

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS IN SINO-AFRICAN INTERACTIONS: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Chinese organisations in Africa face communication challenges attributable to numerous causes, among them anxiety felt by ‘strangers’ (Gudykunst, 1995), ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, language differences, ambiguity, non-verbal misinterpretations and so on. In addition, cultural values and contexts, which influence how people perceive and interpret situations, present further challenges to intercultural communication and its effectiveness (Okech, Pimpleton, Vannatta and Champe, 2015: 271). While there exists an abundance of theories that could serve as prescriptive guidelines for effective intercultural communication, the continuing challenges in the Sino-African context point to possible inadequacies. In particular, most existing theories have been developed in the West and may not be relevant for the Sino-African context. Moreover, these existing theories adopt mostly mono-cultural perspectives with greater concern for home country perspectives without perhaps due consideration for host country perspectives. While the expectation in intercultural communication effectiveness (ICE) is maximum understanding among interactants (Nieulip, 2012), experience has shown that misunderstandings often arise due to differences in expectations. This potentially implies that the term ‘effective’ may indeed assume different meanings in different contexts, hence raising the issue of appropriateness in communication. To minimise some of the challenges faced in intercultural communication and to enhance effectiveness it is therefore important that communication be approached in a carefully considered manner. As such, in the endeavour towards (ICE) in Sino-African interactions, this study proposes a ‘*multi-view*’ approach to understanding intercultural communication effectiveness. A critical review and synthesis of extant literature culminates in the development of an *a priori* ‘*multi-view*’ conceptual framework of understanding (ICE) reflecting potential synergies and gaps in African and Chinese communication culture. A ‘*multi-view*’ approach is one where interactants seek a reciprocal understanding of communication effectiveness within and across cultures. The bedrock of this understanding can be explained along six considerations identified as enablers of ICE), namely; values and guiding philosophies, self-perceptions, the nature of communication (ontology), degree of interaction (epistemology), objective of communication (axiology), and process and style of communication (methodology). Consequently this understanding breeds ‘intercultural awareness’ - a state of knowing the distinct characteristics of one’s own culture and that of one’s counterparts (Chen, 2015:466). When individuals are interculturally aware they are better positioned to be mindful and sensitive in their communication, hence potentially enhancing its effectiveness. Applied to the Sino-African context the *multi-view* approach provides a theoretical representation of the perceptions of ICE potentially held in African and Chinese cultures, while at the same time identifying potential gaps and synergies in communication culture. Once validated empirically, the framework can provide insights that can inform training programmes, policies, strategies and other interventions aimed at enhancing ICE in Sino-African interactions.

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