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Cultural Intelligence Sounding the Death Knell for Stereotypes in Business Communication

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1.   Introduction

Globalization, understood as the integration of markets, capital, nation and technologies across individuals, groups and organizations has made the world seemingly smaller (Hill, 2008; Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007). There are however those who insist that the world remains huge, but that globalization has only made it faster. Knowledge and reach go farther, are deeper and cheaper (Cox & Blake, 1991).

Businesses have to adjust to an increasingly globalized world where talents are sourced and collaborate across an almost borderless world. This is changing the yardstick for measuring successful managers, and the criteria these have to follow (Palich & Gomez-Mejia, 1999). Managers can count on talents from across the globe, but as they enjoy a more global market, they must also factor in global competitiveness. In addition to being highly qualified and competent professionals in their various fields, the business leadership role needs to include developing a more global perspective or mind-set, the so-called cultural intelligence which Ang et al (2007:336) define as an "individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings". Organizational talents, customers and stakeholders are world citizens who come from varied cultural background. A leader is needed who would effectively guide social interactions of all stakeholders and take business decisions that will enhance value for all.

This increased cultural sensitivity can begin during the training of managers. They have to be taught to recognize the cultural *landmarks* where to look for the essential manifestations of culture, how to recognize cultural differences and their influence on human behaviour and be attune to all the subtle realities that have culture as either proximate or remote cause (Foronda, 2008). Managers should be taught to recognize stereotypes, control for them and thus create a synergy of cross-cultural resources towards growing business value.

This study proposes a unified framework for the use and understanding of organizational culture to improve business communication. The *Message Coding Congruence* model draws on national and organizational culture models (Geert Hofstede, Edgar Schein and Alfonso Nieto) to facilitate the sharing of meaning in interpersonal and organizational communication towards organizational effectiveness, especially in the face of stereotypes (Beagan, 2003). Stereotypes

are here considered obstacles to the proper encoding and decoding of messages, and thus of communication. (Hippie, Issa, Ma & Stokes, 2011). Members of groups will thus understand better how much of their observations and interpretations are victims of often wrongly held assumptions based on the cultural backgrounds of their interlocutors.

This framework should be useful in academic settings and in actual business environments. It would help in the training of managers and team members in effective communication that accommodates cultural diversity. Beyond training purposes the model also improve practitioners' awareness and understanding of the consequences of cultural differences and taking them into account in striving to attain organizational aims.

The three models/theories are those of Hofstede and his dimensions of national culture; Schein's 'levels' of organizational culture manifestation; and Nieto's process of organizational communication, which gives a central place to culture as both the content, and style of communication organizational identity.

The contexts of the three models differ somewhat. One deals with culture at the national level while the other two deals with culture at the organizational level. Individual human persons are however common to these contexts as the repository, embodiment and agent of cultural expressions.

On one level an objective of this study is to improve interpersonal and organizational communication: specifically by ensuring that parties in the communication process attain a shared understanding or meaning in the messages exchanged. When there is failure in shared meaning, the proposed model should help to understand why this has happened and how to either create or restore it. On another level, this study aims at creating commonality from diversity, forging a common goal for people from diverse and often contrasting culture backgrounds.

Some authors (Cox & Blake, 1991; Nunez, 2000) claim that diversity of workers is a good thing in an organization because their varied backgrounds induce them to want to contribute qualities that together create a richer organization. Other authors (for example, Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2010) do not however agree that diversity necessarily results in better teams, because individuals still have a tendency to form in-groups, resisting attempts to 'force' them to be part of a 'strange' group. The only exceptions seem to be when the persons share a strong common passion for something, such as sports.

The Transactional Model of communication recognizes the 'equality' of all parties in the process, who have a contribution to make, and whose situations should be taken into account for communication to take place (Siminoff & Step, 2005). The process is akin to a negotiation where the different needs of the parties are considered before a conclusion can be drawn. These 'needs' include the surrounding 'framework' (cultural influences) that impact on the meaning derived by the parties (Campinha-Bacote, 2002).

'Semantic noise' would result if the individual needs were not considered in creating meaning of messages, such as when one party encodes using only his framework as reference, not factoring in the framework that the other party would be using to decode the intended meaning (Hockett, 1952). Communication would be a failure because there was no shared meaning. There was no shared meaning because the parties were coding messages from non-aligning perspectives and cultural assumptions.

What causes stereotypes and why is there sometimes a lack of shared meaning in communication? We propose that the causes can be found in the manner of the coding and decoding of messages, and that a defective coding and decoding is likely culture-mediated.

We think that Hofstede's dimensions are a useful tool in academics and practice, because of the greater understanding and measurability they provide for the study of national cultures. We however recognize the possible risks associated with Hofstede's model (a possible source of stereotypes, etc), even though we acknowledge that these outcomes were unintended and collateral.

Hofstede's 'dimensions' of culture can thus be considered a 'double-edged' sword; a panacea as well as a problem. First, it provides an explanation for the pattern of observed characteristics in people from specific geographical locations, which allow us to then discuss them. In this way, it also 'quantifies' the intangible concept that is culture, allowing its measurement and comparability.

Unfortunately however, these same characteristics make the dimensions seem a problem, because of the implied determinism that frame peoples and nations into moulds. Even though what Hofstede did was to identify and recognize an already existing 'framework' of culture 'moulds', his model can be accused of generating the bias of stereotypes in those who never had them before, by informing them of the lens through which they should view peoples and behaviours. Similarly, for those who already had these biases, the model would seem to confirm them in their ways.

This work is arranged as follows. We begin with definitions of culture by various scholars and then focus on how Schein, Hofstede and Nieto understand it, giving some useful background to those concepts we believe will get some mention in our resulting model. We then introduce our proposed Message Coding Congruency model, which takes up the rest of the paper. We make some conclusions with recommendations for possible empirical validation of our proposal.

2. Defining Culture

Culture lends itself to different definitions, a testimony perhaps to the pervasiveness of the concept in all aspects of life. While some define culture in terms of 'values' and 'beliefs', others consider these terms as only partial explanatory variables of culture. Most of the popular definitions available have converging points.

2.1 Various authors

Ralph Linton (1893–1953) defined culture as a "*configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society*."(Linton, 1945:32)

Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) on his part sees culture as "*those patterns relative to behaviour and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes*." (Parson, 1949:8)

2.2 Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch researcher has done extensive studies on organizational culture, the most prominent of which developed a framework that is still widely used (Hofstede, 1983). He pioneered studies in cross-cultural groupings such as countries and regions, and how these influence culture in organizational units, when people from these disparate units come together for a common purpose. Following a worldwide survey of the work-related values patterns of some industrial employees, he obtained results from about 116,000 people in 50

countries thus developing a framework which showed a pattern that allowed behaviours and beliefs to be mapped to four major areas in the first instance: Power distance (strength of social hierarchy); Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism-collectivism and Masculinity-femininity (task orientation versus person-orientation). Later updates added Long-term, Short-term orientation; and Indulgence. Hofstede defines culture as "*the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another.*"(Hofstede, 1980:21)

Newcomers to any organization arrive from a broader national culture whose framework will form a background of how they interpret messages and events, and how to integrate with persons from other national cultures to form a new organizational culture.

Constructivism, as propounded by Jean Piaget (1980) and John Dewey (1960) posits that prior knowledge and cultural nuances shape the construction of knowledge. Hofstede is quick to point out that his 'dimensions' do not explain an intangible concept such as culture, but should instead be considered a best first guess (Osland & Bird (2000)). Culture, for him, is a construct and citing Teresa Levitian, 1973, he describes construct as things 'not directly accessible to observation'. They can instead be inferred from outward practices like speech and other behaviours. While they give an insight into certain behaviours, they are useful in 'predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and non-verbal behaviour'.

Research and several validation tests would seem to show this to be quite a good 'best guess', providing a quantifiable method of comparing national cultures (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Osland & Bird, 2000; Adler, 1986)

2.3 Edgar Schein

Edgar Schein takes a 'deconstructive' approach to the definition and analysis of culture [9]. This enables him to 'break it down' into its component 'parts' leading him to speak of the characteristics, dimensions, and levels, of culture. He defines culture as, "*A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members*

as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems"(Schein, 2010:18)

It might be worth noting in Schein's definition the emphasis on "pattern', 'shared' and 'teach ability' to new members as essential components of what makes culture. "*The power of culture comes about through the fact that the assumptions are shared and, therefore, mutually reinforced*". (Schein, 2010:31)

In light of the focus of this study, improving cultural intelligence of managers, careful note should be made of the reference to group learning or group education in Schein's definition of culture.

Taught to new members would imply that culture embodies beliefs and value that an organization would be interested in systematically teaching to new recruits so as to make possible and hasten their belonging to the group. In the process of group formation, the components of culture also determine the criteria for who is in and who is out of the group. Aspiring and new group members must therefore be formally instructed in the ways of the group, especially when there are aspects of culture that are hidden to outsiders and often whose true meanings are also hidden to many insiders (Smithwick, Schultz, Sullivan & Kashiwagi, 2013). This teaching process ensures that new members do not make mistakes in their interpretation of what is expected of them.

2.4   Alfonso Nieto

Alfonso Nieto, whose model of the 'process of organizational communication' we will be using here, defines culture as a "*collection of values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of being of an institution, how it relates with its members or persons directly linked to it, as well as with the public to which it directs its products or services*." (Nieto, 2006:115)

The common elements and points of convergence in these definitions and explanations, while not always synonymous, are to be found in one or other of the various definitions, such as Parson's 'patterns', and Linton's 'shared' elements. Others are norms, values, behaviour patterns, rituals and traditions, 'programming'. Further, many of these definitions imply 'sharing' as a key component of culture. This is because, in order for behaviour traits to be considered manifestations of a 'culture', they ought to be present in many members of a group in the same way, over a period of time.

2.5   Comparing and contrasting Hofstede, Schein and Nieto's culture paradigms

Hofstede's definition is especially applied to a nation or community of peoples. 'Collective programming' would seem to indicate an unconscious lack of deliberateness in the culture characteristics adopted and exhibited because the members are necessarily 'bound' to some naturally occurring group. This is a lower level of individual differentiation.

Schein's definition of culture on the other hand applies, not at the national, but at the organizational level, to a group whose members have freely decided to come together in order to achieve a common objective. That common goal is what drives them to want to freely adopt specific ways and patterns of confronting group existential challenges. This higher level of individual differentiation would assume the previous one at the national level.

Having and exhibiting some culture characteristics is therefore a prerequisite for belonging to and remaining a member of the group.

Finally, Nieto's definition of culture, rather than take its starting point from the individuals who make up a group, is so undifferentiated as to seem to be focused solely on the institution. Culture is then described and understood not as inhering on the individual -to be later understood as institutional culture because of a summation of observations- but rather a wholesome phenomenon that describes the entire organization. To put it another way, if understanding the individual group member's behaviour is the aim in using Hofstede's and Schein's culture paradigm, understanding the entire institution would be the aim in using Nieto's culture paradigm. The unit of description in the former is the individual while the unit of description in the latter is the organization.

Another unique feature of Nieto's approach is the seemingly more 'natural' and mediate way culture is communicated. The primary goal is to live and transmit the institution's identity and mission, which then has as a consequence, the transmission of culture.

3.   Understanding Culture

According to Schein, three elements can improve understanding of culture: a) its processes, *how* things are done; b) the content of the processes, indicating what exactly is being done; and c) organizational structures. One gains a better understanding of the culture by observing processes. Structures, on their part, are 'processes in *actu*' - processes in action which occur in predictable and stable ways under certain given conditions. Culture, in this view proposed by Schein, is thus one of the most important categories of these types of processes. They are stable process-structure, which are so predictable as to form the "taken for granted tacit assumptions about how group members should perceive, think about, and feel about the events they encounter" (Schein, 1999:123)

### 3.1   Schein's Three Levels of Culture Manifestation

Culture makes itself known by various means. The external structures that are more visible are the artefacts or "manifestations of the culture of the group"(Schein, 1999:169) One explicit level leads into another explicit level until we are taken into the "basic assumptions", the hidden, implicit level that Schein calls the "essence of culture".

Artefacts refer to those tangible and overt manifestations, which are visible, observable and feel-able, such as structures and processes, as well as the observed behaviour of organization members. Artefacts also include all the myths and stories told about the organization, its published list of values, charters, formal descriptions of how the organization works, observable rituals and ceremonies, structures and processes, language, technologies in use, artistic inventions, style and the way members address and relate with each other, with outsiders, and all kinds of emotional displays. These external manifestations are however not enough to draw conclusions about the culture. It is only by staying long enough to become a member of the group or by talking to someone who knows that one can hope to go beneath surface phenomenon.

The oft-repeated warning by Schein about the danger of inferring deeper assumptions from an organization's artefacts alone is because apart from the fact that they do not reveal the deeper covert assumptions, the interpretation given to

these observable phenomena may be projections of the observer's feelings, reactions and background (Malos, 2007).

Levels of Culture
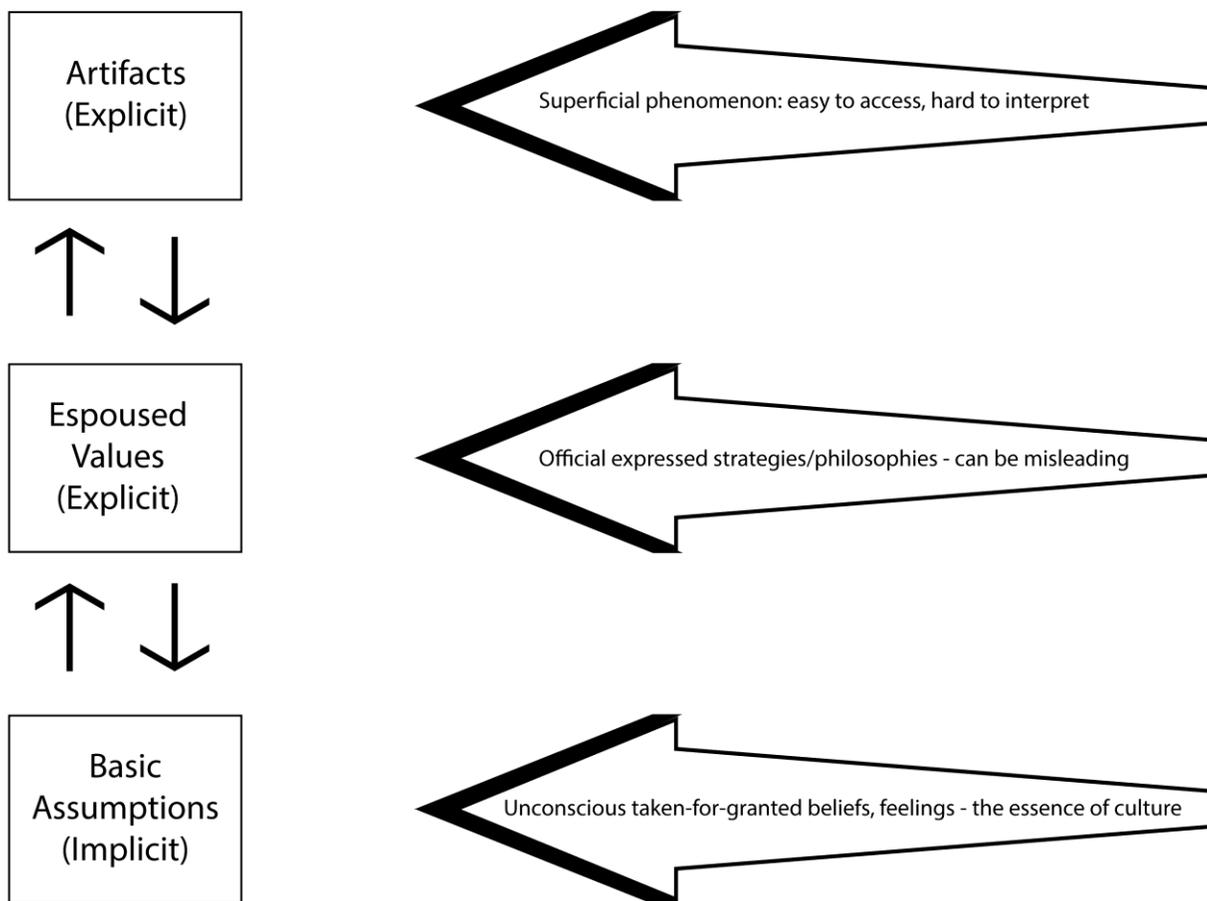
Figure 1: Schein's Levels of Culture

In Figure 1, progression from one 'level' to another indicates a searching for meaning. At the level of artefacts, someone is trying to get meaning from observable phenomena. At the level of espoused values, someone is offering meaning while at the level of assumptions, there is hidden meaning that needs to be discovered, admitted and revealed.

The third level is according to Schein the essence of culture. It is the level of tacit basic assumptions. The beliefs and values held here are so innate to the

old members of the organization that they unconsciously and consistently act based on them. They do not need to explain these shared basic assumptions to themselves because they are taken-for-granted ("it is just the way we've always done it here"). They do not ordinarily explain it to strangers and not immediately to newcomers for the simple reason that they don't explain it to themselves either. "You either know it or you don't". When more tangible manifestations are out of sight, when what is explained is forgotten, it is the tacit basic (unspoken, unexplained but ever influential and present) assumptions that guide the beliefs, values and behaviour of organizational members. Isn't this what culture is?

The content of tacit basic assumptions lie at the deepest level of the 'rite of initiation'. Anyone considered qualified to belong would receive an explanation about these things without waiting for time to pass, for him to understand himself.

3.2   Nieto's Process of Organizational Communication

Nieto's treatment of communication is very much tied to organizational culture. He defines organizational communication as a process or a collection of phases that form part of its communicative activities (Nieto, 2006). It begins from organizational principles to determine its identity, defines its mission, goals and means and hence the culture, gives rise to an image reflected in the minds of the public, and if the image formed is positive, results in a positive judgement or reputation, that eventually ends up earning the organization respect from the public because of the authority it now has.
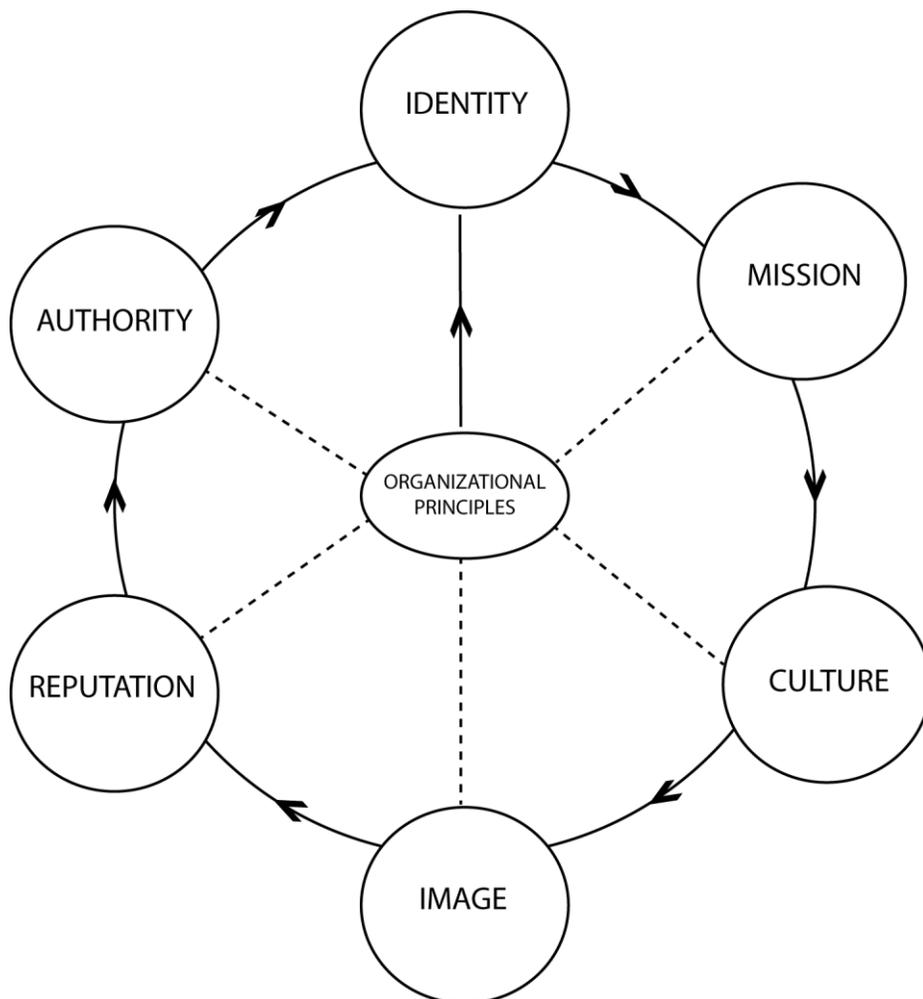
Figure 2: Nieto's Organizational Communication Process

The organizational communication process is cyclic with the final phase (authority) becoming the starting point for a new process of communication.

The unbroken line from organizational principles to identity shows it as the beginning and primary source of the idea or concept that leads to what the organization becomes. It is the root from which springs the first step in the communication process that ends in authority. The dotted lines leading from organizational principles to the other phases indicate that while they do not derive directly and immediately from it, they all have the principles as a reference point at

any time. An organization desirous of remaining faithful to its foundation will always want to make reference to this starting point.

3.2.1 Identity: Underlying the entire process of organizational communication are the 'principles of the organization', its primary reason for existence. This principle will be a reflection of the thoughts of the founders or initiators because every organization begins from an idea, the expression of which seeks to answer the question of why the organization exists. This principle is then formulated in a unique form that defines or describes the organization differentiating it from others of similar characteristics. This gives rise to the identity of the organization.

3.2.2 Mission: In the definition of its nature, an organization starts by saying what it is, stating the tasks it has set out for itself to do in society: from what it is, to what it does. This is its mission.

3.2.3 Culture: As an organization develops there arises certain ways of doing things, of thinking, of carrying out its mission. There would be certain basic assumptions that the members of the organization employ in their actions without conscious thought (Nieto, 2010). As it struggles to solve problems, organizations develop ways that work for them all the time and which they teach to newcomers as acceptable ways to think, act or perceive under definite situations.

3.2.4 Image: With time the culture of the organization becomes consolidated into the image that the public perceives of it, negative or positive. A point to be made here is that the activities of the individuals that make up the organization cannot be divorced from the eventual perception or image of the organization that the public has because they personify the organizational culture and values. The image of the organization always reflects the reality and is the product of time, patience and constancy (Nieto, 2006). Nieto describes it as the conceptual manifestation that is reflected in its "being in the mind of the recipient."

3.2.5 Reputation: This is the state of public opinion at any point about the organization and of the individuals that constitute it. It is what results from an organizational image that persists over time, and can either be negative or positive. While there are actions initiated from the inside, reputation is always the result of a judgement coming from outside the organization.

3.2.6 Authority: This is a reflection of the social power or influence that an organization acquires over time. When, as a result of the good reputation an organization has in the minds of the public, it is able to influence behaviours and attitudes especially on controversial issues in its areas of operation, it is said to have authority. A firm authority is needed to influence those who influence others, and just like reputation, authority is not self-attributed but 'given' from outside the organization. It is a product of perception.

4.   Breaking down Stereotypes: The Communication Congruence (CC) and Message Coding Congruence (MCC) model

Schein's three levels of cultural manifestation provide a road marker for a newcomer to an organization to know where to look out for the culture in a bid to understanding it, and within an organizational setting, they help to illustrate two terms we propose to call *Communication Congruence* and *Message Coding Congruence*: the first refers to message content and meaning similarity resulting in shared meaning; the second refer to semantic signifier agreement (semantics understood as the relation between the signifier and intended meaning).

Whether considered as a positive-stereotype maker, or a stereotype-buster, Hofstede's six dimensions provide a greater knowledge of the 'intricacies' of culture. One might consider Hofstede's culture dimensions in the negative sense as 'framing' or 'cultural determinism' or more sympathetically as 'sophisticated stereotype'. However one might look at them though, the dimensions, as far as making culture effects better known and measured, could be considered a useful baseline or light for studying it. This knowledge or awareness is the first step to taking culture into account when communicating.

4.1   Preliminary Check for Consistency

There are three measures we can use to check for the congruence of the communication process: a) An 'internal consistency' check, or confirming the 'truth' of the matter itself; b) A check whether two parties to the communication

process agree on what something signifies, and c) A check as to how perfectly one thing agrees with, or is in harmony with another thing

a) The truth of the thing
b) Agreement between messages transmitted from different points within the same body
c) What the thing is intended to signify

a) *The truth of the thing*:
With respect to the first, Thomas Aquinas describes the truth of something as "*Adaequatio rei et intellectus*", which literally means "the conformity of the intellect to the thing", a reference to the fact of the truth of something inhering in the thing itself, and not depending on a subjective grasp of the reality. The observer achieves congruence (shared meaning) by recognizing the thing for what it is.

b) *Agreement between messages transmitted from different points within the same body:*
As we consider the three levels of cultural manifestation in Schein's model, we constantly compare and check for agreement between the message transmitted from one level, and the messages transmitted from the other two levels. Just as in mathematical congruence where one shape fits perfectly into another, congruence (shared meaning) would be where the message from each level is practically synonymous with the messages from the other two levels. This we call Communication Congruence (CC).

c) *What the thing is intended to signify*:
Semantics is the relation between the signifier and intended meaning. If it is possible for one party in a communication process to signify X, intending it to mean XU, but it is possible that the second party who correctly sees the signifier X understands YU as the intended meaning. XU is different from YU therefore what was understood was not what was intended. There would therefore be no shared meaning in such a case. Congruence (shared meaning), would only be attained when both understand signifier to be 'X' and the meaning 'XU' (Tubbs & Moss, 2006). This we call Message Coding Congruence (MCC).

4.2   Figure 3: The Proposed Message Coding Congruence Model
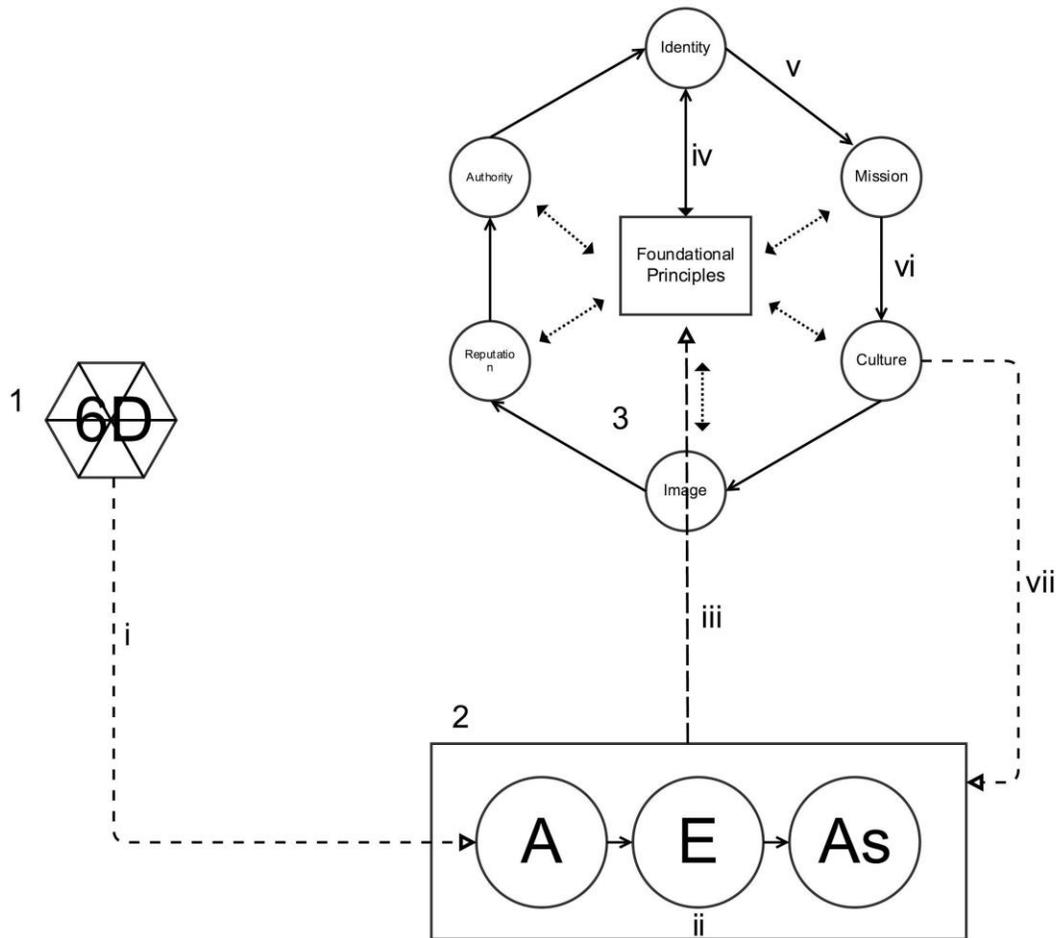
We therefore propose the above Message Coding Congruence model, which creates a synergy uniting the three models of Hofstede, Schein and Nieto to achieve greater shared meaning between communicating parties. The letters and numerals in the model are explained below.

'1' is the Hofstede six culture dimensions (6D); '2' is Edgar Schein's levels of culture manifestation and '3' is Nieto's process of organizational communication.

The Roman numerals indicate the communication congruence pathways and the route through which we attempt to solve the problem.

i. Hofstede's 6D, as light revealing the existence of bias in people, provide an understanding that makes us alert to the dynamics of culture perception in an individual who approaches a particular organization in search of meaning. As we go from national culture to organizational cultures (with individuals as actors in both spheres), we join the understanding provided by Hofstede for the former, to the understanding provided by Schein for the latter. Further, the understanding that Hofstede's 6D gives of national culture can also be an explanation for the biases observed at the first level of Schein's model. It is to this extent that Hofstede's six dimensions (6D) may be considered both a panacea and a problem.

To illustrate further, assumptions based on Hofstede's 6D can result in stereotypical conclusions of which Schein's "Artefacts" can be a manifestation. Just as conclusions about the culture of an organization cannot be reached by observing the artefacts alone, interpretation of the meanings of messages cannot be inferred from understanding of the framework of interlocutors based solely on knowledge gleaned about their cultural backgrounds. The point should be made here that although Schein's levels are applied to institutions, we generalize the model to include individuals as well. We infer that just as the culture of organizations can have varying levels of manifestation (from the external to the more internal), individuals can have varying levels too, cognitive and personality manifestations (from the more external to the more interior). This generalization allows us make declarations about Hofstede's 6D being responsible for stereotypes both about organizations and about persons.

Hofstede's dimensions can be a problem when an observer bases his conclusions about another person or about an organization on first impressions, seeking or finding justification in the model's inherent determinism of national culture characteristics.

It is also a problem where both parties in interpersonal communication fail to factor in the influence on them of their different cultural backgrounds.

Although as a model it can lead to a better understanding of national culture, it can also give rise to the rigid categorization of people into modes of behaviour, a categorization that can be blamed for giving birth to stereotypes (Nunez, 2000).

In defence of Hofstede's 6D against accusations of causing stereotypes however, it can argued that since the measures were based on self-reports of respondents and not on third-party perception reports, the result can escape the accusation of bias because they merely captured and reported a pre-existing, 'as is' situation or pattern.

A medical doctor would be happy to know of the existence of a fatal illness in one of his patients. While it would be preferable that the patient did not fall ill at all, knowledge of it when it does happen is much better than ignorance, for then the search for a cure could begin. Similarly a positive view of the dimensions would be to consider them a 'light' and a revelation that can be put to good use.

Considered in this latter sense, the 6D can offer an explanation for why some observers of an organization would be content to claim complete understanding of its culture by remaining at the level of artefact alone.

Although aware they might be acting without complete information, they are convinced that what they observe at the level of artefacts is all there is to see, and so they make a judgment. Their resoluteness may be strengthened by their awareness of the 6D, for has this model not already justified the deterministic nature of human cultural experiences? The individuals understand 6D not as a "best first guess" but as a complete explanation (Berdahl & Min, 2012). They know that they have come from a particular national culture background and therefore expect (and rightly so) same of other people. When they come into an organization they expect, receive and conclude that whatever they observe first must necessarily be expressions of these national cultures. Nothing can convince them otherwise. Asked about their new colleagues, they would conclude that these colleagues have been determined by their national cultures and that the immediately tangible external manifestations are the correct and only valid explanations for why they do the things they do (Berdahl & Min (2012). The stereotype pathway from 'national' to 'organization' culture can be traced from 6D to A.

Two reasons can be offered why an observer should 'resist' 'believing' all that is manifested by the Artefacts. First is that all members of a new organization have a duty to work together to create a new organizational culture. Secondly, they need to create this new culture in order to achieve a common organizational goal. For both these reasons, initial cultural neutrality is called for, especially at the level of "Artefacts".

ii.   If McLuhan says that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, M. 1964:1), we would agree and add that Schein's three levels show the 'medium and the message' making up the culture, since culture is both the content and method of message communication at all three levels.   The desired and ideal situation is agreement (or congruence) between the messages exhibited at all three levels. The artefacts (A) 'speak' for themselves and if we consider the organization as the subject of the action, communication here can be considered 'non-verbal' and sometimes 'unintended'. This is because observations at the level of Artefacts are the more overt and externally manifested characteristics of the subject (organization or individual), which a new and curious observer notices. The point should be made that the observations (and conclusions derived from this) made by the new comer is done without an active input by the subject, who cannot therefore actively and in 'real time' determine the meaning derived. The architectural style of a building, the way organization members relate with each other, are all "non-verbal" communications of its "way of life". And since the organization being observed may not intend all the consequence of the conclusions an observer makes, this communication can also be considered "unintended.

The second level called Espoused Beliefs and Values (E) are what the organization says about itself. It is the first time that organizational leaders take a proactive and intentional step to explain meanings to newcomers to the organization. These newcomers can be clients, visitors or new employees. Leaders intervene here to form or improve the cultural intelligence of managers through the content of training manuals, staff handbook, induction or on-boarding programs, aimed at proactively teaching different aspects of the organization's culture. This is deeper than the artefacts and helps to explain or justify what was observed without institutional intervention. 'E' may however contradict 'A' and this would be the first occasion of a lack of *Communication Congruence (CommCon)* and a failure of communication.

One major assumption we make here is that in communicating, the leaders in the organization have no intention to deceive, and that if a lack of harmony were detected there would be genuine perplexity and every effort would be dedicated to finding an honest solution.

Because organization leaders want to limit a lack of *CommCon* as much as possible, they try to be alert to its presence, first by comparing the 'E' to the

message communicated at 'A' and the message communicated at the level of Basic Assumptions (As).

To repair any lack of communication congruence the parties may try to encode the message differently, aiming always to reach an agreement.

As stated earlier, assuming there is no deliberate intention to deceive, one reason for a lack of congruence between the three levels could be due to the message coding process yielding different meanings. The person sending could be encoding the message in ways that do not result in the attainment of shared meaning with the receiver who is likely decoding improperly. They 'hear' one another but they understand different things. Their different cultural backgrounds (national, individual) could be responsible for creating the semantic noise blocking this mutual understanding.

The communicating parties therefore need to improve their communication by increasing their cultural intelligence: awareness of their varied cultural backgrounds and acting in consequence.

It may be useful to mention here that Charles Hocket makes a distinction between "channel" (or *engineering*) noise and "semantic" noise as follows: "Channel noise, thus, is the responsible factor when that which leaves a transmitter is not that which reaches the receiver; semantic noise is a discrepancy between the codes used by transmitter and receiver" (Hocket, 1952:257). Our model addresses both types of noise.

Thus MCC can be improved by modifying *signifiers*, adopting those common to the cultural background of one's interlocutor: verbal expressions, body language, signs, colours, etc. Between 'A' and 'E', this might see the organization either changing the manifestations at 'A' to match with what they say in 'E', or if 'A' as it is, is the desired state, modifying what they say in 'E' to match with the existing 'A', all the while comparing the result with 'As". The only tool at the disposal of those thus trying to improve MCC (in training or actual management) would be communication skills.

iii. There is a limit though to this attempt at repair. The persons in charge may come to the painful but pragmatic conclusion that there is no way to reconcile or align the three levels of 'A', 'E', and 'As'. If after all efforts to encode and decode differently there is still a lack of agreement or the presence of non-communication congruence (CC), it might be time to admit that the problem

is not in the way the message is being encoded but has a deeper root which may be the message itself, or a problem with the organization whose culture is 'expressed' in its message.

To put it another way having concluded that the cause of a lack of congruence is not in the manner of coding of the message, but that the problem is inherent in the message itself, we come to the conclusion that the 'message coding' process needs a deeper and foundational 'reference point'. The parties would therefore have to temporarily abandon effort at repairing the coding process, and backtrack to the foundational principles guiding the existence of the group, for herein will be found the primary motivations for initiating the communication process itself (which Nieto equates with the very existence of organizations). We will have to increase the cultural awareness and sensitivity of parties involved by offering them strong criteria as a reference point - the foundational principles of the organization, and this is where Nieto's Model of Organizational Communication comes in.

The organizational culture manifested as the three levels, 'A', 'E' and 'As' would individually and collectively have to 'piggy back' to the foundational principles of the organization in order to recover their "bearings" and resist any stereotypical influences. This should also ensure communication recovers both its internal consistency and relational consistency (communication congruence in coding and meaning).

iv, v and vi.   The aim of the following steps is to discover the 'original' culture of the organization which would them serve as a model (or a reminder) for the message coding process, in order to achieve the desired "Message Coding Congruence". The reference culture will be derived with the "Foundational Principles" as starting point, which allows one to reflect on the reason for the very existence of the organization. Every endeavour, private or public has a founder who sets out original aims of incorporation, aims that determine the next steps in its life cycle, steps that Nieto identifies with organic communication.

Nieto's thesis is that authentic organizational communication is bound to the life of the organ, such that message and life are one and the same.

What sort of identity was envisioned for this organization? The legal identity such as that of sole proprietorship or its economic identity such as being a for-profit enterprise would determine the next stage, the mission, wherein are

found the values, the strategic intent and thus the means to carry out the end the organization has set for itself. As can be seen, all of these choices, based originally on the foundational principles are slowly but surely establishing stable structures, processes and particular ways of dealing with different realities. Ways are being set about how to do things and so a culture is coming into being that make this organization different from all others. Intentionally or otherwise, these 'ways' would be noticed internally and externally (communication), would be taught to new members as the 'correct ways to think, act and perceive' (Schein).

Notice how each stage of the cycle has a dotted arrow directed towards the middle. This means that at every stage, reference can be made to the beginnings so that one never lose sight of the foundational principles, which ought to be the guide to alert to any deviation.

vii. The resulting culture from Nieto's model, trusted for good reason because of its presumed faithfulness to foundational principles and identity is held up as a model or 'repair book' for the three levels of Schein's model. This referent culture model will be applied like a balm individual to 'A', 'E' and 'As' and collectively to the entire Schein frame. Stereotype at point 'A' could be one reason why there is a lack of communication congruence between the three levels. This is because not only is it true that reliance on 'A' (artefacts) alone does not provide all the information about an organization or individual, but that no matter how well 'E's message is coded to resemble 'A' in meaning and vice versa, the stereotype-biased 'A' would remain an obstacle until the influence of external stimuli (6D) is either blocked or neutralized. The new referent culture model will hopefully play this role.

5.   Conclusion

The Message Coding Congruence (MCC) model has several implications for managerial and cross-cultural practice and particularly, communication in an increasingly globalized business world. The new type of work team, diverse and dispersed, involves a lot of interaction between culturally different individuals who must work together to achieve common organizational objectives. These groups need managers trained to communicate in a culture-centric manner.

The proposed *Message Coding Congruence (MCC)* model extends useful features in previous culture models (Hofstede and Schein), and one culture-centric organizational communication model (Nieto). It also solves some limitations in the individual models with a view to achieving shared meaning in interpersonal and organizational communication, as well as increasing the cultural intelligence of business people.

The MCC model suggests that often the cause of stereotypes or a lack of shared meaning in communication can be found in the manner of the coding and decoding of messages, from sender and receiver respectively, both of which processes may suffer obstacles or interruptions. These obstacles may be attributable to culture-mediated stereotypes. Our model should hopefully intervene to reduce both channel and semantic noise types.

Improving awareness of stereotypes and minimizing its deleterious influence in business communication can be achieved through interventions that improve the cultural intelligence of managers and team members. This will result in increased sensitivity to and accommodation of diversity.

When cultural inconsistencies appear in organizations leaders might find help in the MCC model as it will help by referring structures and processes back to the foundational principles to ensure conformity. These interventions can occur at any time in the life of a group but can also proactively be a major part of the induction process or training of new team members and managers.

Awareness of other cultures, stereotypes in self or others would however not be enough, especially when efforts at controlling for them does not yield the desired shared meaning. It must be linked to a better understanding of the organization's foundational principles, identity and mission and ensure that structures and processes have not deviated from these over time. The MCC

model thus offers a check and healing pathway back to the roots of organizational beginnings.

When people change jobs, they move from one organizational culture - and 'ways of doing' things – to another. They would have to adapt, change or abandon aspects or all of their previous organizational culture characteristics if they are to attain shared meaning with their new team members. Edgar Schein recommends that members being prepared to work together in a new team be 'inculturated' in a culturally neutral training environment he calls a "culture island". The increased cultural intelligence taught by the MCC model should contribute the same value as a cultural island in a more continuous and organic way, with the additional benefit that the new culture understanding is anchored on the stable structure of organizational identity.

We hope that future work will subject our MCC model to an empirical test.

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