Summary and Keywords

The phrase "intercultural competence" typically describes one’s effective and appropriate engagement with cultural differences. Intercultural competence has been studied as residing within a person (i.e., encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral capabilities of a person) and as a product of a context (i.e., co-created by the people and contextual factors involved in a particular situation). Definitions of intercultural competence are as varied. There is, however, sufficient consensus amongst these variations to conclude that there is at least some collective understanding of what intercultural competence is. In “Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence,” Spitzberg and Chagnon define intercultural competence as, “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 7). In the discipline of communication, intercultural communication competence (ICC) has been a subject of study for more than five decades. Over this time, many have identified a number of variables that contribute to ICC, theoretical models of ICC, and quantitative instruments to measure ICC. While research in the discipline of communication has made a significant contribution to our understanding of ICC, a well-rounded discussion of intercultural competence cannot ignore the contribution of other disciplines to this subject. Our present understanding of intercultural competence comes from a number of disciplines, such as communication, cross-cultural psychology, social psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and education, to name a few.

Keywords: intercultural competence, intercultural communication, effective, appropriate

A Brief Introduction

With increasing global diversity, intercultural competence is a topic of immediate relevance. While some would question the use of the term “competence” as a Western concept, the ability to understand and interact with people of different cultures in authentic and positive ways is a topic worth discussing. Though several parts of the world do remain culturally homogenous, many major cities across the world have undergone significant transformation in their cultural and demographic landscape due to immigration. Advances in communication technologies have also facilitated intercultural communication
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without the prerequisite of geographic proximity. Hence educational, business, and other projects involving culturally diverse workgroups have become increasingly common. In such contexts the success of a group in accomplishing its goals might not depend only on the group members’ expertise in a particular topic or ability to work in a virtual environment but also on their intercultural competence (Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004). Cultural diversity in populations continues to keep intercultural competence (or cultural competence, as it is known in some disciplines) on the agenda of research in applied disciplines such as medicine (Bow, Woodward, Flynn, & Stevens, 2013; Charles, Hendrika, Abrams, Shea, Brand, & Nicol, 2014) and education (Blight, 2012; Tangen, Mercer, Spooner-Lane, & Hepple, 2011), for example.

As noted in the historiography section, early research in intercultural competence can be traced back to acculturation/adaptation studies. Labels such as cross-cultural adaptation and cross-cultural adjustment/effectiveness were used to describe what we now call intercultural competence, though adaptation and adjustment continue to remain unique concepts in the study of migrants. It is fair to say that today’s researchers would agree that, while intercultural competence is an important part of adapting to a new culture, it is conceptually distinct.

Although our current understanding of intercultural competence is (and continues to be) shaped by research in many disciplines, communication researchers can lay claim to the nomenclature of the phrase, particularly intercultural communication competence (ICC). Intercultural competence is defined by Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009) as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 7), which touches on a long history of intercultural competence being associated with effectiveness and appropriateness. This is echoed in several models of intercultural competence as well. The prevalent characterization of effectiveness as the successful achievement of one’s goals in a particular communication exchange is notably individualistic in its orientation. Appropriateness, however, views the communication exchange from the other person’s point of view, as to whether the communicator has communicated in a manner that is (contextually) expected and accepted.

Generally speaking, research findings support the view that intercultural competence is a combination of one’s personal abilities (such as flexibility, empathy, open-mindedness, self-awareness, adaptability, language skills, cultural knowledge, etc.) as well as relevant contextual variables (such as shared goals, incentives, perceptions of equality, perceptions of agency, etc.). In an early discussion of interpersonal competence, Argyris (1965) proposed that competence increases as “one’s awareness of relevant factors increases,” when one can solve problems with permanence, in a manner that has “minimal deterioration of the problem-solving process” (p. 59). This view of competence places it entirely on the abilities of the individual. Kim’s (2009) definition of intercultural competence as “an individual’s overall capacity to engage in behaviors and activities that foster cooperative relationships in all types of social and cultural contexts in which culturally or ethnically dissimilar others interface” (p. 62) further highlights the emphasis on the individual. Oth-
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ers, however, suggest that intercultural competence has an element of social judgment, to be assessed by others with whom one is interacting (Koester, Wiseman, & Sanders, 1993). A combination of self and other assessment is logical, given that the definition of intercultural competence encompasses effective (from self’s perspective) and appropriate (from other’s perspective) communication.

Before delving further into intercultural competence, some limitations to our current understanding of intercultural competence must be acknowledged. First, our present understanding of intercultural competence is strongly influenced by research emerging from economically developed parts of the world, such as the United States and parts of Europe and Oceania. Interpretivists would suggest that the (cultural) perspectives from which the topic is approached inevitably influence the outcomes of research. Second, there is a strong social scientific bias to the cumulative body of research in intercultural competence so far; as such, the findings are subject to the strengths and weaknesses of this epistemology. Third, because many of the current models of intercultural competence (or intercultural communication competence) focus on the individual, and because individual cultural identities are arguably becoming more blended in multicultural societies, we may be quickly approaching a point where traditional definitions of intercultural communication (and by association, intercultural competence) need to be refined. While this is not an exhaustive list of limitations, it identifies some of the parameters within which current conceptualizations of intercultural competence must be viewed.

The following sections discuss intercultural competence, as we know it, starting with what it is and what it is not. A brief discussion of well-known theories of ICC follows, then some of the variables associated with ICC are identified. One of the topics of repeated query is whether ICC is culture-general or culture-specific. This is addressed in the section following the discussion of variables associated with ICC, followed by a section on assessment of ICC. Finally, before delving into research directions for the future and a historiography of research in ICC over the years, the question of whether ICC can be learned is addressed.

Clarification of Nomenclature

As noted in the summary section, one of the most helpful definitions of intercultural competence is provided by Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009), who define it as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 7). However, addressing what intercultural competence is not is just as important as explaining what it is, in a discussion such as this. Conceptually, intercultural competence is not equivalent to acculturation, multiculturalism, biculturalism, or global citizenship—although intercultural competence is a significant aspect of them all. Semantically, intercultural efficiency, cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication competence, cross-cultural competence, and global competence are some of the labels with which students of intercultural competence might be familiar.
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The multiplicity in nomenclature of intercultural competence has been one of the factors that have irked researchers who seek conceptual clarity. In a meta-analysis of studies in intercultural communication competence, Bradford, Allen, and Beisser (2000) attempted to synthesize the multiple labels used in research; they concluded that intercultural effectiveness is conceptually equivalent to intercultural communication competence. Others have proposed that intercultural sensitivity is conceptually distinct from intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Others have demonstrated that, while there are multiple labels in use, there is general consensus as to what intercultural competence is (Deardorff, 2006).

In communication literature, it is fair to note that intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence are used interchangeably. In literature in other disciplines, such as medicine and health sciences, cultural competence is the label with which intercultural competence is described. Some have also proposed the phrase cultural humility as a deliberate alternative to cultural competence, suggesting that cultural humility involves life-long learning through self-awareness and critical reflection (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

The nature of an abstract concept is such that its reality is defined by the labels assigned to it. Unlike some concepts that have been defined and developed over many years within the parameters of a single discipline, intercultural competence is of great interest to researchers in multiple disciplines. As such, researchers from different disciplines have ventured to study it, without necessarily building on findings from other disciplines. This is one factor that has contributed to the multiple labels by which intercultural competence is known. This issue might not be resolved in the near future. However, those seeking conceptual clarity could look for the operationalization of what is being studied, rather than going by the name by which it is called. In other words, if what is being studied is effectiveness and appropriateness in intercultural communication (each of these terms in turn need to be unpacked to check for conceptual equivalency), then one can conclude that it is a study of intercultural competence, regardless of what it is called.

Theories of Intercultural Competence

Many theories of intercultural (communication) competence have been proposed over the years. While it is fair to say that there is no single leading theory of intercultural competence, some of the well-known theories are worth noting.

There are a couple of theories of ICC that are identified as covering laws theories (Wise-man, 2002), namely Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory and Face Negotiation theory. Finding its origins in Berger and Calabrese (1975), AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1993, 2005) proposes that the ability to be mindful and the effective management of anxiety caused by the uncertainty in intercultural interactions are key factors in achieving ICC. Gudykunst conceptualizes ICC as intercultural communication that has the least amount of misunderstandings. While AUM theory is not without its critics (for example, Yoshitake, 2002), it has been used in a number of empirical studies over the years (exam-
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...include Duronto, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005; Ni & Wang, 2011), including studies that have extended the theory further (see Neuliep, 2012).

Though primarily focused on intercultural conflict rather than intercultural competence, Face Negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988) proposes that all people try to maintain a favorable social self-image and engage in a number of communicative behaviours designed to achieve this goal. Competence is identified as being part of the concept of “face,” and it is achieved through the integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and skills in communication (relevant to managing one’s own face as well as that of others). Face Negotiation theory has been used predominantly in intercultural conflict studies (see Oetzel, Meares, Myers, & Lara, 2003). As previously noted, it is not primarily a theory of intercultural competence, but it does address competence in intercultural settings.

From a systems point of view, Spitzberg’s (2000) model of ICC and Kim’s (1995) cultural adaptation theory are also well-known. Spitzberg identifies three levels of analysis that must be considered in ICC, namely the individual system, the episodic system, and the relational system. The factors that contribute to competence are delineated in terms of characteristics that belong to an individual (individual system), features that are particular to a specific interaction (episodic system), and variables that contribute to one’s competence across interactions with multiple others (relational system). Kim’s cultural adaptation theory recognizes ICC as an internal capacity within an individual; it proposes that each individual (being an open system) has the goal of adapting to one’s environment and identifies cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of ICC.

Wiseman’s (2002) chapter on intercultural communication competence, in the Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication provides further descriptions of theories in ICC. While there have been several models of ICC developed since then, well-formed and widely tested theories of ICC remain few.

Variables Associated with Intercultural Competence

A number of variables have been identified as contributors to intercultural competence. Among these are mindfulness (Gudykunst, 1993), self and other awareness (Deardorff, 2006), listening skills (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), positive attitude toward other cultures, and empathy (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005), to name a few. Further, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, capacity for complexity, and language proficiency are also relevant. There is evidence to suggest that personal spiritual wellbeing plays a positive role in intercultural competence (Sandage & Jankowski, 2013). Additionally, there is an interesting link between intercultural competence and a biological variable, namely sensation seeking. Evidence suggests that, in the presence of a positive attitude towards other cultures and motivation to interact with people from other cultures, there is a positive relationship between sensation seeking and intercultural competence (Arasaratnam & Banerjee,
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Cognitive complexity has also been identified with intercultural competence (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Cognitive complexity refers to an individual’s ability to form multiple nuanced perceptual categories (Bieri, 1955). A cognitively complex person relies less on stereotypical generalizations and is more perceptive to subtle racism (Reid & Foels, 2010). Gudykunst (1995) proposed that cognitive complexity is directly related to effective management of uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural communication, which in turn leads to ICC (according to AUM theory).

Not all variables are positively associated with intercultural competence. One of the variables that notably hinder intercultural competence is ethnocentrism. Neuliep (2002) characterizes ethnocentrism as, “an individual psychological disposition where the values, attitudes, and behaviors of one’s ingroup are used as the standard for judging and evaluating another group’s values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 201). Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2011) found that introducing ethnocentrism into a model of ICC weakened all positive relationships between the variables that otherwise contribute to ICC. Neuliep (2012) further discovered that ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension debilitate intercultural communication. As Neuliep observed, ethnocentrism hinders mindfulness because a mindful communicator is receptive to new information, while the worldview of an ethnocentric person is rigidly centered on his or her own culture.

This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of variables that influence intercultural competence, but it is representative of the many individual-centered variables that influence the extent to which one is effective and appropriate in intercultural communication. Contextual variables, as noted in the next section, also play a role in ICC. It must further be noted that many of the ICC models do not identify language proficiency as a key variable; however, the importance of language proficiency has not been ignored (Fantini, 2009). Various models of intercultural competence portray the way in which (and, in some cases, the extent to which) these variables contribute to intercultural competence. For an expansive discussion of models of intercultural competence, see Spitzberg and Chagnoun (2009).

If one were to broadly summarize what we know thus far about an interculturally competent person, one could say that she or he is mindful, empathetic, motivated to interact with people of other cultures, open to new schemata, adaptable, flexible, able to cope with complexity and ambiguity. Language skills and culture-specific knowledge undoubtedly serve as assets to such an individual. Further, she or he is neither ethnocentric nor defined by cultural prejudices. This description does not, however, take into account the contextual variables that influence intercultural competence; highlighting the fact that the majority of intercultural competence research has been focused on the individual.

The identification of variables associated with intercultural competence raises a number of further questions. For example, is intercultural competence culture-general or culture-
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specific; can it be measured; and can it be taught or learned? These questions merit further exploration.

Culture General or Culture Specific

A person who is an effective and appropriate intercultural communicator in one context might not be so in another cultural context. The pertinent question is whether there are variables that facilitate intercultural competence across multiple cultural contexts. There is evidence to suggest that there are indeed culture-general variables that contribute to intercultural competence. This means there are variables that, regardless of cultural perspective, contribute to perception of intercultural competence. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), for example, identified five such variables, namely empathy, experience, motivation, positive attitude toward other cultures, and listening. The rationale behind their approach is to look for commonalities in emic descriptions of intercultural competence by participants who represent a variety of cultural perspectives. Some of the variables identified by Arasaratnam and Doerfel’s research are replicated in others’ findings. For example, empathy has been found to be a contributor to intercultural competence in a number of other studies (Gibson & Zhong, 2005; Nesdale, De Vries Robbé, & Van Oudenhoven, 2012). This does not mean, however, that context has no role to play in perception of ICC. Contextual variables, such as the relationship between the interactants, the values of the cultural context in which the interaction unfolds, the emotional state of the interactants, and a number of other such variables no doubt influence effectiveness and appropriateness. Perception of competence in a particular situation is arguably a combination of culture-general and contextual variables. However, the aforementioned “culture-general” variables have been consistently associated with perceived ICC by people of different cultures. Hence they are noteworthy. The culture-general nature of some of the variables that contribute to intercultural competence provides an optimistic perspective that, even in the absence of culture-specific knowledge, it is possible for one to engage in effective and appropriate intercultural communication. Witteborn (2003) observed that the majority of models of intercultural competence take a culture-general approach. What is lacking at present, however, is extensive testing of these models to verify their culture-general nature.

The extent to which the culture-general nature of intercultural competence can be empirically verified depends on our ability to assess the variables identified in these models, and assessing intercultural competence itself. To this end, a discussion of assessment is warranted.

Assessing Intercultural Competence

Researchers have employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the assessment of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2006) proposed that intercultural compe-
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tence should be measured progressively (at different points in time, over a period of time) and using multiple methods.

In terms of quantitative assessment, the nature of intercultural competence is such that any measure of this concept has to be one that (conceptually) translates across different cultures. Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) identified three biases that must be considered when using a quantitative instrument across cultures. First, there is potential for construct biases where cultural interpretations of a particular construct might vary. For example, "personal success" might be defined in terms of affluence, job prestige, etc., in an individualistic culture that favors capitalism, while the same construct could be defined in terms of sense of personal contribution and family validation in a collectivistic culture (Arasaratnam, 2007). Second, a method bias could be introduced by the very choice of the use of a quantitative instrument in a culture that might not be familiar with quantifying abstract concepts. Third, the presence of an item that is irrelevant to a particular cultural group could introduce an item bias when that instrument is used in research involving participants from multiple cultural groups. For a more detailed account of equivalence and biases that must be considered in intercultural research, see Van de Vijver and Leung (2011).

Over the years, many attempts have been made to develop quantitative measures of intercultural competence. There are a number of instruments that have been designed to measure intercultural competence or closely related concepts. A few of the more frequently used ones are worth noting.

Based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986), the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) measures three ethnocentric and three ethno-relative levels of orientation toward cultural differences, as identified in the DMIS model (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). This instrument is widely used in intercultural research, in several disciplines. Some examples of empirical studies that use IDI include Greenholtz (2000), Sample (2013), and Wang (2013).

The Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) is another known instrument that approaches intercultural competence from the perspective of a person's ability to appropriately modify his or her behavior when confronted with cultural differences, specifically as they pertain to individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). It must be noted, however, that intercultural sensitivity is not necessarily equivalent to intercultural competence. Chen and Starosta (2000), for example, argued that intercultural sensitivity is a pre-requisite for intercultural competence rather than its conceptual equivalent. As such, Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity scale should be viewed within the same parameters. The authors view intercultural sensitivity as the affective dimension of intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 1997).

Although not specifically designed to measure intercultural competence, the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) measures five dimensions, namely open mindedness, emotional stability, cultural empathy, social initiative, and flexibility (Van Oudenhoven &
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Van der Zee, 2002), all of which have been found to be directly related to intercultural competence, in other research (see Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

Quantitative measures of intercultural competence almost exclusively rely on self-ratings. As such, they bear the strengths and weaknesses of any self-report (for a detailed discussion of self-knowledge, see Bauer & Baumeister, 2013). There is some question as to whether Likert-type scales favor individuals with higher cognitive complexity because such persons have a greater capacity for differentiating between constructs (Bowler, Bowler, & Cope, 2012). Researchers have also used other methods such as portfolios, reflective journals, responses to hypothetical scenarios, and interviews. There continues to be a need for fine-tuned methods of assessing intercultural competence that utilize others’ perceptions in addition to self-reports.

Can Intercultural Competence Be Learned?

If competence is the holy grail of intercultural communication, then the question is whether it can be learned. On the one hand, many researchers suggest that the process of learning intercultural competence is developmental (Beamer, 1992; Bennett, 1986; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Which means that over time, experiences, and deliberate reflection, people can learn things that cumulatively contribute to intercultural competence. Evidence also suggests that collaborative learning facilitates the development of intercultural competence (Helm, 2009; Zhang, 2012). On the other hand, given research shows that there are many personality variables that contribute to intercultural competence; one could question whether these are innate or learned. Further, many causal models of intercultural competence show that intercultural competence is the product of interactions between many variables. If some of these can be learned and others are innate, then it stands to reason that, given equal learning opportunities, there would still be variations in the extent to which one “achieves” competence. There is also evidence to suggest that there are certain variables, such as ethnocentrism, that debilitate intercultural competence. Thus, it is fair to conclude that, while there is the potential for one to improve one’s intercultural competence through learning, not all can or will.

The aforementioned observation has implications for intercultural training, particularly training that relies heavily on dissemination of knowledge alone. In other words, just because someone knows facts about intercultural competence, it does not necessarily make them an expert at effective and appropriate communication. Developmental models of intercultural competence suggest that the learning process is progressive over time, based on one’s reaction to various experiences and one’s ability to reflect on new knowledge (Saunders, Haskins, & Vasquez et al., 2015). Further, research shows that negative attitudes and attitudes that are socially reinforced are the hardest to change (Bodenhausen & Gawronski, 2013). Hence people with negative prejudices toward other cultures, for example, may not necessarily be affected by an intercultural training workshop. While many organizations have implemented intercultural competency training in employee education as a nod to embracing diversity, the effectiveness of short, skilled-based training bears
further scrutiny. For more on intercultural training, see the *Handbook of Intercultural Training* by Landis, Bennett, and Bennett (2004).

**Research Directions**

In a review of ICC research between 2003 and 2013, Arasaratnam (2014) observed that there is little cross-disciplinary dialogue when it comes to intercultural competence research. Even though intercultural competence is a topic of interest to researchers in multiple disciplines, the findings from within a discipline appear to have limited external disciplinary reach. This is something that needs to be addressed. While the field of communication has played a significant role in contributing to current knowledge of intercultural competence, findings from other disciplines not only add to this knowledge but also potentially address gaps in research that are inevitable from a single disciplinary point of view. As previously observed, one of the reasons for lack of cross-disciplinary referencing (apart from lack of familiarity with work outside of one’s own discipline) could be the use of different labels to describe intercultural competence. Hence, students and scholars would do well to include these variations in labels when looking for research in intercultural competence. This would facilitate consolidation of inter-disciplinary knowledge in future research.

New and robust theories of intercultural competence that are empirically tested in multiple cultural groups are needed. As previously observed, the majority of existing theories in intercultural *communication* competence stem from the United States, and as such are influenced by a particular worldview. Theories from other parts of the world would enrich our current understanding of intercultural competence.

Thus far, the majority of research in intercultural communication has been done with the fundamental assumption that participants in a dyadic intercultural interaction arrive at it from two distinct cultural perspectives. This assumption might not be valid in all interactions that could still be classified as intercultural. With increasing global mobility, there are more opportunities for people to internalize more than one culture, thus becoming bicultural or blended in their cultural identity. This adds a measure of complexity to the study of intercultural competence because there is evidence to show that there are cultural differences in a range of socio-cognitive functions such as categorization, attribution, and reasoning (Miyamoto & Wilken, 2013), and these functions play important roles in how we perceive others, which in turn influences effective and appropriate communication (Moskowitz & Gill, 2013).

The concept of competence itself merits further reflection. Because the majority of voices that contribute to ongoing discussions on intercultural competence arise from developed parts of the world, it is fair to say that these discussions are not comprehensively representative of multiple cultural views. Further, the main mechanisms of academic publishing favor a peer-review system which can be self-perpetuating because the reviewers themselves are often the vocal contributors to the existing body of knowledge. For a more well rounded reflection of what it means to engage in authentic and affirming intercultur-
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al communication, sources of knowledge other than academic publications need to be considered. These may include the work done by international aid agencies and not-for-profit organizations for example, which engage with expressions of intercultural communication that are different from those that are observed among international students, expatriates, or medical, teaching, or business professionals, who inform a significant amount of intercultural competence research in academia.

Historiography: Research in Intercultural Competence over the Years

The concept of “competence” is not recent. For example, in an early use of the term, psychologist Robert W. White (1959) characterized competence as “an organism’s capacity to interact effectively with its environment” (p. 297) and proposed that effectance motivation (which results in feelings of efficacy) is an integral part of competence. Today’s research in intercultural competence has been informed by the work of researchers in a number of disciplines, over several decades.


While much of the momentum in communication research started in the late 1970s, a conservative (and by no means comprehensive) glance at history traces back some of the early works in intercultural competence to the 1960s, where researchers identified essential characteristics for intercultural communication. This research was based on service personnel and Americans travelling overseas for work (Gardner, 1962; Guthrie & Zetrick, 1967; Smith, 1966). The characteristics they identified include flexibility, stability, curiosity to other perspectives, and sensitivity, to name a few, and these characteristics were studied in the context of adaptation to a new culture.

In the 1970s, researchers built on early work to further identify key variables in intercultural “effectiveness” or “cross-cultural” competency. Researchers in communication worked toward not only identifying but also assessing these variables (Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Ruben & Kealey, 1979), primarily using quantitative methods. Ruben, Askling, and Kealey (1977) provided a detailed account of “facets of cross-cultural effectiveness” identified by various researchers.

In the 1980s, research in ICC continued to gain momentum, with a special issue of the International Journal of Intercultural Relations dedicated to this topic. ICC was still approached from the point of view of two specific cultures interacting with each other, similar to the acculturation approach in the previous decade. Many of the conceptualizations
of ICC were derived from (interpersonal) communication competence, extending this to intercultural contexts. For example, Spitzberg and Cupach’s (1984) conceptualization of communication competence as effective and appropriate communication has been foundational to later work in ICC.

Researchers in the 1990s built on the work of others before them. Chen (1990) presented eleven propositions and fifteen theorems in regards to the components of ICC, building from a discussion of Dinges’ (1983) six approaches to studying effective and appropriate communication in intercultural contexts. Chen went on to propose that competence is both inherent and learned. The 1993 volume of the *International and Intercultural Communication Annual* was dedicated to ICC, introducing some of the theories that later become influential in intercultural research, such as Gudykunst’s (1993) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, Cupach and Imahori’s (1993) Identity Management theory, and Ting-Toomey’s (1993) Identity Negotiation theory. Contributions to intercultural competence theory came from other disciplines as well, such as a learning model for becoming interculturally competent (Taylor, 1994) and an instructional model of intercultural strategic competence (Milhouse, 1996), for example. The formation of the International Academy for Intercultural Research, in 1997, marked a significant step toward interdisciplinary collaboration in intercultural research. Research in the 1990s contributed to the strides made in the 2000s.

In a meta-review of ICC, Bradford, Allen, and Beisser (2000) observed that ICC and intercultural communication effectiveness have been used (conceptually) interchangeably in previous research. Despite the different labels under which this topic has been studied, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) made the case for the culture-general nature of ICC, and Deardorff (2006) demonstrated that there is consensus amongst experts as to what ICC is. The publication of the *SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Deardorff, 2009) and Spitzberg and Chagnon’s (2009) comprehensive introductory chapter on conceptualizing intercultural competence are other noteworthy contributions to literature in intercultural competence. In 2015, the publication of another special issue on intercultural competence by the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (some 25 years after the 1989 special issue) signals that intercultural competence continues to be a topic of interest amongst researchers in communication and other disciplines. As discussed in the Research Directions section, the areas that are yet to be explored would hopefully be addressed in future research.

**Further Reading**


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