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Towards intercultural communication effectiveness (congruence) in Sino-African interactions: A theoretical perspective

ABSTRACT

Within the field of intercultural communication, the position of theorist is adopted, to re-think and reframe existing insights by creatively combining them in a more useful and holistic way, towards intercultural communication effectiveness (congruence). More specifically, this paper is premised on the view that intercultural communication awareness resulting from an understanding of communication cultures of those in interaction can enable development of appropriate strategies for enhancing intercultural communication effectiveness (ICE). Thus, with reference to the Sino-African cultural context, a synthesis of literature on culture and communication in Western, African, and Chinese cultures on the basis of a conceptual framework for intercultural communication effectiveness is conducted. The result is a framework reflecting potential synergies and differences in communication culture and patterns, while also suggesting low culture distance between African and Chinese culture. A higher culture distance is reported when African and Chinese cultures are compared to Western cultures. Patterns of similarity and difference in African and Chinese communication culture are also presented. This paper contributes to the limited knowledge of intercultural communication in Sino-African interactions by providing insights into African communication culture and comparing three cultures (Chinese, African, and Western).[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The global outlook of business demands that managers learn to function effectively in other cultures (Dean & Popp, 1990; Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman, 1978). For instance, in a foreign environment, "Knowing how to listen, how to interrupt, how to praise, and how to scold, are more important to a foreign manager than learning the language" (Berger, 1987 as cited in Dean & Popp, 1990:405). The same principles apply to organisational incumbents in the host country as they strive to interact in a way that both effectively meets their goals and accommodates their societal norms.

In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of Chinese organisations presents a melting pot of culturally diverse personnel, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Inclusive of the intercultural communication barriers and challenges faced, are ethnocentrism (Okech, Pimpleton, Vannatta & Champe, 2015:271), stereotyping, prejudice, language differences, ambiguity, and non-verbal misinterpretations (Washington, 2013; Beebe, Beebe & Redmond, 2011; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Phatak, Bhagat & Kashlak, 2005) and so on. In addition, cultural values as well as contexts which may influence how people perceive and interpret situations present further challenges to ICE (Okech et al., 2015:271). Tellingly, while the expectation in intercultural communication is maximum understanding among the interactants (Neuliep, 2012), experience has taught that misunderstandings often arise as a result of differing expectations.

Furthermore, in the midst of the challenges experienced, there is little existing research pertaining to the management of Chinese organisations in Africa in general and to intercultural communication in the organisation in particular (Jackson, Louw & Zhao, 2011). Where intercultural communication theory research exists it is said to be mostly influenced by the West, comprising "… borrowed concepts, theories, methodologies and models … open to racial exploitation" (Tomaselli, 1999:153). In particular, Tomaselli (1999) notes the misinterpretation of Hall's 1978 model of high and low context cultures manipulated into a matrix of race and cultural classification citing Groenewald et al., 1988. The current paper, however, does not enter into any racial classification where in its context the definition is all encompassing, referring to one who has been a psychological member (Shuter, 2012) of African society. Regardless of their race, they have to have been born and socialised in an African country south of the Sahara.

It is conceivable that despite an abundance of theories that could serve as prescriptive guidelines for effective intercultural communication, the continuing challenges in intercultural interactions point to their possible inadequacy due to various reasons including inappropriateness, misinterpretation and misapplication. This state of affairs necessitates tailored research aimed at understanding intercultural communication in the Sino-African context that is informed by African and Chinese perspectives. In this way, mono-cultural, potentially ethnocentric standards are avoided. This view aligns with that of Bell & Metz (2011) who in their highly informative piece comparing African and Chinese traditions argue for inclusion of other cultures rather than relying solely on Western-centric practices in trying to determine a universal set of values that appeals to all people. In view of this line of thought, Chigwendere (2016) proposes a multi-view approach to conceptualising

and understanding ICE. This approach takes into consideration the communication cultures of all parties involved in interaction.

The objective of this study is to apply the multi-view approach in synthesising literature aimed at building profiles of Western, African and Chinese communication cultures. In so doing, synergies and differences in communication culture as well as emerging communication patterns are identified. In spite of this generalist approach the authors are in full acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of Western, African and Chinese cultures. Particularly, it is not the intention to stereotype African and Chinese people; rather, without essentialising cultures and glossing over the heterogeneity and diversity that reside within them (Martin & Nakayama, 2010:91), the view presented in this paper is that distinctive fundamental values, norms and mores which transcend ethnic boundaries continue to be shared across Africa (Narh, 2013; Asante, 1987; Maomeka, 1989). As such, it is plausible to speak of "an African culture". Similarly, in Chinese culture, common themes – particularly Confucianism (Gan, 2014; Salo-Lee, 2006; Chen & Chung, 1994; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Hofstede & Bond 1988; Yum, 1988) legitimise the existence of "a Chinese culture" despite the multiple ethnicities of China's population. The authors further acknowledge the challenges of basing cultural understanding on perhaps inadequately interrogated philosophies such as Ubuntu, which may be open to racial interpretation (Tomaselli, 2016a) and external influences that may have in instances reshaped African values (Fourie, 2008). Such a debate is however is beyond the scope of this paper.

Needless to say while the approach adopted in this paper is more generalist, it presents broad insights upon which more focused research can be conducted in future studies. Thus in this paper, a theoretical framework depicting communication in the different cultures results. The theoretical framework enhances intercultural awareness and points to synergies and differences in African and Chinese communication culture and patterns. It is these synergies and differences that, with appropriate intervention strategies, can either be optimised or reconciled towards ICE. On the whole, this paper validates the multi-view approach by successfully developing a comparative understanding of communication in African and Chinese cultures. In so doing, it contributes to the limited knowledge of intercultural communication in Sino-African interaction through building on the work of others before us for example, (Tomaselli 2016a, 2016b, 1999; Metz, 2015a; Bell & Metz, 2011; Fourie, 2008; Blankenberg, 1999) providing insights into African communication culture and comparing three cultures.

The multi-view approach is discussed in the next section.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICA-TION EFFECTIVENESS: THE MULTI-VIEW APPROACH

According to Chigwendere (2016), a multi-view approach is one where interactants seek a reciprocal understanding of communication effectiveness within and across cultures. The multi-view approach is depicted in Figure 1.
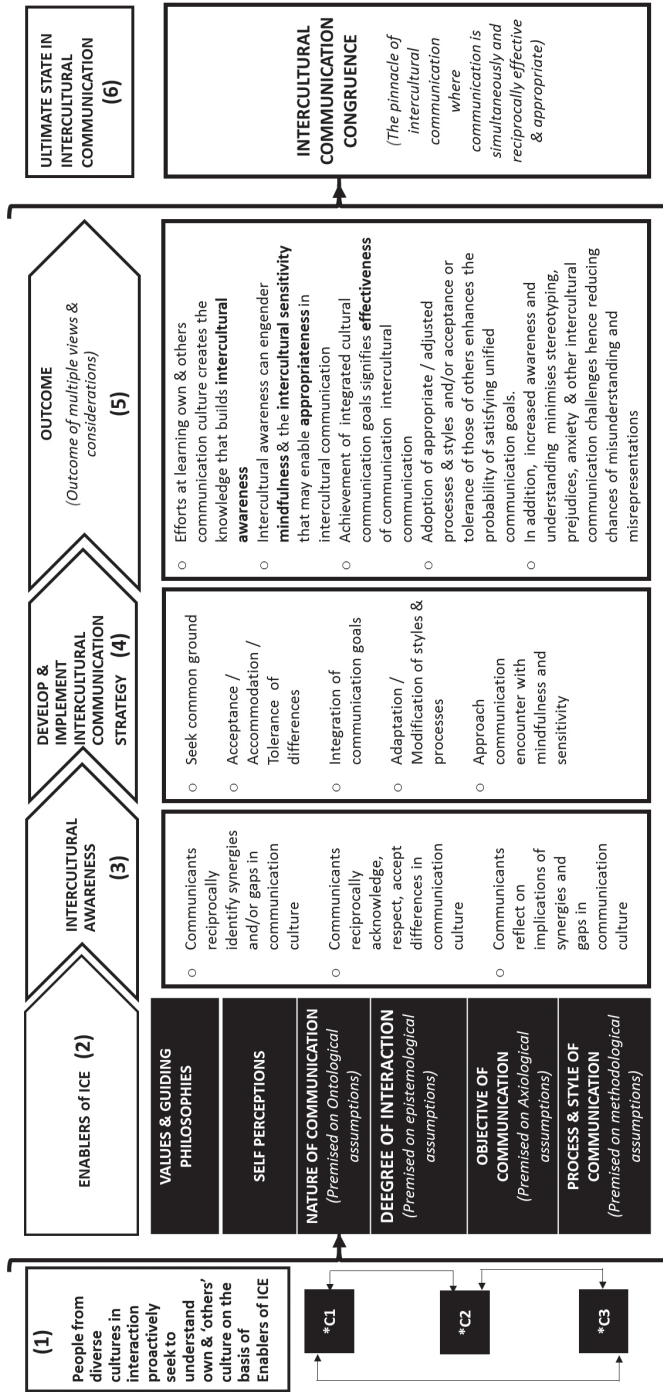
(1)

People from diverse cultures in interaction proactively seek to understand own & 'others' culture on the basis of Enablers of ICE

ENABLERS of ICE (2)

VALUES & GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES

SELF PERCEPTIONS

NATURE OF COMMUNICATION *(Premised on Ontological assumptions)*

DEEGREE OF INTERACTION *(Premised on epistemological assumptions)*

OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION *(Premised on Axiological assumptions)*

PROCESS & STYLE OF COMMUNICATION *(Premised on methodological assumptions)*

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS (3)

○ Communicants reciprocally identify synergies and/or gaps in communication culture

○ Communicants reciprocally acknowledge, respect, accept differences in communication culture

○ Communicants reflect on implications of synergies and gaps in communication culture

DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY (4)

○ Seek common ground

○ Acceptance / Accommodation / Tolerance of differences

○ Integration of communication goals

○ Adaptation / Modification of styles & processes

○ Approach communication encounter with mindfulness and sensitivity

OUTCOME
(Outcome of multiple views & considerations)
(5)

○ Efforts at learning own & others communication culture creates the knowledge that builds **intercultural awareness**

○ Intercultural awareness can engender **mindfulness** & the **intercultural sensitivity** that may enable **appropriateness** in intercultural communication

○ Achievement of integrated cultural communication goals signifies **effectiveness** of communication intercultural communication

○ Adoption of appropriate / adjusted processes & styles and/or acceptance or tolerance of those of others enhances the probability of satisfying unified communication goals.

○ In addition, increased awareness and understanding minimises stereotyping, prejudices, anxiety & other intercultural communication challenges hence reducing chances of misunderstanding and misrepresentations

ULTIMATE STATE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION (6)

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION CONGRUENCE

(The pinnacle of intercultural communication where communication is simultaneously and reciprocally effective & appropriate)

*C1

*C2

*C3

*C1, *C2 and *C3 represents the multiple cultures in interaction

Figure 1: A conceptual framework for understanding intercultural communication effectiveness
Source: Co-author Chigwendere (2016)

A multi-view approach is characterised by an inquiry into the perspectives of communication culture of the home country (China) and host country (South Africa), in order to establish intercultural awareness. In the case of Sino-African organisations in Africa, the inclusion of Western cultures provides contextual reference given the significant role Western countries have played in the emergence of the formal economic organisation. Western perspectives on communication applied together with the perspectives of those under study, provide a basis for discussion and comparison. Engaging Western or Eurocentric theory, however, does not underplay or negate the strides made in the development of more indigenous theories of communication such as Afrocentricity (Asante, 1999; 2012) in relation to Africa, and Asiacentricity (Miike, 2007) in respect of Asia.

It is argued that adopting a multi-view perspective in the Sino-African context allows for a "dialectical approach" (Martin & Nakayama, 2010) where meaningful intercultural communication can be built on non-Western and Western perspectives of ICE and a consideration of difference as much as similarity, uncertainty as much as certainty (Xu, 2013:387). The multi-view approach opens up new possibilities for researchers to look for values and beliefs about communication that cross boundaries (Chen & Starosta, 2003:3).

Given the fact that different societies are founded on different paradigmatic assumptions influencing their worldviews (Narh, 2013:9), and that values and paradigmatic assumptions shape the way individuals view and relate to the world – and by extension, how they express themselves and understand each other (Huang, 2010:100) – a multi-view approach is deemed appropriate. Hall (1959:159) emphasises this point with the proclamation: "Communication is culture".

Within the multi-view approach, this study proposes observing intercultural communication through the lens of what have been termed "enablers" of ICE. "Enablers are those determinants that enable the understanding of communication in different cultures for the purposes of understanding intercultural communication effectiveness" (Chigwendere, 2016:24). The resulting understanding provides the basis for intercultural awareness – "a state of knowing the distinct characteristics of one's own culture and that of one's counterparts" (Chen, 2015:466). Specifically, as per Figure 1, the enablers of ICE represented in column 2 are labelled as follows: values and guiding philosophies, self-perceptions, perceptions on the nature of communication (ontology), degree of interaction in communication (epistemology), the objective of communication (axiology), and the process and style of communication (methodology).

As Figure 1 indicates, a multi-view approach to conceptualising and understanding ICE is broad. Column 1 is a depiction of people from different cultures (labelled C1, C2 and C3) in interaction. Each cultural group actively seeks to understand self and other, as shown by the interlinking reverse arrows connecting all cultural groups together. In the context of this study, this is in reference to Western, African, and Chinese cultures.

Column 2 represents the enablers of ICE, in terms of which an understanding of communication in each cultural is sought both within and across cultures. The enabler-based understanding

of communication is simultaneous and reciprocal to develop a comparative understanding of communication, giving clues to what ICE might look like. It is envisaged that such a proactive and participative approach by those in the intercultural encounter results in intercultural awareness (column 3).

It is thus proposed that a state of intercultural awareness provides the foundation from which suitable strategies and approaches to the intercultural communication encounter can be developed and implemented. Potential strategies for improving the effectiveness of the intercultural communication encounter are listed in column 4. A particularly positive spin-off of intercultural awareness is the potential for greater mindfulness and intercultural sensitivity in interaction, thereby enhancing ICE.

Potential outcomes of approaching intercultural communication from a multi-view perspective are listed in column 5 as increased understanding, greater sensitivity, achievement of integrated goals, adaptation of styles greater effectiveness and appropriateness in communication and so on. This creates a "win/win" for all in communication. This perspective is in tune with other theoretical approaches aimed at achieving win/win scenarios in communication, such as Grunig, Grunig and Ehling's (1992) two-way symmetrical model aimed at achieving public relations (PR) excellence. In this model, PR practitioners are called to adjust or adapt their behaviours, with emphasis being placed on reciprocity and mutual understanding. In the intercultural encounter, increased awareness and understanding ultimately serves to minimise stereotyping and anxiety among other challenges that hamper ICE. Increased awareness also enables the optimising of existing communication synergies.

Finally, column 6 represents the hypothetical ultimate state of intercultural communication – *"intercultural communication congruence"* (IC congruence) – where communication is both effective and appropriate. Such a state is achievable when the cultures of all interacting parties are considered in the endeavour towards ICE, because there is no culture that is greater or lesser than any other (Asante & Miike, 2013:4). It is therefore advanced that one cannot speak of effectiveness without consideration of appropriateness in intercultural encounters.

IC congruence is multi-dimensional, and in explaining it as a concept, it is postulated that approaching communication between people from different cultures from a point of equality and respect inspires a state of congruence where harmony and agreement prevail. Agreement exists in the sense that all parties acknowledge the need for mutual achievement of their ultimate communicative goals. Harmony, on the other hand, is a consequence of the tolerance (Chen, 2015), accommodation, acceptance or adjustments that may be accordingly made in the process of the intercultural communication encounter. In other words, this study argues that intercultural effectiveness in a multi-cultural context should not be understood on the basis of mono-cultural views.

Although the multi-view approach may be criticised for perhaps oversimplifying or overgeneralising distinct cultural characteristics in its application, it is practical and provides a starting point for understanding Sino-African interactions. It is a synthesis of insights derived from existing
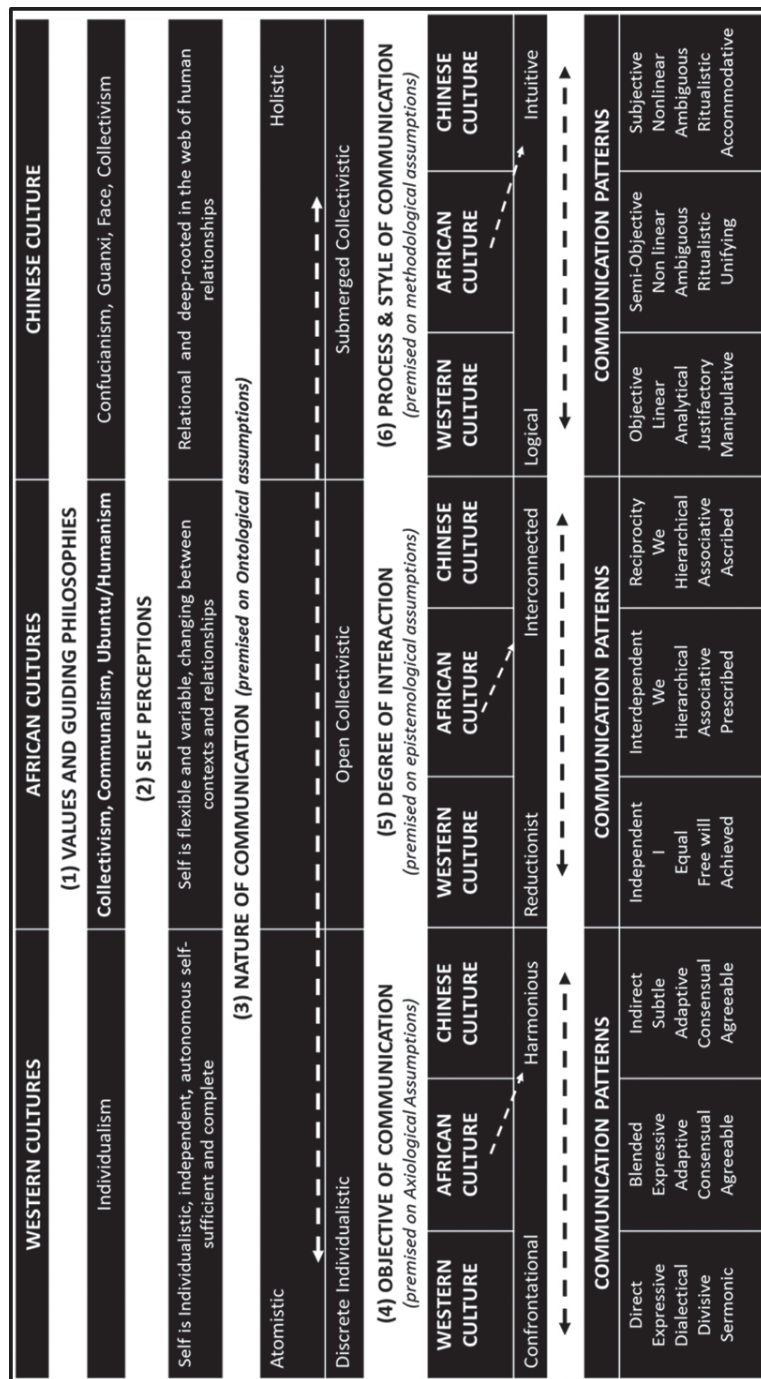
approaches to form a holistic framework for understanding that has both practical and scholarly implications. The multi-view is based on combining the perspectives of those involved in interaction, and not on predetermined standards set in other cultures, as is the case with existing approaches. Its specificity ensures a more accurate, culturally relevant understanding. Essentially the multi-view approach is designed to be live and interactive in nature, deriving meaning and insights from active self- and other-reporting by those in the intercultural encounter. In the next section, the multi-view is applied in a synthesis of literature aimed at developing an understanding of communication in the Sino-African context.

2. APPLICATION OF THE MULTI-VIEW APPROACH TO THE SINO-AFRICAN CONTEXT

2.1 Methodology

It is on the basis of the conceptual framework for understanding ICE that a quasi-systematic literature review and meta-synthesis of extant literature on culture and communication in the different cultures (Western, African, and Chinese) is conducted with the aim of providing collective insights into fields and sub-fields (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003:220) useful for the business context. A cross-section of literature including empirical, non-empirical, and philosophical texts was synthesised. Abductive, inductive and deductive techniques generally viewed as forms of qualitative data analysis rooted in the Peircean logical system of Charles Sanders Peirce (Brinkmann, 2014; Chong, 1994), are engaged in the synthesis of literature. This process helps to address questions on communication synergies and/or gaps in Western, African, and Chinese cultures, providing a theoretical view from within the culture of communication, with the potential to enhance the understanding of ICE. As a final outcome, meta-synthesis results in the development of a theoretical framework for understanding ICE in Western, African, and Chinese cultures which can be validated through an empirical study.

In a synthesis of literature pertaining to ICE in Chinese organisations in Africa, the Western, African, and Chinese cultures are considered. The inclusion of Western cultures is critical in view of the influence that the West has had on the very emergence of the formal economic organisation in Africa. In addition, it allows the provision of a point of comparison that may enhance the understanding of non-Western cultures

Figure 2: A theoretical framework for understanding ICE in Western, African and Chinese cultures

	WESTERN CULTURES	AFRICAN CULTURES	CHINESE CULTURE
(1) VALUES AND GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES	Individualism	Collectivism, Communalism, Ubuntu/Humanism	Confucianism, Guanxi, Face, Collectivism
(2) SELF PERCEPTIONS	Self is Individualistic, independent, autonomous self-sufficient and complete	Self is flexible and variable, changing between contexts and relationships	Relational and deep-rooted in the web of human relationships
(3) NATURE OF COMMUNICATION *(premised on Ontological assumptions)*	Atomistic / Discrete Individualistic	Open Collectivistic	Submerged Collectivistic / Holistic

(4) OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION *(premised on Axiological Assumptions)*

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

WESTERN CULTURE	AFRICAN CULTURE	CHINESE CULTURE
Confrontational	Harmonious	
Direct	Blended	Indirect
Expressive	Expressive	Subtle
Dialectical	Adaptive	Adaptive
Divisive	Consensual	Consensual
Sermonic	Agreeable	Agreeable

(5) DEGREE OF INTERACTION *(premised on epistemological assumptions)*

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

WESTERN CULTURE	AFRICAN CULTURE	CHINESE CULTURE
Reductionist	Interconnected	
Independent	Interdependent	Reciprocity
I	We	We
Equal	Hierarchical	Hierarchical
Free will	Associative	Associative
Achieved	Prescribed	Ascribed

(6) PROCESS & STYLE OF COMMUNICATION *(premised on methodological assumptions)*

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

WESTERN CULTURE	AFRICAN CULTURE	CHINESE CULTURE
Logical		Intuitive
Objective	Semi-Objective	Subjective
Linear	Non linear	Nonlinear
Analytical	Ambiguous	Ambiguous
Justifactory	Ritualistic	Ritualistic
Manipulative	Unifying	Accommodative

Source: Chigwendere (2016) with adaptations of Chen (2015)

** There exist opposite value orientations in each set of paradigmatic assumptions in all cultural groups, with cultures tending to lean to one extreme over the other in interaction (Chen, 2015:467). This is represented by the dotted arrows that represent a continuum. Differences in culture are thus in degree rather than type (Chen, 2015:468).

** African cultures tend to be more similar to Chinese cultures though a complete overlap is not posited. This position is inferred from literature reviewed.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2 presents a comparative theoretical framework of communication in Western, African and Chinese cultures, based on the enablers of ICE, highlighting areas of similarity and difference and potential implications for communication.

The framework is inspired by the work of Chen (2011; 2015), who compares the paradigmatic assumptions of American culture (taken here to represent Western cultures) and Chinese culture. Chen's model is adapted to incorporate the assumptions of African cultures, also reflecting patterns of communication as inferred from literature. The figure is columnar and flows from top to bottom, left to right.

3.1 Values and guiding philosophies (labelled (1) in figure 2): comparison and implications

Reflected in Figure 2 (1), are values and guiding philosophies in Western, African, and Chinese cultures stated as individualism in Western cultures; communalism, Ubuntu, and humanism in African cultures; and Confucianism, humanism, and collectivism in Chinese culture. The African and Chinese guiding philosophies generally reflect collectivist tendencies, hence they are in many instances referred to as collectivist cultures (see Hofstede, 2011).

Because African and Chinese cultures are reportedly collectivistic at face value, it can be inferred that communication emphasis could potentially be similar in the two cultures. However, inquiry into both African and Chinese culture shows that this is not necessarily the case, since the way in which collectivism is expressed differs in the two cultures. For example, African communalism and Ubuntu place an emphasis on the interdependence of the individual and the community at large, including the living, the dead, and the spiritual (Narh, 2013; Higgs, 2010; Van der Colff, 2003; McFarlin, Coster, & Mogale-Pretorius, 1999; Maomeka, 1989). Confucianist principles, on the other hand, place an emphasis on interconnectedness and relationships between people, honouring their roles in those relationships (Yum, 1988; Lockett, 1988). Particularly Ubuntu in African culture advocates hospitality, respect, and acceptance of all, including sojourners (Bell & Metz, 2011:90), while under Confucianism, communitarianism does not extend to strangers, but is more insider-focused, in terms of the distinctions in Chinese culture of insider versus outsider (Salo-Lee, 2006; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

The sense of community therefore appears to be more "universal" in African cultures, with application to all in the community, while in Chinese culture, community would tend to be more particularistic, based on the context and the relationship status. Having discussed the collectivism/communitarianism of African and Chinese cultures, mention is also made here of the individualism of Western cultures, seen in the individual's pursuit of own goals and primary concern with the self, power, achievement, and self-direction (Kim, 2007; Miike, 2002; Eaton & Louw, 2000; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Schwartz, 1992). Apart from overall

values and guiding philosophies, self-perceptions in Western, African, and Chinese cultures are compared.

3.2 Self-perceptions and communication (labelled (2) in figure 2): comparison and implications

Figure 2 (2) represents the consideration of the self-perceptions of people in Western, African, and Chinese cultures, because how people see themselves influences how they communicate (Huang, 2010:100). Towards this understanding, Figure 2 juxtaposes self-perceptions in Western, African, and Chinese cultures.

While in Western cultures the self is viewed as individualistic, ego-driven, self-sufficient and complete (Kim, 2007; Miike, 2002:6; Eaton & Louw, 2000:211; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998), in African culture, the self is interdependent and self-perception is flexible – varying between contexts and relationships (Faniran, 2014; Eaton & Louw, 2000; Myers, 1987). In Chinese culture on the other hand, Confucian tradition defines the self from a group perspective and places self at the centre of relationships and the social roles they play (Miike & Yin, 2015:458; Miike, 2002; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). The value placed on an individual's self-perception and association with their community in African and Chinese culture thus bears similarity. A complete overlap is not posited, however, as differences are apparent in the manner in which communication takes place.

In African cultures, communication is largely consensual and community-centred, with a strict following of the rules and norms of the community, as well as the maintenance of respect (Faniran, 2014; Maomeka, 1989). Comparatively, in Chinese cultures, communication is adaptive to the role and hierarchy of relationships (Chen, 2015; Yum, 1988). Maintaining harmonious relationships, saving face, and giving face are central to communication in Chinese culture. In addition, where Africans will use any means possible to share information, be it loud or subtle, the Chinese have a preference for subtlety and succinctness. In Western cultures on the other hand, communication is explicit, assertive, and geared towards controlling and differentiating one's self from others (Chen, 2015). It is postulated that self-perceptions and the values and guiding philosophies to which people are socialised influence their views on the nature of communication.

3.3 Nature of communication (labelled (3) in figure 2): comparison and implications

Essentially, Western cultures are dominated by the theme of individualism (Chen, 2015; Narh, 2013; Higgs, 2010; Hofstede, 1980), while African culture emphasises the interrelationship between the human and spiritual networks (Narh, 2013; Igboin, 2011; Myers, 1987). Chinese cultures on the other hand, similar to African culture, emphasise interrelationships of human beings and nature across space and time (Miike, 2002; Chen & Starosta, 2003:5). In addition, the Chinese theme of circularity provides "a sense of relatedness of the present to the past and the future, and life to nature" (Miike, 2002:6). All is viewed as in transition, and

communication is seen as always being in a state of change and transformation (Chen & Starosta, 2003:5). This has certain parallels to African culture where the universe is viewed as "a composite blend of divine, spiritual, human, animate and inanimate beings constantly interacting with one another" (Igboin, 2011:98; Myers, 1987). In African culture, no reality exists without a spiritual inclination (Narh, 2013:7). Consequently, due to the different views held on the nature of existence across the cultures, different values are displayed in interaction. In Western cultures, people display the value of individualism in interaction, while in African and Chinese cultures, people display a more collectivistic and holistic orientation (Chen, 2015:468; Maomeka, 1989). In the collectivism displayed in African and Chinese cultures, however, there are subtle differences. In African culture, the nature of communication is such that it is openly collectivistic, extending to the whole community and those who enter it. In Chinese culture on the other hand, communication can be described as "submerged collectivistic" (Chen, 2015), with people tending to submerge into the in-group.

On the basis of what has been learnt of the different ontological assumptions, one can infer that communication in Western cultures takes place through free will and though polite, may not necessarily show concern for the feelings of others. In addition, preferred communication in Western culture is likely to present a situation of either "black" or "white" with no grey areas. On the other hand, communication in Chinese and African cultures may require extra care in ensuring the comfort of all interactants owing to their communal and holistic orientations.

3.4 Degree of interaction (labelled (4) in figure 2): comparison and implications

By virtue of their individualistic and atomistic assumptions, Western cultures are characterised by a reductionist way of knowing (Chen, 2015:467) that has led to them being termed "truth-orientated cultures" (Metz, 2015b:97; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). A reductionist view is dependent on dichotomising and the simplification of complex phenomena through rational and logical thinking (Chen, 2002:7; 1993). As a result, the values of independence, "I" sense, equality, free will, and achievement in the process of interaction are seen to come through (Chen, 2015:467–468). The Western reductionist view, however, differs from the Chinese and African interconnected way of knowing.

The Chinese way of knowing is intuitive, interconnected, and holistic (Chen, 2015; 2011). Interconnectedness between the knower and the known is seen as the centre of genuine knowledge (Chen, 2015; Miike, 2002:6). As such, human communication is seen as a relational process in which interactants constantly adapt to and relocate each other in a network of interdependence (Chen & Starosta, 2003:5-6; Ding, 2006). Mutual dependence dominates Asian existence (Chen & Starosta, 2003) and interconnectedness in communication is demonstrated by behavioural characteristics such as "we" group sense, reciprocity, hierarchy, and associative and ascribed relationship (Chen, 2015:467).

In African culture, on the other hand, community and ancestry lie at the centre of knowing (Narh, 2013:6) with individual knowledge being dictated by symbolic knowledge and participation in

the social context of the community (Ani, 2013). As in Chinese culture, the highest value is placed on interpersonal relationships between people (Myer, 1987), and communication is a matter of human interrelationships conducted strictly according to norms and mores of the community (Maomeka, 1989:5). Communication is therefore interdependent, prescribed and we-centred. In this study, what remains to be determined is the potential impact of the different epistemological assumptions on the process of communication when people from different cultures interact, as well as how these assumptions can be reconciled.

As a consequence of the perceived ways of knowing in each of Western, African and Chinese cultures, assumptions can be made about interactions between people from those cultures. It can be hypothesised that for the Chinese culture, it may be possible to adapt to the communication requirements of other cultures where cultural distance is not too large, because adapting to the requirements of another context or relationship comes naturally to them. In the case of Chinese and African cultures, there is a similarity in the value placed on the community and the need to follow rules and guidelines in communication, maintain relationships and preserve harmony. Through proactive knowledge-seeking and intercultural awareness, perhaps a third culture or intercultural communication culture can be established for people engaged in intercultural communication. While creating an intercultural communication culture may be a possibility; this would need to be underpinned by an acknowledgment, understanding, and incorporation of the broader perceived communication goals of all the cultures in interaction. Essentially, the concept of relationships and how they are managed may very well be an overarching factor in the quest for mutual understanding in intercultural communication. However, while there is an academic body of knowledge on "relationship management", for the sake of brevity a discussion on this shall not be entered into.

3.5 Objective of communication (labelled (5) in figure 2): comparison and implications

While the goal of existence in Western cultures is to solve problems, control, and influence (Chen, 2015; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993; Miike, 2002:8), in African cultures the goal is to promote the social order and harmony (Maomeka, 1989). Comparatively, the goal of communication in African culture has parallels to that of Chinese culture, where harmony is the ultimate goal (Chen, 2015:467; Chen, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2003:6; Miike, 2002:7). At the core of Asian culture, harmony has ethical appeal and is seen as the end rather than the means of human communication (Chen & Starosta, 2003:5-6). As such, people communicate with dignity and influence in a mutual and interdependent network on the basis of cooperation (Chen & Starosta, 2003:5-6). Harmony thus regulates the process of communication in Asian culture. The goal of communication in Chinese culture, however, differs starkly from that of Western cultures where there is an innate desire by interactants to exert power and direct interaction in their own favour in communication (Chen, 2015; Chen & Starosta, 2003; Miike, 2002). In Chinese culture, harmony is sought within the in-group and with the universe at large, while in African society it is largely valued in the community. Arguably, an understanding of differences in communication between African and Chinese cultures could be further enhanced when viewed in relation to Ludwig von Bertalanffy's systems theory. In the context

of this study, each culture is viewed as an entity, driven by synergy, interdependence, and interconnectedness.

In addition, because collectivism is emphasised in both Chinese and African cultures (where a quest for relationship and social order maintenance is evident in the communalism and Ubuntu of African society, and harmony and guanxi in Chinese society), it is worth investigating whether these seemingly related factors can be harnessed to develop unified goals in intercultural communication. Thereafter, ways of reaching goals of communication which were acceptable to all communicating parties, would have to be sought.

3.6 Thinking process and communication labelled (6) in figure 2): comparison and implications

Cross-culturally there are differences in thinking process and the methods engaged in reaching communication goals in African and Chinese cultures. According to Chen (2015), the Chinese preference for intuitive problem-solving indicates that many paths can reach the same destination, and that all paths are complementary and equally appropriate (Chen, 2011; 2015). Western cultures, on the other hand, follow structured logical thinking in their problem-solving approaches (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010; Chen, 2015). There is a consideration of objectivity, linearity, analysis justification and manipulation in the process of interaction (Chen, 2015:467). In African culture, methods are potentially a blend of prescription, ritual, and semi-objectivity aimed at gaining consensus. Interaction styles are thus potentially accommodative in African cultures, adaptive in Chinese cultures, and confrontational in Western cultures.

Furthermore, while Western cultures employ verbal strategies to win over counterparts in communication, in Chinese cultures, people are mutually concerned with cooperation (Chen, 2015:468; Chen & Starosta, 2003) as in African culture. In Western culture an individual will speak in a manner as they see fit based on their personality and socioeconomic position (Miike, 2002:8). What they say and how they say it is unpredictable because it is self-determined. In both African and Chinese cultures, on the other hand, what is said and how it is said intra-culturally is largely predictable owing to the prescriptive nature of African culture (Faniran, 2014:5; Maomeka, 1989), while rules and ethics honour the nature of Chinese culture (Chen & Starosta, 2003:7; Miike, 2002:11). The complications in intercultural communication encounters potentially arise because different cultures have different communicating rules.

On the whole, this section has demonstrated an exploratory theoretical application of the multi-view in the Sino-African context. In addition, over and above the deductions made, it is plausible that other models and theories in the discipline of communication science could further illuminate and address the challenges faced in intercultural communication. This is an area for future investigation. What is evident, however, is that this exploratory application has implications for both management practice and theory development.

4.   IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT AND THEORY DEVELOPMENT

A conceptual framework for understanding ICE in Sino-African interactions has the potential to make significant contributions to improving communication effectiveness in Chinese organisations in Africa. Applied to multi-cultural groups, the insights gained could more appropriately inform the communication of policies and strategies in intercultural interactions as reflected in the theoretical framework of communication in Western, African, and Chinese cultures (Figure 2). Particularly in organisations, such insights are useful in the area of training, which has been long identified as a key strategy for dealing with many of the challenges emerging in the Sino-African relationship (Feng & Mu, 2010). It is thus contended that the multi-view approach, through its facilitation of mutual and reciprocal knowledge acquisition, can potentially mitigate the effects of ignorance related to intercultural communication barriers such as stereotyping. Stereotypes are defined by Martin and Nakayama (2010) as widely held beliefs, assumptions and generalisations about a group of people that influence what people know and expect of others. Examples of common stereotypes include the labelling of Africans as lazy, and the Chinese as hardworking.

Thus it is contended that if those engaged in intercultural communication have a proactive and accommodative knowledge-seeking attitude, an integrated communication culture may result, potentially improving effectiveness in the intercultural encounter.

In adopting a cross-cultural and comparative approach to issues of intercultural communication, this study contributes to the body of knowledge of ICE in general, and in a Sino-African context in particular. A multi-view approach provides an additional way of understanding ICE, and its application to the Sino-African context provides a platform for its validation. Applied practically in instances of intercultural interaction, an understanding of communication in each culture can be sought in terms of the identified enablers of ICE. The resulting theoretical framework can then be verified by means of qualitative in-depth interviews based on a series of questions designed to capture communication nuances along the identified enablers. A juxtaposition of findings would then illuminate gaps and synergies, hence pointing to areas of training and insights in need of sharing.

It is also anticipated that insights gained from a comparison of the different cultures will clarify what "effectiveness" means in ICE in specific contexts, particularly in the Sino-African context. Indeed, the different theoretical perspectives of communication in the different cultures as shaped by the enablers, point to the potential irrelevance of a state of effectiveness in intercultural communication, but rather one of congruence where the multiple perspectives are taken cognisance of in communication.

Finally, in view of the challenges emanating from intercultural interactions, more specifically from Sino-African interactions in Africa, the multi-view approach contributes towards the formulation of solutions to minimise misunderstandings and challenges in different organisational aspects of life. It does this through a process of simultaneous and reciprocal knowledge production and sharing by the cultural interactants. This in turn informs the nature and content of interventions

aimed at enhancing ICE. If left unchecked, challenges of ICE may have negative implications for integration between the Africans and the Chinese both inside and outside the organisation. On the other hand, culturally informed African and Chinese people coming together are productive, as they interact effectively and appropriately while getting on with business.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative theoretical framework for understanding ICE in Sino-African interactions, as developed in this study, points to potential similarities and differences in communication culture. There is also a suggestion of differences in similarity, cautioning that appearances must not be taken at face value. This outcome therefore points to the need for empirically validating the insights gained. In the process of validating the theoretical insights, the proposed multi-view conceptual framework for understanding ICE will also be validated.

Finally, it can be postulated that in seeking to understand ICE in intercultural interactions such as those between the African and Chinese people, although a multi-view approach may be seemingly idealistic, it is nonetheless appropriate. This is because it allows for the identification of synergies and/or gaps that can be optimised towards achieving a state of congruence where communication is effective, appropriate, and potentially more acceptable to the interacting parties. Arguably, therefore, the quest in intercultural communication should be for intercultural communication congruence (IC congruence).

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