REVISITING HOFSTEDE AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS: SOME INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

This research addressed two questions: (1) Are black and white students rather more different or similar concerning Hofstede's cultural dimensions?; and (2) How should culture differences be accommodated during communication? A questionnaire was administrated among a sample of 1374 respondents, 50% black and 50% white students, from three different universities. The findings provided a glimpse of the "cultural software of the mind" of students who will be employees in different organisations in the near future. The findings indicate that there are more similarities than differences concerning the cultural dimensions, irrespective of biographical, racial or ethnic differences. The vast majority (83%) agreed that some form of accommodation should take place. Sixty three different suggestions have been mentioned by all respondents. It is noteworthy that the three with the highest frequency are the same for both groups: knowledge of the other culture, respect for them and the use of English as code for communication. This indicates and proves to a certain extent that, despite the existence of certain differences, these respondents are not only rather similar concerning the cultural dimensions alone, but also in their suggestions on how to accommodate cultural differences during their communication with people from another culture.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Geert Hofstede's IBM research (1987; 2001) conducted more than 20 years ago the "software of the mind" in people from different countries is divergent, especially with regard to five dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, and – more recently – long-term orientation. These differences distinguish people from different countries but also certain groups of people within a country from others, the so called sub-cultures. Amongst all the many definitions, Hofstede (1987: 21) defines culture as the "interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment". He collected data from 53 countries during his first survey in 1967 and from 71 countries during the second survey done in 1971-1973 (Hofstede 2001: 43-46).

With regard to South Africa, Hofstede (2001: 189) involved only white South African employees of IBM (an organisational context) in his research and thus created the perception that all South Africans have the same cultural "software of the mind". Even recent textbooks on intercultural communication uncritically use Hofstede's index and South Africa's ratings against other countries (Lustig & Koester 2003: 110-138; Jandt 2007: 157-182; Neuliep 2006: 65-92; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2007: 198-207). The ratings concerning South Africa can be questioned on the basis of the generalisation, which implicate all South Africans are the same in spite of the non-representativeness of the respondents used and also the lack of currency, as this was done more than twenty years ago.

As opposed to Hofstede's broad generalisation, South Africa is often referred to as the Rainbow Nation, a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and later adopted by former president Nelson Mandela. This metaphor describes the country's diverse multicultural range. It is a country with four broad racial groupings, eleven official languages and growing communities of migrants and immigrants.

Some researchers (cf. Asante, Miike & Yin 2008: 195 & 206; Van der Walt 1997; Van der Walt 2007: 140-149; Groenewald 1996: 13-23) also confirm the cultural differences among Afrocentric people who originated from Africa and those who originated from Europe with their more Eurocentric cultures. Subsequently, questions regarding the nature of differences and/or similarities between South Africans emerge.

These include the issue whether communication should focus on the accommodation of possible cultural differences (and possibly perpetuate likely stereotypes) or rather on similarities to enhance the preferred unity within the Rainbow Nation.

In the post-apartheid era and also as a result of affirmative action and immigration, people of diverse backgrounds and different languages or sub-cultures are working side by side in most organisations, finding themselves involved in communication across, between and among different cultures. Business or organisational communication is thus for a large part intercultural communication. As Beamer and Varner (2001: xiii) articulate it in their introduction to pinpoint the need for intercultural business communication competence: "In order to understand the significance of a message from someone, you need to understand the way that person looks at the world, and the

values that weigh heavily in that person's cultural backpack." This cultural backpack relates to the dimensions of the so called "software of the mind" (cf. Gudykunst & Kim 1992: 5). This research endeavours to offer more recent information/data for people in positions where they have to manage employees from different cultures. It could also empower them to come to terms with the cultural diversity within organisations (cf. Varner & Beamer 2005: 76). Therefore, the respondents used in this research were chosen because they could be employed in different organisations within the next two to four years.

Furthermore, improving organisational coherence and intercultural business communication seems an important reason for the interest in intercultural knowledge. As such, several commercial South African books try to explain the differences between traditional African cultures and so called Western cultures in business (Boon 1996; Lessem 1996; Mbigi & Maree 1995). Against this reality, where it is not clear if the Rainbow Nation is rather "brothers and sisters under their skin" or really "birds of a different feather", the research presented in this article revolves around two overarching questions:

1) Can the two most extreme racial *groups* within the so called Rainbow Nation (i.e. the *black* and *white* students/peoples) be perceived as rather more different or more or less similar concerning the cultural dimensions?; and

2) Should communication behaviour accommodate differences or rather focus on similarities?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
Following a pilot study, a final questionnaire was administered among undergraduate students of five different campuses in three provinces during 2008: The University of the Free State's main campus; the North-West University's Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vanderbijl Park campuses; and the University of Johannesburg's Auckland Park Kingsway campus. The respondents were asked to complete a five-point Lickert scale questionnaire where they had to indicate whether they strongly agreed (1), agreed (2), were unsure (3), didn't agree (4) or strongly disagreed (5) with statements that were retrieved and adapted from Neuliep's (2006: 79) questionnaire (cf. Hofstede 2001: 467-474). As Hofstede warned that an exact replication is not possible for many reasons, this study does not endeavour to replicate the Hofstede research. Although general tendencies will be mentioned, this research does not endeavour in the first place to present a general classification or common trend of the two cultural groups concerning the five cultural dimensions. Rather, certain individual factors or values of each dimension will be the focus (cf. Hofstede 2001: 1-36; Bearden, Money & Nevins 2006: 195-203).

Eight (8) biographical questions were asked; twenty five (25) statements were phrased, with five each related to the five cultural dimensions; and two (2) questions (one open-ended) related to the accommodation of people from another cultural while communicating to them.

The statements were phrased alternatively in a positive and negative way within an organisational context as this was anticipated to be the context where much of the

intercultural communication takes place. After working hours most people will be at home where they normally communicate in their mother tongue with family members of the same culture. It was assumed that this convenient sample of students (n = 1374) would provide a glimpse of the "cultural software of the mind" of future employees in different organisations.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS release 16.0.1 and SAS 9.1.3. A comparison of means was performed using independent t-tests with a significance level of 0.05. Standard errors of the mean were supplied to ensure that the t-tests are reproducible. Small standard errors are also an indication that this sample is likely to be an accurate reflection of the population. This supports any inferences which might be made concerning the population (Field 2005: 17). Levene's test (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim & Wasserman 1996: 112), with a significance level of 0.05, was used to analyse the sample variances of different groups before drawing conclusions from the t-tests. Comparisons of the mode score of different groups were also used to highlight possible differences between groups.

Biographical data

Of the 1374 respondents, 50% were white and 50% black. Of these, 28% were male and 72% female. According to the languages they indicated as their mother tongue, the distribution was as follows: Afrikaans: 41%; Sesotho and Sepedi: 19%; Setswana: 16%; isiZulu: 9%; English: 7%; isiXhosa: 5%; Siswati: 1%; Xitsonga: 1%; and Tshivenda 1%.

Of all respondents, 8% grew up in a rural area, 44% in a semi-rural/urban area and 48% in an urban area. Fifteen percent (15%) consider their family as traditional; 68% as somewhere in between and 17% as modern or non-traditional. Eleven percent (11%) perceive their family to be poor, 78% to be average and 11% to be rich.

The main distinguishing characteristics of the average respondent in this group can thus be described as either black or white (with an equal probability) with a female majority between the age of 19 and 25. Most grew up in a semi-rural or urban area and perceive their upbringing as somewhere between traditional and modern with an average income. The female majority is in line with the current policy of the ANC to get more women appointed in Government as well as all other sectors.

FINDINGS

The findings concerning the cultural dimensions will be discussed and summarised first, followed by the analysis of the answers to the open-ended question, namely *How should one accommodate different cultures during your communication?* This will be followed by a reflection and, to conclude, a summary and synthesis, hopefully to evoke further debate on the complex and dynamic issue of cultural dimensions and intercultural communication.

Cultural dimensions

Masculinity versus femininity
On the one hand, this dimension refers to cultures' maximal or minimal distinction between what men and women are expected to do, and, on the other hand, to the broad tendency of both women and men of certain cultures to value strength, assertiveness, competitiveness and ambition (masculine) rather than attributes such as affection, emotionality, quality of life and compassion (feminine) (Lustig & Koester 2003: 127; Samovar *et al.* 2007: 273; Hofstede 1987; Jandt 2007: 171).

As a group, the respondents agreed that there should not be much difference between the work performed by women and men in the workplace. They preferred a job which leaves enough personal time to have quality of life and good relationships rather than one with a high income and material success. The respondents further agreed that managers should be more concerned with the quality of life of their employees. Although the mode score indicated that the majority agreed that competition among employees does more good than harm, the mean score (3.48, standard error = 0.0306) indicated that they were unsure about the value of competition in the workplace.

The mean and the mode scores indicated a stronger tendency toward a feminine dimension in both groups: blacks: 1.97 (standard error = 0.035) and whites: 1.99 (standard error = 0.03). This tendency may be slightly biased due to the 72% female respondents. Although the female respondents showed a slightly greater tendency towards the feminine dimension (mean = 1.9, standard error = 0.025) than men (mean = 2.3, standard error = 0.049, with a significant difference: a p-value of less than 0.01), both men and women indicated a tendency towards a feminine dimension. While the whites just *agreed* with all statements, the blacks all *strongly agreed* and therefore the black respondents indicated a slightly less pronounced feminine tendency. As mentioned above, this research was not a replication of the research done by Hofstede. Comparisons can therefore only be made tentatively. However, it is interesting to take note that the above finding regarding the future employees differs significantly from Hofstede's findings, which placed South Africa as the 13th most masculine amongst 53 countries (Hofstede 2001: 286).

Uncertainty avoidance
This dimension deals with the extent or degree to which people try to avoid uncertainty or feel threatened by unknown situations. Normally this would create nervous stress and would be avoided by maintaining strict codes or formal rules of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths. Members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures are aggressive, emotional, compulsive and intolerant, while members of cultures that are tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity have lower stress levels, are contemplative, accept dissent and are more willing to take risks (Jandt 2007: 175; Gudykunst & Kim 2003: 74; Neuliep 2006: 82-84).

There was no significant difference between the racial and language groups among the respondents regarding the concept of uncertainty avoidance. The mean score of 3.49

(standard error = 0.0185) showed moderate uncertainty avoidance, although the majority agreed that they felt nervous when they are uncertain what is expected of them when working in a group, and were not comfortable when they were unable to interpret a situation. That 52% agreed that rules should not be broken even if it would be in the best interest of the company serves as an indication of a slightly higher than moderate uncertainty avoidance regarding this aspect.

Although the general tendency leans towards a rather moderate to high uncertainty avoidance, the different scores indicate a variety with regard to uncertainty avoidance amongst these students, with the black students slightly higher (mean = 3.63, standard error = 0.025) than the white students (mean = 3.35, standard error = 0.025). The difference was significant with a p-value of less than 0.01. Thus, although the order of the difference is not that high (only 0.28 difference), the white students are more tolerant of uncertainty or ambiguity. Although the majority agreed that they would prefer a manager who would rather give broad guidelines than detailed descriptions with regard to how to do their job, the majority of white students with a traditional upbringing did not agree with this notion, preferring detailed instructions.

In Hofstede's study, South Africa scored on the lower part of the scale pointing to a moderate to low level of uncertainty avoidance (39/40th lowest of 53 countries; Hofstede 2001: 151). However, the results indicate a slightly higher than moderate avoidance of uncertainty.

Power distance

Power distance refers to the way members of a culture deals with inequalities. Hofstede (1987) believes power distance is learned early in families. Cultures with high power distance accept power as a basic necessity and stress coercive or referent power with respect for authorities while members of low power distance cultures prefer expert or legitimate power and believe power should only be used in exceptional instances and would rather use fewer levels of hierarchies within organisations (Gudykunst & Kim 1992: 46; Jandt 2007: 172; Samovar *et al.* 2007: 271-273).

The results indicate a preference towards an average to low power distance, with white respondents indicating a slightly higher power distance (black mean = 2.36, standard error = 0.023 and white mean = 2.72, standard error = 0.023). The difference is significant, though, with a p-value of less than 0.01. The majority of respondents disagreed that people in higher management levels deserve more respect than their subordinates, while they agreed that they would easily ask for a salary increase if necessary and would express their disagreement with managers in higher positions.

One difference, however, is that 50% of black students would not accept decisions made by higher management if they disagreed, while 45% of white students would accept such decisions. Most students were unsure whether it is acceptable for an organisation to have many management levels and hierarchies to function properly which indicates a moderate power distance. It is also possible that their lack of working experience could be the reason for their uncertainty.

According to Hofstede's findings (Hofstede 2001: 87), South Africa scored more or less in the middle regarding this dimension and could thus be regarded as a country with a moderate power distance. Hofstede's ranking is to a certain extent similar to what was found in this study, although the respondents – especially black students – would prefer a smaller power distance.

Individualism versus collectivism

Individualism refers to cultural values that emphasise the individual's identity, rights and needs over the collective identity, rights and needs of the larger group. The former appreciates the "I-identity" while the latter emphasises the "we-identity" (Orbe & Harris 2008: 205-208; Gudykunst & Kim 2003: 73). It is noteworthy to mention that, according to Van der Walt (1997) and Groenewald (1996), African cultures are stereotyped as collectivistic and people originating from Europe as individualistic.

According to the mean and mode scores of the students, both groups showed more collectivistic than individualistic tendencies with the white students (mean = 2.7, standard error = 0.025) slightly less collectivistic than the black students (mean = 2.47, standard error = 0.029). The majority of students in both groups disagreed that decisions made by individuals are usually better than decisions made by groups. They agreed that they would usually take their own group and their family into consideration in decision-making even if they would not benefit from the decision. However, one difference between the two racial groups is that 50% of black students agreed that acknowledgement of success at work should be given to the team rather than to the one person who contributed mostly to the success, while 55% of whites didn't agree with this statement and would rather acknowledge the individual in this case.

According to Dodd (1991: 76) and Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000: 95) individualistic cultures can be characterised by a sense of personal guilt, while collectivistic cultures are known as shame cultures where it is more important not to lose face. In contrast to the other rather collectivistic responses, 87% of all students strongly disagreed with the statement "*There is no harm in cheating society as long as people do not find you out*".

The general findings (that these young respondents indicated more collectivistic than individualistic tendencies with the white students slightly less collectivistic) also differ from Hofstede's results, which considered South Africa as a rather individualistic country – in fact, as the 16th most individualistic amongst 53 countries (Hofstede 2001: 215).

Long-term orientation

This dimension was not included in Hofstede's initial research, but he has acknowledged that the four previously described dimensions have a Western bias. The time-orientation dimension is based on the work of a Canadian, M. H. Bond, who has lived in Asia, and is related to the Confucian work dynamism (Hofstede 2001: 356; Jandt 2007: 176; Lustig & Koester 2003: 130). This dimension refers to one's point of reference about life and work. Cultures that nurture a long-term orientation admire

thrift, persistence, "savings, perseverance toward results and willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose" (Jandt 2007: 176). Conversely, a short-term orientation tends to have an appreciation of tradition, personal stability, less savings and maintaining the "face" of self and others.

All respondents agreed that they should cultivate the habit of saving money and use resources sparingly, while perseverance in spite of difficulties was considered as very important. The only difference found was that blacks (mean = 2.39, standard error = 0.05) would rather focus on doing well every day than spend time to plan for the future, while whites (mean = 3.09, standard error = 0.042) disagreed with this view. The big difference is not only confirmed by a p-value of less than 0.01, but is also statistically confirmed when comparing the modes, with the majority of black students strongly agreeing with the statement, while the majority of white students did not agree. Both groups were also unsure about whether what could happen in the future is more important than what has happened in an organisation's past.

Thus, both groups' responses leaned towards a long-term orientation while the black students' responses suggested a tendency towards a more medium-term orientation, as noted above.

Hofstede has no score or rating for South Africa where long versus short-term orientation is concerned, as this dimension was not part of the original research. He mentions, though, that "Africa, and particularly Africa south of the Sahara is a development economist's headache" and predicts that the administration of a possible questionnaire would "see whether any new dimension emerges that might explain why Western recipes for development don't seem to work in Africa" (Hofstede 2001: 369).

SUGGESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Masculinity versus femininity

Although female respondents showed a slightly greater tendency towards the feminine dimension than men, and black respondents indicated a slightly less pronounced feminine tendency, both men and women indicated a tendency towards femininity.

Therefore managers should be more concerned with the quality of life of their employees as they prefer a job which leaves enough personal time to have quality of life and good relationships rather than one with a high income and material success. Employers should be cautious not to initiate competition between different groups as this can create more tension than motivation for improvement. It seems that a people-oriented rather than a task-oriented manager will be more acceptable for future employees.

Uncertainty avoidance

The results showed a slightly higher than moderate uncertainty avoidance as the majority agreed that they felt nervous when they are uncertain what is expected of them when working in a group, and were not comfortable when they were unable to interpret

a situation. Managers should wisely give clear instructions using regular communication opportunities with open channels when innovative undertakings or new tasks should be completed, especially when it includes group activities. Especially black employees as well as whites with a traditional upbringing are less tolerant of uncertainty or ambiguity, preferring detailed instructions. Otherwise, when it comes to individual tasks, the average employee will prefer broad and clear guidelines rather than detailed descriptions with regard to how to do their job.

Power distance

The average employee prefers an average to low power distance, with whites indicating a slightly better tolerance for a higher power distance. Managers should take note that employees will easily ask for a salary increase if necessary and will express their disagreement with them. The employee of the future seems to be more assertive and expects the same respect for all workers even if they are subordinates. Compared to their black colleagues, white employees will more readily accept decisions with which they do not agree. Thus, consultation and consensus seeking should be used, and, if necessary, expert or legitimate power should be utilised during persuasion.

Individualism versus collectivism

As both groups showed more collectivistic than individualistic tendencies, with the white students slightly less collectivistic than the black students, managers should realise that most employees will usually take the group and/or their family into consideration in decision-making. Decisions based on individual basis should be the exception and not the rule. One difference between the two racial groups, though, would imply that acknowledgement of success at work should be given to the team when black employees are involved while the individual who contributed mostly to the success should be acknowledged when white employees are involved. This leaves the manager with a dilemma when both races are involved in a successful project.

Long-term orientation

Both groups' responses lean towards a rather long-term orientation while the black students' responses suggest a tendency towards a more medium-term orientation. During strategic planning managers should take this tendency into consideration. After plans for the future have been decided on, these strategic plans, as well as the long-term vision and mission of the organisation should be communicated to employees to enable them to "see" their day to day work as an essential part of the bigger picture. It is encouraging for managers on all levels that all respondents agree that they should cultivate the habit of saving money and use resources sparingly, while perseverance in spite of difficulties is considered as very important.

GENERAL REFLECTION

If one takes the responses of the students into consideration, there are more significant similarities than differences regarding the cultural dimensions, irrespective of biographical, racial or ethnic differences. Contrary to the diversity within the country

and the anticipated differences, as stated above, this is in line with a report released in 2008 by the Presidency's Policy Coordination and Advisory Services: *A nation in the making: A discussion document on macro social trends in South Africa*. The report mentioned that since the end of Apartheid there has been a growing sense of nationhood in this race-conscious country, with a large number of divergent people seeing themselves as primarily South African and not as members of specific racial or ethnic groups.

Except for the dimension of power distance, this study suggests that this younger sample of the Rainbow Nation is different in respect of the other mentioned dimensions from Hofstede's generalised ranking of "South Africa". Hofstede's dimensions are based on the idea that the different groups in South Africa are homogenous and do not change over time. Quite often, these dimensions are used uncritically despite the fact that they were developed as early as 1980 (Jensen 2008: 3). Individual cultural values or dimensions are a much more complicated, multidimensional concept than one-dimensional measures of general national cultural values.

Another deduction from the results indicates that the general assumption and statements regarding the "significant" differences between the so called Afrocentric and Eurocentric cultures (Asante *et al*. 2008: 195 & 206; Van der Walt 1997; Van der Walt 2007: 140-149; Groenewald 1996: 13-23) as far as the youth is concerned, are not that significant. On the contrary, it proved to be rather more similar.

The highly negative response from all the students to the statement regarding cheating or betraying society is, however, encouraging in a country where cheating, fraud, bribery and corruption is part of everyday life. For example, Max du Preez (2009: 5) states that corruption has become systemic and an integral part of the South African culture. The issue is: Will these students actually put their money where their mouths are? Only future conduct will tell. As the saying goes: It is easier said than done. This also relates to a question in an editorial article in *Beeld* (Anon. 2009: 12): "Regte geluide, maar dade sal deurslag gee" (Right sounds, but the deeds would be conclusive proof).

Despite the similarities that were found between the two racial groups in this study, intercultural communication will not be without stumbling blocks or prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism. The differences in appearance and background of these two racial groups, or appearance heterophily (Dodd 1994: 178-182), unfortunately often play a more significant role than the dimensional homophily between racial and ethnic groups. Although it seems that acculturation has taken place to a certain extent between black and white students, the imagined and/or real experiences of the Apartheid past, certain applications of affirmative action, fraud and crime (which is mostly perceived as racially motivated) and the lack of service delivery, to name a few, create fear within the white minority groups that the black majority will do unto them what their white forefathers did during the Apartheid era.

Such differences regarding the "positions of experiences", a concept in the post structural model of Iben Jensen (2008), come into play here and should be addressed in intercultural communication within organisations. It is not possible to ignore communicators' daily experiences in the context of intercultural communication. According to Jensen, minorities often struggle to establish a position separate from the majorities in the media as well as in everyday life, which can be a crucial stumbling block in intercultural communication and overshadow the dimensional similarities.

Therefore, the perpetuation of stereotypes and possible differences accompanied by the well-meant accommodation thereof in communication might confirm the social inequalities of the past in South Africa as a country in transition trying to construct a new identity of one nation in the post-Apartheid era.

Thus, the critical debate should be concerned with whether and how these similarities and perceived or real differences should decide the content and manner of intercultural communication.

COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION
The last section of the questionnaire focused on the issue of whether one should accommodate your fellow communicator's culture. It concluded with the open-ended question: *If agreed, how should it be done?*

The vast majority of students (83%) strongly agreed that some form of accommodation should take place. There was a high measure of consensus between the frequencies of responses from white (n = 1072) and black (n = 1039) students with regard to the open-ended question to give suggestions as to how one should accommodate someone from another culture during communication. The responses were coded by assigning the same code number to more or less similar suggestions and by grouping similar suggestions together. Sixty three different but related suggestions were coded. Only the eight with the highest frequency are mentioned in this article.

The three responses with the highest frequency were the same for all students. *To know or learn more about the other's culture* received the highest response rate (96.4% of all respondents). Many added that one should adjust accordingly. This response is in line with Berger and Calabrese's uncertainty reduction theory (Jandt 2007: 72; cf. Rogers 1999) where the communicator feels insecure or anxious because little is known about the other culture. Correct and relevant knowledge will reduce the possible anxiety and indicate what to expect and how to behave.

The response with the second highest frequency (94.1%) focused on *respect for other cultures, even if one does not always agree.* Thus, knowledge is fine but not sufficient as respect for differences should be part of the communication behaviour. As Houston and Wood (1996: 54) state, a culture should respect how another culture interprets experiences.

The third most mentioned behaviour involved *the use of English as communication code* (67%). This seems to be very relevant for South Africa with its eleven official

languages. English, while being the language of business, politics and the media, and the country's *lingua franca*, ranked only joint fifth out of eleven as a home language. In spite of the fact that the use of English, which is a second and third language for most, can cause many misunderstandings during communication as the command of English varies from very good to very poor, most regard it as the preferred language code to communicate with someone from another culture.

The next priority, fourth for the speakers of African languages (38.2%), was *to be able to speak the mother tongue of your communication partner*. White students (12.1%) rated the priority of this suggestion lower (5th). The issue would be that one should make a choice about which language to use. Should it be the code of the person in the socially perceived subordinate position or the code of the perceived superior partner/manager?

The fourth most frequent response for the white students (13.1%) focused on *the specific use of the language code utilised*, namely to avoid jargon or slang, and to speak slower, articulate clearer and choose words carefully. According to the Bernstein (1966) hypothesis (cf. Dodd 1994: 134-136) one should thus adapt to the social context and use an elaborated code and not a restricted code (shorthand) when speaking. This should not be perceived as "speaking down" to a colleague, but as trying to accommodate the fact that their mother tongue is not used in the communication. This was the ninth most frequent response from the speakers of African languages (26.4%).

Fifth for blacks (35.3%) and sixth for whites (10.3%) is the endeavour *to know and accommodate the perspective, viewpoint or context of the other culture*, or, as some phrased it, "to know where they are coming from". This response relates to a certain extent to the first two recommendations above: knowledge and respect. To know the customs and more overt aspects of the culture are not enough. Their values, world view and religious beliefs also need to be understood. Apart from comprehending the more cognitive aspects of the other culture, more black students (1.1% while 0.1% for whites) also mentioned that one should empathise with the feelings/emotions of the other as part of accommodating another culture. The accommodation of the other's perspective relates directly to "cultural presuppositions", another one of the analytical tools of Jensen's model (2008: 8) mentioned earlier. It refers to knowledge, experiences, feelings and opinions the communicators have towards people they do not regard as members of their own community with which they identify themselves. This implies a "deeper" understanding of one's own prejudices to counter the normal process where people from another culture are often negatively characterised on the basis of one's own values.

Another response (7th for white students [9.5%] and 8th for black students [26.8%]) mentioned *the importance of feedback* in the sense that one should ask if you do not understand something or detect that you are not well understood. This response relates to the notion that one should listen even more carefully in intercultural interactions (7th for black [27.2%] and 10th for white students [7.5%]). If one listens carefully,

misunderstandings can more easily be detected and corrected by using feedback. Attentive listening also communicates respect and concern for your fellow colleague.

The next response involves *nonverbal communication*: 9.5% for whites (8th) and 22.5% for blacks (11th). Both groups mentioned that, on the one hand one should avoid nonverbal behaviour that could offend another culture – especially with regard to eye contact and personal space – and on the other hand, use "positive" nonverbal behaviour that will encourage the partner's involvement. Although the concept positive nonverbal behaviour was not articulated in detail in most answers, it would imply at least an open body stance or position and appropriate greeting (i.e. any nonverbal behaviour which would communicate attentiveness, openness and acceptance of the other person).

Although 63 different suggestions have been mentioned by all respondents, it is noteworthy that the three with the highest frequency are the same for both groups: knowledge of the other culture, respect for them and the use of English as code for communication. The frequency of the other responses differs slightly, but not significantly between the two groups. This indicates and proves to a certain extent that these respondents are not only more like "brothers and sisters under the differences of their skin" regarding the cultural dimensions alone, but also in their suggestions on how to accommodate cultural differences.

One difference worth mentioning, though, is that most black respondents can speak apart from English on average three to four other African languages. A few even speak eight of the official languages, while the Afrikaans and English mother tongue speakers mostly speak only these two languages, and, with a few exceptions, no African language. During Apartheid, language was to a certain extent used as an instrument of division and control. In the new democratic dispensation, however, language should become instrumental in the effort to unite its previously divided communities, at least within a diverse organisational context. To learn at least one African language, depending on the specific region/province, should be a priority for Afrikaans and English mother tongue speakers to improve intercultural communication especially within the workplace. This will enhance intercultural competence and demonstrate respect for one another.

It is positive to note that the majority of respondents phrased their suggestions in a "you-oriented" manner, in other words, with the intention to accommodate the other person, while only 3% were "I-oriented" expecting others to accommodate them.

CONCLUSION

As people, even from the same sub-culture, are unique, no prescribed formulas can be given regarding this complex issue. Only guidelines or suggestions have been and can be deducted from the above data. People in organisations concerned with communication could apply these above-mentioned suggestions within their specific context while taking the nature of the organisation into consideration. Alternatively, human resource managers can interpret the data from their point of view and experience to enhance intercultural competence. Communicators should search, articulate and

emphasise commonalities and similarities, since there are quite a number, as these findings indicate. Hopefully, that will draw people closer together. The tendency towards similarities rather than actual differences is indicative of the idea that a model of cultural synergy should be pursued.

Differences should be valued, and people should be encouraged not to ignore them but to respect and understand these differences. The dynamics that can arise from differences through interaction should be used to fill the gap between the possible cultural differences within the mentioned cultural dimensions. Maybe one criterion for intercultural competence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas or different cultural values, your own and those of the other, and still retain the ability to function while tolerating the differences. Although one should take the bigger picture and co-cultures into consideration, one should also never forget that every person is not necessarily typical of the stereotyped perceptions of a certain cultural group.

Both employers and employees should accept their individual role and collective responsibility and accept responsibility for their behaviour within a diverse working environment in striving for intercultural competence. All participants must be aware that they should be actively involved and play the role of both addresser/sender and addressee/receiver at the same time, a notion that demands a transactional alertness and commitment.

The sometimes unpredictable context of intercultural interaction requires the ability to adjust and fashion your communication behaviour to fit, ideally, the setting, the other person and yourself. The notion and freedom of trial and error should come into play rather than using strict formulas.

In conclusion, the small standard errors indicate that the sample used is likely to be an accurate reflection of the population used in this study (Field 2005: 17). This supports the findings concerning the youth of South Africa who will be employees within the next few years. The general responses create cautious optimism regarding intercultural communication in the future.

To get a more complete picture of the "software of the mind" across the whole spectrum of the Rainbow Nation – younger and older people – more research with other target populations needs to be undertaken. More complete cultural knowledge will enhance the ability to improve on intercultural communication competence in all spheres of life.

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