

## IMPROVING CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS: A CASE STUDY FOR GLOBAL MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE TRAINING AND TRANSFER

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### **Abstract:**

Globalization enabled by technology has increased with both physical and virtual global connections. Global Management Competence (GMC) is in high demand at both multinational and state-owned enterprises. Training and transfer of such GMC skills and knowledge require positive intercultural personality characteristics (Furuya et al., 2009). Cultural competence and intercultural communications are desired skills and knowledge in intercultural personality characteristics. This research is a case study with a workshop, post-workshop survey and qualitative self-reflections in a university setting with undergraduate students. It shows that a seminar designed to enhance cultural competence and intercultural communications was much welcome and has led to improved GMC in its three major dimensions of Cognitive-perception, Relationship, and Self-Management. Analysis related lived, and shared experiences of undergraduate students demonstrate how cultural competence and intercultural communications improvement programs can be deployed for enterprise training in GMC. Specifically, their immediate applications of these skill sets into evaluating the cultural and intercultural presence at the workshop further demonstrated the value and effectiveness of such programs.

*Keywords: Perception, Cultural Competence, Intercultural Communications, Global Management Competence, Competence Training, Competence Transfer*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, due to the advent of technology and its assortment of social-media channels of communication, people are readily equipped to communicate across the vast global landscape even without ever going abroad. Globalization enabled by technology has already or potentially broadened the scope of operation of any enterprise as the stakeholders of the enterprise are and could be from worldwide. Hence, global management competence (GMC) of the employees are in high demand not only by the traditional multinational enterprises (MNEs) but also by the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Even for an organization with its local operations, its human resources could be diverse and have a multi-national presence. Organization's access to diverse individuals demands that individuals are equipped to understand better the multitude of nuances associated with a multi-ethnic society.

Global Management Competence (Furuya et al., 2007, 2009) is typically studied in Human Resources management in the context of expatriation and repatriation experiences. Facing the globalization enabled by advanced technology, everyone could have virtual expatriation, and repatriation experiences in digital communications and digital lived and shared experiences. Everyone could and should have a global mindset. Such a global mindset is no longer limited to executive managers of the multinational enterprise. Hence, GMC should be learned and trained on a larger scale beyond traditional purposes.

Global Management Competence is traditionally defined as the global/managerial knowledge that the expatriate has learned during the international assignment experience (Furuya et al, 2009). GMC consists of cognition, relationships, traits and values developed or acquired by expatriates during their overseas learning experiences (Mendenhall et al., 2008). Great level of GMC can be developed, managed, and transferred to others. One of the factors affecting GMC transfer is positive intercultural personality characteristics (Furuya et al., 2009).

Positive intercultural personality characteristics positively affect GMC transfer (Furuya et al., 2009). Intercultural personality characteristics have been well studied and they are operationalized as a composite measure comprising three (3) major dimensions and 16 minor dimensions and assessed via the 117-item Global Competencies Inventory (Furuya et al., 2007). The three major dimensions are in the orientations of cognitive-perception, relationship, and self-management. The first orientation is more at the contextual level, the second at the interpersonal level, and the last orientation at the individual level.

Since the Global Competencies Inventory is a complicated scale with many items, this research focuses only on the three major dimensions in GMC. Also, competence cultivation in global management can start with the competence building in cultures. This research, therefore, especially focuses on the training and transfer in cultural competence as a pre-requisite for the training and transfer in GMC. In addition, this research regards the intercultural communications training as a means to specifically improve the *relationship* orientation in GMC.

This research is a case study in cultural competence and intercultural communications as pathways to cultivate GMC. It serves a building block for the future training in GMC and GMC transfer.

This research especially addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does training and transfer in cultural competence and intercultural communications improve Global Management Competence in the *cognitive-perception* orientation?

RQ2: How does training and transfer in cultural competence and intercultural communications improve Global Management Competence in the *relationship* orientation?

RQ3: How does training and transfer in cultural competence and intercultural communications improve Global Management Competence in the *self-management* orientation?

This study aims to provoke thought and substantive discussion regarding individual and group's perspectives on cultural competence and intercultural communications. It applies a case study

research methodology with a workshop in cultural competence and intercultural communications, a simple quantitative survey post-workshop and qualitative self-reflections on the related topics.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Global Management Competence**

As mentioned earlier, positive intercultural personality characteristics are one of the critical factors for Global Management Competence. Their intercultural personality characteristics are operationalized as a composite measure comprising three (3) major dimensions and 16 minor dimensions and assessed via the 117-item Global Competencies Inventory (Furuya et al., 2007).

The three major dimensions are with:

1. *Cognitive-perception* orientation (e.g., “I treat all situations as an opportunity to learn something new”);
2. *Relationship* orientation (e.g., “I enjoy getting into long discussions with people who are different from me”); and
3. *Self-management* orientation (e.g., “My friends would say I easily change my routine when circumstances arise”).

Further, these three major dimensions are categorized into the following sixteen (16) sub-dimensions or facets:

1. *Cognitive-perception* orientation (4): non-judgmentalness, openness, tolerance of ambiguity, and cosmopolitanism.
2. *Relationship* orientation (5): relationship interest, interpersonal initiation, emotional sensitivity, self-awareness, and behavioral flexibility.
3. *Self-management* orientation (7): Optimism, self-confidence, self-identity, emotional resilience, non-stress tendency, stress management, and interest flexibility.

This research only focuses on the three (3) major dimensions rather than dives into the details into the sixteen (16) sub-dimensions.

### **2.2. Cultural Competence**

Cultural competence is a subset or a prerequisite of Global Management Competence. For those without international exposures, cultural competence can be a proxy subset for GMC. Cultural competence is a skill needed to navigate the individual's different cultural norms, religious background, and ethnicity are highly necessary to combat people's differences. Sue (2006) defines cultural competence as a specific set of skills required to engage a particular culture better. The author argues it is a set of skills that need to cultivate continuously. For instance, due to the changes in mental health and mental health research, the philosophy and practice about cultural competence have and continues to evolve. This shift is due to the importance of mental health therapists need to understand the cultural background of their client better to treat them better. The same philosophical framework holds true for the general populace because people from different cultures bring a different set of perspectives, norms, values, and belief systems. Consequently, it is imperative that people are better equipped to engage different types of people better.

Cultural competence is an equally important skill for the ever conscious CEO, who guards their organization's quality of service, brand recognition, and their bottom line. Wilson-Stronks (2010) arguably makes the claim that a culturally competent skilled labor force and conscious hospital CEO contributed favorably to their organization's mission and patient population outcomes. Uelinger (2019) affirms that intercultural competence is the ability to interact with people from different cultures in a respectful, attentive, and reflective manner. Further, much of the work and

concept of intercultural competence is attributed to the late Edward T. Hall (Uelinger, 2019), whose philosophy and work draws on the following principles:

- To not be defined or confined by conventional categories and expectations
- To draw from and be respectful and appreciative of a history that brought us here
- To trust what we see and feel and sense in all our senses and tell others about what makes sense to us, even if we do not yet have words for that

Intercultural competence begins with each of, and we must make a clear and deliberate effort to improve how we engage and better communicate with each other. The idea will help us better bridge the divide between people from different cultural backgrounds better communicate with one another. Gertsen (1990) makes the point that expatriates who travel abroad for an extended period as an agent of their company undergo the following stages when traveling abroad: Honeymoon, Crisis, Recovery, and Adjustment. During the honeymoon period, individuals are excited and curious because of the surface relationship they have with the locals they come in contact with. Later they experience a period of crisis, they become homesick or feel out of place because of their new surroundings, As time goes on, people slowly recover as they adjust to their new environment and later make new friends and develop a degree of comfort. The process of becoming proficient in intercultural competence is a developmental issue with the goal of being able to adequately decode signs and symbols from diverse people Beamer (1992).

### **2.3. Intercultural communications**

Effective communications between people of different ethnic backgrounds, cultural norms, and values have ever become important in digital society. Due to technological advancement in telecommunication, communication between different people has and continues to increase and grow more complex. The increased prevalence of multinational corporations, increased jet travel, and the advent of the internet to include a multiplicity of social media channels has made communication across the globe seamless and easy. Intercultural communication and cultural competence in relation to Global Management Competence have become a vital and critical topic for study and further exploration in a world comprised of a plethora of diverse people. Hence, a better understanding of intercultural communication is necessary to live in a world that is characterized by a highly digitized and connected world that includes a myriad of multi-media and social media channels, increased jet travel and the ever-growing prominence of multinational corporations that have a global footprint. To that end, it is pivotal that people and organizations are highly skilled and sensitive regarding their knowledge and awareness when engaging people that do not share their cultural norms and values.

Although not a skill set, the study of intercultural communication has tried to address the question, “How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?” This dilemma was often a challenge associated with foreign diplomats and people traveling abroad. Further, in today’s modern and highly digitized world, everyone is confronted with this issue. Consequently, people are forced to be more intentional and purposeful to work together in a multicultural society. The philosophical framework associated with intercultural communication forces us to collaborate with people who do not look like us, act like us or share the same belief systems. It forces individuals to learn how to understand another person language. People cannot just make an assumption or take for granted other people (Bennet, 1998).

### 3. A CASE STUDY

The methodology of this research is a case study that includes a workshop, a post-workshop quantitative survey and qualitative self-reflections by the attendees of the workshop.

#### 3.1. A Workshop on Cultural Competence and Intercultural Communications

The workshop is hosted in a University that has a special administration office dedicated to the working with the underrepresented minority student achievement. The office is tasked to strengthen the University's retention and enrollment goals. The University has and continues to make a difference in the lives of all students, with exceptional attentiveness to the underrepresented minority students based on the study of their past and present academic performances. It is believed that the office and its programs would, by keeping with values and equality, help to enhance underrepresented minority students' retention, graduation efforts, and overall successful life outcomes.

Per specific initiatives undertaken by Georgia State University (GSU) to improve its retention and graduation rates, the University's staff and faculty met to discuss certain ingenuities which might be adoptable at the University to improve its retention and graduation rates. As a result of several meetings and discussions with key university officials, the office dedicated to working with underrepresented minority student achievement planned, coordinated, and helped to facilitate a life skills workshop focused on cultural competence and intercultural communications.

The workshop was facilitated by an invited educational consultant, Dr. S., Professor Emeritus, from one of the Pennsylvania state Universities. Dr. S.' area of expertise pertains to issues of diversity, inclusion, cultural competence and intercultural communications. The purpose of the program was to inform students, faculty, staff, and guests about the importance of understanding different types of people and how to navigate their differences (i.e., related to the *relationship* orientation in GMC). The speaker provided the audience with his perspective regarding matters of perception when interacting with other people (i.e., related to the *cognitive-perception* orientation in GMC). Further, he shared an excerpt from the book *100 Years of Lynching* (Ginzburg, 2996). The selection was about a personal and heartbreaking story (i.e., related to the *self-management* orientation in GMC) about the murder of that author's great grandfather and the impact it had on his father and generations thereafter. His story was captivating and illustrated through personal and generational growth in cultural competence and intercultural communications.

Dr. S. provided the audience with handouts to include key terms and definitions about diversity, inclusion, cultural competence, and intercultural communications. This proved very useful because it laid a strong foundation for everyone to follow the discussion and provided everyone with the tools needed to grasp the subject matter better. It also helped the audience to engage each other better, ask questions and debate one another about the topic. For these reasons, the office further made a case for additional presentations and discussions to include a course, seminar, and workshop focused on cultural competence for students, faculty, and staff because of its positive implications on the University at large. It is confirmed that the workshop is a valuable program for cultural competence training and transfer.

#### 3.2. A Quantitative Survey of Workshop Performance

A survey was administered to all twenty-five (25) attendees of the cultural competence and intercultural communications workshop. Among them, eight (8) attendees responded to the post-workshop survey which renders 32 percent response rate.

Overall analysis of the survey shows positive feedback from the respondents. Among those who responded to the survey, 100 percent of the respondents agreed on recommending the event to a friend or colleague, 62 percent rated the event as excellent and 37 percent of respondents rated the event very good. Additionally, 50 percent of respondents said the event was extremely organized, 25 percent said it was very organized, and 25 percent said it was somewhat

organized. 75 percent of the respondents agreed that the event environment was friendly and 25 percent believed that it was very friendly. 87 percent responded that the length of the event was just right and 12 percent argued that it was too short. The majority of the respondents stated that they would attend an event like this in the future, and maybe invite others to attend.

However, when asked what they disliked about the event, most respondents said they would have preferred if more students attended, the room temperature was too warm, it would have been better if the audience was more diverse.

Their feedback demonstrated that they have in real-time applied what they have learned in cultural competence and intercultural communications into practice and observed the contextual settings of the workshop itself and measured its performance with the elevated quality described in the cultural competence and intercultural communications training and transfer workshop.

### **3.2 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Self-Reflections**

The workshop attendees were asked to voluntarily self-reflect on the topics of cultural competence and intercultural communications and the workshop itself. The outcomes of the qualitative self-reflections are coded, analyzed, and contextualized to examine recurring themes until several prominent recurring themes result closely. It is examined if the prominent recurring themes match and/or represent the key three dimensions of GMC of *cognitive-perception, relationship* and *self-management*.

#### **3.2.1. In the cognitive-perception orientation of GMC**

On the value of the workshop related in the cognitive-perception orientation of GMC, majority of the participants enjoyed it and saw it as an eye-opener for learning the differences between cultural competence and diversity. They especially were cognitive about the learning of new skills not offered in a traditional school setting.

On the way individuals with different ethnicities and races can express themselves, one participant said:

*"I urged my peers who attended the seminar to be responsible with the way they express themselves. To be sure not to scare the same people we want to engage away from the table. I really hope we have more of such seminars where we can teach each other the right way to go about transformation as a collective people regardless of race. We can never really divorce ourselves from our past, but we need to be careful to not let it get in the way of better relations between racial groups."*

Most of the participants felt that the event is very informing, and the topics covered are inclusive and needed to change the future cultural environments needed in our global arena today. One participant expressed that:

*"The cultural competence discussion was extremely informing. The deliverance on the topic was phenomenal. I learned new topics, such the "Melting Pot". However I must admit that I was disappointed in the white to black ratio. Despite the new information I learned, a lot of the topics I was already aware of. I feel as though the more representation of the white community should have attended."*

#### **3.2.2. In the relationship orientation of GMC**

On the ability to engage individuals with various cultural and racial backgrounds, one participants said:

“the ability to engage the student audience was amazing, my favorite part was hearing the students themselves discuss various racial and cultural issues from their personal perspectives. They provided some great insights that sparked conversations I had later with friends, family, and co-workers.”

On the inclusion concepts, all participants felt that this event created a great environment of cultural inclusion, as one participant specified:

“I learned some very valuable information that I plan on using in not only my professional life but my personal life as well. I think that each student should need to attend a workshop similar to this in order to finish their SET credit, if more people/students would open their eyes and think more of the big picture instead of just their own personal culture, it could make not only our campus but workplaces much more culturally sound and create more of a ‘tossed salad’ instead of a ‘Melting Pot’.”

On the diversification, inclusion, and the roles of individuals within their societies, cultural competence and intercultural communications are major players in the success of the interrelationships and hence the exchange of knowledge and experiences, as one participant shared that:

“People young and old, black and white, actually talked with and to each other, rather than at each other. This was perhaps the most profound meeting that I have attended as an employee of the University. It literally changed my view of the world and enhanced my convictions that we certainly have intelligent and caring students.”

On the negative side, participants felt that there was a gap in engaging individuals from different backgrounds. On the topic of the event and its importance, the participants emphasized on their disappointment with the failure of engaging more faculty. Faculty needed to attend events like this as they can change the way they perceive the intercultural phenomenon among students or peers, one participant said that:

“I am still surprised that there were only three staff people and no faculty in attendance. I am afraid that apathy still rules at our school. I truly believe that a conversation was initiated last night, and it was a great start. Every student played a part and it was a positive learning experience for all of us.”

Some participants especially emphasized the need of participation by minority faculty, in events like this although the event itself met its purpose and goals overall. One participant shared that:

“The topic was timely and necessary. I was disappointed by the lack of participation by faculty and staff, especially minority faculty and staff members. I can appreciate how and why our students of color feel isolated and unsupported if we are not present to help nurture, guide and support them along this journey. I was truly saddened by several of the comments offered by our students. Again, reiterating the need to be present and available for our youth. In the same respect I would like to commend the young man that offered an apology and asked for patience as he modified his life's perspective regarding minorities. I am looking forward to more workshops of this nature in the future along with open conversations with our students.”

### **3.2.3. In the self-management orientation of GMC**

Also on the role of social skills in cultural competence and intercultural communications, the participants felt that there is a need to change the code of speaking among minorities and the university's faculty and staff, saying:

*“I think cultural competence is a social skill that we don't recognize the way we should be as students and educators. This discussion reminded me of ‘code switching,’ which is a term that*

*refers to the way minorities switch from one linguistic code to another depending on who it is they are speaking to. I know that almost every black student at this university can probably attest to changing code when speaking to professors, at interviews, or other white spaces compared to with other black students. I think this really attests to the 'chameleonness' that minorities are expected to have in order to be successful in a world that is so dominated by whiteness."*

On the overall perceptions of the event and the importance of the cultural competencies in learning new life skills, especially those related to intercultural communications and connections, the participants agreed on the impact and the importance of events like this for many students of all backgrounds and races, saying:

*"I thought the life skills: cultural competence discussion was very enlightening. I enjoyed how the speakers were able to tell a personal story that would relate to a topic he would be teaching us. The information itself was very new to me, I have never really studied the concept of cultural competence. I knew some terms such as assimilation and equity however he was able to break down some common terms that we all use so that we all left with a true understanding of each term. Some of these terms: equality, equity, and competence. Besides learning more about the competence, related to our lives. What I have learned from this discussion is that our campus is making strides to make this institution diverse and inclusive, but the university is falling short. This narrative was heard numerous times by my peers at the discussion."*

#### **4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

One limitation to the study is the number of responses to the survey was less than expected due to the lack of incentives for workshop attendees to provide feedback and the limited time available for obtaining the feedback. Many participants did not get the chance to view or learn about the survey before hands. Another limitation refers to the instrument used. The survey questionnaire excluded data related to participants' cultural backgrounds as well as their demographics.

Due to the limitations mentioned above, future research should consider conducting a mixed method approach to study the cultural competence and intercultural communications by assessing a few more workshops of this kind and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from a larger sample and from both students and faculty to better assess the improvement in cultural competence from the workshop participants.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Global Management Competence is a well-studied construct measuring the skill sets of individuals who travel abroad as agents of their companies. Graduates of universities who would become the labor force for the global companies and the stated owned companies with digital, global customer base should cultivate their global management competence. Cultural competence and intercultural communications are the subsets or related skills of GMC. A case study with a workshop on similar topics to undergraduate students at a university shows that training and transfer in cultural competence and intercultural communications skill sets have positive influences on the workshop participants and reflected in the three major dimensions of GMC: cognitive-perception, relationship, and self-management. More interestingly, their immediate applications of these skill sets into evaluating the cultural and intercultural presence at the workshop further demonstrated the effective training and transfer of competence.

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