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Deardorff's model



Deardorff's model

Definition: A framework for developing skills to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures.

Academic Background:

- Darla K. Deardorff is an internationally recognized expert in intercultural competence and global education.
- She holds a Ph.D. in Education from North Carolina State University (2003).
- Currently serves as Executive Director of the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) and has held teaching/research positions at Duke University, NC State, and other institutions.



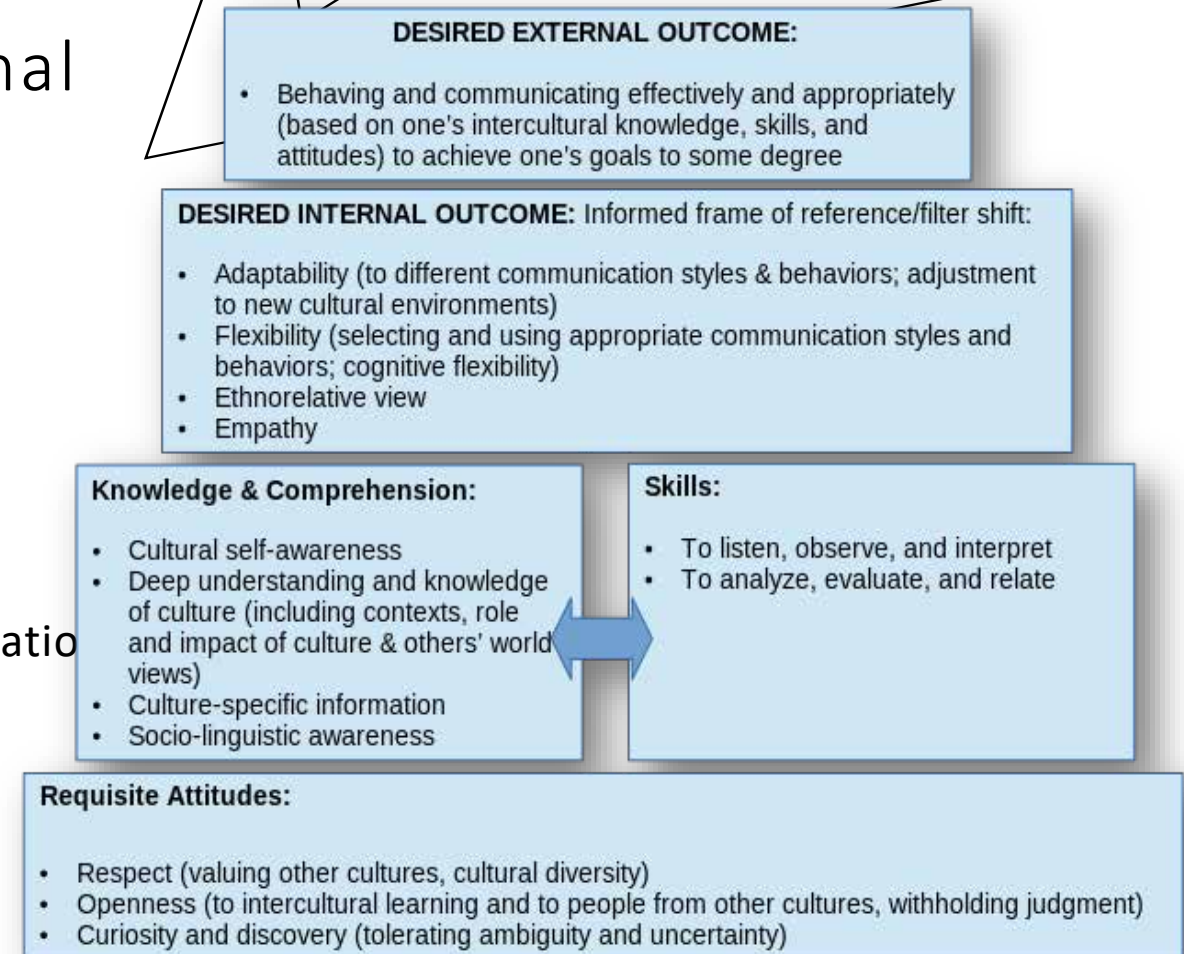
Research focus and key contributions

- Specializes in intercultural competence assessment, international education, and global leadership.
- Developed the **Process Model of Intercultural Competence** (2006), one of the most widely cited and influential frameworks in intercultural studies.
- Her work bridges education, business, and policy, helping institutions assess and develop intercultural skills.
- The model has been broadly adopted in intercultural training and academic research worldwide, serving as a foundational framework for understanding and fostering intercultural competence.



The pyramid model (foundational elements and outcome)

- **Attitudes:** Openness, respect, curiosity
- **Knowledge & Comprehension:** Understanding cultural norms, language nuances
- **Skills:** Listening, observing, adapting communication
- **Internal Outcomes:** Empathy, flexibility
- **External Outcomes:** Effective interactions, appropriate behavior



Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2004, 2006, 2009)



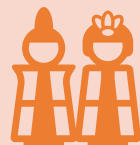
Attitudes (the foundation)

Before gaining knowledge or skills, one must have the right mindset for intercultural interactions.

- Openness: Willingness to engage with different cultures without judgment.
- Respect: Valuing other cultures as equally valid.
- Curiosity: A desire to learn rather than assume.
- Empathy: The ability to understand others' perspectives.



Attitude example



Maria, a project manager from Spain, was assigned to lead a new team with members from Japan, Brazil, and Germany. Before the first meeting, Maria felt a bit nervous because she wasn't familiar with the cultural backgrounds of her teammates.



Instead of making assumptions or sticking to her usual way of working, Maria approached the situation with **openness** and **curiosity**. She took time to learn about each culture's communication style and work preferences. During the meeting, she listened carefully, showed **respect** for different viewpoints, and asked thoughtful questions to understand her teammates better.



Because of Maria's positive attitude, the team quickly built trust and collaboration. Her openness and respect helped create a welcoming environment where everyone felt valued, leading to more effective teamwork and successful project outcomes.





Knowledge & Comprehension

Understanding cultural norms, communication styles, and historical contexts is crucial.

- Cultural self-awareness: Recognizing your own cultural biases.
- Culture-specific knowledge: Learning about traditions, values, and taboos.
- Sociolinguistic awareness: How language varies across cultures (e.g., direct vs. indirect communication).



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Knowledge and comprehension example



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Imagine Sarah, an American businesswoman, traveling to Japan for an important meeting with Japanese colleagues. During the meeting, Sarah notices that there are several long pauses and moments of silence when her Japanese counterparts are speaking. In the U.S., Sarah is used to lively discussions where silence often feels awkward or uncomfortable, so she starts to feel uneasy and wonders if something is wrong or if the meeting is not going well.

However, before the meeting, Sarah had taken time to learn about Japanese communication styles. She understood that in Japan, **silence is often a sign of respect and thoughtfulness**. It means that people are carefully considering what has been said before responding, rather than rushing to speak. This knowledge helped Sarah interpret the silence correctly, rather than misreading it as disinterest or discomfort.

Because Sarah comprehended this cultural nuance, she was able to remain patient and respectful during the pauses. She didn't interrupt or try to fill the silence, which would have been seen as rude in Japanese culture. Instead, she waited calmly, showing respect for the communication style of her colleagues.



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Skills (putting knowledge into action)

- Active listening: Paying attention without immediately judging.
- Observation: Noticing nonverbal cues (gestures, eye contact, personal space).
- Adaptability: Adjusting communication style as needed.
- Conflict mediation: Resolving misunderstandings respectfully.



Skills example



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Ahmed, a business executive from Saudi Arabia, was negotiating a partnership deal with Lisa, an American businesswoman. During their discussions, Lisa asked Ahmed several direct questions about whether he agreed with certain contract terms.

Instead of giving a clear "no," Ahmed often responded with polite phrases like, "We will consider this carefully," or "That might be challenging." In Saudi culture, directly saying "no" can be seen as impolite or confrontational, so people often use indirect language to express disagreement or hesitation.

Lisa, unfamiliar with this cultural nuance, initially felt confused and frustrated because she was expecting straightforward answers. However, she quickly realized that to communicate effectively, she needed to develop the **skill** of reading between the lines—paying attention not just to what was said, but how it was said, including tone, body language, and context.

By observing Ahmed's indirect cues and asking open-ended questions, Lisa was able to understand his concerns without forcing a direct "yes" or "no." She adapted her communication style to be more patient and attentive, which helped build trust and allowed the negotiation to progress smoothly.



Internal outcomes

- **Increased Empathy:** A deeper ability to understand and share the feelings of people from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Flexibility in Thinking:** The capacity to adapt one's mindset and perspectives when encountering cultural differences.
- **Reduced Stereotyping:** A conscious effort to move beyond simplistic or prejudiced views about other cultures.
- **Heightened Self-Awareness:** Recognizing one's own cultural biases and how they influence perceptions and interactions.
- **Open-Mindedness:** Willingness to consider and accept cultural differences without judgment.



External outcomes

These outcomes are observable behaviors and skills that demonstrate effective intercultural competence in action:

- **Successful Collaboration:** Working effectively and harmoniously with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Respectful Conflict Resolution:** Managing and resolving disagreements in ways that honor cultural differences and promote mutual understanding.
- **Ability to Navigate Cultural Differences Smoothly:** Demonstrating adaptability and sensitivity in cross-cultural interactions, avoiding misunderstandings.
- **Effective Communication:** Using culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.
- **Building Trust Across Cultures:** Establishing credibility and rapport with people from different cultural contexts.



EXAMPLE SCENARIO FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OUTCOMES

Anna, a Swedish manager, leads a team based in Vietnam. Sweden's culture is characterized by low power distance and an egalitarian approach, where open discussion and equal participation are expected in meetings. In contrast, Vietnam has a high power distance culture, where hierarchy is respected, and junior team members may hesitate to speak openly in group settings, especially in front of senior leaders.



EXTERNAL VS INTERNAL

External Outcomes (Behavioral Results)

Adapts Meeting Structure: Instead of relying solely on group meetings, Anna schedules one-on-one meetings with team members before group discussions. This allows individuals to share their thoughts privately, where they feel more comfortable.

Encourages Participation: During group meetings, Anna explicitly invites junior team members to contribute, signaling that their input is valued and safe to share.

Builds Trust and Cohesion: These adjustments lead to better communication, increased trust, and stronger team cohesion, as team members feel respected and understood.

Internal Outcomes (Personal Growth)

Develops Adaptability: Anna recognizes that her usual meeting style—encouraging open group discussions—does not work well in the Vietnamese context. She understands that her colleagues may not feel comfortable speaking up freely in front of others due to cultural norms around hierarchy and respect.

Cultivates Empathy: She learns to interpret silence not as agreement or disinterest but as a sign of respect or hesitation. This empathy helps her appreciate the cultural reasons behind her team's behavior rather than misjudging it.

Increases Cultural Awareness: Anna becomes more aware of her own cultural assumptions and how they differ from those of her Vietnamese colleagues. This self-awareness helps her approach interactions with greater sensitivity.



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Deardorff, D.K. (2006). A Model of Intercultural Competence and Its Implications for the Foreign Language Curriculum. In Wilkinson's *Insights from Study Abroad for Language Programs* (Thomson). Invited chapter.

Deardorff, D.K. (ed). (2009). *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Sage)



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