Extended Civilizations and Cultural Quantum

A new way of looking at cross-cultural communication

Jeanne Boden

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Contents

Introduction

In the course of the twentieth century understanding of variation in human behaviour moved from correlation with human biology to culture (Boas) and to a variety of fields of study like language (Whorf, Sapir, Wittgenstein), time, space, communication (Hall), semiotics (Geertz), and more. In search for a workable definition of culture some authors have formulated very complex definitions (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck). After reviewing definitions of culture, Keesing identified two main themes: culture as adaptive system and culture as ideational system.[1] Until today no consensus on a definition of culture has been formulated that can be used across disciplines. Needless to say, the study of culture is complex.

The relevant question in this context of cross-cultural communication is: if culture is already so difficult to grasp, then how can we deal with the cross-cultural?[2]

Edward Sapir concluded in 1927 that it was better for people to be unconscious than conscious of their own behaviour patterns. However, with globalization the need of consciousness of behavioural patterns has become

absolute key.[3] With people across the globe interacting and communicating, understanding of cultural behaviour and mutual expectations has become crucial to human interaction in enabling efficient and effective cooperation. As a result, cross-cultural communication has gained prominence as a field of study and practice, with a high need for methods and tools to enable efficient cross-cultural practice.

This book first critically assesses, across disciplines, a number of current theories, practices, and commerce in the cross-cultural field. It investigates the dominant paradigm of looking at cultures as static and nation-centred with more dynamic alternatives. It points towards problems of the use of static concepts such as nation, ethnic, values, and discusses culture-centrism and western-centrism.

Next to theory, our main concern is to look into the practices and commerce in the cross-cultural arena today. The variety of viewpoints on cross-cultural communication reflects the complexity of the field. The wide offerings of cross-cultural services mirrors the large demand in the global market.

In conclusion, it introduces a Five-Step Method to engage in cross-cultural cooperation and communication. The method results from decades of cross-cultural consultancy practice across Europe and Asia. In our fast changing world, cross-cultural communication calls for a dynamic, flexible, situation-related approach, while at the same time, our practical

[1] Roger, M. Kessing, "Theories of culture", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1974, 3, pp. 73–97, quoted in Gudykunst, Ting-Toomy, 1988, pp. 27–29.

[2] The terms intercultural and cross-cultural are generally used interchangeably. While some authors discuss interaction between separate cultural entities, we prefer the term cross-cultural as it better represents the complexity of crossing cultures, which happens today in global interaction.

[3] Edward Sapir, "The Unconscious Patterning of Behaviour in Society", 1927, in Paul A. Erickson and Murphy D. Liam, eds., *Readings for A History of Anthropological Theory.* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 237–47.

experience in working across East and West convinces us that understanding the larger framework is a crucial first step. We notice that the *crossing* of cultures, in what is generally called cross-cultural communication, is problematic. *Crossing* cultures differs from *cultural exchange*.

Our method proposes an understanding of meta-frameworks in combination with focussing on the situation at hand in a bottom-up approach considering culture as continuous negotiation in *intra-action* – a term inspired by Karen Barad's idea of entangled rather than intertwined agencies on which we will elaborate later.[4]

To address the macro-level, we introduce the concept of 'extended civilization' as meta-level of reflection. For the micro-level of situation-related cultural practices, or intra-action, we use the term 'cultural quantum'.

Critical assessment of current cross-cultural theories, practices, and commerce

Dominant paradigm: A framework to fit all cultures

Attempts to understand and manage cultural differences result in a number of perspectives on how people relate to each other, interact, communicate, cooperate, deal with time and space, and more.

Geert Hofstede and a team of IBM researchers presented impactful research in the 1970s. The research team conducted a worldwide survey of IBM-employees active across 70 nations, collecting around 116,000 responses. The goal was to characterize how national cultures differ from one another. Analysis of the data lead to Hofstede's publication *Culture's Consequences*.[5] Hofstede defined culture as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'.

The size and success of this research initiated a dominant paradigm of thinking about cultures and interaction between cultures in terms of categories claimed to exist across all cultures on the globe.[6] Hofstede initially pinpointed four dimensions in cultures: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculine/feminine, and individual/collective.

[4] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 33.

[5] Geert Hofstede, *Cultures' Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations.* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, original publication in 1980), p. 9.

[6] https://geert-hofstede.com/about-us.html

Other researchers expanded on his research. An example is Michael Harris Bond and his research group, Chinese Culture Connection at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, who developed the Chinese Value Survey. Based on their findings, a fifth dimension was added to Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions.[7] The initial four dimensions were complemented by what was first labelled as 'Confucian dynamic' and later renamed as 'long-term versus short-term orientation'.[8]

Since Hofstede started to publish his research, a whole army of researchers and practitioners expanded and elaborated on his theory, adding insights to this trend of thinking. We give a few examples of people who followed in Hofstede's footsteps.

Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner focus on organizational dynamics in various national cultures.[9] They also formulate their ideas in terms of dimensions using concepts like universal-particular, individual-communitarian, affective-neutral, and specific-diffuse. They describe alternative time concepts and relationships of human beings to nature. Like Hofstede, their focus is on nations.

Erin Meyer's cultural scales, in *The Culture Map*, is yet another example following the dominant paradigm inspired by Hofstede. With surprising confidence, she makes statements about all kinds of nationalities and provides ready-made advice on how to deal with the interaction between these national cultures. The terminology she uses, such as 'cultural stereotype' and 'national stereotype', reflect her static view on culture. Her invitation to reflect on cultures in relative terms does not surpass relativity between one static culture vis-à-vis another static culture. Her Western-centric viewpoint surfaces in her choice of topics like 'delivering negative feedback' (Why only negative feedback?). The concept of the book itself – strongly written from an individual ego-centric 'I, me, my' point of view – extensively individualizes staged protagonists in their personal lives, clothing, and bodily statures. She does this with all people from across the globe addressing her by her first name, 'Erin'. Underlying patterns are reduced to simplistic statements such as 'Taoism, which influenced Buddhism and Confucianism'.[10]

Credit should go to Hofstede for his tremendous work and life-long achievement. The fact that so many have followed him testifies to the importance of his work. Nevertheless, a static view on culture – where cultures do not change over generations – is not supportable, nor is it attainable in an increasingly globalizing world.[11]

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[7] Hofstede, *Cultures' Consequences*.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998).

[10] Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Public Affairs, 2015).

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqAJclwfyCw

The problem of static categories

Nation

Problems arise from the use of concepts like 'nation', 'ethnicity', or 'values' as preconceived static and well-defined concepts.

The nation-oriented approach is limiting and problematic in many ways. Hofstede claims, for instance, that Chinese organizations should be imagined like families, in comparison to organizations in other national cultures that behave more respectively like markets, machines, or pyramids. Although this may be valid in some cases, in the case of China the diversity of State Owned Enterprises, Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprises, Town and Village Enterprises versus private enterprises – which all have their specific features – is widely overlooked. Closely intertwined economy and politics in China results in very specific corporate cultures that do not function like families at all.

If it would be possible to reflect on culture in terms of nations, then how should we deal with difference in size? Could huge nations such as Russia, India, or China be compared with a nation as small as Belgium? Nations often encompass a variety of cultural or ethnic groups. Even a small country like Belgium has a Dutch-speaking, a French-speaking, and a German-speaking community, plus an enormous amount of other cultural groups from all over the globe – many residing in Belgium for generations – have Belgian citizenship. Do they all fit into the same denominator of 'Belgian'? A nation is a political constellation and as a category of culture not sustainable.

Although nations are often represented as ancient, our understanding of the nation is actually a modern invention, developed from the imperial expansion of the eighteenth century and derived from the relations of power and exchange established by capitalism.[12] Benedict Anderson calls the nation an *imagined community*. For Anderson, nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. One of the paradoxes he defines is 'formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will "have" a nationality, just like he or she "has" a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, "Greek" nationality is sui generis'.[13]

While nations as imagined communities can be considered cultural artefacts, cultural activity can be approached as social imaginary, which is what Arjun Appadurai does. Crediting Anderson for developing the notion of imagined communities, Appadurai distinguishes global cultural flows. The 'new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order' composed of different interrelated, yet disjunctive global cultural flows or 'scapes'.[14] He defines five scapes: *ethnoscapes*, the migration of people across cultures and borders; *mediascapes*, the use of media that shapes

[12] Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism" in Corrigan, T., White, P., & Mazaj, M., *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), p. 910.

[13] Anderson, "Imagined Communities", p. 911.

[14] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Public Worlds,* Volume 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 33.

the way we understand our imagined world; *technoscapes*, cultural interactions due to the promotion of technology; *financescapes*, the flux of capital across borders; and *ideoscapes*, the global flow of ideologies.

Ethnicity

Equalling culture with nation, like Hofstede et al. do, also brings up the problem of ethnicity and dominant versus minority cultures. Populations that have been or still are under control of communist ideology, like Russia and China, have been categorized according to Stalin's definition of ethnic identity as having a common language, common territory, common economic life, and common psychological make-up, later generalized as 'culture'. Categorization based on this restricted definition has led to merging of ethnic groups and has had a reducing effect on diversity of cultures in those areas. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China there are 56 officially recognized ethnic groups. The Han-Chinese are constructed as the majority-group with its dominant culture used in education, economy, politics, and more in China. Huge cultural differences within the Han-group are ignored for political reasons. Ethnic groups, like national borders, are categories defined by political choice, and as a static unit are problematic in reflecting culture.

Values

Another problematic static category when discussing cultures is values. Values get their meaning in the cultural context they arise from, and are not preconceived static categories. What exactly do terms like benevolence or self-direction, for instance, mean in a Western context or in an Eastern

context respectively? Concepts used to describe values differ according to context.

Both Shalom H. Schwartz and Richard Barrett use values as the core of their theories, considering values as static. Schwartz's search for meaningful, perhaps universal values, as he puts it, led to his *Theory of Basic Values* and to the development of the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) in 1992 – a tool to test a set of specific values within different nations.[15]

Barrett creatively combined Abraham Maslow's pyramid of hierarchy of needs and theory of human motivation with Indian Vedic philosophy referring to different levels of consciousness, claiming this eclectic construction can be used 'to measure unconsciousness' via values.[16] Barrett's values are divided into positive values versus potentially limiting values. But, what is positive in one cultural context may not be considered positive in another. Barrett measures values such as 'ethics', 'accountability', 'efficiency', 'personal growth', 'teamwork', and 'integrity'.[17] Concepts like 'efficiency', 'forgiving', 'responsible', 'integrity', and many other values, mean something else in Greco-Roman-Christian inspired cultures

[15] S. H. Schwartz (2012). "An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values", *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2 (1). http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116

[16] Abraham Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*. (Seaside, Oregon: Rough Draft Printing, 2013 (originally published in 1943). Vedic Philosophy refers to ancient Indian texts. It is not clear which sources Barrett used to build on.

[17] www.valuescentre.com Richard Barrett, *Building a Values-Driven Organization: A Whole System Approach to Cultural Transformation*. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006).

than in Confucian meritocratic-inspired cultures. Values are not independent fixed and static concepts; they are defined by the context in which they are used.

While building on Western (Maslow) and Eastern (Vedic) insights, Barrett's model is Eurocentric. Barrett considers hierarchy to be negative.[18] In Confucian-inspired meritocratic dynamics, as well as in many other cultures, hierarchy is one of the very cornerstones of the system.

Dominant paradigm practitioners offer value surveys, tools and certifications, commercializing their ideas into institutes where trainers can be certified in their specific theories. Geert Hofstede established ITIM International offering tools and certifications in his dimensions theory.[19] Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner offer certification in their theory.[20] Erin Meyer developed a network of Culture Map certified consultants.[21] Richard Lewis developed his own model inspired by Edward T. Hall's findings.[22] They all have created their own communities of followers, leading to a continuation of the dominant paradigm in practice. All of these models are nation-centred and based on static views on cultures. Institutionalization of the dominant paradigm leads to more of the same.

We can conclude that static categories – whether nation, ethnicity, or values – raise problems in dealing with a highly complex reality of cross-cultural communication. We need to search for alternative methods to handle complex cross-cultural interaction.

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z66__YVDoVw

[19] https://geert-hofstede.com http://itim.org

[20] http://www2.thtconsulting.com/services/licensing/

[21] http://erinmeyer.com

[22] Richard Lewis defines cultural types as linear-active, multi-active, and reactive. http://www.crossculture.com/about-us/the-model/

Dynamic, in-between and negotiating common ground

Working with static categories has proved unsustainable and has led to alternative ways. Several authors have sought solutions, no longer approaching the individual as a fixed category within a fixed ethnic group within a fixed nation. They have formulated ideas like 'third culture', 'third space', or have promoted a flexible approach towards cultural interaction as on-going negotiation in an ever changing (political, economic, legal, cultural) context, and have searched for workable methods. Cultures are not end states, they are fluid, changeable, and different in each context and situation.

Finding inspiration in chaos theory Fred Casmir introduces the concept of 'third culture'.[23] Casmir wants to see cultures as dynamic, changing, and developing processes. He also wants to move away from intercultural communication as an artefact of culture-comparisons – contrasting and suggesting a post-modern chaotic conceptual basis as a more adequate approach to study cultural processes, change, and human adaptation.[24] He redefines cross-cultural communication from generalized categories observed by outsiders (culture A interacting with culture B) to an approach from within the social group (culture A's emic [from within] categories of individual A's interactions with individual B, interacts with

culture B's emic categories of individual B's interactions with individual A). This is what he calls the 'third culture'.

Considering cultures as dynamic processes requires negotiations between different interlocutors. The need for on-going negotiation in intercultural communication has been recognized by authors such as Homi Bhabha, Dru Gladney, Roger Keesing, and David Pinto.

As a post-colonialist Homi Bhabha points towards the on-going negotiation from a minority perspective coining the term 'third space'.[25] Representation of difference must not be read as a pre-given ethnic or cultural trait 'set in the fixed tablet of tradition'. For Bhabha, 'social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation'.[26] The transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One, nor the Other but something else besides*, which contexts the terms and territories of both [italics in original]. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself be conscious'.[27]

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[23] Fred L. Casmir, "Foundations for the study of intercultural communication based on Third Culture Building Model", *Int. J. Intercultural Rel*. Vol. 23, No. 1 (Elsevier Science Ltd., 1999), pp. 91–116.

[24] Ibid., p. 92.

[25] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[26] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 37.

[27] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

In a similar vein, negotiation is key to Dru Gladney's description of ethnic identity 'in dialogical interaction of shared traditions of descent with socio-political contexts, constantly negotiated in each politico-economic setting'.[28] In studying particular ethnic minorities in China, Gladney brings in the specific context of politics, economy, and shared traditions of descent that all need to be taken into account. He pleads for constant negotiation in each politico-economic setting, requiring a dynamic approach. Also, Keesing agrees that culture must be studied within the social and ecological setting in which humans communicate.

We subscribe to this line of reasoning. The need for negotiation not only exists between dominant and subaltern, minorities and majority, but in each and every cross-cultural context and will always be a dynamic on-going process. We want to extend the need for on-going negotiation in each politico-economic setting to all cross-cultural interaction.

Constant negotiation when engaging in cross-cultural interaction requires clear methods. David Pinto proposes a three-step method to deal with differences, enabling respectful and qualitative communication.[29] Effective communication between individuals or groups from different backgrounds can only exist when intercultural awareness exists in combination with a double perspective from the point of view of each party.

Using a three-step method Pinto proposes:
1. getting to know one's own norms, values, and behavioural codes;
2. getting to know the norms, values, and behavioural codes of the other party;
3. determining how to deal with the observed differences in norms, values, and behavioural codes in a given situation.

Each party should establish the extent to which it is willing to adjust to and accept the behaviour of the other party. These limits should be made clear to the other party, if possible in a timely fashion and in a way consistent with the communication codes of that party.

The steps Pinto introduces look like common sense. Nevertheless, practice has also taught us that reality does not always follow common sense. Pinto's proposal seems to be directed at two 'opposing' parties. In line with Casmir, we plead to look at cross-cultural communication as complex and 'chaotic'. Although we appreciate Pinto's attempt to establish a workable method, we introduce a five-step method for cross-cultural practice.

[28] Dru C. Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 152.

[29] David Pinto, *Intercultural Communication: A three-step method for dealing with differences.* (Garant, Leuven, Apeldoorn, 2000), p. 173.

Culture-centrism and discourse

Generally cross-cultural theorists and practitioners do not take into account post-colonial dynamics. Western dominance in many areas is taken for granted. Following western principles of academic writing is one example. Since many sciences came into being in the west, it is probably natural that western logic underpins academic writing. But this implies that all other writing traditions from different cultures are ignored. The use of English as a global language is another. Even most theories and tools developed for cross-cultural communication – and more general for management and business taught in international business schools – are rooted in a western frame of thought only and tend to look from a western-centric viewpoint.

Examples of culture-centrism are myriad. For example, we pointed out that Erin Meyer's work is Western-centred, or, better, United States (US)-centred. Still, her work is promoted by Harvard Business School and by INSEAD, *the school of the World* [italics added].

In *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour* Nancy Adler pleads to reflect on cultures beyond national boundaries. Does she mean beyond US-borders? She states that prior to the twenty-first century a disproportionate amount of published material on management came from the US and US-trained researchers based on US-centric assumptions. Although this might be partly true, the statement ignores a huge amount of research done by non-Americans across the globe, and may hide US-centrism in her research.

She argues: 'Both managers and researchers assumed that American's work behaviour was universal... Luckily... variations across cultures and their impact on organization follow *systematic predictable patterns*' [italics added]. Adler wants to move beyond nationalistic categorization, but her statements reveal a static view on culture. It is not clear how the systematic predictable patterns she mentions are defined.[30]

In her TEDx talk on cultural difference in business with China, Dutch Sinologist Valerie Hoeks presents herself as a China expert by inserting Chinese words and proverbs in her talk and by claiming closeness to the Chinese.[31] The Chinese culture that she claims to understand well is presented as extremely difficult to enter. She does not present us with a Chinese counterpart with whom we could engage into an equal dialogue about doing business. On the contrary, she presents a China that is poor, strange, difficult to understand, exotic, and only accessible via her as an insider. She introduces a Chinese man squatting on the ground while selling old computers in the market and Chinese student girls she meets in far out remote places with which she shares a room. When she describes a business case that was solved due to her intervention – saving the Dutch counterpart from loss of face – she secures the business opportunity. She does not present herself as an intermediary who helps business people to get connected, but rather as an in between shield, an expert in an

[30] Nancy Adler and Allison Gundersen, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour.* (Cengage Learning, 2008).

[31] Valerie Hoeks, *Cultural Differences in Business* (in China) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMwjscSCcf0

exclusive position. However, her claimed closeness to China is displayed by positioning herself between hierarchically low-level people in Chinese society. By doing that she undermines here credibility as a China expert. Access to higher levels of the hierarchically organized Chinese society is needed to be able to work efficiently in China. She puts herself in an exotic position, as an outsider-westerner, telling other Westerners she has the key to open the door, not by merited expertise, but by her claimed position as an insider in the closed Chinese communities.[32]

This case can be seen as an example of what Hodge and Louie have defined as a distinct branch of *Orientalism* applying to China: *Sinologism*.[33] Just as *Orientalism*, described by Edward Said, is a Western invention created to serve the agenda of dominant western powers, *Sinologism* is a discursive regime in its role as a site for controlling who can speak with authority about China.[34]

Post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said (1978), Gayatri Spivak (1988), Homi Bhabha (1990), Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994), have reacted against Eurocentrism with its binary oppositions like centre/margin, enlightened/ignorant, civilized/primitive, nations/tribes, culture/folklore, religions/superstitions, and its overall simplification and generalization.

Kishore Mahbubani (1997) and Naoki Sakai (1997) has pinpointed Eurocentrism in the study of Asia. Yet, culture-centrism does not only exist in the West. Chen Xiaomei, for instance, has discussed Occidentalism in cultural artefacts in China. Similarly, I have elaborated on Sino-centrism in China in dealing with the West elsewhere.[35]

Cross-cultural communication requires awareness of culture-centrism of all interlocutors involved; it requires knowledge about each other and a willingness to open up to alternative viewpoints. This is a crucial step for defining common ground before entering into communication.

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[32] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMwjscSCcf0

[33] Robert Ian Vere Hodge and Kam Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture: The Art of Reading Dragons.* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.12–13.

[34] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, Penguin Books, 1995).

[35] Jeanne Boden, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Post-socialist, Post-traditional, Post-colonial.* (Brussels: ASP, 2014).

Towards a five-step method for effective cross-cultural communication

The high need for cross-cultural services has opened up a market for many players to jump in with commercially successful cross-cultural services that are not necessarily based on validated research, but sometimes on rather questionable pragmatic constellations inspired by an uncritical shake of concepts from different traditions and shallow presumptions. As a result, some practitioners add to stereotyping rather than to better cross-cultural understanding. The information describing all kinds of cultures and countries that can be found on websites of consultancy companies is exemplary. But it often does not go beyond superficial etiquette rules or habits, neglecting and ignoring the impact of a deeper level of culture. The fact that cultural features often belong to the unconscious makes cross-cultural communication a field where it is hard to distinguish wheat from chaff and guarantee quality.

Although credit should go to any contribution to master the complex field of cross-cultural communication, we need to move beyond the level of awareness-raising about national cultures and beyond culture-centrism. Complexity of individual cultural backgrounds, of multicultural teams and organizations, requires a dynamic informed approach to deal with differences. We adhere to the idea of culture as dynamic and negotiable in each particular situation and context. In our view, however, this dynamic approach needs to be combined with insight into larger frameworks. We propose a combined method of macro-level, which we call 'extended civilization', and a flexible approach on a micro-level, which we call 'cultural quantum'. In our Five Step Method explained below, we will also include the political, economic, social, and legal context.

Before we turn to the practical method, we first introduce the new concepts of extended civilization and cultural quantum.

Extended civilizations:
Pillars and Pyramids

What we introduce seems to be common sense but decades of bridging Europe and Asia have taught us that it is not. Our experience in cross-cultural consultancy has proved again and again that many people continue to think in their own reference framework while engaging in cross-cultural communication, even after spending many years in another culture. A complicating factor is that after spending time in another cultural context people tend to perceive they do understand based on learned cultural practices. But their understanding often remains superficial and does not reach the out-of-awareness level of culture.

The introduction to the large framework of extended civilization serves as general background, no more than that. It exceeds the dimension of culture. Like culture, its impact is unconscious, taken for granted. To reflect on culture against this background helps to recognize behavioural patterns. It is relatively easy to open people's eyes by explaining basic principles of alternative cultural frameworks that are not their own, which they will recognize and with which they have often been struggling over a long time. The larger framework is not something people grasp automatically because it remains unconscious. Therefore, there is no effort to explain or pay attention to potential differences. We cannot expect all cross-cultural interlocutors to be cultural specialists. We need to find a method to lower the threshold to cross-cultural understanding.

There is no outlined definition of culture, nor is there one of civilization. Intuitively, civilizations seem to refer to a bigger framework. Civilizations are described as complex societies characterized by urban development with complex social stratification, symbolic communication forms, and writing systems. They are often characterized by particular architectural complexes that symbolize human domination over nature.

In line with Edward T. Hall we contrast West and East. The pillar and pyramid model we discuss below are respectively rooted in ancient Greece and in ancient China. They are just two examples of extended civilizations that left a deep imprint on large parts of the globe. Besides these, others exist of course. Here we contrast East and West because it belongs to our field of expertise. We present this contrast as a case.

Obviously, today the world is a different place than two thousand years ago. It is, however, interesting to notice that ancient Greek and ancient Chinese philosophers formulated their ideas in exactly the same era and their respective ideas have resulted in two different systems that continue to have huge influence through today. Between East and West today, these two models continue to clash and lead to misunderstanding.

Also, it is difficult to draw a clear line here. The French society is quite meritocratic, but has a strong debate culture following the pillar model. Japan, with its meritocratic society following the pyramid model, deserves special

attention as Japanese management systems have had huge influence on western management methods.[36]

The pillar model and the pyramid model respectively use distinguishable cultural patterns. Interaction between individual people, teams, and organizations belonging to different extended civilizations – each with their own internal logic that is, in principle, incompatible with one another – will not settle into harmony or efficiency without conscious assessment, considerations, decisions, and strategies. Building trust between people follows different patterns in the pillar model and the pyramid model respectively and is therefore very difficult to achieve and often remains a challenge in cross-cultural interaction.

Pillars: the roots

At first extended civilization is rooted in ancient Greece and Europe and later extended to other global areas. Ancient Greece was considered a civilization with people like Pythagoras, Archimedes, Socrates, Euclid, Plato, and Aristotle, and was the basis of modern geometry, biology, physics, western philosophy, and the Socratic educational system. The Roman Empire spread the Greco-Roman civilization and Christianity across Europe. The European legal system that is used today is rooted in the Roman Empire. The Enlightenment promoted the rational human being, separation of powers, the constitution, and human rights came into being. The

[36] Christina El Ahmadjan and Ulrike Schaede, "The Impact of Japan on Western Management", in Nigel Holden, Snejina Michalova, Susanne Tietze, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Cross-Cultural Management.* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 312–47.

combination of all these and many more influences has resulted in an extended culture that spread over a large part of the world in Europe, America, and beyond. The fact that the educational system in the West today is still based on the Socratic method of questioning and challenging is responsible for the continuation of many cultural patterns. In spite of huge differences between areas and populations, there are cultural tendencies shared across this extended civilization. For convenience sake, we call the extended civilization rooted in the West the pillar model. Pillars symbolize ancient Greek architecture – the stoa – a place for debate and public gathering where people tried to convince each other with arguments, where public speaking was most important, where the ideas of democracy, equality between people, and rule of law was born.

Pyramids: the roots

A second extended civilization is rooted in ancient China and later extended to other global areas. Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius, Mencius, Mozi, Xunzi, Han Feizi, and many others lie at the basis of this extended civilization, spreading across large parts of Asia and beyond and developing in a variety of versions. This extended civilization is built on other roots and follows a different cultural logic, which we call meritocracy. Educational systems in Asia are based on Confucian meritocracy, deeply influencing societies today. For convenience sake, we call it the pyramid model. The pyramid is inspired by ancient Asian architecture like the Forbidden City, where everything is based on hierarchy to show status and to enable hierarchical rituals, where everyone had his role

to play according to hierarchical position and where lower levels followed higher levels. Public speaking was not of key importance, but rather a high awareness of hierarchy, status, and a high adaptability to situations. Morality was inspired by correct public behaviour, keeping interpersonal relations in harmony at all times. The importance of the State came before the importance of the individual. Merits, status, hierarchy, moral power, the right behaviour in the right context, high awareness, and interdependence of people are key.

Pillars: today

Western societies today follow the pillar model. Rule of law is the fundament of the model. Different centres of authority co-exist next to one another – different parties in politics, different business units in the same company, different independently working experts in a team – cooperating in a non-centralized manner and interacting based on principle equality. Consensus between equals is key to the pillar model. People learn to look at one another as individual and equals. In this egalitarian model people expect to be informed, to be consulted, and to have a voice. Communication follows a horizontal and matrix pattern running through the whole edifice of pillars. An organisation is glued together by openly sharing information and open communication. Time is monochronic, resulting in sequential planning ahead and sticking to planned schedules. A meeting where people gather for discussion is the basis of cooperation and follows a sequential pattern: topic per topic is argued and discussed, consensus reached, and decisions taken. Education is student-oriented. People learn to debate, to challenge, and to speak in public. People learn to look at

themselves as independent individuals making their own choices and having full responsibility and ownership in study and work. Relationships are open, based on individual choice. The key to build trust lies in keeping one's word, in executing what has been agreed on. People learn to immediately trust each other when meeting for the first time. But trust can be lost quickly when the other party does not keep his/her word.

Pyramids: today

Asian societies are built on the pyramid model based on the logic of meritocracy. Meritocracy implies that people are not equal. Hierarchic relationships are the fundament. Loyalty between people is key. People develop high awareness of social status and interdependence. Organizations are centralised. There is always one centre of authority. Decision-making follows a systematically layered patterned. People learn to look at each other in terms of hierarchical categories. Those who succeed in high merits have moral power and become role models for others to follow. According to merits one occupies a status in the ladder of society, and a hierarchical role in each situation. Tasks, given by the higher level, are well defined, wholeheartedly executed, and responsibilities do not exceed the particular role in a situation or organization. People are at all times aware of their position in the whole of the organization, and do not take full ownership as there is always someone on top to give the final verdict. Communication follows a vertical pattern. The ladder needs to be climbed step by step. Education is built on following role models, to behave according to one's role in each specific situation. Meetings are public hierarchical gathering to symbolically finalize decisions

already taken. Being loyal to a relationship with a higher-ranking person is more important than keeping one's word. Consensus agreed to in a meeting by one person could easily be overruled by another one higher in the hierarchy. Trust is built by loyalty between people, not by keeping one's word. In contrast to the pillar model, information is not shared by everyone. Only the upper layers are involved; lower layers are not considered relevant in decision-making, and may not even be informed about decisions from higher levels.

People learn to think in terms of networks with insider-outsider ethics. They learn to distrust each other when they meet for the first time; loyalty needs to be built over time, or to be passed on between friends. Time and space are one, resulting in high flexibility in dealing with planning on the one hand, and on the other extreme formalization of specific important situations.

Extended cultures and ethics
Westerners often claim they are more ethical than Asians, but their ethics are based on the rule of law, on keeping one's word. Asians claim they are more moral and ethical than Westerners, but their ethics are based on loyalty to complex human relations and networks.

This very basic framework of extended civilization belongs for most people to the realm of the unconscious. Awareness can be established in the short term by education and training. But it takes years to discover that individuals have to learn it by trial and error. As long as this basic insight in extended civilization is not conscious it leads to distrust, frustration, malfunction,

and inefficiency. Once it is clear, it becomes easy to deal with and it is possible to critically reflect on particular situations, to take the right decisions in a mutually respectful and efficient way, and focus on the micro-level of the cultural quantum.

Cultural quantum: minimum possible exchange and intra-action

After addressing the macro-level of extended civilization, we now turn to the micro-level of human interaction in concrete cross-cultural situations. For this level, we use the concept of 'cultural quantum'.

Quantum (Latin for *amount*) is associated with exact sciences, referring to heat, matter, electricity, gas, and radiation. Einstein suggested that radiation exists in spatially localized packets. Max Planck discovered that energy could only be absorbed or released in tiny, differential, discrete packets or energy elements. Differential refers to infinitesimal differences, or differences so small that there is no way to measure them – the minimum possible exchange between bodies. We introduce the concept of 'cultural quantum' to symbolize this line of reasoning: cross-cultural interaction as absorption and releasing of tiny, differential, discrete packets of culture.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Karen Barad builds on Niels Bohr's investigations on quantum physics, questioning the nature of nature, science, and social practices. As human beings we are part of nature, therefore the laws of nature apply to us as to anything else. Entanglement of matter and meaning does not simply mean to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence.[37]

To describe this material-semiotic entanglement Barad follows Donna Haraway, replacing the metaphor of *reflection*, which is about mirroring and sameness, suggesting an illusion of essential, fixed position, with *diffraction* which is about heterogeneity: 'Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings'.[38]

What interests us in this context, without going into scientific details of the concept, is its 'processing of small but consequential differences", and "the processing of differences . . . is about ways of life".[39] Diffraction does not fix object and subject in advance. Therefore, it allows for 'reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge'.[40]

Another interesting idea Barad introduces is *intra-action* as opposed to *interaction*. She states that emergence is not something that happens once and for all 'as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action'.[41] 'Intra-action' signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, which constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality.[42] While

[37] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. ix.

[38] Donna Haraway, quoted in Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 71.
[39] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 29.
[40] Ibid., p. 30.
[41] Ibid., p. 9.
[42] Ibid., p. 33.

interaction presumes preceding individual agencies, *intra-action* does not. The new philosophical framework Barad introduces rethinks fundamental concepts, including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time.[43]

This is especially relevant in a cross-cultural context, where many actions and influences take place simultaneously while concrete space-time concepts differ between cultures. Here, space and time are no more than partial components together with many other that constitute a situation, just as causality is.

It may appear as a contradiction to first raise awareness of the larger framework of patterns of extended civilization, and then to turn to diffraction and intra-action causing things to come into being as they emerge on the spot, but it is not. Awareness of extended civilizations does not mean these patterns are necessarily ascribed. They are mere possibilities to help understand how people behave. Any cross-cultural communication will take place in a given situation, and any situation can be seen as an endless potential of possibilities. The final result will come from the intra-action in that specific situation. Our main concern with the cultural quantum is to allow for an approach of complex cross-cultural situations without preconceived fixed categories, so that each situation can exist in its own and be recognized as such. Independent of cultural background, people will display different behaviour in different situations. The cultural quantum concept gives room for that changeability and flexibility.

In our view, effective cross-cultural interaction in reality requires both an awareness of the overall framework in which people have learned to think and a concrete bottom-up approach of negotiating with people in each particular situation and context. It is a *process of continuous learning* about unconscious patterns of human behaviour and an *on-going exchange and change*.

[42] Ibid., p.26.

Five-step method for effective cross-cultural cooperation

We propose a five-step method to practically engage in cross-cultural communication:

1. Uncover
2. Look around
3. Explore the cultural quantum
4. Negotiate positions and agreements
5. Develop common goals and strategy

We will elaborate on each of the five steps below.

Uncover

Many aspects of culture in general, and of cross-cultural communication, remain to the out-of-awareness realm. The very first step to enable effective cross-cultural communication is to uncover that out-of-awareness dimension and gain *awareness*. This requires an in-depth reflection on one's own cultural background and that of others. This is the crucial to start of the process.

In practice, actions should be taken so that:
- Everyone is aware of and understands the *extended civilizations* involved in the interaction between interlocutors and parties. The pillar and pyramid model will help. What we target here is a macro-level of cultural understanding that exceeds national borders, but that is still recognizable.
- All interlocutors can become conscious about their *culture-centrism*.
- People become aware about their own *individual functioning*, reference framework, behaviour, and core values.

- People become aware and gain understanding of the functioning, reference framework, behaviour, and core values of *all other parties*.

Look around

The second step is to gain understanding of the *context(s) – political, economic, social, legal, cultural –* in which cross-cultural communication takes place. The clearer specificities or the concrete context is, the less misunderstandings will arise, and the more realistic the basis to build on.

In practice, this requires:
- A reply to the question if all interlocutors belong to a similar concrete context, or to different contexts that need to be crossed, besides culture.
- Mapping of strengths and overlapping areas.
- Mapping and consideration of weaknesses and differences.
- Mapping the concrete context: political, economic, social, legal, and cultural.

Explore the cultural quantum

The third step is dealing with the *concrete situation at hand*. Exploring the cultural quantum means mapping cultural preferences, core values, preferred practices of all interlocutors, and based on the result, outline and decide what can and what needs to be done.

We list a number of keys that can be explored in a specific situation at hand. The list below is non-exhaustive. Creating a list of questions is part of the exploration. Most important is a deep reflection and concrete exploration of and with all interlocutors. Some cultural keys may coincide between

individual interlocutors, while others may be very different.

In practice, this means reflection on:
• Language: What language will be used? Will translations be made? Who will translate what? Who decides on this? What is the position of the translator? Is the translator also an intermediary?
• Communication: What are cultural preferences in communication for the parties at the table? Who is at the table? Which stakeholders are involved beyond those at the table? What will be communicated to whom? What agreements can be made to improve and optimize communication? What channels or tools can be developed?
• Organization: How will communication and corporation be organized? Will there be one leader? Or several leaders? How will decisions be taken?
• Leadership: What kind of leadership will be used? Can all parties accept this?
• Relationships: Who is at the table? Who are all the stakeholders involved? How will trust and loyalty be built? Short-term and long-term? Which kinds of relationships should be built with which stakeholders?
• Time and space: How do different interlocutors deal with time and space? How concretely will everything be planned and executed, and how much room can be left for flexibility? Is there any need for formalizing particular situations?

Exploring the cultural quantum also means that all interlocutors in principle must be prepared to engage in efficient interaction and willing to search for a way to do that. Can all parties at the table accept each other as (equal) partners? How will

relationships or hierarchies be influential on what needs to be done? What are the limits in interaction? What is the goal? Does everyone understand the goal? Does everyone agree on the goal? Can the goal be reached in this particular context? Will the goal be reached by step-by-step planning? Will flexibility be permitted? What steps need to be taken to come to agreement? What is the scope? What is in and out of scope? What is the time? Are there enough resources to establish the cross-cultural common platform, short-term and long-term? What evaluation systems will be used, when, and how? Will procedures be put into place to deal with changes? How will long-term common understanding be assured?

Mapping the cultural quantum in a specific situation prepares for negotiation, which is the next step.

Negotiate positions and agreements
After mapping the cultural quantum level, negotiation can start. Rules and agreements can be made for negotiations, and a method and work instrument developed. A special coach or team of coaches (integration office) can be appointed to enable group processes, changes, and other services if needed. What exactly will be negotiated? What cannot be changed? What can be changed? What should change? One person or an integration office on who/which all parties have agreed can facilitate negotiations.

Develop common goals and strategy
The fifth and final step is executing what has been agreed on and the development of a long-term strategy with intermediate feedback intervals and evaluation systems. Cross-cultural

interaction is an on-going process that never reaches a full end-state; the process must be facilitated and renegotiated at regular intervals.

Cross-cultural communication and cooperation is not something that comes about automatically. It can only be successful when fully supported by a sponsor and resources addressed to it.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural field becomes more complex every day with people and businesses moving across the globe. Cross-cultural communication has become a complex arena of theories and practices, while tools and insights to deal with that complexity are often lacking. Researchers often miss a deeper practical understanding of cross-cultural practices, and practitioners lack a deeper knowledge of research and get lost in superficial features.

The dominant paradigm of thinking about culture in terms of nations is not sustainable for long-term cross-cultural success. We need a dynamic approach combining insight in overall logics of extended civilizations and focusing on concrete quantum situations in which all parties can interact, set conditions, work towards common goals efficiently, and to balance universal and specificity.

The field of cross-cultural interaction and its impact is widely overlooked. A lot of frustration and loss of resources can be avoided. Goodwill and motivation can be gained if it is dealt with in the way it deserves. Today, with intense global interaction we can no longer close our eyes for the need of cross-cultural understanding. Cross-cultural communication will always be a process of lifelong learning and negotiating. But we need to find a way to interact in a respectful and efficient way.

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Extended Civilizations and Cultural Quantum: A new way of looking at cross-cultural communication first assesses current theories and practices in the cross-cultural field. It then elaborates on the concepts of extended civilisations, and cultural quantum, and introduces the Five-Step Method to engage in efficient and respectful cross-cultural management.

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