



## Intercultural Competence

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### What is it?

Intercultural competence refers to effective and appropriate behaviour in interactions with persons from other cultures. Also sometimes known as intercultural communication competence, this concept is associated with qualities such as ability to empathise, ability to listen actively, positive attitude towards people from other cultures, motivation to interact with people from other cultures, flexibility, and willingness to learn from new experiences.

### Who uses the concept?

Because of its relevance in a wide range of contexts, intercultural competence is of interest to researchers in a variety of academic disciplines such as communication, cross-cultural psychology, linguistics, education, and business. In terms of practice, again intercultural competence is of interest to a variety of people such as diplomats, teachers, business persons, trainers, service-providers, and policy-makers. A significant amount of theory development on this topic, however, is situated in the field of intercultural communication.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Intercultural competence is intimately related to intercultural dialogue because the success of the later often depends on the level of intercultural competence of the persons involved. Regardless of the specific outcome of the dialogue, competent intercultural communicators arguably benefit from the process of dialogue itself because of their ability to learn from the experience and to empathise with the other's point of view.

### What work remains?

Researchers have studied intercultural competence from a variety of angles, using quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, with increased global diversity, the nature of cultural identity is changing. Thus what we once understood as "another" culture is no longer as clear as before. In other words, people's cultural identity is becoming more complex and nuanced. As such, our understanding of intercultural communication needs to be refined and our understanding of intercultural competence as effective and appropriate behaviour in interactions with people from "other" cultures must be nuanced. Additionally, research on intercultural competence from multiple cultural perspectives would enrich our understanding of this concept.

### Resources

- Arasaratnam, L. A., & Doerfel, M. L. (2005). Intercultural communication competence: Identifying key components from multicultural perspectives. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 137-163.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2009). *The Sage handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 13(3), 1989 - special issue on intercultural communication competence.
- Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2012). *Intercultural competence* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.