity, body language under interaction, and questions of hygiene, food etc. under worldviews. For further details see section on results.

5. Results

5.1. Exposure to cultural diversity

The criteria for the selection of the participants was that in their past or present professional life they met cultural diversity, either through foreign assignments or through working in a heterogeneous work environment in their home country (50-50%). We have asked participants whether they had already met cultural diversity before their present work. The answers are summarized in the tables below.

Percentage of respondents who had previous experience with diversity %

Table 4 Previous experience with diversity per sector.

Sector	%
VET	56
PUB	52
BUS	50
NGO	50

Table 5 Previous experience with diversity per country.

country	%
SE	90
UK	86
NL	78
UKNI	63
HU	45
IT	38

Table 4 shows that there wasn't difference amongst the sectors with respect to previous meeting with diversity. Table 5 shows that in some countries the participants were much more likely to work previously with cultural diversity than in others.

We also wanted to find out to what extent it was common across the sectors and the countries to deal with diversity through specific policies or practices. Results show some differences between the sectors, and strong differences amongst the countries (table 6 and table 7).

Table 6 Percentage of existing policies / practices through sectors

	BUS	NGO	PUB	VET
Formal policy	29	32	17	50
Practice	53	71	45	44

Table 7 Percentage of existing policies / practices through countries

	HU	IT	NL	UK	UKNI	SE
Formal policy	27	38	17	62	83	14
Practice	36	75	26	67	50	67

5.2. Representations of interculturality and cultural diversity

Concerning the representations of cultural diversity, we have found that for about one fifth of the respondents the first association is something clearly positive: a source of enrichment, wealth, a learning opportunity etc. Furthermore, to many, the

first thought about cultural diversity refers to the sources and manifestations of diversity. A wide range of concepts were named,

As to the relevance of diversity for professional life, according to the respondents, cultural diversity does influence a variety of professional tasks, from communication to such concrete technical tasks as finance and informatics.

Table 8 Number of mentions of factors influenced by diversity

communication - PR - client relations	108
work process (meeting, cooperating, deciding etc)	85
hr development (training, coaching)	30
administration	10
Support activities	8
technical-professional	6

As to the representations of “intercultural competences”, the competences mentioned by the respondents could be categorised into 5 dimensions (see table 9): personal-social skills, cognitive skills, interaction management, language and social sciences. The most mentioned were personal skills and dispositions such as curiosity, empathy, humbleness, tolerance, etc.

Table 9 Number of respondents mentioning an item falling into the category

	Total	Bus	NGO	PUB	VET
Personal-social skills	159	36	39	40	44
Cognitive skills	72	20	19	18	15
Interaction management	39	16	5	10	8
language	25	12	2	6	5
social sciences / knowledge on cultures	13	5	3	1	4

The same categories could be found when we looked at what intercultural competences the respondents desired to develop. The difference compared to the previous table is that relative importance of the dimensions. For instance, while most respondents mentioned personal skills (e.g. empathy) amongst intercultural competences, they did not mention them amongst the competences desired to develop, suggesting that they are satisfied with their existing level.

Table 10 Number of respondents mentioning an item falling into the category.

Interaction management (negotiate, organise, coach, mediate, communicate)	40
Personal skills, dispositions (positive, coping, dignity, confidence, tolerance, getting rid of fear)	34
cognitive openness (open, flexible, adaptable, stereotypes, perspective-taking)	31
Social science, Knowledge, understanding on culture	31
Language	27
Technical (specific professional comp)	9

5.3. Difficulties in the intercultural process and the competences to overcome them

In our demand-led approach to intercultural competences, we have tried to identify the situations and areas of difficulty that professionals face in their work. By *situations* and *areas of difficulty* now we do not refer to specific professional tasks performed during work (e.g. organising a meeting, claiming expenses etc.). Instead, we were looking for the underlying key moments at the source of the difficulties (e.g. handling the aggressive communication style of a partner in a meeting).

Through the textual analysis of answers to questions on critical incidents and on how diversity influenced the work life we have elicited two types of difficulties:

- a) Related to the process of the interaction, i.e. aspects of psychological functioning at the cognitive, behaviour and affective level
- b) Related to themes and subjects around which tensions, misunderstandings or culture shocks tend to emerge.

While the first type of difficulties will feed our process-oriented model of intercultural competences, the second type informs on the topics of intercultural misunderstandings and tensions, and will be used in the construction of the assessment tool. The different components of the two types of difficulty areas are shown in the table below.

Difficulties related to process (how)	Difficulties related to content (what)
Regulation of emotions: fighting stress, controlling anger, fear etc (affective level)	
Managing the interaction process: handling differences in communication styles, handling the communication problems, decoding body language etc. (behavioural level)	Aspects of social organisation (gender roles, role of hierarchy etc)
Making sense of the situations: controlling attribution mistakes, handling uncertainty (cognitive level)	Basic worldview differences (perception and use of time and space, role of transcendence, way of life, traditions, norms etc)
Handling threats to identity (touching on all three levels)	Differences in the administrative, technical, legal, social systems

Table 11 Areas of difficulty. For an in depth discussion of the dimensions, please see section 6 entitled “discussion of the model”.

The section below shows the factors within each main category of process. Because the orientation of our model to the processes of intercultural interaction, the subjects and themes identified as “sensitive zones” or “points of friction” are not used for the construction of the model. However, they will serve as input in the construction of the assessment tool.

5.3.1. Content – difficulties related to content

Cohen-Emerique calls “sensitive zones” the areas which have a stronger tendency to generate tensions or culture shock. While in theory a wide range of areas of activity and values can become source of conflict, what actually becomes a

sensitive zone depends on the cultural, personal and professional identity of the individual.

However, our research has also showed that often there is nothing inherently sensitive about the areas that will come to cause conflict, shock or serious misunderstanding, and that it is only in the contact that the seemingly harmless factors can lead to a clash. For instance the use of metric system or the use of feet seemed harmless until discoordination between them lead to the failure of a Euro-American joint space project.

If any cultural difference can become a point of friction, there can't be any a priori set exhaustive list of these differences, just as there can't be any closed inventory listing all the cultural behaviours. As an illustration of the possible range of cultural variables we present the codes identified in our research, and give some concrete excerpts from the text. Again, these cannot be considered a real system, or a sound typology of the items.

The factors that served as points of friction in the experiences of the respondents were

- Rules of social organisation: gender roles, the role of community, family structures, relationship to hierarchy and authority
- Embodiedness: role of physical contact, experience of body, hygiene, smells, climate
- Conceptions and uses of time and space
- Values, norms, traditions
- Way of life, working style
- Thinking, learning style, conceptions of the world
- Interaction codes and patterns
- Intergroup relations, different demographic and religious composition of the societies
- Differences in the administrative, legal, social or political settings
- Technical and professional differences

An example from the interviews (coded under social organisation)

“I remember I was going to wash my socks and out servant was in the house sweeping the floors. When she saw me washing the socks, she shouted at me not to do that. She grabbed the socks from my hand and started to wash them for me. I felt that I insulted her by doing a domestic job that was not in class with my profession and status in her society. I was a professor and a professor should not perform such duties. That was a servant's work. I was shocked to see her face full of fears and shame because I was going to do her type of job.” (Respondent from Sweden)

5.3.2. Processes of intercultural interaction and the difficulties they imply

▪ Difficulties related to emotions in the intercultural process

The affective component of the model basically refers to the emotional reactions of the persons having the intercultural experience, as opposed to the cross-cultural variability of emotions. Indeed, emotions can accompany intercultural conflicts in communication situations, they are a core component of the reactions in culture shock, and they also accompany the adjustment process during cross-cultural transition. Even if positive emotions can surface, generally the uncertainty inherent in intercultural encounters tends to provoke negative emotions.

	TOTAL	Mobility	No mobility
	148	94	54
uncomfortable / confusion / apprehension / nervous / odd	29	18	11
attacked	25	20	5
tiring / consuming / disheartened / depressed / disappointed / upset	18	10	8
alone / isolation	17	14	3
fear	12	8	4
stress	11	8	3
frustration	11	6	5
positive emotions	9	6	3
other negative emotions	8	2	6

Table 12 Factors of the affective component

As seen in the table above, emotions were more relevant for respondents having an experience of international mobility. This is not surprising: international transitions imply life-changes that are typically stress provoking (Ward et al 2001:73). Indeed, life changes themselves are considered inherently stressful, even without any trans-cultural element. A new environment is by definition not decipherable, not predictable, and not completely foreseeable. If life changes are replete with potentially stressful factors, cultural distance adds to the distress, thus making the emotional aspects a core theme in cross-cultural adjustment literature (Chang 2007).

While emotions are mentioned almost twice as often amongst respondents who had an experience of mobility than those who had not, all intercultural encounters are susceptible to trigger emotional reactions through culture shock experiences or conflict. Accordingly, emotions also appear in literature on cross-cultural communication. For instance Matsumoto's intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale is based on the argument that tensions and conflicts are inevitable attachments of intercultural encounters.

▪ **Difficulties of behaviour: interaction negotiation**

We have coded different aspects of the interaction, which we explain in detail below, and that take into account the various functions of communication and the mutual dependence of culture, identity and communication.

	TOTAL	Mobility	No mobility
	213	101	112
facework	36	21	15
communication inefficiency	35	18	17
communication style	28	15	13
interpersonal attitude	26	13	13
interaction rituals	22	12	10
body language	21	7	14
Establishing relations	20	15	5

Table 13 Factors of the interaction component

Facework

The concept of facework is part of the metaphors proposed by Goffman, intended to reveal how during interpersonal interactions social relations come to influence personal identity.

The concept of *face* is understood as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman 1955: 213). Facework refers to the measures individuals take to manage threats of the face – either own face or face of the other - in an effort to keep equilibrium in accordance with their relative social status.

Because the codes for facework, and facesaving are also a culturally variable, the intricate negotiations of facework constitute new difficulties in an intercultural interaction, as illustrated in the example below:

“When doing business with Arabs, you need to know that the Arab businessman can never completely lose, if he loses you make an enemy, and you too can never always lose because you will just seem stupid. You need to let him win but also let him know that you know that he is winning and you don’t hate him for it” (respondent 6, Italy)
“I think that some migrants have a problem with asking for help. I don't get this.”
(resp 5, NL)

Communication efficiency

Concerns of efficiency reflect to the referential function of communication, i.e. the fear, expectation or observation that the message will not go through. The examples below illustrate this component:

“an ongoing challenge to ensure that Chinese and British understood each other”
(resp 13 UK)

“We speak on that between us but always in an informal manner, so that there is an exchange but not really effective”. (resp 1, Italy)

“I have had problems with migrant workers who say they understand the work and they do not.” (resp 4, UK-NI)

“I realized that it is not enough to make the things clear beforehand, we have to tell everything again and again...” (resp 8, Hungary)

If you need help to find a place, dont ask locals, because if they dont know, they still will say something, maybe wrong direction. (Resp 20 Hungary)

Communication style- interpersonal attitude

There is such a large variety in communication styles, that even creating an exhaustive list of the possible dimensions is a doubtful enterprise. A basic distinction was proposed by Hall, who differentiated high and low-context communication, depending on the relative importance of direct explicit speech or contextual elements (including: status of respondents, space arrangement, etc). Communication styles can also differ along the dimension of formality, vs. non formality, the different regulations of turn-taking according to hierarchy, etc. The examples below illustrate some further elements that were coded for communication style and interpersonal attitude.

- Showing emotions:

“Take the Nigerians. They talk in a very loud voice, and you think that they are about to get into a fight”. Resp 12, Italy

“for the monitoring of a report which was incomplete, we asked the authors of the report to meet. These two authors were resentful, they felt this procedure as an insult. Both of them have hierarchical and patriarchal cultural background. One of them was hitting the table and shouting, that he doesn’t answer the questions, the other ran out from the room” resp 15, Hungary.

- Focusing on content or focusing on relationship:

“For example: the Germans / Swiss are usually hard and direct, if they have to tell you something they do, even in an offensive manner, but they haven’t got anything against you, they’re just like that” (resp 3, Italy)

“In Germany they have very unfriendly customs service, that's the first idea you get. Later on you realise that's just the way they act”. (Resp 4, Netherlands)

- Interpersonal attitude:

"I found myself wondering why everyone in the USA was so friendly...(resp 4, UK-NI)

“People from the north are more friendly than people in the west of Holland I think”. (resp 9, Netherlands)

“I was impressed by the amount of friendliness of the people and openness” (respondent from Sweden)

“Experience with a Russian Coach was awful. He said he understood our UK training techniques for children and then suddenly our client were leaving us...children and family members were been harassed, shouted at and told 'this is what is done in Russia.'” (Resp.4. UK-NI)

“I was shocked when I saw people in the buses quiet. In Chile people talked to one another regardless of people’s anonymity in relationship to me. They did not know me and I neither knew them but we talked still”. (Case from Sweden)

- Linearity, rhythm, enmeshment

“She comes from a culture where conversation is a lot less linear than ours, where we wait for a pause in the conversation before starting to speak. In her family people are very courteous but happily cut in and talk across each other - no one 'has the floor' so to speak. My family may not even have had an issue about it but I became acutely conscious and very uncomfortable after a while.” (Resp.2, UK)

Interaction rituals

We have differentiated ‘interaction rituals’ from communication styles, to code comments that referred to the existence of concrete codes or even choreographies that the respondents noticed, and which to them seemed as common rituals (or practices) specific to a given cultural group.

“In a business trip to Japan, the locals tried to scare him. They started the negotiations 3 or 4 against him, who was alone, and later more and more Japanese joined, and they were talking in Japanese sometimes, while all of them understood English. Also they gave him alcohol, he accepted, but drank just a little. After a few hours the Japanese groups accepted him, and began to respect him. May the reason was that he was young and he came alone”. (Resp. 19 Hungary)

“...the English appear to be very cold, detached, closed, not direct people. then at 5 o'clock they shake off the world of work and everyone goes off to the pub, which is a source of life: the Anglo-Saxons open up in front of a pint of beer, they become themselves, they throw off their inhibitions and become likable”. (Resp. 19, Italy)

Body language

Non verbal communication codes also exhibit great variation across cultures, and they are particularly prone to provoke attribution mistakes or directly bad feelings tension, as they are often decoded without conscious attention. Some examples:

“Sometimes it seems that foreigners don't like to make eye contact. Especially women.” (Resp. 6, NL)

“I have experienced culture shock. I was once in a restaurant with African friends having dinner and suddenly I felt someone touching my hair. I looked around and it was a 70-year old lady who said that she wanted to touch and feel my hair...We all laughed in the middle of the culture shock incidence. I never expected that my African hair was something new for an elderly lady.” (Respondent in Sweden)

Establishing relationships and creating network

While the elements listed above were equally relevant for respondents with experience of international mobility and those without, difficulties related to creating a social network were rarely mentioned by the latter group. Indeed, the loss of the social network is one of the critical tasks people settling in a new country must face. If the social network is important as a daily – logistic support system, it is also crucial from the perspective of basic psychological needs. Baumesiter and Tice propose that a social relatedness is actually the main valid factor of happiness (2001). Accordingly, the constitution of a social network in the new environment is a key competence for all expatriates.

“...some of the most problematic aspects lie in the difficulty of creating a network of foreign friends.” (Resp. 9, Italy)

“Interpersonal relationships take a lot of effort, because Switzerland and Germany have a colder nature. Everyone gets on with their own lives, they feel no obligation to make you feel at home” (Resp 3, Italy)

▪ **Cognitive component**

The cognitive aspect of the model refers to tasks related to thinking, perceiving, understanding, explaining the intercultural situations. We have identified the cognitive tasks listed in table 18.

	TOTAL	Mobility	No mobility
	46	18	28
proper attribution	13	4	9
awareness of special needs / differences / relativity	13	5	8
handling dissonance	8	3	5
handling uncertainty	7	3	4
reflecting, controlling stereotypes	5	3	2

Table 14 Factors of cognitive component

Proper attribution

Attribution refers to the need to understand, explain what we see. Trying to decode situations is so much built into humans, that they are ready to interpret the motion of geometric figures as social interaction (Heider’s experiments 2003/1958). When trying to make sense of others’ behaviour, people find explanations based on internal factors (e.g. intention, inherent characteristic of the protagonist) called dispositional attributions or based on external factors (elements of the context, culture etc) called situational attribution. People tend to have a preference for dispositional attributions in explaining other’s behaviour, even when the behaviours can be better explained with situational factors, thus resulting in attribution mistakes. Attributions are particularly difficult in intercultural situations, where cultural differences are interpreted as intent, such as assuming that the man coming very close to us is aggressive, whereas he may just be used to smaller distance. Example from the text:

“Men holding hands in Venda - took a long time to understand just what men were doing holding hands whilst walking around. Very confusing and unsettling at a time when just starting to develop social relationships with people in the area. Slowly

through observation and as knowledge of language developed, as well as personal experience, was able to understand that it was linked to a question of trust.” (Resp 7, UK)

Awareness of special needs, relativity, differences

The idea of formal equality – i.e. equality happens when everyone gets the same formal rights – and the universalist approach of emphasising what is common over what is different often hides the need to actually become aware or deal with differences. In a sense this is about becoming aware of own ethnocentrism, and being able to relativise, realise that what is good for one is bad for the other.

“A group of Muslims asked company for prayer mats and a room to pray. Unite reps went in and discussed their religious differences and the company provided same to the group. They also explained to the rest of the workers about the religious differences.” (Resp 17 UKNI)

Handling dissonance

People enter situations with a set of expectations regarding how the situation will evolve. In intercultural situations due to cultural differences, people often have to move away from their expected scenarios. Dissonance refers to the gap between expectations and what is actually happening.

“Nothing I saw in reality matched my expectations”. (Resp. 20, UK)

“I experienced "culture shock" myself as the Irish are more clannish than the Americans. I expected them to be exactly the same as they spoke English.” (Resp 1, UKNI)

Handling uncertainty

Interculturality usually implies a high level of uncertainty, because of the plurality of representations, communication codes etc.

“To me culture shock means that you are put into an unexpected situation. This I was exposed to when I was working in the prison and in the mental hospital. In the prison the guards and the inmates thought differently from what I was used to. In the mental hospital as well. They behaved in a way I did not understand. This did not basically follow working norms that I was used to. I was therefore confused.” (Resp. from Sweden)

“Culture shock means that one is exposed to something one is not used to. It is a new situation. This is something I do not recognise. One should analyse why one reacts to new situations so that one avoids being over reactive to a cultural difference which one terms as abnormal.” (Resp. from Sweden).

Reflecting, controlling stereotypes

It is part of the natural human cognitive functioning to use categories, generalisations or stereotypes. Moreover, these are non conscious cognitive phenomena, and it is not evident at all to become aware that what we think of the other is not so much inherent characteristics of the other than result of our thought processes. Sticking to our categories and stereotypes can lead to rigidity in accepting new information and closure towards the other. Moreover, in interaction stereotypes often become self-fulfilling prophecies, which will justify the further maintenance of the preconceptions.

- **Self and identity**

While identity is linked to intercultural experiences in most theories, it is almost exclusively with regards to collective or cultural identity, and usually restricted to situations of international mobility (for an example see Ward et al 2001). In this vein acculturation processes are invoked to show the change of cultural identity through the exposure to a new cultural environment (Berry 1988), and the dynamics of social identity are cited to explain intergroup relations. However, it is not only collective identity, but the integrity of the self system that is involved in such situations, including personal aspects of the identity. Indeed, for French social psychologist Cohen-Emerique, all intercultural encounters are potential identity threats (2002). Identity threats occur, when we are unable to satisfy basic needs or principles related to identity (Breakwell 1988). Up to the present there isn't any scientific consensus on an exact exhaustive list of these principles. Accordingly, our code categories do not reflect such a theoretically proven model. We did however intent to elicit the extent and type of identity threats intercultural situations are susceptible to provoke.

	TOTAL	Mobility	No mobility
	103	71	32
threat to collective identity, victim of racism / discrimination	40	28	12
threat to pragmatical function (separation from the others)	23	16	7
threat to "ontological function" (relativisation of beliefs)	22	13	9
threat to personal identity	10	7	3
threat of professional competences	8	7	1

Table 15 Factors of the identity component

b) Threat to the ontological and pragmatic functions (Camilleri, 1985)

Camilleri distinguished the ontological and pragmatic functions of identity. The ontological function is to give meaning to the world, while the pragmatic is about relatedness; it is about creating links with the social environment. Usually enculturation into a culture (national, professional etc) simultaneously satisfies both, but in cross-cultural transition, the two needs may induce opposite developments, and to satisfy one sometimes must be at the expense of the other.

- Threats of the ontological function. When the ontological function is threatened, our core assumptions about the world are questioned, and our sense of continuity and coherence are broken.

“When I went back to my home town later that was when I sunk in the culture shock. I realised that I did not know much. I was a virgin. I was naive. I did not understand anything. I could easily be fooled. I was not critical and I could not be myself”. (Resp. from Sweden)

- Threats of the pragmatic function.

“...for them it is hard to understand our way of life, even though there we did without almost everything we need to life according to a Western mentality, but we still had 100 times more than they did: This is a gap that cannot be filled. We will never be like them, and rightly so that was not our objective. This is rather a shock because it makes you feel bad, and always makes you feel awkward. A fundamental discomfort that you never get over, and which keeps you under stress to eliminate all that is.” (Resp. 8 IT)

c) *Exposure to racism, discrimination is a threat to collective identity*

A lack of positive recognition of a specific cultural identity (national, ethnic, subcultural etc.) is a threat to collective identity, which can be manifested in explicit stereotypes, prejudice or overt discrimination. Some examples:

“I was the only black child at school - I was spat at, even teachers called me blackie or darkie.” (Resp. 22, UK)

“I did feel the racism towards Italians when opening a current account at the bank.” (Resp. 3 Italy)

“White trainers and managers have a perception that as a black trainer you had to be limited in what you could do. If there was 'race' involved they were happy to include you, otherwise they just ignored your skills”. (Resp. 8, UK)

d) *Threat to personal identity:*

Personal identity is threatened when one is not being recognized as an individual, but is seen exclusively as member of a particular group. In this sense the person seems to lose all individuality and uniqueness. While exposure to discrimination, racism or stereotypes also implies a threat of the personal identity (because one is considered only as a group member), such threats can occur even without manifestation of overt discrimination, whenever one is not relevant self image (e.g. as a heterosexual, as a non racist person, etc) is not reflected by the others.

“You do not feel considered as an individual, but simply as an Italian, despite having a good work contract.” (Resp. 3 Italy)

“Once I was trying to explain the rules of a course to a class of Roma students, and some of them called me a racist (in front of the group). I was really shocked.” (Resp. 11, Hungary)

“I had a homosexual colleague, I had a neutral approach to this, I felt at ease with him, and he was convinced that I was homosexual too, and shared his opinion with other colleagues. This led to misunderstanding.” (Resp 13, Italy).

e) *Threat to professional identity*

We coded threats to professional identity separately from threats of personal identity as they seemed a recurrent pattern. Indeed, for administrative or merely subjective reasons foreigners often have trouble in continuing their professional life in the new setting. This implies a lack of recognition for their competences and previous achievements. As one of the respondents working with migrants commented “people coming from other countries with high education and arrive and are regarded as nothing as though they are uneducated”.

“I am highly qualified and I love my job but I think being part Asian I am never going to be able to get very high up in the organisation, and I am beginning to feel very frustrated.” (Resp. 19, UK)

We have also found examples on a different note, where misunderstandings or tensions prevented the respondent from efficiently doing their job. Such experiences also amount to threats to professional identity.

“Another funny episode was that of the Egyptian who didn't know that I was not a policeman even though I told him about the appointment the police had published for him on the internet. He blathered, “Bah, in Italy it's all like that”. I then got beyond offence, and my first impulse was to tell him that in Egypt it was much worse and he should stop complaining, and then explain my role and all that I could do for him. Another migrant who was in the office to ask the same thing had to intervene to explain to the Egyptian that I was not a police officer. A third neutral person had to intervene, someone in a situation closer to the Egyptian (an immigrant, an ex- clandestine) in order to restore a situation of trust.” (Resp. 18, Italy)

5.3.3. National differences

Data was relatively homogeneous through the participating countries / regions: the relative weight of the dimensions is very much similar. This suggests that intercultural competences would be relatively stable across our sample of European countries. The hypotheses will be further tested in the validation phase.

However, there are some interesting minor differences, for instance the relative importance of identity and emotion-related answers in UK compared to the other countries, mostly compared to respondents in HU, where mentions of emotion- and identity are much lower than in other countries.

Table 16 Number of respondents mentioning an item falling into the category

	HU	IT	NL	SE	UK	UKNI	Grand Total
interaction	30	20	41	26	24	46	187
emotion	7	15	33	21	39	25	140
Identity	2	12	16	16	31	22	99
cognition	3	6	7	3	7	20	46

5.3.4. Differences in professional fields

The dimensions are very much the similar through the 4 sectors observed. However, there are minor differences such as the relatively low number of respondents mentioning emotional aspects in the business sector compared to the NGO sector. Furthermore, respondents from VET sector were less likely to mention aspects referring to the cognitive dimension – either to cognitive skills or knowledge. This is all the more interesting, as it is the professional field that is actually related to cognitive activities.

Table 17 Differences in professional fields

	BUS	NGO	PUB	VET	Grand Total
interaction	44	52	44	47	187
Emotion	22	51	33	34	140
Identity	20	31	19	29	99
cognition	12	15	13	6	46

The one differentiating factor appears to be the mobility and non-mobility condition. Indeed, it seems that issues related to identity and emotion tend to be triggered by the experience of international mobility.

Table 18 Differences according to mobility and non-mobility condition

	interaction	emotion	identity	cognition
Mobility	104	95	73	19
Non mobility	83	45	26	27

6. Discussion of the model

6.1. A model of intercultural competences

- **Focusing on the general processes of communication**

The intercultural negotiation inventory is based on the recognition that at the heart of intercultural situations there is a triple negotiation process: the negotiation of the meaning, the negotiation of the process of interaction and the negotiation of identity. While these processes take place in all interaction situations, the cultural distance imposes a double challenge: the differences in the initial positions and practices are more accentuated and social identity dynamics can lead to the reification of the initial differences and to closure towards each other.

- **A functional division: affective, behaviour and cognitive levels**

Many models of intercultural competences group the dimensions of competences into basic categories of psychosocial functioning. A basic categorisation often used in psychological literature separates the main types of psychological processes to affective, behavioural and cognitive levels¹ (e.g. Gertsen 1992, Ward et al 2001). We can harmonize our intercultural competence with such a model, hence creating an ABC model of intercultural competences. However, instead of placing identity in the cognitive level, as some authors do (e.g. Ward et al 2001) we'd like to emphasise that identity – the processes and principles of identity – involve all three levels.

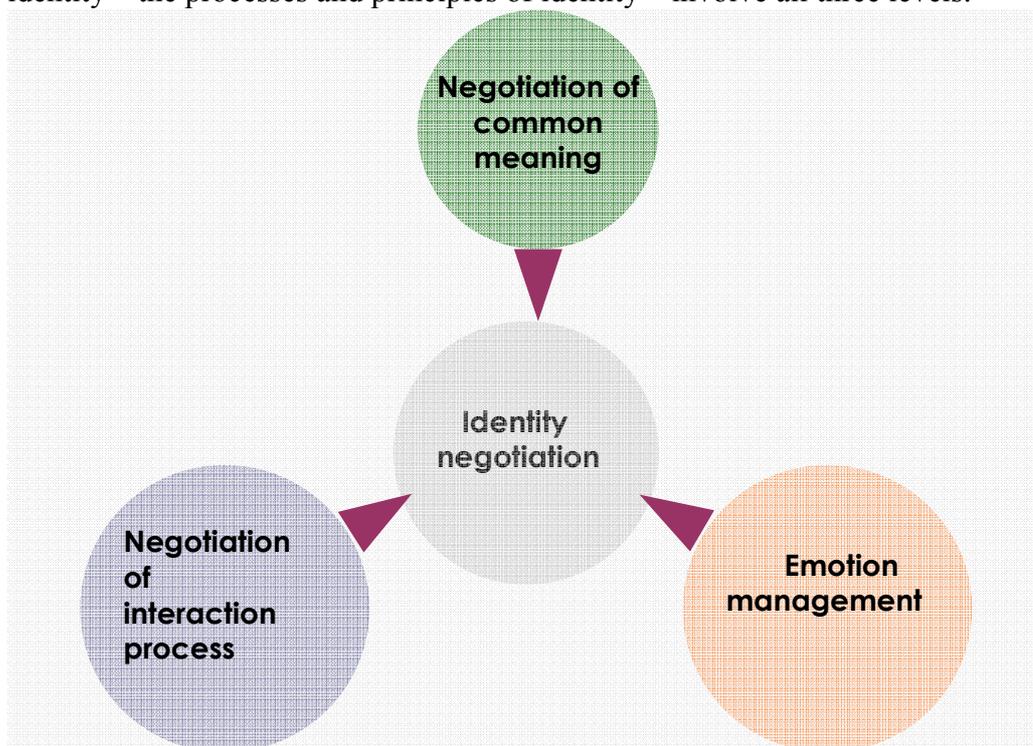


Figure 2 Intercultural negotiation inventory

¹ The division of competence into knowledge / skills / attitudes reflects an educational approach, the desire to expand the contents of education beyond mere knowledge transfer. However, it is not the best frame to understand the *processes* involved in the intercultural interaction.

- **A central role for self and identity**

The negotiation inventory gathers the competences at the affective, behavioural and cognitive levels of psychological functioning that allow these negotiations, and overcomes the rigidity brought by identity threats. If identity is linked to intercultural experiences in most theories, it is almost exclusively with regards to collective or cultural identity, and usually restricted to situations of international mobility (for an example see Ward et al). In this vein acculturation processes are invoked to show the change of cultural identity through the exposure to a new cultural environment (Berry), and the dynamics of social identity are cited to explain intergroup relations. However, it is not only collective identity, but the integrity of the self system that is involved in such situations, including personal aspects of the identity. Indeed, for French social psychologist Cohen-Emerique, all intercultural encounters are potential identity threats (2002). Identity threats occur, when we are unable to satisfy basic needs or principles related to the self and identity (Breakwell 1988).

In accordance with Cohen-Emerique's theory, the centrality of identity in our model comes from the recognition that diversity - direct and indirect - implies threats to identity that transcend the level of cultural identity and involve the entire self-system. Identity threats or threats to the self system, because of they imply non satisfaction of basic self-related motives can hinder and even stop the negotiation process, as they will increase the individual's need for closure and separation. In consequence any model of intercultural competence must tackle how these threats can be overcome, allowing the interaction negotiation to unfold.

6.2. Elements of the model

6.2.1. Affect: emotion management

If intercultural situations have a propensity to trigger negative emotions, the affective component of intercultural competence is the capacity to regulate emotions. First, in order to avoid the escalation of a potential conflict, second, in order to be able to reflect more objectively on the sources of conflict and become aware of the involvement of our own "sensitive zones" (Cohen-Emerique). The relevance of emotion regulation is endorsed by several researchers, as illustrated by the "emotional stability" component of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (Van Oudenhoven, Van der Zee 2002). Furthermore emotion management is a central element of the Uncertainty Management Theory of Gudykunst, Furnham and Bochner's focus on stress management and Matsumoto's ICAPS.

"Emotion regulation allows individuals to engage in clear thinking about intercultural incidents without retreating into psychological defenses. If sojourners do not have the ability to regulate or control their emotions, they will be unlikely to adjust well because they will be locked into their automatic or habitual ways of thinking and interacting with the world. Emotion regulation seems likely to be the gatekeeper skill for intercultural adjustment." (Matsumoto et al 2007: 6)

Based on our results, we propose to retain *emotion management* as the affective component of the intercultural competence model.

Defintion: Emotion management is the capacity to cope with / handle the consequences of negative emotions arising of misunderstandings, conflicts and uncertainty inherent in intercultural encounters. This implies the capacity to avoid action on the impulse of emotion, and not the capacity to suppress the expression of emotion.

6.2.2. Behaviour: interaction negotiation

Communication and interaction are usually the central elements in models and theories of intercultural relations. In fact, many definitions of intercultural competence are actually narrowed down to interacting, communicating efficiently in an intercultural environment. This is well illustrated by the first sentence in Wikipedia's article on intercultural competence: "Intercultural competence is the ability of successful communication with people of other cultures" or Chen and Starosta's proposition for intercultural communication competence as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute *communication behaviors* that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (1999:28).

What makes communication so central is that for many, it is the moment of encounter with another and the occasion of the awareness of difference. Indeed, while there are accounts of culture shock experiences triggered by sudden awareness of smells, the climate or tastes, most people experience interculturality during interaction with other people.

If communication is such a critical event, it is because in contrast with the classical transmission model (Shannon and Weaver 1949), communication is not merely about the transfer of a message unilaterally determined by the sender. First, the meaning of the message is not packaged by the sender, but is negotiated between the interactants, through the influence of their cultural context. Second, even though the process of communication is assumed to be neutral and universal, and the only threat is noise coming from outside, in fact the communication process varies substantially between cultures, and the lack of agreed communication codes can lead to the failure of the transaction. Third, interaction partners are not independent of the communication process, but their relationship and their identity is continuously reconstructed or renegotiated in the process.

The dimensions identified in the research – facework, communication style, communication inefficiency, body language, establishing relations - refer to the aspects of communication that become more difficult as the cultural distance increases. In each interaction, the partners are caught up in a dialectical process between the need to adjust to the other or sticking to one's own communication repertoire. The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT - Giles, Ogay 2006) explains this dialectic through concepts of strategies of accommodation and divergence, which reflect the attitude of inclusion and distinction respectively. Accommodation reflects a motivation of relatedness, while divergence a motivation of separation from the other and reinforcing separate identities.

Thus CAT is describes communication behaviour through motivation, in contrast with other communication models which consider behaviour flexibility - i.e. he *capacity* of expanding one's non verbal repertoire, the flexible switching between repertoires - as a skill independent of motivation. The consequent phase of the research will explore the relationship between behaviour flexibility and the *willingness* to adjust to the other or *motivation* for convergence and divergence, which is comprised in the identity component. Is it possible to conceive behaviour

flexibility as a cold skill? Can it, should it be separated from the motivation factor? Until further results, we propose the following definition for the behavioural aspect of intercultural competence:

Interaction negotiation is the capacity to adjust to others and negotiate a common communication procedure in a situation where there are differences in participants' communication styles, cooperation practices and politeness codes.

6.2.3. Cognitive component

The cognitive aspect of the model refers to the cognitive tasks – i.e. tasks referring to thinking – demanded by intercultural situations. The fact that intercultural encounters imply an unusual level of uncertainty and ambiguity is recognized by most researchers. Some testimonies are the dimension of *open-mindedness* in the *Multicultural Personality Questionnaire* (Van Oudenhoven, Van der Zee 2002) the cognitive component of the concept of *cultural intelligence* proposed by Early and Ang (2003), the *flexibility and openness* dimension in Williams' (2005) *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory* or the *tolerance for ambiguity* identified by Ruben (1976). Openness and uncertainty are actually the central elements of some theories and measures, for instance of the *Attitudinal and Behavioral Openness Scale* created by Caligiuri et al. (2000) and the *Uncertainty and Anxiety Management Theory* developed by Gudykunst (2001).

If how we make sense of a situation is always the product of intricate cognitive processes, in intercultural situations the level of uncertainty is by definition much higher, rendering the negotiation process more difficult. The competence of meaning making in a situation marked by an increased level of uncertainty is well approached by Kruglanski's theory of *need for cognitive closure*, (Kruglanski, Webster 1996). The model is based on the idea that different people in different situations will have a stronger motivation to close all information searching and processing tasks, i.e. closing to new information. The scale has five dimensions: orientation towards order, predictability, decisiveness, ambiguity, and closed mindedness (see annex for the scale). Although the factors of need for closure do not completely match our factors (handling uncertainty, handling dissonance, relativity, handling attributions, reflecting on stereotypes), the construct is very much relevant in the explanation of intercultural dynamics. Indeed, the construct explains people's motivation to maintain cognitive processes (e.g. continue trying to bring new hypotheses to understand the other) or to close them.

Our model of intercultural competences also recognizes the link between motivation and cognition. We believe that cognitive openness is (the capacity to handle dissonance, relativity, etc) is related to the motivation of closure due to identity threats. The extent of relatedness of the two processes is to be explored in the following phase of the research.

The proposed definition for the cognitive aspect of the intercultural competence is:

The capacity to negotiate common meanings and shared knowledge between the participants, which implies the capacity to be open in a situation where the usual frames of reference are missing, and the capacity to resist the need for closure.

6.2.4. Self and identity

If identity is very much at the centre of intercultural theories, it is mainly to focus on the change of cultural identity in the acculturation process, and to understand the dynamics of intergroup relations. Identity is much more rarely integrated in intercultural theories focusing on contact or cooperation in a broader sense. Nevertheless, there are some theories that explain intercultural dynamics through identity.

The Identity Management Theory (IMT) proposed by Imahory and Cupach (e.g. 2005) is such an exception. The IMT is a theory derived from Brown and Levinson's (1978) concept of negative and positive face needs, referring to the need of recognition and the need for autonomy and independence from the other. The theory is based on the inventory of possible face problematics derived from the positive and negative face needs and the need to deal with the face needs of the other. Four types of face problematics are identified: identity freezing (when people are seen only through their cultural identity), non-support (when the cultural identities are ignored) self-other face dialectic (tension between supporting one's own face or the partner's) and finally a positive-negative face dialectic (a tension between supporting the other's negative or positive face needs). The relevance of face needs related to cultural identity is undeniable in all intercultural interaction. Indeed, focusing on face-work is a good frame to understand the dialectic of relatedness and distinction. However, the theory does address the skills or capacities mobilised in the face-management process. The focus of the theory is not on the identification of individual differences, but on the identification of the phases of the identity management process. As such, it can only contribute indirectly to a quest for individual competences.

Another theory using identity as the central component is Ting Toomey's Identity Negotiation Theory (INT), which is much closer to the focus of the present research. Indeed, the ambition of the INT is the identification of intercultural identity competence – its components, criteria and outcomes (Ting-Toomey 2005:211). For Ting-Toomey, intercultural encounters imply a “boundary-crossing journey” between identity security and insecurity, and between inclusion and exclusion (p 216). This process of boundary-crossing makes identity change and transformation inevitable, and leads to identity negotiation: “a transactional process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge and/ or support their own and other's desired self-images” (p. 217). In explaining individual differences, Ting-Toomey's central metaphors are “mindful intercultural communication” or “intercultural identity negotiation competence”, which refer to the “appropriate, effective, and satisfactory management of desired shared identity meanings and shared identity goals in an intercultural episode” (p. 226). This competence has three components: identity knowledge, mindfulness and identity-negotiation skills. Identity knowledge refers to accumulating “culture-sensitive knowledge” about the others' identity domains, with the aim of knowing what aspects of their identity we need to affirm. Mindfulness - following Tharp's proposal (2003) – “is a readiness to shift one's frame of reference, the motivation to use new categories to understand cultural or ethnic differences; and the preparedness to experiment with creative avenues of decision making and problem solving” (p.226.). Finally, identity negotiation skills are adaptive interaction skills, including observation, clarification, listening, empathy, sensitivity, facework, collaborative dialogue etc. (p.227).

To sum up, the INT touches most of the dynamics that this present research is focusing on. Moreover, the centrality of the identity related needs is another common point. However, Ting Toomey does not address many issues that should be clarified. For instance it is not clear what is the relationship between identity and other basic psychological functions of the person that also play out in an intercultural interaction (e.g. cognition, emotions). A further question concerns the constitution of the components, which for now are black box constructs. How were they created? What are their components? If the components are not operationalised: how do we conceptualise mindfulness? How will it possible to measure? What identity motives are exactly taken into account? While the direction Ting-Toomey is taking is very promising for intercultural research focusing on identity, there are some aspects worth further exploration.

According to our model, the identity negotiation competence has a crucial role as well. Primarily it is the mechanism for a dynamic equilibrium, implying a permanent negotiation between different identity motives. If up to the present there isn't any scientific consensus on an exact exhaustive list of these motives (for a new proposal see Vignoles 2006) there seems to be agreement on the fact that some form of orientation to the other (relatedness, belonging or "pragmatic function") and the need for self-enforcement (or continuity, distinctiveness etc.) should be on that list. In each interaction, these identity-needs orient the individual as a compass, toward the best possible satisfaction of these needs, and in the process, they are articulating the motivation to open and to separate from the other. It is for this reason that we suppose, that all other processes (behaviour, emotions, cognitions) are directly linked or mediated by the processes of identity negotiation. The next step is to explore the relations between the construct of identity negotiation and the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of the intercultural competence. Is identity negotiation a separate process? Does it precede and articulate all the other components via motivation, or is it a redundancy?

Identity negotiation competence is the capacity of the self to change between different positions of the self system in order to satisfy different identity principles such as self-esteem, optimal distinction, meaning, continuity, relatedness.

7. Conclusion

Our research aims to re-open the debate on *intercultural competences* often accused of using a reified conception of culture and objectifying as individual characteristics an essentially interactive and subjective process. The challenge our team of researchers has imposed itself is to revisit this hypothesis and to explore whether it is possible to conceptualise and identify intercultural competences avoiding all the epistemological traps the field seems to bear.

While looking for some forms of intercultural competences has been on the research agenda for more than half a century, it is only now that we witness the beginning of the mainstreaming of intercultural competences. Indeed while in earlier works intercultural competence – or cross cultural effectiveness, etc. referred almost exclusively to migrants (“sojourners”), and professionals working with them, today we realize that due to the increasing transnationalisation, the competence to live, work, cooperate with other becomes a key competence for everyone. This shift is reflected by the OECD’s DESECO project, which identified “working in heterogeneous groups” as one of three key competence areas (OECD 2003); as well as the working groups on key competencies within the European Commission, that identified “intercultural competence” as an important element in the 8 competence areas defined. The research is based on such a mainstreamed approach to intercultural competences, where to master intercultural competences is not the exclusive task of immigrants or migrants in general, but concerns the integrity of societies.

As a frame to conceptualise *competences* we adopted the research adopted the *demand-led* approach to competences proposed by the OECD’s DeSeCo project. In this perspective, the focus is not on some pre-defined endstates or qualities, but on the *demands* that individuals have to face in their social or professional life. Accordingly, in our starting definition, we understood intercultural competences as the ability to mobilise different psychosocial resources (knowledge, skills, emotions etc.) to answer intercultural situations. Our task was then to map these intercultural situations, in order to understand what types of demands they imply.

To conceptualise *interculturality*, we departed from the assumption that *intercultural* interactions are not essentially different from *intra-cultural* interactions; in fact they are the two end points of the same continuum varying along the cultural distance of the interaction participants. However, cultural differences can play out in intercultural interaction in two ways: directly through the manifestation of existing differences, and indirectly mediated by the dynamics of social identity. The ultimate interplay of direct and indirect effects determines the subjective experience of interculturality in the interaction.

A total of 135 professionals participated, coming from the three different sectors (business, NGO, public) and also the field of vocational education and training. They took part in an interview consisting of three components: their exposure to cultural diversity within their professional life, their representations of cultural diversity and intercultural competences and finally their concrete lived experiences relating to working in diversity. See interview guide in annex.

Our results revealed that at the heart of intercultural situations there is a triple negotiation process: the negotiation of the meaning, the negotiation of the process of interaction and the negotiation of identity. While these processes take place in all interaction situations, the cultural distance imposes a double challenge: the differences in the initial positions and practices are more accentuated and social

identity dynamics can lead to the reification of the initial differences and to closure towards each other. As a result, we identified four areas of competences that allow these negotiations, and alleviates the rigidity brought by identity threats: emotion management at the affective level, resistance to cognitive closure at the cognitive level, flexibility of the interaction repertoire at the behavioural level and the capacity of identity negotiation or dialogicality at the intersections of the three levels of psychological functioning.

Table 19 Dimensions of intercultural competences

Critical areas	Competence definition
A- affective level	
Emotion management	
EMOTIONS (discomfort, confusion, loneliness, stress, frustration, fear etc)	Capacity to cope with / handle the consequences of negative emotions arising of misunderstandings, conflicts and uncertainty inherent in intercultural encounters. This implies the capacity to avoid action on the impulse of emotion, and not the capacity to suppress the expression of emotion.
B – behavioural level	
Negotiation of the interaction process	
INTERACTION – relatedness (comm. efficiency, Comm. Style, Body language, Creating new relations)	Capacity to adjust to others and negotiate a common communication procedure in a situation where there are differences in participants’ communication styles, cooperation practices and politeness codes.
C – cognitive level	
Resistance to closure - Negotiation of common meaning	
COGNITION (making sense, Dissonance, Stereotypes)	Definition: capacity to negotiate common meanings and shared knowledge between the participants, which implies the capacity to be open in a situation where the usual frames of reference are missing, and the capacity to resist the need for closure.
D. – Self and identity	
Identity negotiation	
IDENTITY (threats to collective, personal id, self doubt;)	Definition: capacity of the self to change between different positions of the self system in order to satisfy different identity principles such as self-esteem, optimal distinction, meaning, continuity, relatedness.

Annex

Need for Closure Scale

"Attitude, Belief and Experience Survey"

Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your beliefs and experiences. Please respond according to the following scale.

1 strongly disagree	
4 slightly agree	
2 moderately disagree	5 moderately agree
3 slightly disagree	6 strongly agree

01. I think that having clear rules and order at work is essential for success.
02. Even after I've made up my mind about something, I am always eager to consider a different opinion.
03. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
04. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
05. I like to have friends who are unpredictable.
06. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
07. I enjoy the uncertainty of going into a new situation without knowing what might happen.
08. When dining out, I like to go to places where I have been before so that I know what to expect.
09. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
10. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
11. I hate to change my plans at the last minute.
12. I would describe myself as indecisive.
13. When I go shopping, I have difficulty deciding exactly what it is I want.

14. When faced with a problem I usually see the one best solution very quickly.
15. When I am confused about an important issue, I feel very upset.
16. I tend to put off making important decisions until the last possible moment.
17. I usually make important decisions quickly and confidently.
18. I have never been late for an appointment or work.
19. I think it is fun to change my plans at the last moment.
20. My personal space is usually messy and disorganized.
21. In most social conflicts, I can easily see which side is right and which is wrong.
22. I have never known someone I did not like.
23. I tend to struggle with most decisions.
24. I believe orderliness and organization are among the most important characteristics of a good student.
25. When considering most conflict situations, I can usually see how both sides could be right.
26. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.
27. I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them.
28. I think that I would learn best in a class that lacks clearly stated objectives and requirements.
29. When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible.
30. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
31. I like to know what people are thinking all the time.
32. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.
33. It's annoying to listen to someone who cannot seem to make up his or her mind.
34. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.
35. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.
36. I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different

from my own.

37. I like to have a plan for everything and a place for everything.
38. I feel uncomfortable when someone's meaning or intention is unclear to me.
39. I believe that one should never engage in leisure activities.
40. When trying to solve a problem I often see so many possible options that it's confusing.
41. I always see many possible solutions to problems I face.
42. I'd rather know bad news than stay in a state of uncertainty.
43. I feel that there is no such thing as an honest mistake.
44. I do not usually consult many different options before forming my own view.
45. I dislike unpredictable situations.
46. I have never hurt another person's feelings.
47. I dislike the routine aspects of my work (studies).

Scoring the Need for Closure Scale

1. Reverse items:
2-5-7-12-13-16-19-20-23-25-28-29-36-40-41-47.
2. Sum the following items to form a lie score:
18-22-39-43-46.
3. Remove the subject if the lie score is greater than 15.
4. Sum all the items except for the above listed lie items to form the need for closure scale.
5. Use the top and bottom 25 percentiles to determine high and low need for closure subjects.
6. If factors are required, use the following scoring system.

Order: 1-6-11-20-24-28-34-35-37-47.
Predictability: 5-7-8-19-26-27-30-45.
Decisiveness: 12-13-14-16-17-23-40.
Ambiguity: 3-9-15-21-31-32-33-38-42.
Closed Mindedness: 2-4-10-25-29-36-41-44.

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