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# INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE BETWEEN DESIRABILITY AND NECESSITY

Review  
Article

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## Abstract

*This article is an attempt to scan and inventory the key aspects concerning intercultural competence on appeal to literature and information provided by training centers. Punctually, our concerns have focused on the definition and components of intercultural competence, but also on some models and tools that form it. Specific aspects in management were highlighted and we make a proposal for a positive exploitation of the ample material, a rather redundant one which we had access to using innovative collaborative networks, within a multidisciplinary and multicultural project.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the current context, dominated by a direct intercultural interaction or a mediated one by virtual communication channels, topics related to our own intercultural competence gained a high importance. If in the past culture wasn't a noteworthy criterion or hadn't the adequate importance in decision-making, now it is considered an extremely useful tool, at least in the field of business, politics / diplomacy, and education. Awareness of the need for intercultural competence training and development concerns in this regard is revealed by numerous companies that evaluate and develop intercultural competence. A simple scan of the international environment (international relations, international business, migration, international projects, multicultural teams, international bodies etc.) shows that owning intercultural competence is not just desirability, but it has become a necessity. Diverse areas of science (anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, management, communication, linguistics, philosophy, etc.) contributed to ample debates issued in intercultural competence, proving the multi- and interdisciplinary interest. In management, aspects of culture and intercultural competence were taken into consideration increasingly as it was realized that cultural diversity requires a specific profile for both the manager and the employee able to perform in the intercultural environment. This is the general framework that has generated the concern for this article where we planned to survey the literature on major issues related to intercultural competence (definition, components, importance, model, and assessment / development tools) with a proposal to valorize the extremely ample information on this topic.

## GENERALITIES REGARDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

### Definition and components

Literature provides numerous definitions of intercultural competence. An inventory in this regard might seem overwhelming considering the extremely high number of related or alternatively used concepts (e.g. multicultural / trans-cultural competence, cultural competence, international competence, intercultural efficiency, intercultural communication competence, intercultural sensitivity, etc.), the revisions by the same author, different models of intercultural competence that we have access to through a simple search in the virtual environment or different aims that require adequate epistemological reconsideration. That is why we don't propose an exhaustive approach and below we try to extract the common / general meaning,

presenting some selected definitions from the literature.

Firstly, we note some of the most common takeovers belonging to Deardorff author: "intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions" (Deardorff, 2006) or "the *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations" (Deardorff, 2006 b), provided that *effectiveness* can be analyzed from the *perspective of the individual*, as adequacy to situations, or from the *perspective of others*, as cultural sensitivity and respect for their cultural norms.

According to Deardorff, intercultural competence includes the following basic components (*idem*): attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery), knowledge (cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness), abilities (observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting), internal outcomes (adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative perspective, empathy), external outcomes (appropriate communication, effective behavior in intercultural situations).

For Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009), intercultural competence represents "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world", and its components are represented by: motivation (the emotional level), knowledge (cognitive level), skills (behavioral level), context (situational level) and results (achievement of aims level).

For Fantini and Tirmizi (2006), to have intercultural competence means to perform "effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself". Concepts of "effective" and "appropriate", say the authors, are very important because they reflect those two perspectives, the emic and ethical one, thereby understanding the individual's ability to integrate different points of view without feeling that their own identity is threatened. The concept's subcomponents here include knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness.

The intercultural competence "involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures" for Wiseman (2003, *apud* SALTO, 2009).

Byram and others (2001), in a description of the people involved in the development of intercultural competence, group the components of intercultural competence in: knowledge (*savoirs* - knowledge about social processes, knowledge about specific cultural processes and products, knowledge about other cultures and about how those from other

cultures perceive themselves), skills (*savoir comprendre* - the ability to interpret events, documents from another culture, to explain and relate to others; *savoir apprendre/faire* - the ability to acquire new knowledge about cultures and cultural practices, ability to operate knowledge, attitude and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction) and attitudes (*savoir être* - curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief regarding other cultures), supplemented by values (*savoir s'engager* - capacity to evaluate critically, on the basis of explicit basic criteria, perspectives, practices, products of our own and other cultures).

The intercultural communication competence reaches a private attention in the specialized literature. Sometimes intercultural communication competence is regarded as a component of intercultural competence, sometimes the terms of intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence are used interchangeably because interaction involves communication. The elements related by both verbal and nonverbal communication are analyzed. It points out that not only knowledge of basic grammatical rules of the common communication language is sufficient but also cultural norms of use. Often the implicit is more important than the explicit and decoding the hidden meaning requires a good *interpretative knowledge*, more difficult than the *factual knowledge*. Language reflects specific ways of thinking, representation of reality, but, often, finding the correspondences is difficult. Therefore, multilingualism and development of translation equivalent capacity are other requirements for the development of intercultural competence (Zait, 2002; UNESCO, 2013).

As a result of this short “inventory” on what the intercultural competence means and includes, we can extract a common, general sense (*individual's ability to interact appropriately in different cultures*) and we can specify that, broadly, the core components refer to: *cognitive dimension* (CgD), *emotional dimension* (AfD), *behavioral dimension* (BhD) and *axiological dimension* (AxD). We note that the relationship between these dimensions is of mutual conditioning. We also appreciate that the axiological dimension is a transversal dimension, manifested through the other three dimensions (see *Figure 1*).

### **The importance of intercultural competence**

The variety of meanings and dimensions associated with the notion of intercultural competence since intercultural competence development is a domain of interest for many areas of social life, from individual needs to the organizational and regional – institutional ones. As result many areas of study have concerns in this regard, among them being: international relations / affairs, intercultural

management, social / intercultural psychology, intercultural communication, social anthropology / ethnology, linguistics, etc.

In management, for example, it is known a definition that supports both its own meaning regarding the concept of culture, but also the efforts that highlight cultural specificity elements, to exploit them in the business environment. It's about Hofstede perspective, who appreciates intercultural competence „a third level of learning, as a result of the awareness of the fact that we have received a certain mental programming and that others (...) have a different mental program, of the acquisition of knowledge on the other culture and of the practice. Competence is able to manage in this new environment, able to solve problems” (*apud* Vallejo-Garcia, 2012).

We may also meet in management: *global management competence*, *global mindset*, *transnational mentality* etc. (Bücker, Poutsma, 2010) or the *cosmopolitan manager model* (Harris, Moran, 1991). There are things that overlap in meaning and they refer to intercultural competence, indicating intense concern for finding solutions to problems that arise in the interaction with diverse cultural backgrounds. The necessary features for managerial activities at a global scale vary from author to author, as in the works focused on other areas of interest. As an example, we mention the following: like going for the bigger, broader picture, balancing paradoxes, trusting process over structure, valuing differences, managing change, seeking lifelong learning, acceptance of complexity, diversity consciousness, an extended time perspective, systems thinking, adventuresomeness, curiosity and open-mindedness (Rhinesmith, Srinivas, Lane *et al.* *apud* Bücker, Poutsma, 2010). For UNESCO, the option taken in consideration is in line with its mission. Therefore, competence refers to having sufficient skill, ability, knowledge, or training to permit appropriate behavior, whether words or actions in a context (UNESCO, 2013, p. 12). Its components are of cognitive (knowledge) type, functional (knowledge application), personal (behavioral) and ethical (guidelines for behavior) ones. As a matter of fact, knowledge helps to develop the ability to speak and to act appropriately in a given context, while ethics and human rights influence both the communication and actions (*idem*).

Intercultural training is an important aspect that is also part of the EU agenda. Beyond the politicized discourse on diversity, there are concerns to find solutions to concrete problems, in European context with multiple challenges. For example, following a roundtable in Rome, in 2009, *SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centre*, which provides resources for non-formal learning as part of the training strategy of the European Commission, proposes the following non-exhaustive list of some

specific components of intercultural competence. They are considered necessary to youth to meet current requirements and international environment: the ability to communicate (nonverbal, different styles), linguistic competence, openness, ability to solve problems, knowing "the other" "socio-political awareness (knowing the context), empathy, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity (ability to react to new situations without much obvious discomfort), motivation, self-awareness / consciousness of own culture (SALTO, 2009). Their development was based on two major dimensions: the affective one (values, attitudes, behaviors) and the cognitive one (knowledge, skills) - another classification, as it may be noticed. It is also highlighted the dependence on context of intercultural competence and it is shown that its development is a continuous process. It involves interpersonal and social skills (see *Figure 2*).

The importance of intercultural competence can be discussed at an individual, group, organizational, etc. level. The necessity of intercultural competence is revealed whether it is about *the global citizen / manager, multicultural teams* or *multicultural company*, because they help to overcome cultural barriers. In the process of their formation / development, individuals come to understand the need to reconcile differences and to develop the dialectical attitude, aspects which will favor the success of intercultural partnerships (Manolescu, Neculăesei, 2014).

## EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

### Overview

The intercultural research field is extremely important and prolific, and therefore aspects of research methodology were developed in the specific context imposed by its particularity.

Being a sensitive area to differences in the perception of researchers, it requires finding ways out of own references or even awareness of its dominance. That is possible by triangulation, namely a *combination of methods, techniques, procedures* (Mărginean, 2000). Literature recommends the mix approach that can eliminate some of the problems and errors facing such a research, quite difficult to achieve. The qualitative approach, by itself, leads to a subjective interpretation, while the quantitative approach may seem superficial in cultural / intercultural studies (Moscovici, Buschini, 2007).

Beyond the mentioned aspect, researchers need to be aware of: cultural differences on theoretical constructs (even the concept of intercultural competence is called into question when analyzing the Western versus the non-Western content - see Stiftung, 2006), the ability to quantify abstract

concepts, that differs from culture to culture, the relevance of investigated aspects in those cultures, the ability to differentiate shades by individuals from different cultures, on the scales used in questionnaires etc. (Bosche, 1993; Zait, 2002, 2007, 2015; Arasaratnam, 2016). Methods, techniques, and tools used in other cultures can be transferred to other cultures only by adaptation, and all the conditions of equivalence (functional, of language, of instrumentation and administration - Hofstede, 1996; Hofstede *et al.*, 2012; Ionescu, Toma, 2001; Onea, 2009, 2011) must be provided in case of intercultural comparison. These measures may help the researcher to prevent any problems disfavoring individuals from other cultures than the one where the reference model and methodology were designed in.

On the one hand, the lack of consensus on the content of intercultural competence, on the other hand, various options of approach, are reflected in the richness and diversity of assessment and development models of intercultural competence. Many authors have tried to present and systematize such models (Arasaratnam, 2016; Damini, Surian, 2014; Hall *et al.*, 2013; Hammer *et al.*, 2003; Hammer, 2011; Matveev, Merz, *op. cit.*; Bhawuk, Brislin, 1992; Van Der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, 2000; LeRoux, Matsumoto, 2006; Munroe, 2003; Munroe, Pearson, 2006; Stinson, 2007; Brinkmann, Weerdenburg, 2014 etc.). It can be mentioned both models that favor the quantitative approach (see examples in *Table No. 1*), as well as models that favor the qualitative approach (portfolios, reflective journals, analysis of critical incidents, responses to hypothetical scenarios, interviews, etc. – see Fowler, Mumford, 1999, Hiller 2009).

We affirm that the necessity of intercultural development can be considered at individual, group or organizational level. If setting the training needs at an individual level is required, the self-evaluation methods are recommended to be complemented by methods that reveal others' perceptions, due to distortions that might arise (Arasaratnam, 2016).

### Management specific aspects

Tools based on general models on intercultural competence can be successfully used in business, but there are also specific tools based on models of intercultural diagnosis that may underlie the evaluation and development of intercultural competence, necessary in management (referring to the necessary competence needed in decision making and activities of multicultural company, from those related to the need to cooperate and work in multicultural teams to those relating to expatriation). There are concerns coming from acknowledged authors (Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars & Charles Hampden-Turner, Shalom Schwartz, Robert House *et al.*, etc.) interested in finding solutions that can be applied in intercultural

interactions related to employment, and answers for intercultural management, comparative / international management, leadership and organizational culture, motivational values in work etc. We will further provide details on some of these concerns and development solutions of manager's competence, capable of addressing cultural diversity.

**ITIM Internațional & The Hofstede Centre**, benefiting from the valuable results of the hard work of Professor Geert Hofstede aim to develop the competence of using culture as a tool by managers. The intercultural diagnostic model, with those six dimensions established as a result of a close cooperation with Michael Bond and Michael Minkov (power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, pragmatism-normativity and indulgence-constraint) is the basis of **Cultura Compass™** application (<https://www.geert-hofstede.com/cultural-survey.html>). It supports the individual to visualize the impact of their cultural preferences and potential behavioral pitfalls in interaction with other cultures. Other applications allow comparison between national cultures, organizational cultures scanning or other necessary aspects for the manager, in their interaction with people from other cultures and organizations.

**THT Consulting** provides information on the key points related to business, based on cultural differences. Another intercultural diagnostic model is reported, the Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars model (universalism-particularism, individualism-collectivism, specificity-diffusion, achievement-ascriptive, clock time-cyclical time, inner direction-outer direction – Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2004). The **Cultura Compass – CCOL** application (<http://www2.thtconsulting.com/tools/#culturecompass>) enables learning the aspects related to business, by considering cultural diversity and its impact on business. The **ICP - Intercultural Competence Profiler** ([http://www.cultureforbusiness.com/icp3/?ICP\\_clientreviewonly](http://www.cultureforbusiness.com/icp3/?ICP_clientreviewonly)) assesses an individual's qualification for international missions, providing guidance for developing intercultural competence needed in the multicultural managerial performance (Trompenaars, Wooliams, 2009). The considered aspects relate to *recognition* (worldly consciousness, diversity of ideas and practices, global dynamics), *respect* (acceptance, self-determination, human dignity), *reconciliation* (human relationships, time, nature) and *realization* (controlling task, managing individuals, facilitating teams).

**Rosinsky & Company** provides a questionnaire to assess and compare the *Cultural Orientations Framework* - COF (<http://www.philrosinski.com/cof/>) which includes several cultural dimensions grouped into seven categories of practical importance for leaders,

entrepreneurs and anyone wishing to valorize human potential in organizations. The considered categories originate in the integration of cultural orientations / dimensions highlighted by Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars etc.: sense of power and responsibility, time management approaches, definitions of identity and purpose, organizational arrangements, notions of territory and boundaries, communication patterns, modes of thinking (Rosinsky, 2009). COF, through its multiple possible uses (cultures assessment, discovery of new cultural options, cultural differences assessment, reducing cultural disparities by creating connections, achieving cultural synergy etc.), is an extremely useful tool to develop intercultural competence in management.

### COLLABORATIVE INNOVATIONAL NETWORKS IN SUPPORT OF RESEARCH ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

In the presentation above we notice that the provided models and tools for assessing and developing intercultural competence cover, each of them, aspects regarding approaches of the subject. For a complex perspective and to eliminate the high degree of redundancy of information generated on this subject we consider that multidisciplinary work teams would be necessary (psychologists, economists, linguists, sociologists, etc.). They might deeply explore components related to intercultural competence (definition, content, assessment / development models, inventory of assessment / development tools, etc.) that ultimately lead to the generation of a new model / complex instrument, on various modules, that can be adapted to different circumstances. This would be made possible by researchers integrated in collaborative innovational networks / structures, with a trans-disciplinary nature, to increase the research performance (Serghie, 2013, 2014). That could raise funds by accessing EU projects. In the future, FRIA (Romanian Foundation for Business Intelligence) might support such a project by creating a platform for interactive work or by taking actions consistent with the objectives it proposes (e.g. “*building collaborative innovational networks, ecosystems and communities among business partners and faculties issued in economics, basic sciences and social sciences*” or “*research-development collaboration with departments, faculties and universities in the fields of information and communication technology, economics, sustainable energy, fundamental sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry), natural sciences, biotechnology, medical sciences*” - <http://evenimente.bxb.ro/parteneriate/>). The project could also have a practical side, namely supporting intercultural competence assessment and

development, especially for people in the North-East, a region that needs more development support. It is a proposal that could have finality in such a subject, in agreement with FRIA mission.

## CONCLUSIONS

*Intercultural competence* is a major concern of many researchers, affiliated or not to training centers, demonstrating its granted importance in present, due to multiple situations that require *access of inter-culturalism*.

Literature review on intercultural competence leads to the idea that there are no holistic, all-inclusive tools to evaluate everything related to intercultural competence (we noticed there is not such approach nor in theory, although there are studies that aim a systematization, as those quoted in this article); but specific aspects related to intercultural competence are delineated (intercultural adaptation ability, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication competence, etc.). This is normal if we take into consideration the diversity of professional areas which the researchers operate in and the preferences of judgments on some sub-topics of interest.

We consider that a multicultural and multidisciplinary approach could lead to a general complex model that would be the basis of designing a multidimensional tool, adaptable to different situations and cultures. It would be a rather difficult project because "intercultural competence" subject has generated an extremely ample literature around it that requires much effort and time for consensus and for a formal order on clear analysis criteria. The proposal based on the use of innovational collaborative networks would be a solution. We do not know if it's possible to reach it nor this level would be reached. We consider that the most appropriate models and tools can be selected and, by the combined approach that allows completion in different area, we can successfully investigate this domain, both from theoretical and practical considerations.

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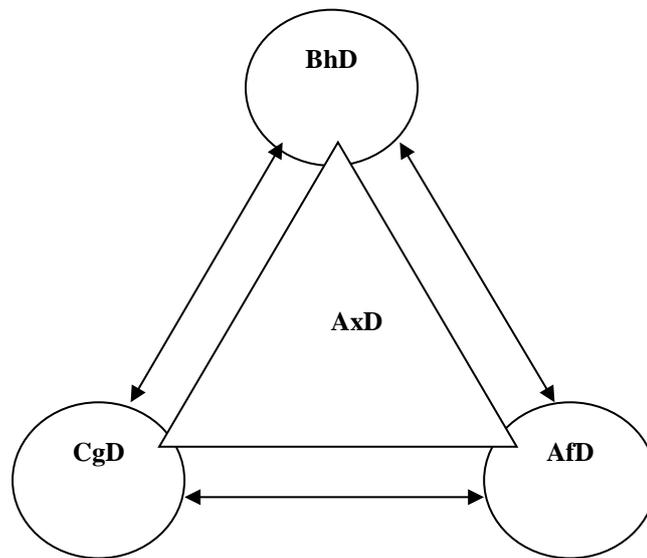
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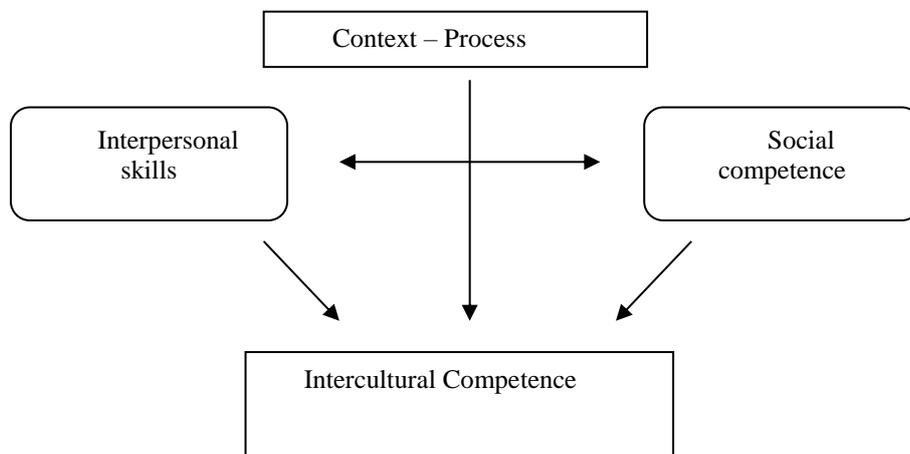
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[http://www.davidmatsumoto.com/content/ICAP\\_S.pdf](http://www.davidmatsumoto.com/content/ICAP_S.pdf)  
<https://idiinventory.com/>  
<http://www.hrdqstore.com/diversity-awareness-profile-hr-training-and-development.html>  
<http://www.ibinet.nl/index.php?mod=irc>

ANNEXES



**Figure 1. Dynamics reflected by the components of intercultural competence**  
(cognitive dimension - CgD, emotional dimension - AfD,  
behavioral dimension - BhD and axiological dimension - AxD)



**Figure 2. Intercultural competence. Components and relations**  
Source: SALTO, 2009.

**Table 1. Examples of assessment tools of intercultural competence**

<b>Assessment tool</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
<b>CCAI</b> (Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory) <a href="http://ccaiaassess.com/">http://ccaiaassess.com/</a>	Kelley, Meyers, 1992	- It measures individual potential of inter-cultural adaptation and helps participants to improve their competence in deficient areas corresponding to the following areas: emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity, personal autonomy;
<b>ICSI</b> (Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory)	Bhawuk, Brislin, 1992	- It measures the individual's ability to modify their behavior in intercultural interaction by considering the following analysis criteria: individualism, collectivism, flexibility, open-mindedness;
<b>MPQ</b> (Multicultural Personality Questionnaire)	Van Der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, 2000	- It measures the multicultural effectiveness using the following personality factors: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, flexibility;
<b>ICAPS</b> (Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale) <a href="http://www.davidmatsumoto.com/content/ICAPS.pdf">http://www.davidmatsumoto.com/content/ICAPS.pdf</a>	Matsumoto <i>et al.</i> , 2001	- It measures the individuals' potential capacity to adapt to a foreign culture, based on own psychological skills;
<b>IDI</b> (Intercultural Development Inventory) <a href="https://idiinventory.com/">https://idiinventory.com/</a>	Hammer <i>et al.</i> , 2003	- It measures the differences regarding cultural orientation with the help of six levels, three ethnocentric and three ethno-relative, described by Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), designed by Bennett in 1986;
<b>MASQUE</b> (Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire)	Munroe, 2003	- It measures multicultural attitudes on several areas: know, care, act;
<b>DAP</b> (Diversity Awareness Profile) <a href="http://www.hrdqstore.com/diversity-awareness-profile-hr-training-and-development.html">http://www.hrdqstore.com/diversity-awareness-profile-hr-training-and-development.html</a>	Stinson, 1991/2006	- It measures awareness of diversity on a spectrum comprising the following phases: Naive, Perpetuator, Avoider, Change Agent, Fighter;
<b>IRC</b> (Intercultural Readiness Check) <a href="http://www.ibinet.nl/index.php?mod=irc">http://www.ibinet.nl/index.php?mod=irc</a>	Brinkmann, Weerdenburg, 2014	- It assesses global intercultural competence based on the analysis of four major categories of intercultural competence: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, building commitment, managing uncertainty.

*Source:* systematization *apud* Van Der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Bhawuk, Brislin, 1992; Matveev, Merz, *op. cit.*; Hammer *et al.*, 2003, Hall *et al.*, 2013; Arasaratnam, 2016; LeRoux, Matsumoto, 2006; Munroe, 2003; Munroe, Pearson, 2006; Stinson, 2007; Brinkmann, Weerdenburg, 2014.