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RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

Enabling IC Global Mission Accelerating Intercultural Agility with Culture-General Foundations

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Enabling IC Global Mission

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Abstract

As the US Intelligence Community (IC) surges to address evolving exigencies, its workforce may need to rely on even higher levels of intercultural flexing to drive collaboration with varied foreign intelligence partners, particularly given the extraordinarily high-stakes and ambiguous nature of intelligence work. This *Research Monograph* explores the value of intercultural competence for navigating the unique challenges of these partnerships and missions, clarifies the intercultural knowledge and skills most needed, and identifies opportunities to accelerate the development of intercultural competence within the IC. This research relies on semi-structured interviews with experienced IC professionals and reviews of recorded lessons learned to gather qualitative data on IC intercultural work with foreign intelligence partners. This study employs an inductive thematic analysis to determine common challenges, as well as a deductive data analysis to explore the value of various competencies in navigating those challenges. In addition, this research includes best practices and opportunities to accelerate the IC workforce's intercultural competence, pulling from consultations with academic experts and IC professionals, as well as the field of intercultural competence with a focus on a subset of intercultural knowledge and skills known as *culture-general*—universal concepts that can be applied to any cultural context to bridge cultural divides.¹ This research also builds on work that has explored intercultural competence for US military missions, which have included military intelligence, and therefore dedicates special attention to how US *civilian* intelligence partnerships and intercultural needs may vary.

The development of foundational intercultural knowledge and skills can guide more efficient *culture-specific* learning of local cultures or languages in service to mission, ultimately saving valuable time and resources. Furthermore, although this research is focused on foreign partnerships, such competence could serve a range of inherently intercultural intelligence missions, such as human asset management and opportunity analysis. Moreover, the risks of intercultural *incompetence* are many and could include misinterpretations that lead to unintended offense, confusion, and weakened trust or credibility. Such dynamics could slow negotiations and cooperation, escalate conflict, and ultimately lead to policy implementation or national security failures.

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Key Findings

This *Research Monograph* affirms that an exceptional degree of intercultural competence—including both cultural knowledge and a range of capabilities, traits, and attitudes—is critical to the success of the IC’s work with foreign intelligence partners. Other key findings include:

- The academic concept of three critical categories of skills—perception-management, relationship-management, and self-management—is core to the IC’s development of intercultural competence.
- IC operations officers and intelligence analysts face considerable challenges when collaborating with foreign partners, including an exacting intelligence mission and policy context, sometimes enigmatic partners, and partners’ exceptionally high expectations of IC competence.
- Interviews with IC professionals suggest the risk of incompetence could lead to misunderstandings that erode trust and credibility or, worse, could escalate quickly into conflict and jeopardize mission success. Such dynamics ultimately slow cooperation, potentially leading to less efficient application of valuable IC time and resources.
- Insights on the ways civilian intelligence work may vary from the military intelligence context help pinpoint how off-the-shelf competency models—namely, the Department of Defense’s Adaptive Readiness for Competency (ARC) Model—can be tailored to meet IC needs.
- The need for certain skills to achieve joint mission success varies depending upon the mission type; for instance, operations officers generally adhere to a wider suite of relationship-management skills, while analysts demonstrate more attention to knowledge and learning skills that fall in the perception-management arena.
- Key lessons learned for applying these skills in service to mission include the value of humility, culture-general knowledge on the ways cultures vary, and culture-specific knowledge on the history of relations with the foreign partner; also learned are the need for “human translation” skills and deep reflection on partner perspectives of the United States and the IC in particular.
- The IC could help accelerate its workforce’s intercultural acumen through both short-term actions (such as appointing intercultural resource referents or developing cross-cultural preparation guides and short-term field rotations) and longer-term institutional initiatives (to include partnering with academic intercultural experts to create culture-general education programs and recruiting for intercultural competence potential), which could reinforce intercultural best practices and ensure workforce agility.

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Contents

Abstract	3
Key Findings	5
The Need for IC Global Agility	11
Helping the IC Develop Intercultural Competence	11
Defining Culture and Intercultural Competence	12
Intercultural Competence for Global Work: A Literature Review	15
The Business Use Case	15
The US Military Use Case	16
The Incomplete IC Use Case	18
Baselining Intercultural Competence	21
Key Theories Underpinning Intercultural Competence	21
An Overview of Culture-General Competencies	23
Culture-General Frameworks To Guide Culture-Specific Learning	26
Ongoing Debate on Intercultural Competency Models	32
Qualitative Research Sheds Light on IC Intercultural Competence Needs	35
Key Questions and Hypothesis Focus on Building Intercultural Competence	35
Research Design Grounded in Qualitative Data Collection...	36
... And Paired with Inductive Thematic and Deductive Data Analysis	38
Findings: The Intelligence Community's Intercultural Challenges	41
Exacting Intelligence Mission and Policy Context	41

The Challenge of Enigmatic Partners	42
Meeting Exceptionally High Expectations	43
Findings: Intercultural Competencies for Foreign Partner Engagement	45
Verifying Key Intercultural Competencies	45
Key Themes in Applying Intercultural Competencies	47
Building Intercultural Competence: Discussion and Future Courses of Action	51
Tailoring the ARC Model for Intelligence Community Needs	51
Opportunities to Accelerate IC Intercultural Competence	56
<i>Recommendations for Short-Term Actions</i>	56
<i>Recommendations for Longer-Term Initiatives</i>	58
Areas for Further Research	59
Appendix A: An Overview of Culture Value Dimensions	61
Appendix B: Cross-Cultural Critical Incident Interview Protocol	63
Appendix C: Reflections from Interviews of IC Intercultural Competence in Practice	65
Appendix D: A Sample Preparatory Intercultural Engagement Questionnaire	71
Appendix E: A Sample Organizational Culture File	73
Appendix F: Sample Lesson Roadmap–Intercultural Competence for Foreign Partner Engagement	75
Addendum: Additional Intercultural Studies Background and Resources	79
Key Milestones in Intercultural Studies	79
Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Studies	80
The Interplay of Cultural Layers and Their Influence	84
<i>Regional Cultures</i>	84
<i>National Cultures</i>	85
<i>Organizational and Professional Cultures</i>	86

<i>Other Cultural Influences</i>	87
<i>A Brief Word on National Security Cultures</i>	87
A Resource Guide for Global Intercultural Work	89
A Resource Guide to Regional and National Cross-Cultural Differences	90
A Resource Guide to National Security, Defense, and Intelligence Cultures	91
Endnotes	93
 List of Figures	
Figure 1. Lewis's Tripartite Model of National Cultures	29
Figure 2. A Sample of Meyer's Cross-Cultural Culture Map Model	31
Figure 3. Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence	33
 List of Tables	
Table 1: Adaptive Readiness for Culture (ARC) Model Competencies	18
Table 2: A Sampling of Key Conceptualizations Underpinning Intercultural Competence	21
Table 3: Richter et al.'s Consolidated List of Intercultural Competencies	24
Table 4: Models for Cross-Cultural Comparisons	27
Table 5: Hofstede's Six Cultural Value Dimensions	28
Table 6: GLOBE Study of Cultural Value Dimensions	28
Table 7: Lewis's Tripartite Model of Cultural Variations	30
Table 8: Models for Organizational Cross-Cultural Comparisons	31
Table 9: Sampling of Intercultural Competency Models	34
Table 10: Top Four Themes on Intelligence Work with Foreign Partners	39
Table 11: Mapping Interviewees' Responses to Richter's Intercultural Competencies	39
Table 12: Frequency of Richter's Competencies in Operational and Analytic Foreign Partner Engagement	46
Table 13: Congruence of the Adaptive Readiness for Culture Model and Richter's Competency List	53
Table 14: Proposed Additions to the ARC Model To Meet IC Mission Needs	55
Table 15: Key Theories on Culture and Its Influence on Nations, Organizations, and Individuals	81
Table 16: Global Cultural Clusters from <i>Leading with Cultural Intelligence</i>	84
Table 17: Conceptualizations of National Security Cultures	88

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The Need for IC Global Agility

A dynamic and unpredictable global threat environment, combined with a leaner US Intelligence Community (IC) workforce, is likely to require IC members to be more agile, surging to address crises emanating from varied regions.² Pivotal events—such as the “Arab Spring,” the Israel-Gaza conflict, and the war in Ukraine—underscore the potential for sudden outbreaks of violence and dramatic declines in security across entire regions that put US assets, personnel, and interests at risk, often with little warning.³ Such episodes could test the IC as it simultaneously works to address exigencies ranging from entrenched narco-terrorist networks in Latin America to conflicts in the Middle East or Asia.⁴

As outlined in the US *National Security Strategy*, published in November 2025, the United States will seek to convene and support an allied burden-sharing network to confront these challenges.⁵ To support this mandate, the IC may turn to foreign partners as force multipliers, leveraging their understanding of regional languages and cultures to fill intelligence gaps and enable disruption operations.^{6, 7} Such relationships are particularly important in times of dramatic and rapid changes in the security landscape, when US unilateral human collection and accesses often take time to adjust.⁸ Trust among partners is crucial, particularly in this sensitive information space where adversaries may try to drive wedges.^{9, 10}

Academic studies suggest exceptional intercultural competence is required to bridge cultural divides, communicate respect, and create a shared sense of purpose and identity, which academic experts posit is the basis for cooperative behavior.^{11, 12} An ability to read emotions, communicate expectations and respect, and inspire cooperation in one’s own culture does not automatically translate in unfamiliar, foreign contexts.¹³ Identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews vary widely across regions, nations, and organizations. These differences extend to seemingly resolute concepts, such as perceptions of what constitutes good-versus-bad, strong-versus-weak, moral-versus-immoral, or rational-versus-irrational.¹⁴ Absent an understanding of partners’ cultural alignments, professionals are likely to engage in mirror imaging and default to deep-seated cognitive biases or shortcuts to deal with uncertainty and complexity, particularly when the operational tempo is high.¹⁵ Furthermore, without the intercultural skills to adapt, learn, and build relationships with partners, IC professionals risk strategic misalignment, miscommunication, and missed opportunities, undermining mission objectives.

Helping the IC Develop Intercultural Competence

In order to help ensure the IC is positioned to meet its intercultural agility needs, this research explores why intercultural competence is valuable for driving collaboration with foreign intelligence partners and seeks

to clarify the combination of knowledge and skills required. This *Research Monograph* builds on previous studies of intercultural competence for US military missions, which have included military intelligence, and therefore dedicates special attention to how US civilian intelligence partnerships and intercultural needs may vary. Furthermore, this study identifies opportunities to accelerate IC workforce intercultural competence development.

Primary Research Question: How do various intercultural competencies impact IC professionals' ability to navigate intercultural challenges and cooperate with foreign intelligence partners?

Secondary Research Question: How could the IC accelerate the development of intercultural competence among its workforce?

Defining Culture and Intercultural Competence

This *Monograph* leans on the following definition of culture:

Culture: A “web of meaning” shared by members of a particular society or group within a society that forms the basis for how people interpret, understand, and respond to events and people around them. Learned over time through socialization, although not static and can change depending on other conditions. (US Army Field Manual 3-24)¹⁶

The terms *intercultural* and *cross-cultural* are sometimes used interchangeably, while some scholars use them to differentiate between particular functions.^{17, 18} This *Monograph* differentiates the terms as follows:

Intercultural: Refers to the interaction or exchanges among members of different cultures, focused on relationships, communication, and exchanges that happen when people from different cultures come into contact. *Intercultural competence*, therefore, is focused on skills and knowledge needed to successfully interact and communicate with people from different backgrounds.^{19, 20}

Cross-cultural: Refers to comparisons between two or more different cultures, focused on examining the similarities and differences across cultures to understand how cultural context influences identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews. *Cross-cultural competence*, therefore, is associated with knowledge and understanding of cultural differences, more often considered the cognitive aspect of intercultural competence.²¹

Academic literature largely converges on several fundamental aspects of the term *culture*. Leading academic scholars in the field, such as Kai Hammerich and Richard D. Lewis, suggest culture is a shared, learned, and transmitted phenomenon that shapes how individuals interpret, understand, and respond to their environment.²² Culture encompasses surface-level, observable behaviors and customs, as well as deeper-level aspects, including values, assumptions, and thought patterns.²³ These deep-seated differences can manifest across what are known as various *cultural value dimensions*, which relate to concepts such as risk tolerance, power hierarchy, and time orientation.^{24, 25}

Although debate exists regarding the malleability of culture, many academic researchers concur cultural patterns are informed by a combination of deeply ingrained, as well as dynamic, factors. Some academic experts, such as pioneering social psychologist Geert Hofstede, view culture as deeply-ingrained “software of the mind” that guides human behavior and social interaction and is passed down through generations and generally slow to change.²⁶ Others argue that culture is dynamic and constantly being negotiated among overlapping cultural influences that can emanate from national, religious, socioeconomic, and generational norms.²⁷ Still other academic scholars, including Hammerich and Lewis, suggest that these cultural layers and variants “spice, but do not basically change the thrust of national culture.”²⁸ They note that cultural influences acquired early in life—often rooted in one’s upbringing within a specific national or regional culture—are probably more deeply ingrained and less subject to change, while those acquired later in life as a result of one’s professional or organizational culture may be more dynamic.²⁹

The included research on national and organizational cultures necessarily relies on broad patterns and generalizations, which can risk oversimplifying complex human behavior or reinforcing stereotypes when applied uncritically. These cultural frameworks are intended, therefore, as starting points for inquiry and intercultural understanding, rather than as predictors of individual behavior, and they should be complemented by attention to the unique characteristics, experiences, and contexts of specific people, groups, and organizations.

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Intercultural Competence for Global Work: A Literature Review

Many industries with global activities credit intercultural competence as key to their success in foreign ventures.³⁰ Literature on its value has also extended to the US national security enterprise, specifically the US military, with robust studies on the specific value of intercultural competencies for military missions. Some academic researchers have broadly explored the value of intercultural competence for liaison engagement, particularly with nontraditional partners in regions such as Africa or Southeast Asia,³¹ but few comprehensive studies have been conducted to determine the specific competencies needed for effective work with foreign intelligence partners. Even less academic attention has been given to those specific competencies of value for driving intelligence relationships, particularly within a US civilian context.

The Business Use Case

Intercultural competence is a critical asset for sustainable success in global business ventures. As companies expand across borders, they encounter diverse cultural challenges, requiring a nuanced understanding of different norms, values, and practices. Cultural misunderstandings are cited as one of the primary reasons international business ventures fail. Studies suggest Starbucks, Walmart, and other major brands have suffered billion-dollar losses in some countries partly due to misunderstanding local consumers' unique behaviors and needs and to relying on culturally ill-informed local competitor analysis.³² In addition, the failure to recognize and adapt to cultural differences can result in early repatriation of managers, operational ineffectiveness, and business opportunities lost to more culturally adept competitors. For example, in the Middle East, some US businesses have lost ground to British, French, and Japanese companies that have better adapted their offerings to local cultures, according to an intercultural expert.³³

Intercultural misunderstandings and conflict within multicultural organizations and among culturally different partners, particularly during business mergers, also hinder collaboration and innovation. Failure to effectively navigate these differences can jeopardize effective integration, resulting in diminished employee morale and productivity. In contrast, international ventures that adopt strategies to bridge

cultural divides between home and host countries foster more effective and efficient teams. A 2023 study on the concept of “cultural bridging” found collaborating with partners more familiar or aligned with the target culture could reduce costs, lower the risk of conflict, and alleviate difficulties associated with a firm’s “foreignness” when operating abroad. Furthermore, this study suggested that cultural differences among partners can be an asset and source of competitive advantage, if differences are appropriately managed and rallied to bring each partner’s strengths to bear to address needs.³⁴

Companies that understand and prioritize culturally intelligent approaches and prioritize intercultural competence among their workforce have demonstrated a greater ability to expand into new markets and establish themselves as leaders in the global economy. McDonald’s is often cited as a leader in successful internationalization, partly owing to its localization initiatives and ability to tailor menu offerings to suit local tastes, while maintaining a consistent brand image.³⁵ Cultural intelligence enables professionals to predict and adapt to new work cultures, resulting in better personal adjustment, reduced burnout, and more successful negotiation outcomes.³⁶ This quality is particularly important in global, matrixed organizations that rely on collaborative decisionmaking where high levels of intercultural competence are essential. Furthermore, intercultural competence is cited as a predictor of leadership effectiveness in building trust within multicultural teams. Recognizing this need, businesses and business schools often offer dedicated intercultural curriculum.³⁷

The US Military Use Case

Intercultural proficiency has also been found to be critical for the conduct of military missions abroad, enabling military members to navigate complex and volatile intercultural operational environments where firepower alone cannot achieve objectives. For instance, intercultural competence fosters patience, trust, and rapport between military advisors and the foreign counterparts they are training and can help strengthen bonds among members of multilateral security organizations.^{38, 39, 40, 41, 42} Intercultural acumen ultimately helps ensure foreign military leaders view US personnel and their recommendations as credible, increasing the likelihood that partners will work proactively and collaboratively with the United States to address core security interests.⁴³

Studies on early US missteps in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s underscore the value of intercultural competence and the risks of cultural misunderstandings. A reliance on outdated or overly general local cultural knowledge impeded early efforts to identify legitimate local powerbrokers, interact with urban-versus-rural local populations, and understand the sensitivities and motivations of would-be partners.^{44, 45} Ill-informed operations inadvertently undermined locals’ livelihoods, fostered distrust of US intentions, and heightened tensions between US and local forces.^{46, 47} In response to recognized intercultural gaps, the US Department of Defense (DoD), as it was then known, ramped up language training to meet the demand, believing communication skills might enable troops to navigate cultural differences.⁴⁸ While valuable, language training required significant resource investments and came at the cost of developing what some military leaders would argue are more relevant intercultural skills and knowledge, which could have better enabled troops to navigate challenges alongside an interpreter.⁴⁹

DoD eventually corrected course and undertook promising initiatives to foster intercultural acumen among the US military services. By 2007, each service had inaugurated its own cultural center and was engaging experts to develop education and training programs, tailored to its mission needs. The Navy's Center for Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC), the Marine Corps' Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Culture Center, and the Air Force's Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) all expanded offerings to incorporate intercultural competence as part of long-term professional education versus "just-in-time" pre-deployment training.⁵⁰ The US Army, however, invested largely in a program called the Human Terrain System, which contracted anthropologists and social scientists to deploy alongside military units to fill debilitating gaps in local cultural knowledge.^{51, 52} Although commanders hailed the effort for its valuable ethnographic intelligence in support of deployed missions, the program struggled to recruit qualified subject matter experts. In addition, some military officials argued the Human Terrain System undermined the development of much-needed intercultural acumen among military members themselves. They argued that a generation of knowledge would be lost when the program ended, as happened in 2014.^{53, 54, 55, 56}

During this time, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Joint Staff also embraced the Navy's LREC triad, publishing a *Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise, and Cultural Capabilities, 2011-2016*. This document signaled senior commitment not only to the well-established cultural competencies of language and regional expertise, but also acknowledged the value of a third set of intercultural skills, known as *culture-general*, which academic experts posited was critical for enabling intercultural work.^{57, 58} In 2012, DoD established the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) to enhance language and cultural capabilities across DoD by providing OSD-level guidance on language and culture training, testing, and curriculum development.⁵⁹ DLNSEO commissioned studies to determine the specific intercultural competencies most needed for DoD missions and to develop associated proficiency models. One such study led in 2015 to the development of the Adaptive Readiness for Culture (ARC) model, which DLNSEO adopted as a guide for intercultural training across DoD. The US Army's Special Operations Forces and the Defense Language Institute, as well as several service-specific cultural centers, adopted the ARC framework, helping to further ground military education in mission-relevant intercultural competencies.⁶⁰

According to applied cognitive psychologist Dr. Louise Rasmussen, the ARC model was developed as a generalized, DoD-wide model of cultural competence that applies across services, ranks, and occupational roles. Grounded in behavioral evidence from personnel who have served in multiple regions and mission contexts, the ARC model identifies core cultural knowledge and skills that support performance in any area of operation. Because the model was derived from diverse DoD communities and validated across a broad range of high-contact roles, it provides a common vocabulary and a flexible foundation that can be reliably customized to meet the needs of specific missions, training programs, and organizational contexts. This generalizability ensures ARC remains relevant for all military members and missions, while still allowing tailored application within specialized domains. Table 1 provides an overview of the ARC model.

Despite this period of renewed DoD interest in cultural competency, most DoD culture centers shuttered as the Global War on Terror ended and counterinsurgency missions waned,^{61, 62} reflecting a similar cycle

Table 1: Adaptive Readiness for Culture (ARC) Model Competencies

Diplomatic Mindset
Maintains a Mission Orientation
Understands Self in Cultural Context
Manages Attitudes Toward Culture
Cultural Learning
Self-Directs Own Cultural Learning
Develops Reliable Information Sources
Reflects and Seeks Feedback on Intercultural Encounters
Cultural Reasoning
Copes with Cultural Surprises
Develops Cultural Explanations of Behavior
Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situation
Intercultural Interaction
Acts Under Cultural Uncertainty
Plans Intercultural Communication
Engages in Disciplined Self-Presentation

Source: Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck, “Adaptive Readiness for Culture: The ARC Model of Cultural Competence,” *Global Cognition*, <https://www.globalcognition.org/adaptive-readiness-for-culture/>, reprinted in this Monograph with the authors’ permission.

cultural contexts.^{69, 70, 71, 72} This understanding is particularly important in missions where the objective itself is a sociopolitical outcome, such as establishing stable governance or fostering economic prosperity.⁷³ Additionally, cultural competence can bridge gaps in bilateral and multilateral security negotiations and foreign military sales, facilitating smoother and more efficient collaborations and resource allocations.^{74, 75}

The Incomplete IC Use Case

Most studies on the value of intercultural competence for intelligence work tend to focus on the impact to analysis and the risk of mirror imaging, which can ultimately contribute to intelligence failures.⁷⁶ Overly rigid, ethnocentric mental models can stymie creative thinking and undermine analysts’ abilities to determine foreign motivations or anticipate future behaviors. For instance, US analysts’ traditional focus on power and wealth as primary human motivators may cause them to overlook alternative value structures and drivers, such as identity, which may be more determinative of behavior in other cultures.⁷⁷ To mitigate these risks, some academic scholars have developed frameworks and approaches to guide analysts’ cultural learning. One notable study outlines a strategy to acquire the *right* cultural knowledge for specific intelligence tasks, including practices such as paying attention to cultural surprises, questioning one’s original

of attention-and-inattention to cultural learning that followed both World War II and the Vietnam War.⁶³ As a result, although DoD’s initial interest in *culture-general* drove new collaboration and research that helped to operationalize the discipline in service to mission, implementation never took off as envisioned and demonstrable progress was never fully realized.⁶⁴ Academic experts have cited several additional factors that contributed to DoD’s shift away from intercultural competence, including the persistent challenges of accurately assessing and capturing learning achievements to showcase the return on investment.^{65, 66, 67} As a former DoD intercultural academic researcher noted, “We don’t go bang... our effects are silent.”⁶⁸

Academic scholars continue to publish on the manifold benefits of intercultural competence for a range of ongoing military missions. For example, several studies point to its benefit for strategic and operational plans, which they claim are likely to be more effective when rooted in a deep understanding of an objective’s local sociopolitical and

interpretations of a behavior or situation, using perspective-taking as a strategy to generate hypotheses about underlying reasons, and identifying and interacting with cultural mentors to get an insider perspective.⁷⁸ A separate Cultural Topography framework, crafted by an author within the IC, mirrors many of these lessons, guiding analysts to consider the impact of overlapping sociocultural dynamics on an intelligence issue of interest.⁷⁹

A smaller set of scholars have also explored intercultural best practices related to US intelligence cooperation with foreign partners, particularly as collaboration expanded with nontraditional partners in developing countries from the early 2000s to 2010s to address emerging transnational terrorism and criminal threats.^{80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85} Most academic researchers agree that shared threats alone are insufficient to overcome cultural divergences that often complicate effective intelligence sharing and cooperation.⁸⁶ Security expert Daniel Byman outlined the challenges of building trust with new partners, particularly those from developing countries, where patterns of governance, power, legitimacy, and leadership often diverge significantly from US norms.⁸⁷ For example, another study posited that intelligence services in some regions, such as Africa, are often an expression of their ruling party, rather than the state, and probably are more individualistic, free-flowing, and reliant on personal relations and trust, compared to traditional intelligence partners who may be more obligated to institutional relationships.⁸⁸

Missing from this academic literature, however, is the utility of intercultural competence for the broader IC workforce and its role in advancing specific intelligence missions. There appears to have been no thorough examination—at least in unclassified channels—of the combination of competencies required for the IC to succeed in its intrinsically global work.

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Baselining Intercultural Competence

To complement this scholarly view that enhanced intercultural competence drives global mission success, much academic work has been done to explore how specific competencies are developed, interplay, and ultimately contribute to one's intercultural competence and the impact on specific intercultural objectives.

Key Theories Underpinning Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is a multidisciplinary field that draws largely on psychology, communication studies, anthropology, and sociology. Conceptualizations draw on a range of identity and psychological theories to explain how individuals perceive themselves and others and the degree to which they are motivated to adapt and grow in new cultural contexts.^{89, 90} Additional theories explore the roots of conflict and conflict management in intercultural contexts.

Table 2 provides a brief overview of major conceptualizations that speak to an individual's ability and willingness to undertake global work and develop the skills necessary to navigate cultural differences. These theories include several that address the process of adaptation and one's ability to manage the stress and anxiety inherent in this process. Others relate to the role of threat perception and conflict in developing intercultural acumen. Notably, several theories shed light on what motivates or discourages intercultural interaction and learning. For instance, the *Learned Helplessness Theory* posits that early and continued cultural misunderstandings and failures can in fact lead to withdrawal and disengagement, suggesting that on-the-job experiences alone do not necessarily lead to greater intercultural acumen.⁹¹ Awareness of the concepts described in Table 2 may be useful for IC leaders and educators who aim to encourage the development of workforce intercultural acumen.

Table 2: A Sampling of Key Conceptualizations Underpinning Intercultural Competence

Theory/Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concept	Discipline
Intercultural Adaptation			
Acculturation Theory⁹²	John W. Berry	Strategies of cultural adaptation (assimilation, integration, etc.).	Psychology / Sociology

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory⁹³	Young Yun Kim	Process of adapting to a new cultural environment through stress-adaptation-growth dynamics.	Communication Studies / Cross-Cultural Psychology / Anthropology
Anxiety / Uncertainty Management Theory⁹⁴	William Gudykunst	Effective communication in intercultural settings requires managing inevitable anxiety and uncertainty to facilitate successful intercultural communication.	Intercultural Communication Studies / Social Psychology
Intercultural Conflict Formation and Management			
Integrated Threat Theory⁹⁵	W. G. Stephan and C. W. Stephan	Prejudice linked to feelings of fear or threat that is rooted in prior conflict history, ignorance or knowledge gap of the other, character and frequency of past contact, and perception of relative power status.	Social Psychology / Cross-Sociology / Cultural Psychology
Cultural Conflict Theory⁹⁶	Kevin Avruch and Peter Black	Cultural differences often underpin conflicts, owing to differing values, worldviews, and communication practices that can lead to misinterpretations.	Anthropology / Sociology / Cultural Studies
Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory⁹⁷	Stella Ting-Toomey	Assumes people from different cultures strive to manage and save face (self-image) in conflict situations.	Intercultural Communication Studies / Social Psychology
Motivation for Intercultural Work			
Cognitive Dissonance Reduction Theory⁹⁸	Leon Festinger	Individuals experience psychological discomfort (dissonance) when holding two or more conflicting cognitions; to reduce discomfort, they are motivated to change one, to justify the inconsistency, or avoid information that might increase the dissonance.	Social Psychology
Balance Theory⁹⁹	Fritz Heider	Tendency of individuals to prefer balanced states of mind and motivated to change attitudes or perceptions to achieve or maintain psychological consistency in their relations and belief systems.	Social Psychology
Self-Determination Theory¹⁰⁰	Richard Ryan and Edward Deci	People are motivated by basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, that when fulfilled contribute to intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.	Motivational Psychology / Developmental Psychology
Expectancy-Value Theory¹⁰¹	John William Atkinson; Jacquelynne Eccles; and Allan Wigfield	Motivation is determined by two factors: expectancy (belief in one's ability to succeed) and value (importance or worth of the task); overlaps with Self-Determination Theory.	Educational Psychology
Social Cognitive Theory¹⁰²	Albert Bandura	Impact of observation, imitation, and modeling on learning new cultural norms, as well as how cognitive processes, such as self-efficacy, influence behavior.	Social Psychology

Learned Helplessness Theory ¹⁰³	Martin Seligman	Individuals may experience helplessness if they repeatedly encounter situations where cultural differences lead to misunderstanding or failure, leading to withdrawal and disengagement.	Behavioral Psychology
Transformation Leadership Theory ¹⁰⁴	James MacGregor Burns and Bernard M. Bass	Role of management and organizational culture in motivating and underscoring the value of intercultural competence.	Management and Organizational Behavior

Source: Author's descriptions of core concepts, drawing on works cited in endnotes (keyed to each theory).

An Overview of Culture-General Competencies

Leaning on these foundational theories, academic scholars have posited a range of knowledge and skills—together known as competencies—that correlate to one's ability to succeed in global work. The bulk of these are considered by experts as *culture-general*, meaning they can be applied to any novel cultural context to bridge cultural divides and facilitate understanding. Academic experts have characterized culture-general skills as being the “long pole in the tent” that enables culture-specific learning and the ability to transfer cultural lessons from one region to another.¹⁰⁵

A 2024 study by Nicole Richter et al. helpfully synthesized more than 250 proficiencies listed in 68 intercultural competency assessments, reconciling overlap, collating them into 22 distinct domains, and helpfully dividing them into three categories: perception-management, relationship-management, and self-management skills (Table 3).^{106, 107} Richter's study also drew on previous academic work to mark each competency as a capability, attitude, worldview, or personality trait, which is helpful for identifying those qualities that might be more malleable and influenced through education versus those that may be innate.^{108, 109} The research presented in this *Monograph* leans on Richter's list and its three categories as a baseline against which to compare IC members' competency needs and evaluate the applicability of existing competency models, namely the ARC model, described above.

- ***Perception-management skills*** relate to the knowledge and skills that enable intercultural newcomers to navigate cultural ambiguity, understand foreign behaviors and values, and see meaning that might otherwise be difficult to discern. Intercultural challenges often arise due to our own misunderstanding of what we expect foreign actors to do and not necessarily what they *actually* do, according to experts, underscoring the need for these skills.^{110, 111} Such competencies include suspending judgment, as well as both culture-general knowledge of how cultures can vary and culture-specific knowledge about a nation or organization, which can help make sense of intercultural surprises.¹¹² Additionally, metacognition is a key perception-management skill that speaks to one's ability to continue to learn in support of intercultural work.^{113, 114, 115, 116, 117}
- ***Relationship-management skills*** are those that enable individuals to form meaningful relationships with others who are culturally different. Notably, these skills include self-awareness, motivation to form cross-cultural relationships, and an ability to effectively adapt behaviors.¹¹⁸ Other competencies are empathy and the effective use of nonverbal and verbal communication.^{119, 120, 121} On the topic of adaption, Andy Molinsky's *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across*

Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process (2007) is a key read on *code-switching*—modifying behavior to resonate in a foreign context—while operating in a “zone of appropriateness” where there is overlap between one’s own preferences and those of the foreign actor. Molinsky also includes tips for considering when to adapt (or not) and how to recover from cultural missteps.¹²²

- **Self-management skills** consist largely of competencies related to one’s self-control and ability to cope with and navigate intercultural challenges. These skills include optimism and a positive explanatory disposition—wherein challenges are often perceived to be temporary and fixable—which correlate to a feeling of agency and ability to navigate challenges.^{123, 124} Many of these specific competencies were characterized in Richter’s study as personality traits, suggesting they may be more difficult, although not impossible, to mold through educational intervention. On this topic, intercultural communication expert Craig Storti presents valuable self-management lessons in his work, *The Art of Crossing Cultures* (2021), which encourages readers to temper negative reactions to inevitable intercultural challenges and take advantage of them as learning opportunities.¹²⁵

Table 3: Richter et al.’s Consolidated List of Intercultural Competencies

Perception-Management Competencies		
Subdomains	Definition	Domain
Suspending Judgment	The ability to respond to others in a nonevaluating and descriptive way.	Capability
Inquisitiveness	An openness toward—and an active pursuit of understanding—new or different ideas, values, situations, and behaviors comprising...	Personality trait; attitude / worldview
Open-mindedness/ openness	An open attitude toward and readiness to learn from other cultures, and...	Personality trait
Multicultural attitude	The attitudes, beliefs, values, assumptions, and recognition of one’s own and of other cultures.	Attitude / worldview
Acceptance of risk/ uncertainty and ambiguity	The acceptance of and ability to handle (cross-cultural-related) risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity.	Personality trait
Cosmopolitanism	A natural interest in and curiosity about different countries and cultures, as well as the degree of interest in world and international events.	Attitude / worldview
Curiosity	The drive to search for and explore new situations.	Personality trait
Category inclusiveness	The tendency to cognitively accept people and situations based on commonalities rather than dividing them into categories (even though these categories may exist and be noticeable).	Attitude / worldview
Ethnocentrism vs. ethnorelativism	A continuum between centrality of one’s own cultural perspective and a perspective on culture that is relative to the (cross-cultural) situation.	Attitude / worldview
Cultural knowledge / cognition	The knowledge of norms, traditions, and customs in different cultures.	Capability
Cultural metacognition	The ability to plan and monitor cross-cultural interaction and revise mental models based on these observations.	Capability
Global business savvy	Having practical knowledge, good judgment, and common sense about global business.	Capability

Relationship-Management Competencies		
Subdomains	Definition	Domains
Relationship interest (cross-cultural)	The extent to which people exhibit interest in and show an awareness of their (cross-cultural) social environment.	Capability
<i>Motivation</i>	The attention to learning about cultures and the drive to engage in cross-cultural interactions.	Capability
Interpersonal engagement	The degree to which people have a desire and willingness to initiate and maintain relationships with cross-culturally different individuals.	Capability
<i>Interaction management</i>	The readiness to initiate and terminate interaction based on a reasonably accurate assessment of the needs and desires of (cross-cultural) others.	Capability
<i>Sociability</i>	The preference to socialize with (cross-cultural) others, rather than to be alone.	Capability / personality trait
Emotional sensitivity/empathy	The ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of different (cross-cultural) individuals.	Personality trait
<i>Respectfulness</i>	The ability to demonstrate respect for the (cross-cultural) beliefs and values of people.	Capability
Self-awareness	The degree to which people are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, own values, and emotions, as well as an understanding of how one's beliefs, capabilities, and limitations impact others.	Capability
Social / behavioral flexibility	The ability to modify ideas and behavior, to compromise, and to be receptive to new ways of doing things (in cross-cultural situations).	Capability
<i>Social influencing</i>	The ability to influence and manipulate others.	Capability
Communication ability	The ability to initiate meaningful dialogue with cross-culturally different individuals and to effectively deal with communication misunderstandings.	Capability
<i>Diplomacy</i>	The ability to find compromises and reach mutually acceptable solutions with (cross-cultural) others.	Capability
<i>Language ability</i>	The ability to communicate in the foreign language of an international conversation partner (or partners).	Capability
Self-Management Competencies		
Subdomains	Definition	Domain
Optimism	The extent to which people maintain a positive, buoyant outlook toward other (cross-cultural) people, events, situations, and outcomes.	Personality trait
<i>Positive explanatory style*</i>	The extent to which people perceive negative cross-cultural experiences as “temporary, local, and changeable,” versus a negative explanatory style that interprets negative experiences as “permanent, pervasive, and personal.”	Attitude / worldview
Self-confidence / efficacy	The degree to which people have confidence in themselves and exhibit a tendency to take action to overcome (cross-cultural) obstacles and to master the challenges.	Personality trait
<i>Proactive initiative</i>	Tendency to take action, show initiative, and address problems proactively.	Personality trait
Self-identity	The extent to which people maintain personal values independent of situational factors and have a keen sense of personal identity.	Personality trait

Emotional resilience	The extent to which a person has emotional strength and resilience to cope with challenging cross-cultural situations.	Personality trait
Stress ability / nonstress tendency	The degree to which someone possesses an innate disposition to respond with calmness and serenity to the stressors that are encountered.	Personality trait
Stress management	The degree to which individuals actively use techniques to reduce (cross-cultural) stress.	Capability
Interest flexibility	The willingness to substitute important personal interests from one's own background and culture with similar, yet different interests in the host culture.	Personality trait
Creativity	The ability to find creative, novel, and unusual solutions for complex (cross-cultural) challenges.	Personality trait/ capability

Note: *Added "positive explanatory style" to Richter et al.'s list, drawing on: Jane Gillham et al., "Optimism, Pessimism, and Explanatory Style," Ch. 3 in *Optimism & Pessimism: Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward C. Chang (American Psychological Association, 2001), 53–76.

Source: Author's consolidation of key points in Nicole Franziska Richter et al., "Reviewing Half a Century of Measuring Cross-Cultural Competence: Aligning Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Measures," *International Business Review* 32, No. 4 (August 2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969593123000227>; open access under Creative Commons license.

Culture-General Frameworks To Guide Culture-Specific Learning

Of the intercultural competencies listed above, cultural knowledge warrants additional coverage given its importance for helping professionals make sense of intercultural surprises and for enabling other competencies, such as adapting behaviors and managing interactions. Culture-general knowledge—an understanding of universal concepts related to culture and elements that constitute a cultural environment—can empower professionals to develop the fullest culture-specific understanding of a foreign actor's motivations, worldviews, attitudes, and behaviors, while also grasping key differences with US norms that may challenge engagements or longer-term relationships.¹²⁶ Such knowledge enables sojourners to develop mitigation strategies prior to engagement with host-country interlocutors.

Academic scholars have advanced many culture-general frameworks to guide the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge about regional, national, societal, organizational, or individual cultures. These range from macro-level considerations, such as the way a foreign society is organized to meet its needs, down to the micro-level, such as how individual partners may communicate in a meeting. Different missions may necessitate use of different models. For instance, US military members engaged in nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan needed to understand a range of systemic, societal-level cultural factors, such as how locals interacted with the environment; expressed ideas and identities; secured, shared, and saved resources; and how health and wellness were prioritized and maintained. These military members also needed to understand micro-level cultural differences, such as communication styles, in support of interpersonal engagements.¹²⁷ These cultural differences are commonly referred to in academic literature as *cultural value dimensions*.¹²⁸ Understanding that such differences exist can help professionals recognize and interpret their own cultural preferences, anticipate the ways in which a foreign partner may diverge, make sense of intercultural surprises, and uncover the root cause of tensions.^{129, 130, 131}

Presented below are some of the leading models in the field of comparative cross-cultural studies that may be helpful for practitioners seeking to learn more about how their cultural leanings may differ from those of a partner nation or organization of interest (Table 4).

Table 4: Models for Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Theory/Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concept	Discipline
Models for Comparing National Cross-Cultural Differences			
Hofstede's Dimensions of National Culture ¹³²	Geert Hofstede	National cultures vary along six dimensions: power distance, individual-vs-collectivism, masculinity-vs-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs short-term time orientation, and indulgence-vs-restraint.	Cultural Psychology / Organizational Behavior
GLOBE Cultural Dimensions ¹³³	Robert J. House et al.	Outlines nine cultural dimensions, building on Hofstede's, that influence leadership behaviors and organizational practices.	Cross-Cultural Management / Organizational Behavior
Lewis's Cultural Types ¹³⁴	Richard D. Lewis	National cultures can be categorized into linear-active (task-oriented, organized, and planned), multiactive (emotion, people-oriented, and flexible), and reactive (listening, accommodating, and situational).	Intercultural Communication / International Business / Cultural Studies
The Culture Map Model ¹³⁵	Erin Meyer	Identifies eight scales of national cultural differences related to communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, and scheduling.	Cross-Cultural Communication / International Business
High-Context versus Low-Context ¹³⁶	Edward T. Hall	Communication styles vary by culture from implicit (indirect) to explicit (direct) styles.	Anthropology / Communication Studies
Conflict Resolution Styles ¹³⁷	M. Afzalur Rahim and Thomas V. Bonoma	Different cultures may prefer one of five conflict resolution styles: integrating (problem-solving), obliging (accommodating), dominating (competing), avoiding (withdrawal), and compromising (mutual concessions).	Conflict Resolution / Cross-Cultural Communications
Tight and Loose Cultures ¹³⁸	Michele Gelfand	Different societies vary in the extent to which they enforce conformity and adhere to norms, ranging from tight to loose cultures, with implications for social behavior, law enforcement, and organizational culture.	Social and Cross-Cultural Psychology

Source: Author's descriptions of core concepts, drawing on works cited in endnotes (keyed to each theory).

Among this body of work, Hofstede's study of the dimensions of national culture is among the most well known. He built on earlier academic studies on cross-cultural variations to drive a global workforce survey of IBM employees, identifying primary organizational cultural value dimensions (Table 5).¹³⁹

Table 5: Hofstede's Six Cultural Value Dimensions

Dimension	Description	Low	High
Power Distance Index	Measures the extent to which individuals accept and expect unequal distribution of power.	Low: Egalitarian, decentralized decisionmaking	High: Hierarchical, centralized decisionmaking
Individualism versus Collectivism	Contrasts individual freedom and interdependence.	Individualistic: Prioritizes personal goals and freedom	Collectivistic: Prioritizes group harmony and interdependence
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	Measures the extent to which individuals are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.	Low: Tolerates uncertainty, more open to change	High: Prefers structure, rules, and planning
Masculinity versus Femininity	Contrasts traditional masculine values (assertiveness, competitiveness) with feminine values (cooperation, nurturing).	Masculine: Emphasizes achievement and competition	Feminine: Emphasizes cooperation and nurturing
Long-Term Orientation	Measures the extent to which individuals prioritize short-term or long-term goals.	Short-term: Focuses on immediate needs and desires	Long-term: Prioritizes future planning and perseverance
Indulgence versus Restraint	Contrasts societies that allow free expression of desires with those that suppress them.	Indulgent: Permissive, enjoying life and leisure	Restrained: More controlled, suppressing desires and impulses

Source: Author's consolidation of key points in Geert Hofstede et al., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind—Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, 2nd Ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2004).

Management scholar Robert J. House later expanded on Hofstede's work, conceiving the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior (GLOBE) study that refined and added some dimensions. The GLOBE study maintained several of Hofstede's original dimensions of national culture with slight variations, but split collectivism into institutional versus in-group collectivism and masculinity-versus-femininity into assertiveness and gender egalitarianism (Table 6).¹⁴⁰

Table 6: GLOBE Study of Cultural Value Dimensions

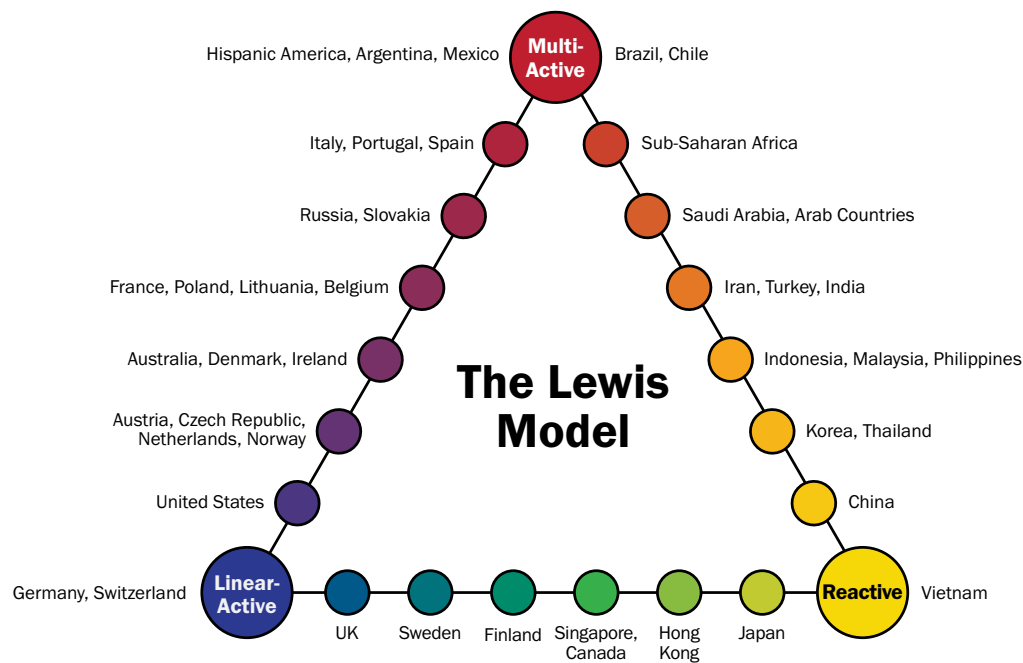
Dimension	Description	Low	High
Assertiveness	Measures the extent to which individuals are assertive and competitive.	Low: Less competitive, more cooperative	High: More competitive, assertive
Future Orientation	Measures the extent to which individuals prioritize long-term planning and future goals.	Low: More focused on the present	High: More focused on the future
Gender Egalitarianism	Measures the extent to which societies promote equality between men and women.	Low: More traditional, patriarchal societies	High: More egalitarian, promoting gender equality
In-Group Collectivism	Measures the extent to which individuals prioritize the interests of their in-group (family, organization, etc.).	Low: More individualistic, prioritizing personal interests	High: More collectivistic, prioritizing group interests
Institutional Collectivism	Measures the extent to which institutions (for example, organizations and governments) promote collective interests.	Low: More individualistic, less institutional support	High: More collectivistic, with strong institutional support

Performance Orientation	Measures the extent to which individuals and organizations prioritize achievement and performance.	Low: Less emphasis on achievement and performance	High: Strong emphasis on achievement and performance
Humane Orientation	Measures the extent to which individuals and organizations prioritize fairness, altruism, and kindness.	Low: Less emphasis on kindness and generosity	High: Strong emphasis on kindness, generosity, and social support
Power Distance	Measures the extent to which individuals accept and expect unequal distribution of power.	Low: More egalitarian, less hierarchical	High: More hierarchical, with significant power differences
Uncertainty Avoidance	Measures the extent to which individuals are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.	Low: More tolerant of uncertainty, more open to change	High: More risk-averse, preferring structure and planning

Source: Author's consolidation of key points in Robert J. House et al., eds., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (Sage Publications, 2004).

In contrast to these bipolar spectrums, in the late 1990s, Richard D. Lewis advanced a tri-polar model in *When Cultures Collide* that categorized national cultures into linear-active, multiactive, and reactive types (Fig. 1). Each category characterizes how various nationalities generally tend to perceive time, conduct conversations, emote feelings, manage work-life balance, use nonverbal communication, and define truth and justice (see Table 7 for a detailed description of each category). Although these types apply broadly at the national level, Lewis argues that most corporate and professional cultures will generally hold to these patterns.¹⁴¹

Figure 1. Lewis's Tripartite Model of National Cultures



Source: Adaptation of the "Tripartite Model of National Cultures" in Richard D. Lewis, *When Teams Collide: Managing the International Team Successfully* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2012).

Table 7: Lewis's Tripartite Model of Cultural Variations

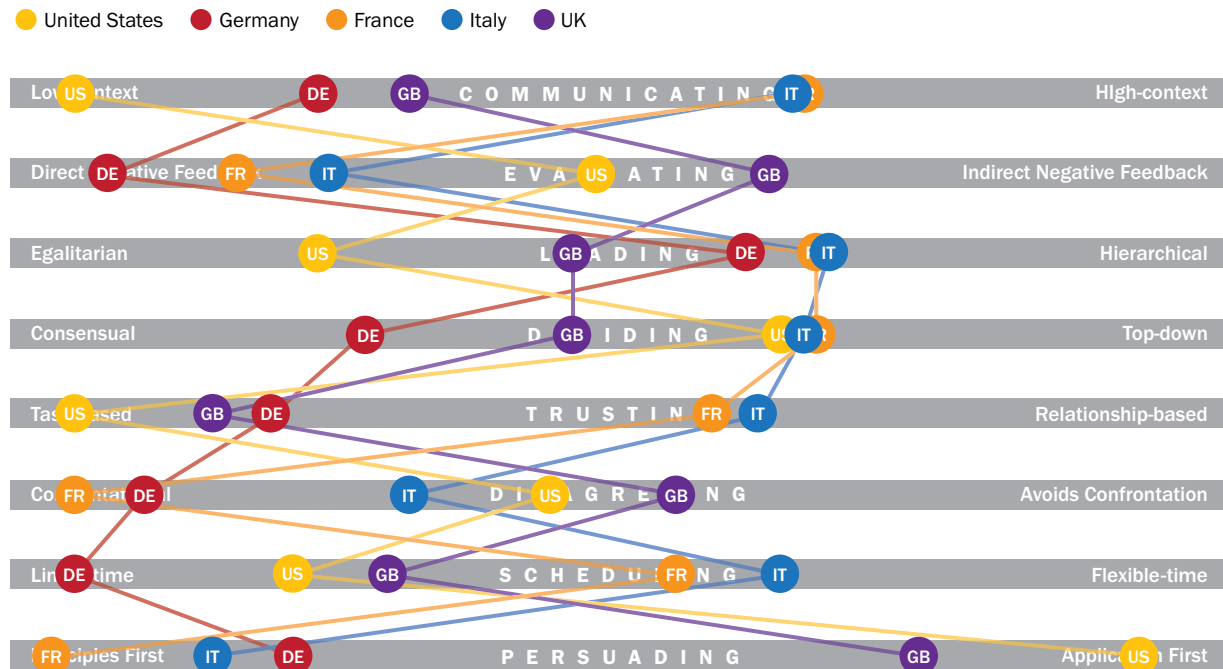
Linear-Active	Multiactive	Reactive
Task-oriented, highly organized planner; prefers getting things done, one task at a time in a planned sequence; arguments are made with logic, while rules are to be followed.	Emotional, loquacious, and impulsive; puts family, feelings, and relationships ahead of following an agenda; comfortable doing many things at the same time.	Polite, attentive listener; rarely initiates action or discussion, instead reacts to it and forms own opinion; harmony and avoiding embarrassment to oneself or others are core.
Talks half the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at a time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Passionate	Polite, indirect
Partly conceals feelings	Displays feelings	Conceals feelings
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Dislikes losing face	Has good excuses	Must not lose face
Rarely interrupts	Often interrupts	Does not interrupt
Job-oriented	People-oriented	Very people-oriented
Uses many facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Truth before diplomacy	Flexible truth	Diplomacy over truth
Sometimes impatient	Impatient	Patient
Limited body language	Unlimited body language	Subtle body language
Respects officialdom	Seeks out key person	Uses connections
Separates the social and the professional	Interweaves the social and professional	Connects the social and professional

Source: Author's consolidation of key points in Richard D. Lewis, *When Teams Collide: Managing the International Team Successfully* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2012).

Another notable study on national-level cultural differences is work by cross-cultural management expert Erin Meyer—outlined in her best-selling book, *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* (2014), that explores cultural variations in preferences related to key management functions: communicating, evaluating, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, and scheduling. As an example of how national preferences vary, even among seemingly culturally aligned partners, Meyer's Country Mapping Tool compares differences among US and European partners (Fig. 2). For example, concepts of persuasion and argumentation among US and French audiences diverge greatly. The French tend to prefer principles-first arguments, grounded in methodology and academic rigor, versus a US preference for applications-first arguments, grounded in case studies and exemplars. Other notable differences exist between US and European partners when communicating, leading, and trusting.¹⁴² Misunderstanding these differences can jeopardize collaboration and lead to conflict.

In addition to these national-level, cross-cultural frameworks, academic literature also considers organizational-level cultural differences. Although most organizations tend to strongly reflect the national values and practices outlined above, subtle variations frequently exist among organizations within the same national culture, often owing to professional differences and the organization's competitive environment.^{143, 144} See some key frameworks that can aid thinking about cultural divergence at the organizational culture level (Table 8).

Figure 2. A Sample of Meyer's Cross-Cultural Culture Map Model



Source: Adaptation based on author's use of the "Country Mapping Tool," featured in Erin Meyer's *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* (Public Affairs, 2014) and available online at: <https://erinmeyer.com/tools/culture-map-premium/>.

Table 8: Models for Organizational Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Theory/Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concept	Discipline
Organizational Culture Theory ¹⁴⁵	Charles Handy	Organizational cultures are of four types: power culture (centralized), role culture (defined by roles and bureaucracy), task culture (focused on tasks and teamwork), or personal culture (individual-centric).	Management and Organizational Behavior / Social Psychology
Competing Values Framework ¹⁴⁶	Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn	Organizational cultures can be understood through two key dimensions—flexibility versus stability and internal versus external focus—as well as four culture types: clan (collaborative), adhocracy (creative), market (competitive), and hierarchy (controlling).	Organizational Behavior / Management Science
Dimensions of Organizational Culture ¹⁴⁷	Geert Hofstede	Organizational cultures can vary along six dimensions, including process-versus-results orientation, employee-versus-job orientation, parochial-versus-professional identity, open-versus-closed system, loose-versus-tight control, and normative-versus-pragmatic in following procedures.	Cultural Psychology / Organizational Behavior

Source: Author's descriptions of core concepts, drawing on works cited in endnotes (keyed to each theory).

The culture-general frameworks outlined in this literature review provide useful scaffolding for IC members' learning that can guide a more comprehensive culture-specific understanding of foreign partners. Armed with these frameworks, IC professionals can better unpack the possible “what” and “why” of intercultural surprises experienced during overseas assignments and put them into appropriate context.^{148, 149} This knowledge enables them to build on each novel intercultural experience and assignment and learn to recognize patterns and connections between cultural practices and values, ensuring they are better able to anticipate and navigate future intercultural challenges.¹⁵⁰ Appendix A provides a graphical overview of key cultural value dimensions pulled from the above work for reference.

Enabled by culture-general understanding and learning objectives, IC professionals can pull from a body of culture-specific materials at the regional, national, and organizational level to help enrich their learning about a specific foreign partner. Regional and national profiles, plus specific studies on their national defense, military, security, and intelligence organizations, provide deep insights into the histories and unique cultures of each partner. In addition, IC professionals can take greater advantage of language-learning opportunities and courses, making better sense of intercultural differences or surprises that arise in training. The Addendum of this *Monograph* provides a more detailed discussion of how these cultural layers overlap, as well as a guide to culture-specific resources.

Ongoing Debate on Intercultural Competency Models

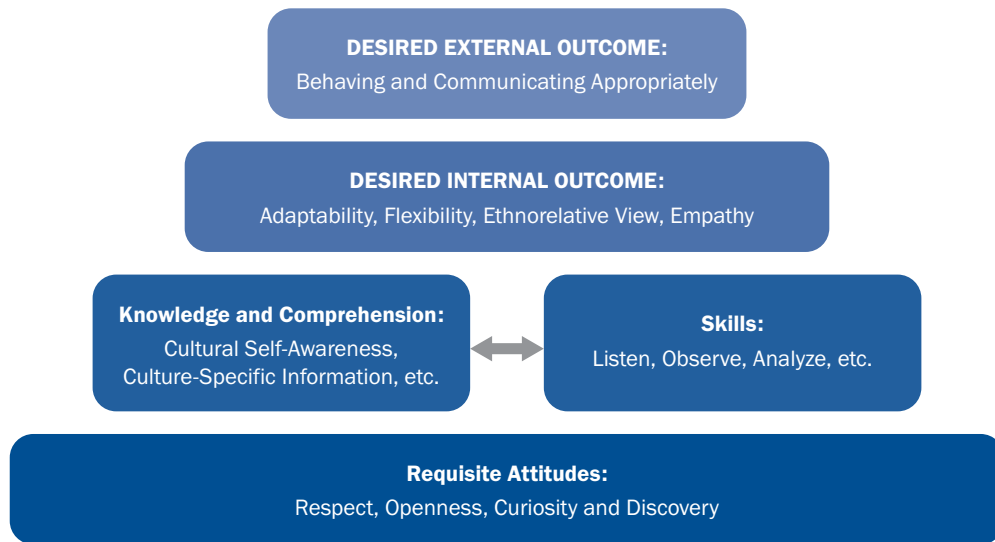
The many intercultural competency models emphasize various combinations of the skills introduced in this literature review and how they may interact in service to unique professional tasks. Academic researchers generally agree that several skills can be deemed foundational for achieving high intercultural competence such as *suspending judgment*, *curiosity*, and *open-mindedness*. Building on these important prerequisites, more advanced skills can be added, including developing awareness of foreign perspectives, honing culture-specific knowledge, and exercising greater behavioral flexibility in intercultural environments. Pre-eminent intercultural expert Darla Deardorff illustrates the interplay of these skills in a model featured in her book, *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Fig. 3).^{151, 152}

Most competency models include a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral knowledge and skills required for intercultural success,^{153, 154} with a particular focus on those that can be more readily taught to enhance workforce intercultural acumen.^{155, 156, 157} Although specific needs can vary depending on the business or mission need, most intercultural models generally include some combination of the following elements or objectives:

- **Compositional:** Traits, characteristics, and skills that correlate to competent intercultural interactions, although gaps often exist regarding what level of competence is decisive;^{158, 159}
- **Co-orientational:** Abilities—for example, perceptual accuracy, empathy, and perspective taking—to accurately understand others in intercultural interactions;¹⁶⁰
- **Developmental:** Focused on the process of developing competence by shifting from ethnocentric understanding of other cultures to ethnorelative appreciation;¹⁶¹ also learning to manage the stages of culture shock;¹⁶²

- **Adaptational:** Ability to adapt within intercultural contexts, including concepts such as accommodation and acculturation; and^{163, 164}
- **Causal process:** Interrelationships between specific components and intended intercultural outcome.^{165, 166}

Figure 3. Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence



Source: Author's gist of core concepts, drawing on Darla Deardorff, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Sage Publications, 2009).

A sampling of some of the most commonly cited intercultural competency models are listed below (Table 9). Of these, the ARC model—with its focus on national security work with foreign actors, including military intelligence missions—is the most promising for possible application to the IC's intercultural needs and is used as a baseline for this study.

Despite general agreement on core intercultural competencies, academic debate continues on the meaning of “competence” and “success” in relation to specific goals, which can vary from intercultural assimilation to job satisfaction or specific performance of professional tasks. Academic scholars continue to explore how intercultural competence can enable missions, such as leading multicultural teams,^{167, 168} negotiating cross-border deals, or enabling global patient outcomes and safety in healthcare and social work.^{169, 170} In addition, debate continues on the inclusion of some competencies in intercultural models. For instance, some academic researchers disagree on the concept of *metacognition* and whether it should be considered a separate dimension or a link among cognition, motivation, and behavior dimensions.^{171, 172} Others question the inclusion of some competencies, such as *motivation* since it is not unique to intercultural situations,^{173, 174} or posit that high self-confidence does not necessarily mean one can interpret foreign cultures adequately.¹⁷⁵ Just as the body of academic work on the value of intercultural competence and related competencies, frameworks, and models is robust and offers a solid foundation upon which the IC could

better meet its intercultural needs, these debates highlight gaps in the development of tools to support and evaluate workforce intercultural competence in the IC. This study and its findings strive to fill that gap.

Table 9: Sampling of Intercultural Competency Models

Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concepts	Discipline
Cultural Intelligence ¹⁷⁶	Christopher Earley and Soon Ang; Dr. David Livermore; Linn Van Dyne	Defines cultural intelligence as an ability to function effectively across cultures, due to cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and metacognitive factors.	Psychology/ Management
Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity ¹⁷⁷	Milton Bennett	Stages of intercultural sensitivity needed to move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism; key skills include empathy, adaptation, and interpersonal skills.	Intercultural Communication/ Education
Process Model of Intercultural Competence ¹⁷⁸	Darla Deardorff	Ongoing nature of developing intercultural competence through first building on attitudes, then knowledge and skills to attain desired internal, then external, outcomes.	Cross-Cultural Psychology/ Communication Studies
Intercultural Communication Competence ¹⁷⁹	William Gudykunst; Stella Ting-Toomey	Knowledge, motivation, and skills for effective intercultural communication.	Communication Studies
Intercultural Communicative Competence ¹⁸⁰	Michael Byram	Focuses on attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness.	Communication Studies / Sociolinguistics
Adaptive Readiness for Culture ¹⁸¹	Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck	Twelve core skills, knowledge, and behaviors found to be essential for DoD success in cross-cultural interactions.	Communication Studies / Organizational Behavior / Psychology

Source: Author's descriptions of core concepts, drawing on works cited in endnotes (keyed to each theory).

Qualitative Research Sheds Light on IC Intercultural Competence Needs

The central hypothesis of this *Research Monograph* is that intercultural competence is as central to IC global success as it has been for global business ventures and the US military. Indeed, given the extraordinarily strategic, high-stakes, and ambiguous nature of intelligence work, even greater levels of intercultural competence may be required. A solid foundation of such acumen promises to enable a more agile workforce that can quickly flex to address new security challenges arising from diverse regions. This *Monograph* seeks to check that proposition and explore opportunities to address shortcomings or build on strengths where they exist.

The goals of this study's qualitative research methodology are to validate the use of specific intercultural competencies for IC work with foreign intelligence partners and to determine which may be most central to both operational and analytic tasks. While academic researchers have conducted similar studies with global businesses and US military workforces, including military intelligence professionals, there appears to be no comprehensive academic research focused on the broader IC workforce and its mission needs. This study seeks to kickstart an exploration of IC intercultural requirements for foreign partner engagement, with consideration to civilian intelligence missions, and to identify opportunities to continue to accelerate intercultural agility and readiness.

Key Questions and Hypothesis Focus on Building Intercultural Competence

Although intercultural competence is undoubtedly of value to a range of intelligence functions,^{182, 183} this research effort focuses on the mission of foreign intelligence partner engagement. This concentration was chosen for its relevance to tackling today's emerging threats and involving a large swath of the IC workforce to include operations officers, analysts, interpreters, and other professional staff. Furthermore, findings and lessons can be more readily shared at an unclassified level for the benefit and consideration of academia.

This research effort employed semi-structured, incident-based interviews, and a review of archival materials of IC professionals' lessons learned, as well as consultations with IC professional staff and academic educators, to answer the following descriptive and inferential research questions:

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

How do various intercultural competencies impact IC professionals' ability to navigate intercultural challenges and cooperate with foreign intelligence partners?

How could the IC accelerate the development of intercultural competence among its workforce?

Descriptive Questions

What lessons about the value of intercultural competence can be learned from IC successes or failures in working with foreign intelligence partners?

What are the various intercultural competencies displayed by IC professionals in their work to support this mission?

What intercultural competency curriculum is currently part of IC officers' core education and training?

Inferential Questions

How does intercultural competence contribute to the success of strengthening ties with foreign intelligence services? How does a lack of competence challenge efforts to strengthen ties?

How do personal, professional, or educational experiences inform development of intercultural competence?

How might additional professional cross-cultural experiences or education—especially earlier in an officer's career—accelerate and strengthen development of intercultural competence?

In keeping with the academic literature described in the previous section, this study explores the following two hypotheses:

1. *A range of intercultural competencies—particularly those known as culture-general—enable IC operations officers and analysts to navigate intercultural challenges and strengthen relations with foreign intelligence partners.*
2. *Dedicated curriculum on culture-general skills and knowledge can better prepare IC officers to navigate intercultural challenges and strengthen relations with foreign intelligence partners.*

Research Design Grounded in Qualitative Data Collection...

For this study, semi-structured, incident-based interviews, and a review of lessons-learned materials were used to elicit detailed information on IC professionals' experiences working with foreign partners. In total, at least 80 unique IC professionals' perspectives on the value of intercultural competence for intelligence work are represented in this *Monograph*. Senior IC officers nominated interview candidates—both operations officers and analysts—based on their experiences and reputed success in intercultural contexts. The focus on this cadre intends to capture the ideal combination of skills and knowledge needed to succeed with foreign partners. The findings, therefore, are not generalizable to the entire workforce, but could inform an IC gold standard to guide the IC's development of intercultural competence. In addition, consultations with IC professional staff, educators, and external academic scholars informed conversations about opportunities to accelerate this competency.

Semi-Structured Interviews on Foreign Intelligence Partner Engagement. The author conducted semi-structured, incident-based interviews to elicit detailed information on how seasoned IC professionals have navigated challenges or facilitated successes with foreign partners. As able, the researcher also explored the unique challenges of intelligence work, particularly civilian intelligence work, at times asking those with previous military experience to compare their civilian and military intercultural missions. This focus intended to determine the degree to which DoD intercultural models and guides might need to be tailored for possible application among civilian IC entities. When possible, the researcher attempted to avoid specific reference to the term “culture” in the interview, which could risk skewing participants’ responses depending on their preconceptions of the term. Each interview lasted about an hour and was held in IC spaces or online via secure government systems. Interviews were not recorded, but extensive handwritten notes were transcribed and filed under anonymous codes. Files were then reviewed for cues that suggested the use of specific competencies outlined in Richter’s list detailed in the literature review. Given the one-hour time limit, interviews probably did not capture the full range of intercultural competencies used but, at a minimum, sought to validate the range of competencies of frequent value to mission with foreign partners.

The researcher interviewed a combination of 24 intelligence officers—analysts and operators mostly from CIA, but including a few FBI analysts, who are involved in a combination of each of the following four functional categories:

1. ***Operations:*** Operations officers and analysts responsible for managing intelligence partnerships;
2. ***Briefing:*** Analysts engaged in intelligence briefings to strengthen relations with foreign partners on shared threats;
3. ***Training:*** Operations officers and analysts leading training for partners; and
4. ***Analysis:*** Analysts providing assessments to support senior US policymaker engagement with foreign intelligence partners.

The author originally hoped to include more FBI agents and analysts, as well as DIA intelligence officers and analysts, but time constraints hindered a broader study during the research period. Despite this more limited study, the interview sample size is on par with related studies on intercultural competence for military missions.¹⁸⁴ Interviewees’ average length of service in the national security community was just over 21 years, ranging from 8 years to an impressive 48 years of service. This research sought to include broad representation and experience with a variety of regional cultures. Of the 24 officers interviewed, most had experience in several regions. Fifteen officers had extensive experience in East Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia; nine in Europe; eight in the Middle East; six in Latin America, and four in Africa. All participants had extensive experience that included at least several years living and working abroad. Appendix B provides a detailed rundown of interview questions. Appendix C offers examples of how IC members’ reflections matched a list of broad intercultural competencies.

Review of IC Intercultural Lessons Learned. In addition to semi-structured interviews, this research study also took advantage of two IC offices’ exemplary initiatives since 2023 to collate intercultural lessons from experienced IC members working with partners in their respective regions. The author reviewed these

recorded sessions, taking note of both key themes related to best practices, as well as additional insights into the unique intercultural needs of civilian intelligence missions. Key intercultural lessons pulled from these archived materials include reflections from an additional 40-plus operations officers and analysts and were integrated into this study. Of note, these sessions focused on intercultural lessons with direct implications for mission, providing valuable insights on the IC's intercultural requirements. None of the IC members involved in the lessons-learned recordings participated in the author's semi-structured interviews.

Consultations on IC Intercultural Education. This research also included about a dozen consultations with IC and other US Government schoolhouses responsible for developing and managing education and training within the national security community. Consultations also included IC members leading nascent, grassroots efforts on intercultural education and training or working in-house to share best practices and resources. These consultations aimed to determine the prevalence and scope of current IC culture-general or culture-specific courses and where opportunities may exist to introduce curriculum that could accelerate the IC workforce's development of intercultural competence.

Consultations on Intercultural Research and Best Practices. Additionally, this research included about half a dozen consultations with academic researchers who have conducted similar work with national security elements, such as the US military, to determine best practices in intercultural research and curriculum development for national security professionals. This cadre's expert insights, commitment to enabling mission, and proactive support for this *Monograph* have ensured its findings were building on the strongest possible foundation of preexisting work on intercultural competence in service to national security.

... And Paired with Inductive Thematic and Deductive Data Analysis

The author conducted an inductive thematic analysis of data from both semi-structured interviews and a review of IC lessons learned to illuminate the intercultural needs of the IC workforce, again with a focus on the unique challenges of civilian intelligence work and how intercultural competencies were specifically applied to strengthen partnerships. To preserve the anonymity of each participant while collating responses, the interviewer assigned each participant a code according to their primary intelligence function: operations (O) or analysis (A). Each was then assigned a consecutive number: 1-7 for operations officers interviewed and 1-17 for analysts interviewed. Review of the interview notes identified common themes related to the unique nature of IC work with foreign partners, particularly any differences from past military experience, as well as lessons learned in how to apply various intercultural competencies to IC work with foreign partners. When an interviewee highlighted a particular theme, an X was noted. Upon completion of the interviews, the total number of Xs were tallied to uncover which themes were particularly salient. See the top four themes, further addressed later in this *Monograph*, and a sampling of responses with the total number of interviewees who cited each theme (Table 10).

The researcher also reviewed themes raised in the IC lessons-learned recordings, which were found to mirror key themes raised in the interviews. These sessions were not used to determine the frequency of

specific intercultural competencies, as with the semi-structured interviews, because they were either group discussions—building on conversations and contributions from others in the session—or part of a series of more narrowly focused lessons on a particular topic. Together these sessions reinforced and expanded upon themes raised in the interviews, yielding additional examples of how intercultural competence was used to advance mission.

Table 10: Top Four Themes on Intelligence Work with Foreign Partners

Theme	01	02	...	07	A1	A2	...	A17	Total (of 24)
Knowledge of Foreign Professional / Organizational Culture	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	X	20
Knowledge of Key History (Country and US Relations)	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	...	17
Unique Intelligence Work Culture (High Risks, High Threat, etc.)	X	X	...	X	X	—	...	X	17
Partners Have Own Goals, Culture of Inherent Distrust and Defensiveness	X	X	...	X	X	—	...	X	14

Source: Author's interviews with IC operations officers and analysts.

In addition to the above inductive thematic analysis, the researcher also conducted a deductive, or code-book, analysis by matching interviewee's reflections of knowledge and skills used to build rapport and navigate challenges with partners against a list of competencies pulled mostly from Richter's study. Participants were coded again as either operators or analysts. The author analyzed each participant's interview notes to determine the prevalence of those capabilities, traits, and attitudes. See the following sample of Richter's intercultural competencies, organized from the most frequently evidenced competency among both operations officers and analysts (Table 11):

Table 11: Mapping Interviewees' Responses to Richter's Intercultural Competencies

Richter Competency	01	02	...	07	A1	A2	...	A17	Total (of 24)
Cultural Knowledge	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	X	24
Self-Awareness	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	X	23
Ethnocentrism versus Ethnorelativism	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	X	22
Cultural Metacognition	X	X	...	X	X	X	...	—	19

Source: Author's interviews with IC operations officers and analysts, mapped to list derived from Nicole Franziska Richter et al., "Reviewing Half a Century of Measuring Cross-Cultural Competence: Aligning Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Measures," *International Business Review* 32, No. 4 (August 2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969593123000227>.

Although most capabilities, traits, and attitudes raised during the IC workforce interviews were clearly delineated in Richter's list, a few characteristics that featured prominently in the participants' reflections did not neatly fit. Of these, *humility* was notably and frequently cited in interviews and in the lessons-learned sessions as indispensable for building rapport and navigating challenges with foreign partners. Humility is not explicitly listed as a standalone competency in Richter's list, but could be considered a component of other listed competencies, such as self-awareness or emotional sensitivity. Given its prominence in IC feedback, the value of humility will be covered in this study's findings as a central theme and best practice for applying intercultural competencies.

Findings: The Intelligence Community's Intercultural Challenges

Interviews with IC professionals underscored the centrality of intercultural skills and knowledge in navigating the unique intercultural challenges of intelligence work with foreign partners. Of note, the intelligence mission is marked by exceptional uncertainty and high stakes, which civilian IC professionals must often navigate with less-close supervision and fewer resources compared to US military counterparts, according to senior officers with experience in both sectors. Although not wholly unique to the IC, several themes related to the challenges of IC intercultural work featured prominently in this study's interviews and review of archived lessons learned. These are presented below, organized by strategic themes though not listed in order of priority.

Exacting Intelligence Mission and Policy Context

Less Routine or Close Supervision. Several IC members, notably many with prior military experience, observed that intelligence decisions and high-level engagements often occur with fewer layers of approval and less oversight, in contrast to their previous experience with the military's more extensive chains of command. They posited that, although this *relative* autonomy can facilitate swifter action, it raises the risk of missteps. As one interviewee put it, "You have lots of rope, but more to hang yourself with." The seniority and outsized influence of many IC foreign partners and interlocutors—for civilian and military IC partners alike—further raises the stakes. One intercultural misunderstanding or slip-up can have ripple effects that reach far beyond individual engagements and can result in major international incidents. Furthermore, the civilian IC's often smaller footprint in many locations means that members have fewer mentors and resources to lean on with relevant firsthand, cultural experience. They must instead rely on their own intercultural acumen to navigate local complexities and to make sense of partners' needs and motivations, communicate respect, foster trust, secure information and cooperation, and ensure the safety of US personnel and assets.

Intelligence Officers as Backdoor US Representatives. Given the IC's subordination to the executive branch and the influence of many senior IC officials, intelligence officers often have close engagement with top policymakers, including privileged insight into their decisionmaking, and so may serve as back-channel

policy representatives to US foreign partners. Given this reality, partners may frequently consider even lower-level and informal exchanges very carefully, dedicating significant time and resources to prepare. Additionally, partners often perceive the IC relationship—which can weather public diplomatic tensions—as a bellwether for actual US bilateral commitments. This dynamic raises the risk that cultural missteps could be misinterpreted to dramatic effect. In one example, a partner service interpreted a US decision to strike a topic from a regular intelligence exchange as a signal of waning US commitment to the bilateral relationship overall, escalating and prompting an office call among seniors. This example underscores the risk of even minor misunderstandings and the need to ensure messages are clearly communicated in ways that anticipate partner needs and sensitivities and resonate in the local cultural context.

Cooperation Subject to Policy Shifts. As the IC’s work is tightly intertwined with US foreign policy, cooperation can be subject to rapid, dynamic shifts. This requires an ability to scale cooperation up or down in line with policy mandates, while keeping relations warm should the partnership be leveraged again in the future. This delicate balancing act requires years—and sometimes decades—of interpersonal continuity and rapport. A strong foundation of genuine institutional and interpersonal trust, empathy, and sharp communication skills can enable IC members to deliver tough messages that may be unpopular among partners, while maintaining collaboration and rapport.

Animating Proactive Cooperation. The intercultural goals of these partner relationships are not limited to sustaining ties, avoiding offense, or blending in as is often the case in other intercultural professional contexts. Instead, the intercultural ask among intelligence partners is even more challenging: to animate *proactive* cooperation and reciprocity with the United States on particularly sensitive issues, ideally getting as much or more from the relationship than is being invested. This presents an exceptionally high bar, which necessitates that IC professionals truly understand partners’ fundamental needs and motivations and address local sensitivities or emotional issues that may impact cooperation, such as sovereignty concerns. To instill cooperation, IC officers must understand what foreign partners value most from US assistance—equipment, information, training, or even the prestige of a certificate—and to tailor offerings to ensure they meet partner needs.

The Challenge of Enigmatic Partners

Ambiguity and Duality of Intelligence Relationships. Opacity and duality are inherent characteristics of intelligence work among partners—or better said, *frenemies*—as each works to simultaneously collaborate, target the other, and protect their own equities. In this actively deceptive environment, it becomes even more challenging to distinguish true motivations and interpret values and behaviors. These obstacles can further undermine IC members’ ability to vet sources, validate information, and make sense of local dynamics, such as who holds real power, who can be trusted, and who genuinely wants to work with the United States. One interviewee reflected on a partner who often feigned ignorance or interest or pretended to oppose US assessments to throw US members off their talking points and elicit additional insights they may not have been prepared to share. As such, cultural understanding is not just beneficial but essential for accurately understanding partners, navigating ambiguity, and achieving US goals while protecting US interests.

Long-Term, “Otherworldly” Trust. Despite the inherent protectionism among partners, the significant risk associated with intelligence work necessitates a transcendent level of trust. Superficial alliances cannot withstand the pressures of high-stakes situations. Trust can be hard to sustain as IC officers usually change positions every few years, while local partners are more frequently career-long intelligence officers in regular contact with generations of US interlocutors, each interaction building on the last. A full suite of intercultural skills is needed by each individual to continue to strengthen and nurture these long-term relationships. This study’s IC interviewees frequently cited empathy and authenticity, in particular, as being key to creating and sustaining a deep emotional connection and developing rapport and trust. In addition, greater behavioral flexibility, relationship investment, and an ability to continue to learn, adapt, and recover from mistakes are essential to ensuring bilateral relations remain on a solid footing.

A Web of Organizational Cultures. Each intelligence engagement occurs against a web of overlapping US relationships with local, regional, and global security and intelligence partners. This requires not only superior knowledge of the local regional and national culture, but also of each service’s unique organizational culture and its relationships with the United States, foreign interagency rivals, and the interlay of local political, economic, and security powerbrokers. Any action with one partner is likely to impact or prompt reaction by another. This requires careful attention to be sure all partners feel respected and that US assistance is equitable and each US partner suited to its corresponding foreign partners’ needs. For instance, some foreign partners prefer high-profile collaboration with overt wins that may be a better fit for US law enforcement entities. Others, however, may prefer behind-the-scenes support, often owing to public sovereignty concerns, preferring collaboration with US partners that operate more clandestinely.

Meeting Exceptionally High Expectations

A “Gold Standard” Reputation. Many foreign intelligence partners perceive the US IC to be the gold standard for intelligence operations and analysis, which can be an asset, but also a challenge. One officer noted the IC still had a mythical reputation in a country where he served, owing to successful US operations there, which continued to foster a belief in exceptional US capacity. In one regard, this belief instills sustained cooperation and encourages partners to improve their own processes and seek alignment with US standards. The continued delivery of high-quality products, information, and training tailored to the local context is central to sustaining this openness to US collaboration. Yet this sets a particularly high bar for IC professionals to maintain. One IC interviewee noted that, if foreign partners perceive the US interlocutor is not meeting this high bar of intercultural competence, they may simply shrug off that IC officer and dismiss recommended courses of action.

Competence Drives Trust and Signals Commitment. Relatedly, foreign partners must believe IC members are culturally savvy and care enough about their realities and operational challenges to learn the basics about their culture, especially when weighing whether to take risks on behalf of the United States. Toward that end, partners expect US intelligence personnel to possess at least some knowledge of the region, the country, and their organizational cultures. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to doubts about US reliability and commitment. Culture-general practices can help to hone the acquisition of the right kind of

culture-specific knowledge that will resonate best with a specific partner. For instance, in some countries, awareness of common greetings, pronunciations, and key history of US actions in the region may go a long way toward demonstrating an appreciation of the local culture and commitment to the partner. Conversely, missteps can signal the opposite.

Principled Resoluteness Demonstrates Reliability. Foreign partners expect US intelligence officers not only to be culturally competent, but also to be principled and resolute in maintaining their values and ethics while advancing US interests. This commitment to US values and principles—while respectfully finding common ground and congruence with local needs—sends a powerful message to local partners that US interlocutors mean what they say and will follow through on their guarantees. Several IC interviewees cited the value of standing ground in the face of demands, which can signal strength. How this resoluteness is communicated and perceived, however, will differ among various cultures. In some regions, for instance, respectful and well-argued debate can showcase one’s competence and develop trust. The interviewees further cautioned that excessive and overly conciliatory attempts to curry favor or accommodate local demands can backfire and instead signal weakness in many cultural contexts.

Findings: Intercultural Competencies for Foreign Partner Engagement

Interviews with IC professionals affirmed superior intercultural acumen is crucial to establishing long-term trust and partner buy-in against the backdrop of the IC's uniquely high-stakes and enigmatic operating environment. Conversations with seasoned operations officers and analysts revealed distinct combinations of competencies most frequently employed in service to their work. These findings shed light on what constitutes a culturally competent IC professional and could inform IC blueprints to accelerate the development of junior officers toward this ideal.

Verifying Key Intercultural Competencies

This study matched IC professionals' reflections of how they navigated intercultural challenges against Richter's detailed competency list to validate the combination of intercultural skills and knowledge of most value for intelligence work with foreign partners (Table 3). Most competencies were found to be of value to both operational and analytic work with foreign partners, although with some differences owing to dissimilarities in each discipline's core responsibilities. See below for the degree to which certain competencies are most prominently and explicitly recognized to be of service to specific operational and analytic missions (Table 12). For a sampling of specific IC members' reflections and anecdotes and how those matched to Richter's competencies, see Appendix C.

Table 12 almost certainly represents the floor of the combination of skills and knowledge needed to succeed in operational and analytic work with foreign partners and is not a report card on the degree to which each officer embodies these skill sets. Some competencies are so innate that professionals may not even recognize they are employing them or are unable to explicitly recognize them. This may partly explain underreporting in some competencies cited in the table, such as *nonstress tendency* or *interest flexibility*, which are certainly central to IC work, but were less likely to be explicitly mentioned in interviews.

For both operations officers and analysts, *cultural knowledge*, *ethnorelative attitudes*, *empathy*, and *self-awareness* featured most frequently in members' reflections on intercultural best practices relevant to their work.

Table 12: Frequency of Richter's Competencies in Operational and Analytic Foreign Partner Engagement

Richter's Intercultural Competencies	Operations Officers Interviewed (# of 7)	Analysts Interviewed (# of 17)
Perception-Management Skills		
Suspending judgment	7	5
Inquisitiveness	4	10
Open-mindedness / openness	6	11
Multicultural attitude	6	12
Acceptance risk / uncertainty and ambiguity	7	5
Cosmopolitanism	1	3
Curiosity	1	1
Category inclusiveness	6	6
Ethnocentrism versus ethnorelativism	7	15
Cultural knowledge/cognition	7	17
Cultural metacognition	5	14
Global business savvy (<i>interpreted as intelligence</i>)	7	11
Relationship-Management Skills		
Relationship interest (cross-cultural)	6	3
Motivation	4	2
Interpersonal engagement	5	5
Interaction management	3	9
Sociability	1	1
Emotional sensitivity / empathy	7	14
Respectfulness	6	5
Self-awareness (<i>of self and the IC</i>)	7	16
Social / behavioral flexibility	6	10
Social influencing	6	8
Communication ability	7	12
Diplomacy	7	7
Language ability	6	13
Self-Management Skills		
Optimism	3	1
Positive explanatory style	3	2
Self-confidence / efficacy	7	11
Proactive initiative	5	8
Self-identity (<i>of self, and USG and IC values</i>)	7	6
Emotional resilience	5	4
Stress ability / nonstress tendency	5	1

Stress management	1	0
Interest flexibility	1	3
Creativity	1	4

Source: Author's interviews with IC operations officers and analysts, mapped to list derived from Nicole Franziska Richter et al., "Reviewing Half a Century of Measuring Cross-Cultural Competence: Aligning Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Measures," *International Business Review* 32, No. 4 (August 2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969593123000227>.

Operations officers cited adherence to a fuller range of perception-management, relationship-management, and self-management skills, underscoring their interpersonal mission and generally more immersive intercultural experiences. This group notably needs competencies—such as *suspending judgment*, *acceptance of risk and uncertainty*, *self-confidence*, and *social/behavioral flexibility*—to operate successfully in their often characteristically uncertain operating space. For the purposes of this study, the concept of *global business savvy* was interpreted in the context of intelligence work, speaking to the subjects' understanding of the intelligence business and its best practices—of high value to their success with foreign partners. In addition, *self-awareness* extended to understanding foreign perceptions of the US Government and the IC overall, and *self-identity* included a sense of and ability to uphold not only personal values, but also those of the US Government and IC. Both competencies featured regularly in operations officers' examples of success with foreign partners. Skills including *relationship interest*, *diplomacy*, and *social influencing* were also prevalent, underscoring the IC's more proactive mission—relative to other national security missions—to shape partners' perspectives, find mutually-beneficial solutions, and secure proactive buy-in.

Most analysts touched on the importance of maintaining *ethnorelative attitudes* and *self-awareness* of real or perceived US shortcomings. Analysts also unanimously mentioned the need for *cultural knowledge* and were more likely to note *metacognitive* competencies in relation to continual learning. They were less likely, however, to focus on several relationship-management and self-management skills cited by the operations officers. This difference is not surprising as most analytic work with foreign partners is generally ad hoc and centered on shorter-term analytic training or one-off briefings. Analysts are generally less responsible for shaping and driving the overall relationship with foreign partners, at least until they reach more senior ranks. Even brief analytic exchanges or training sessions can have an impact on the overall operational relationship, however, and such skills are often called on to help strengthen IC institutional and personal bonds. As one analyst reminded, brief social engagements may be just as important as what is done "at the conference table," and "even if you're introverted and struggling to socialize after hours, the mission requires that you turn it on."

Key Themes in Applying Intercultural Competencies

In addition to highlighting the value of intercultural competencies for work with foreign partners, this study's semi-structured interviews with senior operations officers and analysts, as well as review of archived lessons learned in working with foreign partners, yielded best practices for applying these skills to the IC's operational and analytic missions. Of note, most of these lessons were gleaned from on-the-job experiences, including failures, and almost none of those interviewed had benefited from formal intercultural education or training prior to their assignments.

Humility Is Key. Humility was regularly cited as a foundational quality for working effectively with foreign partners. One IC senior shared that his office's regular study of new hires found humility to be among the most diagnostic in differentiating between the team's top and bottom performers in foreign assignments. Although humility is not explicitly listed as an intercultural skill in Richter's list, other studies have explored the role of humility in enabling various intercultural competencies, including a willingness to appraise oneself and their needs accurately (self-awareness), an orientation toward others (not self), and the ability to regulate one's emotions (interaction management).¹⁸⁵ US agencies are often the elephant in the room, and humble openings and admitting *some* ignorance, while maintaining confidence, helps balance the relationship and encourage reciprocity, particularly if partners feel invited to share or teach US partners something new. In one example, a seasoned officer recounted a time he failed to catch the symbolism of a local leader's attire during a key speech, despite his years of experience with the local culture and language. A foreign partner pointed it out, and the IC member quickly showcased his oversight to stress why the United States needed this individual's partnership.

Knowledge of Culture-Value Dimensions. Another prominent theme was the value of culture-general knowledge related to how identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews can vary across cultures. This understanding was particularly relevant when trying to make sense of cross-cultural differences playing out in less visible ways, for example, in relation to concepts including man-versus-nature, sources of power and authority, nonverbal communication cues, or tolerance for risk. One senior operations officer noted the importance of face-saving in the region and how it challenges a traditional US negotiating style. The officer lamented he had not learned about such differences earlier in his career, only being introduced to the concepts recently in business school. These insights suggest even a cursory introduction to cultural value dimensions could ensure IC officers know where divergence might occur and be better prepared to mitigate potential differences before any engagement.

Know Your History. In relation to *culture-specific knowledge*, more than half of operations officers and analysts explicitly mentioned the criticality of understanding a partner's national and organizational history, specifically its national security challenges and relations with the United States. One interviewee noted, "You can never know enough... It goes a long way to demonstrate your respect and interest in this partner." This observation is relevant even when working with familiar, longstanding partners, such as those in Europe. Several IC members noted some traditional allies will often educate and remind US interlocutors about their deeper experience managing security and conflict on the continent that predates the United States by centuries. Understanding a partner's history of organizational influences—for instance, whether primary support originally came from Western versus Soviet bloc countries—may help make sense of processes, training, and materiel needs.

Go Deeper Than National Cultures. IC members regularly noted the importance of going beyond national cultural understanding to learn more about local organizational, generational, and subnational cultures, which can vary widely in values, motivations, and perceptions of the United States. This knowledge is fundamental to tailoring engagement strategies at the appropriate level and ensuring unity-of-effort among a web of interconnected partners. One officer shared his perspective on a partner, noting major differences in the influence of that country's intelligence apparatus on policy and differences in how they interpreted core

IC concepts, such as “human intelligence” and “analysis.” Another senior officer noted major generational shifts within a partner unit between the early 2000s and the 2020s; earlier generations were just learning the United States had put a man on the moon, but later recruits were so familiar with the United States that they were fans of a particular Miami-based rapper. Despite these differences, recognizing and building upon commonalities between the US and partner intelligence services can help strengthen bonds. For instance, many intelligence units enjoy a shared sense of superiority among peers, critical mission focus, hardship, and risk,¹⁸⁶ which can be helpful starting points for building rapport. Understanding these nuances is a prerequisite to ensure initiatives and exchanges are appropriately tailored and engender goodwill.

A Little Language Goes a Long Way. For both operations officers and analysts, even cursory language skills were essential to demonstrating US commitment and interest in the local partner and respect for them and their culture. For some missions, such as operational cooperation or training, near fluency was crucial to maintaining the momentum of instruction, tailoring content, and listening for subtleties in partner understanding of concepts and guidance. This acumen includes knowing *how* to use language, for instance, shifting between active to passive voice to match expectations of politeness in some cultures. In some cases, however, full fluency was not necessary, particularly in countries where English may be used by professional classes and where interpreters are available. Yet even in these cases, best practices include learning the correct pronunciation of local names and locations and being able to at least give a short toast in the local language. In one example, an analytic training team opted to conduct lessons in a local language after realizing local partners lacked sufficient English skills. Although the co-lead did not speak the local language, she spent an evening learning key phrases to use on the second day, impressing local students and showcasing the IC’s commitment to building rapport with the partners. In another case, a senior officer accepted he might never be fluent in the target language but focused on learning a few jokes—with the help of language instructors to ensure appropriateness—that would resonate with the partner unit and help strengthen their relationship.

Radiate Genuine Interest. The theme of authenticity came up frequently, particularly in relation to showing genuine interest in a partner and their culture. Given the challenging nature of IC work, many interviewees suggested relationships not be superficial but be grounded in authentically shared interests and values. IC professionals enjoy longer-term opportunities to live alongside and immerse themselves in partners’ cultures than do US military members serving in conflict zones with more restrictions. This freedom offers ample opportunities to be flexible and creative in identifying, nurturing, and showcasing interest in aspects of the local culture to include adapting clothing to respectfully mirror local styles. For example, an IC member asked local partners to teach him how to wear a local garment, showcasing his respect and interest in the culture and creating an opportunity to bond with partners as they taught him how to appropriately tie the garment’s knot. Relatedly, pre-crafting culturally astute questions prior to any social engagement can help make the most of the interaction and reinforce IC interest in understanding partners.

“Human Translation” Skills and Resources Are Essential. Interviewees cited an ability to pick up on nonverbal cues as essential for making sense of often enigmatic environments and to accurately interpret partner messages, needs, and information. Nonverbal signals can include environmental and contextual cues—for example, seating arrangements or meeting locales—as well as components such as body

language, facial expressions, touch, personal space, appearance, and the pitch tone, volume, rate, and tempo of speech. How these “translate” in local cultural contexts varies. For instance, in many Latin American countries, interruptions signal interest in the conversation, while in some Asian countries, long pauses signal attention and deep reflection on what has been said. Depending on the context, either practice could be interpreted by the other as signaling disinterest. In another example, one IC member noted a case in which to put a partner at ease, he had to adapt to local norms and place his hands on his legs and sit up straight, pausing to reflect on what was said before responding, thus encouraging more open communication. Several IC members acknowledged the challenges of reading culturally unfamiliar rooms, so they leaned on interpreters or sought other reliable local sources to serve as human translators.

Always Reflect on Partner Perspectives and Sensitivities. Nearly all IC members interviewed touched on the need to step back and consider partners’ perceptions of the United States, the IC, and oneself as an individual; reflect on how these perceptions could impact initiatives or engagements; and then tailor engagements to correct or mitigate negative impressions and manage expectations. In some cases, a history of tensions with the United States or IC can create a steeper climb to develop rapport; however, in other cases, the partner may be awed by the prospect of cooperating with the United States and intimidated by the IC professional or exchange. Reflection also extends to understanding local perspectives of any affiliated enablers or third parties, such as interpreters, and how that may influence engagements. Armed with this knowledge, IC interlocutors can adapt their messaging to navigate sensitivities. In one example, an operations officer noted his success in reassuring a senior partner that, although he would directly communicate perspectives of local needs, he did not expect the partner to act or respond to all inputs, helping to alleviate any pressure the senior partner might have felt, which could have discouraged continued dialogue.

Building Intercultural Competence: Discussion and Future Courses of Action

This *Monograph's* findings support the hypothesis that a range of intercultural knowledge and skills are indispensable for navigating the unique intercultural challenges of intelligence work and advancing cooperation with foreign partners. Yet the interviews conducted with IC professionals also reveal areas of improvement for the IC to accelerate development of the workforce's intercultural competence.

Per discussions with IC professionals, few had experienced dedicated, formal intercultural education or training. Those interviewed often cited childhood and earlier professional intercultural experiences and language training as key in preparing them for later intercultural successes. Many pointed to the opportunity to interact with native language teachers during language instruction as the most rigorous intercultural education they received prior to assignments. Many admitted, however, they would have benefited from earlier introduction to key intercultural concepts and lessons to navigate the challenges they have faced during their careers. If we are to assume a leaner IC workforce may be increasingly called upon to address a wider range of exigencies, the IC may need to consider how better to accelerate the development of these skills, ensuring junior officers are also prepared to step into the mix and work diligently to strengthen relations.

Conversely, the risks of incompetence are great. Intercultural missteps can lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation, resulting in unintended offenses and confusion, eroding trust and credibility with foreign partners. Worse, misunderstandings can quickly turn minor issues into larger disputes, especially a risk within the context of high-stakes and often-tense intelligence work. Without a solid foundation of trust on which to build, foreign partners are unlikely to take risks to collaborate for the benefit of US intelligence and national security objectives. Even when interests may overlap, cooperation can become strained and the mission less likely to succeed. US requests or pressure could backfire, fracturing relations, and presenting openings for US adversaries to make gains.

Tailoring the ARC Model for Intelligence Community Needs

To address IC intercultural competency requirements, the ARC model is a promising starting point for guiding the development of key skills and knowledge for operations officers and analysts. As outlined in the findings

above, both groups cited the centrality of perception-management competencies, such as *avoiding ethnocentric views* and *suspending judgment*. Both also found *cultural knowledge*—culture-general and culture-specific—to be essential, although the kind of insights needed for each mission may differ. In addition, both operations officers and analysts regularly cited the relationship-management competencies of *empathy* and *self-awareness* as important, as well as self-management competencies, such as *self-confidence* and *self-identity*. Operations officers, however, cited a fuller suite of relationship-management and self-management skills more often when discussing their work with foreign partners, illustrating the more involved interpersonal nature of their mission that centers on immersive and longer-term relationships.

Yet some differences in the prevalence of certain skills emerged, probably owing to differences in operational versus analytic missions. For instance, an understanding of cultural-value dimensions related to differences in workstyle preferences may be more relevant for operations officers routinely working alongside partners, seeking to anticipate and manage tensions. Other dimensions, such as understanding how trust is earned in the local cultural context, can also help strengthen long-term working relations. Knowledge related to communication styles, conversational patterns, and concepts of persuasion, however, may be important for analysts tailoring presentations in preparation for an analytic exchange.

Armed with insights on specific IC intercultural competency needs and best practices for foreign partner engagement, this study evaluated the degree to which the ARC model and associated best practices could serve as a guide for intercultural competency development among the IC workforce. As noted in the literature review, the ARC model's 12 mission-focused competencies were developed and tailored for national security missions, which included military intelligence, and therefore would be expected to broadly correspond to IC needs. Given some of the IC's unique challenges and needs, particularly within a civilian context, additional skills and knowledge may be needed to achieve each competency.

Toward this end, this study first considered to what degree the ARC model's 12 overarching competencies and related best practices for DoD intercultural missions—laid out in Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck, *Save Your Ammo: Working Across Cultures for National Security* (2019)¹⁸⁷—addressed the skills and knowledge outlined in Richter's list. See an overview of the ARC model's competencies and best practices along with an assessment of their congruence with Richter's list (Table 13).

Although most of the competencies listed in Richter's study are found among the ARC model's 12 competencies, a few are not explicitly covered by the model. For instance, *cultural knowledge* is not broken out explicitly but is embedded as a component of several ARC model competencies, such as *taking the perspective of others*, *developing cultural explanations of behavior*, and *planning intercultural communication*. Additional competencies found by this research to be critical to intelligence work, particularly within a civilian context, are also not explicitly covered. These competencies include *relationship interest*, *diplomacy*, *social-influencing*, *interest flexibility*, and *proactive initiative*. Given the ARC model's focus on DoD's more expansive, more overt, and perhaps shorter-term military missions, attention to such skills may reasonably not figure so prominently. Yet for the civilian IC, where developing and leveraging human relationships is the goal, these skills are critical and worthy of additional attention in any intercultural model and best practices designed to guide the development of key skills for this particular workforce.

Table 13: Congruence of the Adaptive Readiness for Culture Model and Richter's Competency List

ARC Competencies	Related Practices (from <i>Save Your Ammo</i>)	Congruence with Richter's Competency List
Diplomatic Mindset		
Maintains a Mission Orientation	- Keep an eye on the limits of your mission and avoid overstepping those boundaries. - Do not try to impose US customs and laws or make other cultures exactly like US culture. - Manage conflicts between your mission objectives and local cultural norms.	Related to <i>global business savvy</i>, but in a national security context that includes awareness of US mission needs and best practices. Could also relate to <i>motivation</i>, <i>self-identity</i> as a security professional representing US values, and <i>category inclusiveness</i> embodied in mantras such as "one team, one fight."
Understands Self in Cultural Context	- Consider how your personal background and culture shape the way you see the world. - Objectively compare your own culture to new ones you come across. - Figure out how you and other Americans are viewed by people from other cultures.	Overlaps with <i>self-awareness</i> competency.
Manages Attitudes Toward Culture	- Manage reactions and attitudes to sustain relationships and get things done. - Find ways to maintain a positive or neutral attitude. - Notice how broader, ongoing circumstances are affecting your attitude and reactions.	Relates to <i>suspending judgment</i> , <i>respectfulness</i> , <i>open-mindedness</i> , <i>multicultural attitude</i> , <i>stress ability/nonstress tendency</i> , <i>positivity</i> , and <i>optimism</i> .
Cultural Learning		
Self-Directs Own Cultural Learning	- Take charge of your cultural learning and tailor it to your interests. - Focus your learning on building rapport and developing relationships. - Keep learning. Continually improve your cultural knowledge.	All three relate to the broader concept of <i>cultural metacognition</i> ; however, this breakdown from the ARC unpacks important nuance on how to put this competency into practice.
Develops Reliable Information Sources	- General facts and rules you learn about a culture will not always hold true. - Determine the credibility and bias of your cultural information providers. - Consult several sources with different viewpoints to obtain reliable cultural information.	
Reflects and Seeks Feedback on Intercultural Encounters	- Reflect on your intercultural encounters to build your cultural understanding. - Ask for feedback after awkward interactions to improve future performance. - Compare across cultural experiences to draw general lessons.	

Cultural Reasoning		
Copes with Cultural Surprises	• Expect to be surprised when working across cultures. • Ask “why” to disentangle weird behavior and puzzling interactions. • Look into culture as a potential source of seemingly odd behavior.	May include a combination of traits and capabilities that would enable coping to include <i>an acceptance of risk, cultural knowledge, emotional resilience, and a stress ability/nonstress tendency.</i>
Develops Cultural Explanations of Behavior	• Come up with several possible reasons for a person’s actions. • Go past simple stories and describe deeper causes of behavior. • Consider how the culture and situation affect what people are doing.	Grounded in <i>inquisitiveness</i> , as well as an <i>ethnorelative</i> mindset and <i>cultural knowledge</i> of differences.
Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situation	• A person’s background shapes how they view the world. • Take another’s perspective by thinking about what they know, want, and feel. • Use what you know about a person’s culture to put yourself all the way in their shoes.	Relates to <i>emotional sensitivity/empathy</i> , enabled by <i>cultural knowledge</i> .
Intercultural Interaction		
Acts Under Cultural Uncertainty	• Push yourself to engage with the culture even if you have not mastered it (you never really will). • People will generally appreciate when you try to work with their customs and language, even if you are not quite getting it right. • Use what nuggets of knowledge you have about the culture in your dealings and decisions.	Relates to <i>acceptance of risk</i> and <i>self-confidence/efficiency</i> .
Plans Intercultural Communication	• Before diving into critical interactions, pause and think about what you really want to achieve. • Consider how to best express yourself and your messages to achieve your objectives. • Use your cultural knowledge to tune your transmission to the people with whom you are dealing.	Relates to <i>cultural metacognition and communication ability</i> ; could also relate to <i>interaction management</i> , although Richter’s characterization of this category does not specifically call out “ <i>planning</i> .”
Engages in Disciplined Self-Presentation	• The way you present yourself has an influence on intercultural interactions. • Adapt your style within reason to achieve your aims in the culture and situation. • Tune in to how you are coming off to cultural others and adjust as needed.	Includes <i>suspending judgment, self-awareness, communication ability, social-behavioral flexibility</i> , and <i>stress ability/nonstress tendency</i> .

Source: Author’s comparison, drawing on Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck, Save Your Ammo: Working Across Cultures for National Security (*Global Cognition*, 2019); and Nicole Franziska Richter et al., “Reviewing Half a Century of Measuring Cross-Cultural Competence: Aligning Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Measures,” *International Business Review* 32, No. 4 (August 2023), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969593123000227>.

Relevant to the IC, however, the ARC model does offer more specific skills related to the broader concept of *cultural metacognition*. The ARC model lists three distinct competencies within this category, namely the abilities to self-direct one's cultural learning, to develop reliable information sources, and to reflect and seek feedback on intercultural encounters. These specific skills are of particular value when operating in relatively autonomous and ambiguous intelligence environments.

To meet the unique challenges and needs of the IC workforce, as outlined in the IC interviews, this *Mono-graph* proposes additional tailored skills and knowledge, keyed to each of the ARC model's competencies. Many of these additions (Table 14), relate to the unique intercultural challenges that civilian components of the IC may face, as covered in the findings above.

Table 14: Proposed Additions to the ARC Model To Meet IC Mission Needs

ARC Competencies	Additional Practices for IC Foreign Partner Engagement
Diplomatic Mindset	
Maintains a Mission Orientation	• Adhere to shifts in US mission and policies, while sustaining long-term trust and rapport with partners. • Navigate the local cultural context to shape foreign partner decisionmaking and find compromises to reach mutually acceptable solutions and advance US policy objectives. • Understand the peculiarities of the intelligence mission and recognize the limits and tradeoffs in building rapport.
Understands Self in Cultural Context	• Consider how you and your IC organization are viewed by members of your partner unit.
Manages Attitudes Toward Culture	<i>No proposed changes or additions.</i>
Cultural Learning	
Self-Directs Own Cultural Learning	• Learn locals' key emotional issues and relevant history, especially any interplay with the United States or IC. • Go beyond an understanding of a partner's national culture and seek to learn about relevant regional, organizational, generational, or subnational cultures. • Lean on intercultural preparation guides and colleagues' lessons learned to consider the full range of intercultural dynamics that may impact engagements.
Develops Reliable Information Sources	<i>No proposed changes or additions.</i>
Reflects and Seeks Feedback on Intercultural Encounters	• Request independent assessments and follow up with partner services to solicit feedback on how partners perceive engagements and the relationship overall. • Seek to understand the root causes of successes and failures with foreign partners, incorporate lessons to adapt.
Cultural Reasoning	
Copes with Cultural Surprises	• Embrace best practices in recovery to manage missteps, ensuring they do not escalate and risk damaging relations.
Develops Cultural Explanations of Behavior	• Lean on culture-general guides to broaden one's mental lens to consider a fuller range of possible explanations for surprising behaviors.

Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situation	- Consider how local perspectives of the IC and your IC organization in particular may be shaping how they prepare or show up to the engagement. - When using an interpreter or third-party enabler, consider how locals may perceive them and how that may impact the engagement.
Intercultural Interaction	
Acts Under Cultural Uncertainty	Proactively push to find common ground and build on shared interests to continue to strengthen rapport and trust with partners.
Plans Intercultural Communication	- Frame US proposals and requests in ways that resonate with local sensitivities. - Direct cultural learning and resources to best interpret verbal and nonverbal cues in the local cultural context. - Consider the impact of engagement with one organization or partner on the interconnected web of other US and foreign partners. - Pre-craft questions for social engagements that showcase your awareness of local cultures and unlock deeper levels of learning about your partner. - Lean on even cursory familiarity with the local language and pronunciation to reinforce US interest and respect for the local partner and their culture.
Engages in Disciplined Self-Presentation	- Demonstrate humility and an openness to learn from partners, setting the relationship up for greater reciprocity. - Specifically understand what nonverbal behaviors put partners at ease and encourage greater information sharing.

Source: Author's recommendations for adapting the ARC model for IC mission needs, building on Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck, "Adaptive Readiness for Culture: The ARC Model of Cultural Competence," *Global Cognition*, <https://www.globalcognition.org/adaptive-readiness-for-culture/>.

Opportunities to Accelerate IC Intercultural Competence

Reflecting on industry and academic best practices, as well as consultations with IC professional staff, ample opportunities can be identified to help accelerate the development of the IC workforce's acumen. The following recommendations include both short-term initiatives that could be implemented at relatively low cost and longer-term investments at the institutional level.

Recommendations for Short-Term Actions

IC leaders could dedicate modest effort at the unit or office level to quickly advance several initiatives that could help to accelerate workforce cultural knowledge in the short term and motivate learning. Per consultations with IC professionals leading units and intercultural development efforts, some offices are already using some combination of the processes, tools, and best practices listed below, but professionals suggested more could be done to encourage broader adoption. IC progress on even a few of these recommendations could help ensure IC operations officers and analysts are better prepared to navigate intercultural challenges in service to mission.

- ***Appoint a Center/Unit Referent.*** With little effort, unit or center mid-level leaders could appoint intercultural referents who would serve as a resource and repository of relevant intercultural

information and tools. Furthermore, these individuals or small teams could advance various short-term initiatives, helping to collate and build on their unit's preexisting skills, knowledge, and lessons learned.

- ***Introduce Key Concepts via Brownbag Sessions and Language Learning.*** Office referents could pull on the concepts presented in this *Monograph* and other literature to craft short brownbag sessions that briefly introduce colleagues to core concepts. In-house language instructors could also incorporate unique cross-cultural challenges into their curriculum. Although such efforts may not permit sufficient time to develop specific skills, introduction to key culture-general concepts, especially knowledge of cultural-value dimension differences, could help raise awareness of intercultural needs and tools available to the workforce.
- ***Develop Cross-Cultural Preparation Guides.*** IC practitioners could develop and disseminate comprehensive preparation guides to ensure key cultural dynamics are more regularly considered as part of pre-foreign-engagement planning. These guides could lean on culture-general concepts to guide the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge in preparation for foreign partner engagements. Intercultural expert Darla Deardorff posits a culture-based appraisal process, which could include sociocultural evaluations—alongside general situational and interactional appraisals to ensure success. Appendix D offers a sample draft preparation guide, inspired by Deardorff's model.
- ***Improve Knowledge-Management Processes.*** In support of answering the above pre-engagement questions about specific partners, IC officers—possibly IC desk officers responsible for managing partner relationships—could collate cross-cultural insights and lessons learned into “Organizational Culture Files” on key partners. These files could provide deeper insights into how each partner compares across various cultural-value dimensions—such as communication style, risk aversion, hierarchy, individualist-versus-collectivist identities, and work-life preferences—allowing future IC professionals to benefit from the intercultural experience of their predecessors (see Appendix E for a sample). Separately, broader intercultural guides could be crafted that draw on lessons learned in navigating common challenges, such as working through the aversion-to-risk characteristic of many partner cultures.
- ***Short-Term Field Rotations Dedicated to Intercultural Learning.*** IC units could develop and authorize short-term field rotations of a few days to weeks that could be tailored to enhance an IC professional's intercultural learning, particularly on new accounts. These orientation tours can be focused on visits to key historic or cultural sites, particularly museums, and even be accompanied by learning materials and assignments to help ensure lessons are considered in the context of their IC work. Travel opportunities could also be complemented by foundational coursework, or be leveraged as an incentive to complete such courses, should they be mandated as prerequisites for these foreign intercultural learning rotations.
- ***Leverage AI Dialogue Tools To Strengthen Intercultural Flexing.*** IC practitioners and educators could lean on rapidly evolving artificial intelligence (AI) dialogue tools to develop cultural knowledge, broaden mental models about foreign behaviors, and strengthen intercultural flexing. AI tools can be valuable for culture-specific research, but users should be aware that these tools vary in quality or may harbor biases from the training data. AI tools are also in development that could help users practice navigating challenging intercultural situations with exercises to hone skills such

as *suspending judgment*.¹⁸⁸ These tools could help IC professionals develop stronger intercultural muscle to quickly make sense of possible cross-cultural challenges and navigate interactions in more culturally intelligent ways.^{189, 190}

- ***Encourage Intercultural Performance.*** IC leaders could help spur the workforce to develop intercultural competence by reinforcing messages on its value and expectation that professionals demonstrate these skills and knowledge as a core competency and job expectation. This messaging can include rewards and recognition for those demonstrating exceptional competence as part of their operational or analytic work, or contributing to workforce development by developing intercultural education, training, or knowledge sharing.

Recommendations for Longer-Term Initiatives

Longer-term initiatives at the institutional level could help expand education and training to strengthen workforce intercultural foundations and to ensure recruitment, hiring, and performance feedback tools are aligned with IC intercultural needs. These recommendations would probably require senior leader buy-in and a greater commitment of resources.

- ***Partner with Academic and Private Sector Intercultural Experts.*** The IC could initiate outreach programs designed to reinforce relationships with academic and private sector experts on intercultural competence, ensuring the IC is benefiting from the latest research, best practices, and tools, especially in the continued development of education and training for IC mission needs.
- ***Culture-General and Intercultural Education and Training.*** IC educators could tailor dedicated, stand-alone culture-general courses to introduce IC professionals to key knowledge, concepts, and skills, ideally as part of core operations or analytic tradecraft curriculum. Later education and training could be tailored to build on these foundational concepts and customized to IC missions, such as foreign partner engagement. Educators could draw on a large body of literature on best practices for developing such curriculum. These works lean on key educational theories, such as experiential learning theory and goal-setting theory, and underscore the utility of classroom tools, such as mission-related scenarios to prompt critical reflection and continued learning.^{191, 192} Appendix F offers a sample lesson plan for a course tailored to intercultural engagement with foreign partners.
- ***Consider Continuity Best Practices.*** Given the centrality of trust in this particularly challenging intercultural intelligence space, IC leaders could consider best practices that may include maintaining some continuity across rotations, possibly by returning culturally adept officers to the same region every few years or relying on a smaller cadre of senior leaders who could sustain occasional contact with senior foreign partners to reinforce institutional confidence and trust.
- ***Recruit and Hire for Intercultural Competence Potential.*** Competencies such as *self-confidence*, *stress management*, *positive explanatory styles*, and *interest flexibility* were found to be valuable traits for navigating intercultural challenges, although many are personality traits that are more innate and less teachable. IC hiring officials could, to a greater degree than they already are, consider key

personality traits found to correlate with high intercultural competence and tailor hiring assessments to account for those traits. This step could help ensure the IC is not only bringing in officers who possess adequate cultural knowledge, but are also agile and motivated, and can continue to learn to address ever-dynamic intercultural mission needs.

- ***Tailor Testing and Evaluation.*** To identify IC officers with exceptional intercultural acumen, IC professional staff could tailor preexisting measurement tools to IC missions as an additional means of tying performance objectives to this competency. Managers and human resource professionals could lean on a body of literature, including work by organizational psychologist Xiaowen Chen et al., that explores how to measure success in foreign contexts through task, contextual, and adaptive performance types.¹⁹³

Areas for Further Research

Time constraints unfortunately precluded the inclusion of a wider swath of the IC workforce in this study, which largely focused on CIA work with foreign partners, although several FBI analysts were also interviewed. Additional research among IC agencies' workforces would be valuable to assess the impact of intercultural competence on each agencies' unique missions. Additionally, a deeper exploration of the impact of intercultural competence to other intelligence functions—for example, human collection and specific types of analysis, such as political, leadership, economic, or military analysis—could further ensure foundational education is tailored for the benefit of all IC work. Despite the challenges of testing and evaluating the impact of intercultural competence, future studies could also consider ways to measure progress in strengthening rapport and trust with foreign intelligence partners.

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Appendix A: An Overview of Culture Value Dimensions

UNDERSTANDING NORMS AND WORLDVIEWS:

	MAN-VERSUS-NATURE:	Subjugation to Nature (fatalist) ↔ Mastery over Nature (controllable)
	TIME ORIENTATION:	Short-Term (immediate results) ↔ Long-term (perseverance, future focus)
	JUDGMENT:	Universalist/Institutional (rules apply to all) ↔ Particularistic/Individual (case dependent)
	RULES:	Tight/Closed/Formal (strict rules, formality) ↔ Loose/Open/Informal (flexible norms and rules)
	DECISIONMAKING:	Consensual (group buy-in, consultative) ↔ Top-down (boss makes decision)
	GENDER ROLES:	Equality/Egalitarian (less distinction) ↔ Inequality/Traditional (set expectations)
	STATUS:	Achievement (basis of achievement) ↔ Ascription (basis of age, class, gender, etc.)

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS:

	IDENTITY:	Individual (personal achievement, autonomy) ↔ Collectivist (societal goals, relations) Family/In-Group (protect in-group needs)
	POWER DISTANCE:	Low (egalitarian, OK to challenge authority) ↔ High (hierarchical, unequal power)
	ACHIEVEMENT:	Competitive (material success, achievement) ↔ Cooperative (value quality of life, care)
	UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE:	Low (OK with ambiguity, risk-taking, change) ↔ High (low risk, need clear rules, structure)
	DESIRES:	Indulgent (free gratification) ↔ Restraint (control of desires)
	PERFORMANCE:	Achievement prioritized and rewarded ↔ Achievement not prioritized or rewarded
	WORK-LIFE BALANCE:	Doing (work-centric, career first) ↔ Being (life-centric, leisure time)

COMMUNICATING AND PERSUADING:

	MESSAGES:	Low-context/direct (explicit, verbal, clear) ↔ High-context/indirect (implicit, nonverbal)
	EXPRESSIVENESS:	Affective/Expressive (show emotion) ↔ Neutral/Nonexpressive (straight face)
	NEGATIVE FEEDBACK:	Direct (critique clear, up front) ↔ Indirect (positive framing, save face)
	EYE CONTACT:	High (direct eye contact to show interest) ↔ Low (indirect, reflects thought)
	CONVERSATION:	Interruptions (shows enthusiasm) ↔ Long pauses after comments (shows reflection, respect)
	PERSUASION:	Applications-first (key points first, case studies) ↔ Principles-first (data, methodology first)

BUILDING RELATIONS AND WORKING:

	TRUST:	Task-based/cognitive (competence and reliability) ↔ Relationship-based/affective (personal bond)
	PERSONAL DISCLOSURE:	Share openly (all topics on the table) ↔ Guarded, work-focused (no personal small talk)
	CONFLICT:	Disagreeable (debate, confrontation) ↔ Agreeable (avoid conflict, save face)
	RELATION TO TIME:	Punctual (schedules) ↔ Relative (flexible, relations first)
	WORKSTYLE:	Monochronic/linear (one task at a time) ↔ Polychronic/Nonlinear (multitask)
	LEADERSHIP VALUES:	Task-oriented (focus on results and productivity) ↔ Relationship-oriented (maintain harmony)
	INVOLVEMENT:	Specific (segregate work vs. private life) ↔ Diffuse (relations transcend life spaces)
	SELF-PROMOTION:	Lean-in (tout successes, self-promote) ↔ Self-effacing (never brag, humble)

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Appendix B: Cross-Cultural Critical Incident Interview Protocol

Part 1 (20 minutes): Part one of the interview elicited a brief overview of the participant's personal, professional, or educational cross-cultural experiences.

- How long have you served in the National Security Enterprise (security, IC, military, etc.)?
- Tell me a little about your personal and professional background with a focus on where in the world you have lived and worked.
- Tell me more about any intercultural education you have received in preparation for your global assignments.
- Tell me broadly about the nature of your recent work with foreign intelligence services (while respecting and avoiding operational details).

Part 2 (40 minutes): Part two of the interview focused on eliciting critical incidents during which the officer or associates—knowingly or unknowingly—employed intercultural competencies to navigate a challenge and drive a success with foreign intelligence partners.

- Please tell me about a time, ideally in your most recent experience, when you interacted with members of a partner security or intelligence service and found the interaction particularly challenging or notably successful. Please talk me through how you navigated the experience and factors that might have contributed to that failure or success?

As applicable, the interviewer then asked additional probing questions to elicit more information on the participant's thinking, judgment, decisionmaking, and actions, listening for verbal cues that aligned with specific intercultural competencies. Follow-on questions included:

- What additional factors or knowledge do you perceive helped you navigate this challenge or success?
- What additional factors do you perceive impeded your efforts to navigate this challenge?
- What would you have done differently? What do you wish you had known?
- How have you attempted to develop the skills and knowledge needed to work with foreign partners?
- How did the organizational culture of the foreign intelligence service impact the engagement?

- How have you found the nature of IC work with foreign partners different from previous experience, particularly compared to any prior military experience?
- What lessons from foreign partners changed your perspective (US, mission, approach, etc.)?
- Do you recall an experience when a partner gave feedback about you, your office, or a colleague?
- What advice would you give to new officers deploying to a new AOR [area of responsibility]? What resources, who to talk to?

Appendix C: Reflections from Interviews of IC Intercultural Competence in Practice

The below are paraphrased anecdotes from interviews with IC professionals, tailored for readability and to avoid mission details, that speak to how they employed various competencies in their work with foreign partners.

Perception-Management Verbal Cues	
Suspending Judgment	<i>You have to be nonjudgmental... you don't get to pick who is the most valuable partner... so they may say things that are despicable and lean into conspiratorial thinking... but many grew up in environments where their governments actually have done conspiratorial stuff and so their perspective may not be so far-fetched relative to their upbringing...</i> <i>Some behaviors might not mesh with your personal comfort level, but you should only jump in to adjust if the risk to mission is too high... often you can let something ride, so long as the behaviors are within acceptable goalposts...</i> <i>On day one of class, no one showed up, although we'd confi med with leadership the day before... we learned the unit had just been paid and everyone had rushed to the bank to pull out the money they'd need... we learned you can't train students if their fundamental needs aren't met... need to be fl xible and know that concepts, such as time, might be different...</i> <i>Have to keep the mission in mind... for example, a US offi er wanted an incoming host-nation commander fi ed who'd bought his position... an advisor told the US official o weigh the tradeoffs, noting any replacement will probably do the same... better to evaluate the incoming offi er's abilities fi st, then use this info to have him removed if he's not effective...</i>
Inquisitiveness	<i>I like to read local literature from the country of interest... especially poetry, which is how people talk about themselves to themselves... for instance, reading Rumi gave me a sense of how Persians think of themselves in the context of the region and the Silk Road...</i>
Open-mindedness/ openness	<i>I spent a lot of time with the interpreters, asking them to teach me their local chai recipe... everyone had their own recipe... it allowed them to teach me something and to learn something new about their culture...</i> <i>I sought to study abroad... gave me an external perspective on US policy and history, seeing what WWII looked like from the Dutch perspective or the Cold War from the Czech perspective, which I'd never considered before... I was only getting the US perspective in the US...</i>

Multicultural attitude	Our partners in this Asian country were very conflict avoidant... they would even give themselves nicknames because they knew US interlocutors couldn't pronounce their real names... they wanted to head off the discomfort of making US partners uncomfortable... We understood that diaspora communities in the US had preconceived notions about government surveillance... many were fleeing authoritarian regimes, so they assumed the US was monitoring them too and aware of home-country threats against them... so they felt if the US wasn't intervening, it must be because they didn't care... I recognize that corruption is inherent and just a part of life there... many partners are from lower socioeconomic classes and are likely to take a little money off the top of what we pass to them for programs...
Acceptance of risk/uncertainty and ambiguity	Even if we didn't have insight to their entire plan... we had to defer to our partners and accept they would get the mission done their own way...
Cosmopolitanism	I wish I'd had this comparative cross-cultural framework earlier... how dynamics like saving face differed in different parts of the world... I'd have been interested to know it matched up with the challenges we were facing with a Middle Eastern partner...
Curiosity	I do lots of self-study when learning about a new region, reading books by US officials who have served there and talking to other government experts and colleagues... can never learn enough history about a foreign partner and their relationship with the US...
Category inclusiveness	I recognized our partner unit was responding to orders from their president in the same way that we were...
Ethnocentrism versus ethnorelativism	We tend to dismiss smaller services and have overly low assumptions about what they do, because they don't do it like us, but that doesn't mean that they're not good critical thinkers or good analysts and not serving their customers... This country's culture was not monolithic... there were many different subcultures and dialects... if our materials were presented with simplified language that was not common to that region, locals took the message that the US didn't really understand or care about them... We asked a trainee to give a briefing in English in front of her commanders as part of a capstone exercise... she almost had a panic attack... I wondered in hindsight if that was valuable or necessary for mission... we could have evaluated her without that pressure... asking her to do it in English wasn't fair... took away from testing core competencies... When collaborating with an African partner, I realized our analytic processes didn't fit well with their writing and argumentation styles... the kind of evidence that is persuasive to their leadership may be different than what works for a US official... we also underestimated the challenges of sharing drafts and by the time our effort was published, it was outdated... Most partners know us better than we know them and fully understand US redlines and bureaucracy and will understand the restrictions IC officers may also be under...
Cultural knowledge/cognition	Although the US culture is rooted in an idea that success is earned through hard work and self-determination, the tribes I dealt with believed success came through cunning and one's ability to trick the other... they survived through trickery... it was important to understand this deeply-seated value...

	<i>It's important as analysts to understand our audience's worldview... have to speak to their values and consider emotional issues... for instance, many in the developing world are not interested in hearing about the international rules-based order, which many perceive as a fig leaf for more powerful countries to hide their activities...</i> <i>There are significant impacts owing to generational differences... vastly different starting points for relations with partners and local perspectives of the US... with the first generation during the early 2000s, most had only heard about the US from their local mullah, and had just learned the US had put a man on the moon... later generations were raised entirely online and with access to the US...</i>
Cultural metacognition	<i>Seek a partner to keep you in check during engagements and let you know if you're talking too much... because if you are, the subject isn't...</i> <i>I needed a "human interpreter" not just a language interpreter... I didn't know if my message was resonating in the way I intended... so I would pre-game and sync with them beforehand, relaying my intended tone and purpose of the meeting, then ask them to cue me when it was appropriate to ask certain questions throughout the engagement...</i> <i>We drove conversations to dig into why their classification system worked the way it did... this helped us understand their concerns and needs... to adopt a new process for intel sharing that was more compatible with both services' needs...</i>
Global business savvy (interpreted as intelligence savvy)	<i>Most of my ah-ha moments have related to learning about our own internal processes and what's acceptable for our intelligence work with foreign partners...</i> <i>I have often seen times when other US partners are too accommodating with partners, leading to less fruitful outcomes for the US... they need to remember that they're still talking to another intelligence service...</i> <i>I had enough experience to know the difference in partners' claims that "everyone knows this," which in one cultural context referred to the person's nuclear family and, in another, the entire city market...</i>
Relationship-Management Verbal Cues	
Relationship interest (cross-cultural)	<i>I built rapport with a gruff senior official who'd been proud of his anti-US operations during the Cold War... I shared my background serving in the opposite US partner unit... used that to build a bond and months later gifted him a symbolic item from my old unit... he was deeply moved...</i>
Motivation	<i>I was motivated to enable partners out of a desire to train them to conduct their own operations so that the US could accomplish its policy objectives without having to risk as many US lives...</i>
Interpersonal engagement	<i>Spend time with the interpreters, especially if you don't speak the local language... let them teach you about the local culture... important context for intelligence reports you read...</i>
Interaction management	<i>As we reached the end of training, we could see our partners were frustrated and tired... one instructor wanted to end the class early... however, I knew they wouldn't be happy if they didn't complete the assignment and I insisted we push through... our partners needed the pride of doing it on their own and not letting us do it for them...</i>
Sociability	<i>When everyone else went home, I'd spend evenings drinking with and learning additional colloquial phrases from the language instructors...</i>
Emotional sensitivity / empathy	<i>The analytic culture is too focused on answering requests for information (RFIs)... too much pressure to answer those specific questions... we don't take the time to first figure out who the subject is and listen... if they say they're sad, you need to reflect on that first, learn why, and connect...</i>

Respectfulness	<i>I'd originally taken for granted that the local culture was fatalistic and that death wasn't a big deal because of the difficulties of life in this country... but upon the death of a popular local soldier, his team was devastated... I realized people are people, and we need to meet humans where they are.... even if they don't have the luxury in that environment to mourn or grieve the way we do in the US...</i> <i>This partner country had a long history of abandonment and being sold out, which is reinforced in their schools... this history is very real and alive... so it was a higher bar to establish trust...</i>
	<i>We found it was more helpful to characterize "training" as "exchanges" as the latter implied that we could work together to achieve a specific goal... the former could come across as dictating and give a hierarchical impression... that we're teaching them how to do the work because they have a problem...</i> <i>Spirited debate may generate respect... some countries may perceive you as weak if you agree to everything, but if you can make respectful, well-argued points as part of hard conversations or debates, they'll often respect that you took a position...</i>
Self-awareness (interpreted to include self and organization)	<i>I knew that due to my Latin American ethnicity I'd have a higher bar to prove that I was actually the senior IC representative and a credible interlocutor... I didn't look like the "gringo" that our partner in Latin America expected and wanted to be in charge...</i> <i>There were many preexisting notions about US interventions abroad from TV and movies... if their impression is the US doesn't care about the world, you want to start with a story that shatters that stereotype and shows you're different...</i> <i>Many diasporas in the US harbor deep suspicion of any government, which is why many of them fled their home countries in the first place... so trust in the US Government is low and requires sufficient language capability and cultural knowledge to overcome distrust...</i>
Social / behavioral flexibility	<i>I told a visiting analyst to eat the dessert our partners had provided, even though he didn't like it, because it was a traditional dish from that region and a matter of great pride...</i> <i>Don't just give them boots... teach them how to fight in flip-flops... learn what they're good at already and build from there...</i> <i>Our partners in a Southeast Asian country were struggling to understand vague concepts we were presenting as part of a hypothetical scenario, so we adapted our lesson plan and the next day asked them to pull from a real-world challenge... and they thrived...</i> <i>While we wanted to give a young, outstanding officer an opportunity to do a capstone briefing at the end of training... we adjusted and let the class pick the presenters... we knew in this culture they'd pick the seniormost officers to present... it could have embarrassed our pick... learned it's better to adapt to their system and use the training to build goodwill...</i> <i>The way you sit in the room with someone from this East Asian culture can matter... sitting straight with your hands on your legs will help put your subject at ease... they'll be more likely to share information...</i> <i>In this Southeast Asian country, there was no banking system, so we had to develop processes to ensure compensation and resources were being delivered to the intended recipients...</i>
Social influencing	<i>To get buy-in with this partner, we had to frame conversations by hypothetically suggesting solutions and starting a conversation about what would be needed to alleviate any concerns in that scenario... we also understood the need to show proof of concept first... this framing helped to reassure our particularly risk-averse partners...</i>

	We would tailor our presentations to include data, which our partners valued... helped to get around emotional issues, such as whether or not engagement was decreasing, by showing that the number of meetings was actually increasing... We would lean on science-based techniques and studies to demonstrate for our partners the value of approaches that were more humane... a way to influence, while working around any moral judgment... had to convince them in culturally intelligent ways...
Communication ability	To develop trust, I had to be an active listener and not just focus on notetaking... I needed to be patient and slow down and not dominate the conversation in order to really hear them and learn about their interests and needs... It's important to know what eye contact means in some cultures... when talking with detained terrorists, they made eye contact because they hated you... My mother taught me the value of the "Arab rule of 3" in which many from that culture may repeat a point three times, but if you interrupt to ask questions, you'll hijack their train of thought... it's important to give brief acknowledgement, but then let them repeat and they will expand each time, giving more detail and refining the point...
Diplomacy	An underperforming partner unit needed to increase their collection or risk losing resources... I appealed to the unit chief by pointing out our shared responsibility to be responsive to "the boss"... used language and concepts that would resonate... they increased collection... Saving face was key in this culture, so negotiations couldn't be done in a traditional way where both sides put their cards on the table and bridge gaps... had to be more subtle to frame positions... "from my perspective, you might see that I would want..." that gives the chance to air positions indirectly without pressuring the other side to acknowledge conflict... We swayed our partners on a proposal to include more background on how information was acquired ... such detail isn't usually part of their products as standard practice, owing to concerns about leaks in their own system... but we made it clear that this was their unique value add...
Language ability	Language skills are key, even just knowing a few phrases, but particularly how to toast in your partner's own language... Basic language skills weren't going to cut it for this mission... higher levels of language capacity were needed to communicate complicated concepts and drive a joint operational program... I knew I wasn't going to master this language, but if I could deliver a few local locker-room jokes, I could quickly build rapport with this unit... and it worked... Knowing how to pronounce place names in the local language was critical... We decided to run a class in the local language after seeing students' English wasn't sufficient... while my co-instructor had the local language, I did not... but I spent hours studying basic phrases to use on the second day... our partners were impressed... strengthened rapport...
Self-Management Verbal Cues	
Optimism	Positive attitude is a catalyst and can be contagious and can help to attract intelligent and committed people to the team...
Positive explanatory style	Don't make fun of teammates. If someone smells, there might be a reason...

Self-confidence / efficacy Proactive initiative	<i>This US team has “innate confidence born of experience”... the job now is to grow laterally, to keep building on that experience, and educate themselves... then apply those lessons elsewhere...</i>
	<i>We crafted an approach to appeal to what we knew was motivating in this culture—self-advancement—to get a key official to move past his reluctance to work with us...</i>
Self-identity (interpreted as commitment to US/ IC identity)	<i>It was important to recognize that partners had their own needs and mission objectives and could be manipulative too... had to understand and keep the US mission need first and not take the partner’s word as gospel...</i> <i>Although graft and corruption are common, you can’t allow it to happen... it was challenging, but had to get them to understand that, while this practice was acceptable there, we have different standards and expectations...</i> <i>There is an expectation, especially in the Middle East, that senior officials or partners would meet with the most senior IC official in country... the “grey beard”... but sometimes due to time constraints or security issues, that was not always possible, so we had to find ways around it and explain why we couldn’t accommodate those requests...</i> <i>In some cultures, they welcome debate... if you showcase expertise and respectfully push back on false claims or messaging... helps to cut through the BS and show you’re serious... can build rapport and ensure the exchange can focus on key issues...</i>
Emotional resilience	<i>If you make a mistake, sometimes it’s best to let them teach you a lesson and vent it out... just take it and learn from it...</i>
Stress ability / nonstress tendency	<i>I relayed a point about the value of intel cooperation that translated poorly into Arabic during a meeting with a local official... he was offended and walked out... the translator explained the offense to me, and I immediately went outside and smoked a few cigarettes with the official, owning the bad translation, apologizing, and explaining the original intent... we were able to get the meeting back online...</i>
Stress management	<i>No explicit examples were raised in interviews on this competency, but the questions did not directly ask about coping mechanisms to manage the stress of international work...</i>
Interest flexibility	<i>Younger professionals can bond over a shared understanding of technology... even if they find different videos funny, they’re still using the same platform to watch those videos...</i> <i>I love music and leaned into that to learn local music and get to know local bands... I could also bond over major events, such as when Taylor Swift came to town, which was a big deal...</i>
Creativity	<i>Our team had a broadly blue-collar background and was good at finding creative local solutions to address challenges, such as repairing local materiel for use when facing resource shortfalls...</i>

Appendix D: A Sample Preparatory Intercultural Engagement Questionnaire

Intercultural questionnaires or learning guides could be tailored to aid IC professionals' learning prior to intercultural work. Academia offers some valuable lessons to help frame such an exploration. Darla Deardorff posits that a culture-based appraisal process prior to engagements could include:

- **General Situational Appraisal**—Degree of formality, mood/climate of the situation, artifact displays, seating arrangement, room design, etc.
- **Sociocultural Role Appraisal**—Role expectancies between conflicting parties, such as professional role identities, cultural/ethnic issues, other salient identity concerns and expected behaviors, etc.
- **Interactional Appraisal**—Anticipated rewards, costs, language needs, communication needs, etc.¹⁹⁴

Learning Resources:

- What resources are available to learn about this specific culture, including regional, national, organizational, or subnational influences?
- Which may be most relevant for this specific engagement and objective?
- What is the credibility of learning resources? Any biases? Which are most reliable?

General Situation Appraisal:

- What is the current political, economic, and security environment? How does this engagement intersect with those?
- What are partners' positions, knowledge, and sensitivities related to this engagement?
- Who will be present? Senior or working-level officials?
- What are partner expectations of US reciprocity?
- What is the level of formality for official and unofficial functions? What protocols are expected?

Sociocultural Dynamics:

- What is the history of US and US IC relations with this partner? How will this shape partners' perspectives of you, your team, or the engagement?

- How might this partner's identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews differ across the below cultural-value dimensions? To what degree may you need to adjust the engagement or objective?
 - Appropriate greetings (verbal and nonverbal)?
 - Direct versus indirect communication styles?
 - Use of nonverbal cues, symbols, or patterns of speech?
 - Impact of hierarchy and decisionmaking practices (consensus-based or individual)?
 - Acceptable topics for small talk? What questions can I tee up to drive the conversation?
 - Work-life balance and priorities?

Interactional Needs:

- What are the primary and secondary objectives of this engagement?
- What are the risks and rewards of this engagement?
- What is the degree of English capacity? Do we need interpreters (for language and nonverbal cues)?
- How may the format of the meeting help or hinder the engagement?

Appendix E: A Sample Organizational Culture File

The following chart illustrates how an organizational file could be set up to collate key cultural insights on a specific partner unit. This sample is for a notional partner, drawing on existing culture-general course materials, real-world examples, and best practices gleaned from IC interviews.

Cultural-Value Dimensions	Knowledge of Partner	Strategy/Best Practices
Individualism versus Collectivism	Collectivist —emphasis on group goals and personal relationships	Consider using “we” instead of you/me/I when framing proposals
High- versus Low-Power Distance	Often High —major differences in status, deference to superiors for decisions	Seek senior-level buy-in, follow chain-of-command, do not question seniors publicly
Direct versus Indirect Communication	Relatively Indirect —messages communicated through tone, context, nonverbal signals; will hint at senior expectations to request US assistance, will not ask directly; grunts may signal concern	Employ local “human translators” to ensure correctly reading the room; consider pre-gaming exchanges with interpreters; consider how to incorporate indirect cues into your message
High versus Low Uncertainty Avoidance	Usually High —desire clarity and certainty, usually unwilling to take risks	Emphasize mitigation strategies, demonstrate understanding of partners’ concerns/fears; reassure some failure is normal and built into plan
Doing versus Being Work-Life Balance	Being —preference for time outside of work, prioritizes socialization and time with family	Avoid long after-hours engagements, opt instead for brief coffee meetups or lunch to build rapport
Linear, Multi, versus Reactive Culture	Multiactive —profuse speech, lack of strict agendas, takes up issues as they come	OK to interrupt, do not need to wait for an invitation to speak, can signal interest, show passion for issue

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Appendix F: Sample Lesson Roadmap—Intercultural Competence for Foreign Partner Engagement

The following proposal offers a broad outline of a two-day course that could help introduce IC professionals to the intercultural competence concepts presented in this *Monograph*, tailored to the IC's unique needs for engaging foreign partners.

Course Objectives and Outcomes:

The purpose of this course is to provide students with knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture on their intelligence work, especially with foreign partners. Students will be able to:

- Explore the unique intercultural challenges of intelligence work and relevance for mission;
- Understand the influence of culture on identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews;
- Understand the impact of culture on foreign partner engagement, including functions, such as communication, negotiation, decisionmaking, trust, motivation, and conflict resolution; and
- Understand cultural variations between self and a partner or partners of interest.
- Understand the range of skills of value for:
 - Making sense of cultural differences among US and other partners (perception-management skills);
 - Driving relations with foreign partners (relationship-management skills); and
 - Navigating the challenges and stress of intercultural work (self-management skills).
- Generate strategies for gaining needed cultural knowledge about partners;
- Generate strategies for working with teams and individuals from different regional, national, organizational cultures; and
- Explore common challenges and best practices for collaborating with foreign partners, including reconciliation and recovery.

Pre-Class Assignments:

- Assign self-assessment survey to identify the class's baseline level of intercultural experiences and familiarity with core concepts of intercultural competence.
- Assign cultural self-assessment to determine each student's individual preferences across a range of common cultural-value dimensions (to be used later in class).
- Ask students to consider one or two examples of a cross-cultural challenge they have come across in their personal or professional lives, be prepared to raise in class.

Introduction and Caveats:

- Clearly state the learning objectives cited above, emphasizing the impact to mission.
- Underscore that this course will address broad cultural trends, which can risk stereotyping, but emphasize these are only starting points to compare relative differences among regional, national, and organizational cultures; no one team or person fits neatly into any bucket, requiring continued learning and open-mindedness.

Module 1: Baselining Concepts of Culture

- Opening lecture/discussion could include:
 - Definitions of *culture*, *intercultural*, and *cross-cultural*;
 - Brief introduction to major components, theories, and models of culture;
 - Brief overview of cultural relativism and cross-cultural comparisons;
 - Impact on identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews; and
 - Brief introduction to levels of cultural influence (national/societal, social identity, organizational, professional, and individual).

Module 2: Establishing the Mission Need and Challenge

- Lecture/discussion: Introduce real-world mission examples of intercultural challenges rooted in cross-cultural differences; do not explain the root causes, but open for class discussion on possible dynamics at play:
 - Invite student discussion on a few examples of cross-cultural challenges they may have experienced; put in a “parking lot” for later reflection.
- Lecture: Share key lessons on the value of intercultural competence from global business and US military case studies.
- Facilitated brainstorm/lecture: Unique challenges and needs for intelligence partnerships.

Module 3: Developing Intercultural Understanding (Perception-Management Skills)

- Class exercise: draw on opening scenarios or present new ones; ask each group to consider underlying cultural dynamics that might be at play; discuss as a class and categorize ideas into dimensions (for example, time orientation, communication style, and expressiveness).

- Lecture: Build on exercise to iterate the value of *suspending judgment*, the foremost skill in making sense of foreign cultures; introduce other key perception-management competencies.
- Lecture: Focus on types of cultural knowledge:
 - Introduce differences between *culture-general* knowledge and related tools and frameworks; this could include Hofstede and GLOBE dimensions, Meyer's Cultural Mapping, and Lewis's tripartite model.
 - Introduce how this knowledge can aid acquisition of *culture-specific* knowledge (for example, of region or nation); focus on the importance of historical knowledge.
- Exercise/lecture: Introduce the cultural-value dimensions included in the pre-class assignment:
 - Assign each group one or two dimensions to study for five minutes, pass out explanation/examples, and ask each to present this dynamic to the class.
 - Pass out each student's cultural-mapping results (from pre-class assignment).
 - Show class averages and ask each student to think quietly about where they may diverge from norms; reiterate no one will neatly map to norms.
 - Show relative differences in class average to other nations' mapping averages; invite discussion and reflection on areas of notable divergence and what that might mean for foreign partner engagement.

Module 4: Developing Rapport (Relationship-Management Skills)

- Lecture: Intro to communication differences and needs; attention to verbal versus nonverbal styles, paralinguistic differences, conversational patterns, question-and-answer differences, and value of language (even limited language skills).
- Lecture/exercise: Concept of self-awareness; assign each group a foreign partner, ask them to consider how that partner might perceive them as a US citizen, an IC professional, or individual with other identifying factors (such as gender or ethnic background).

Module 5: When To Adapt, or Not (Relationship- and Self-Management Skills)

- Lecture: Overview of social, behavioral, and interest flexibility as key to building rapport; note concept of "zones of appropriateness" and how to adapt without losing yourself or being fake.
- Lecture/discussion: Importance of self-identity and confidence for intercultural intelligence work; introduce ethical/social challenges in which maintaining identity and holding onto values is key; conversely, introduce examples when adapting or setting aside ethics may be necessary for mission.

Module 6: Managing Oneself (Self-Management Skills)

- Lecture: Introduction to traits such as resiliency, self-confidence, and optimism that can enable intercultural work, especially over the long term; introduce tips, tricks, and tools.
- Lecture/exercise: Managing displays of attitude; ways to navigate a frustrating or surprising incident; attention to how partners may be gauging your reaction, testing you; pass out real-world

examples to each group and have them discuss among themselves how they might have reacted, then share real-world best practice of how the subject actually acted and why.

Module 7: Reconciliation and Recovery (Relationship-Management Skills)

- Lecture: Value of humility and owning mistakes; lessons learned and tips (from Molinsky's *Global Dexterity*) that include attention to societal norms (tight/loose), ability to blame "foreignness" (with caution and only in some situations), preempted frustration by owning foreignness and the mistake, demonstrate a genuine interest in culture and how to correct mistakes.
- Exercise: Introduce several real-world scenarios to each group in which an engagement is starting to go off the rails; ask them to consider how they might adapt in the moment or over the long term.

Module 8: Putting It All Together for Continued Growth (All Skills)

- Lecture/discussion: Finding cultural mentors and resources; brainstorm creative ways to continue to learn about a partner of interest.
- Introduce additional in-house resources, materials, and guides that could aid in preparation for future assignments; these could include:
 - The Cultural Topography Framework;
 - Literature on regional cultural differences; and
 - Literature on intelligence, security, and defense cultures.
- Discussion: Key takeaways and how the students will apply these skill sets in their assignments; what new insights the students will take with them.

Addendum: Additional Intercultural Studies Background and Resources

Building on the findings of this *Monograph* on the value of cultural knowledge and opportunities to empower the workforce with foundational resources, this addendum provides an overview of the vast body of research on the concept of culture and its impact on foreign societies and organizations.

This review started with seminal works most frequently cited in the field of intercultural competence. It then expanded to include peer-reviewed articles from top journals in intelligence, defense, security, and global leadership, using databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCO, JSTOR, and the National Intelligence University Library. Search terms included “culture general” and (cultur* AND “intelligence community”) and (cultur* and “intelligence analysis”). Additionally, this review included studies and insights shared by leading US intercultural experts and academic scholars with experience in the national security community.

Key Milestones in Intercultural Studies

The US Government’s recognition of the importance of intercultural understanding dates to World War II (WWII) and the Cold War era. During this time, anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Gregory Bateson, worked with the government to analyze adversary cultures, providing critical insights that informed diplomatic and military strategies.^{195, 196} In fact, one study posits that as many as half of all professional anthropologists worked full time in a war-related government capacity during WWII, with another quarter working on a part-time basis.¹⁹⁷ Benedict’s seminal work, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), remains a landmark study on Japanese culture that had significant implications for post-war US policy toward Japan.¹⁹⁸

The post-WWII era saw significant contributions to the field of intercultural studies, including Edward T. Hall’s work on cultural difference in communication, inspired by his observations in the field during WWII of how miscommunication exacerbated conflict. His concepts, such as high-context versus low-context communication styles and proxemics—the study of how personal and social space differs among cultures—remain

fundamental to the field.^{199, 200} The RAND Corporation also played a key role in applying anthropological and sociological concepts to Soviet, Chinese, and Third World cultures, such as Vietnam's, to inform Cold War policies and military strategies.^{201, 202}

The 1990s and 2000s saw a surge in intercultural studies as globalization forced businesses to confront their own ethnocentric tendencies. Academic scholars such as Geert Hofstede made major contributions, developing frameworks for measuring cultural differences across national and organizational dimensions. These tools empowered global leaders to navigate the challenges of increasingly multicultural teams.^{203, 204} The national security community also faced new, transnational challenges, prompting academic researchers to assist in tailoring intercultural lessons to enable US security operations with new partners. This collaboration was not without controversy, however, with some academic experts criticizing the use of anthropology in military contexts.

The debate surrounding DoD's Human Terrain System initiative in the 2000s-2010s, in which academic experts embedded with the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan, highlighted tensions between the anthropological community's ethos and concerns about the US Government's focus on achieving kinetic objectives. Anthropologists, such as David H. Price and Montgomery McFate, represented opposing views on the issue, with Price criticizing the collaboration in *Weaponizing Anthropology* (2011)²⁰⁵ and McFate advocating for a partnership that would "anthropologize the military."²⁰⁶

As the world faces new challenges and uncertainties, intercultural competence can help the IC address emerging threats and cooperate with foreign partners. This *Monograph* hopes to inspire the IC to empower its workforce with the necessary skills and resources, and for the academic intercultural community to continue tailoring the field to meet evolving national security needs.

Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Studies

A variety of academic disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, history, and communication studies, provide a rich foundation for understanding the complex interactions among culture, societies, organizations, and people. Each has put forth foundational theories, many dating to the early 20th century, that seek to explain how culture influences identities, behaviors, values, attitudes, and worldviews, as well as how those are shaped by events, policies, and external forces, such as colonization and migration.

See below highlights of some of the most significant theories and models that underpin the roots of culture and how those have shaped—and been shaped by—societies, nations, and individuals (Table 15). This brief overview of foundational theories can be helpful for IC practitioners, particularly analysts, in determining how these various actors may be shaping the present-day culture of a country or partner of interest. In addition, these theories can help guide IC members' exploration of a foreign actor's culture, offering a range of indicators that help elucidate cultural differences, such as communicative processes, rituals and routines, and power structures.

Table 15: Key Theories on Culture and Its Influence on Nations, Organizations, and Individuals

Theory/Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concept	Discipline
Roots of Culture			
Cultural Materialism Theory²⁰⁷	Marvin Harris	Material conditions, such as the economy, environment, and technology, shape culture; a focus on economic foundations' impact on social structures, ideology, beliefs, and values.	Anthropology / Sociology / Economics
Structural Functionalism Theory²⁰⁸	Emile Durkheim; Talcott Parsons	Culture functions as a key component of the social system, maintaining order by integrating individuals through shared beliefs, norms, and values.	Sociology
Cultural Evolutionism Theory²⁰⁹	Lewis Henry Morgan; Edward Burnett Tylor	Also known as unilineal evolution; culture evolves through distinct phases from more primitive to advanced civilization; later criticized as ethnocentric and simplistic.	Anthropology / Sociology
Symbolic Interactionism Theory²¹⁰	George Herbert Mead; Herbert Blumer	Culture is created through daily interactions of individuals through shared symbols, languages, and meaning.	Sociology
Cultural Relativism Theory²¹¹	Franz Boas; Margaret Mead	Every culture is valid in its own context; practices and beliefs should be understood relative to one's own system; rejects ethnocentric judgments.	Cultural Anthropology
Cultural Hegemony Theory²¹²	Antonio Gramsci	Dominant groups use cultural institutions to maintain power by promoting ideology and values to reinforce the status quo, suppressing alternative viewpoints.	Sociology
Diffusionism Theory²¹³	Alfred L. Kroeber; Fritz Graebner	Cultural elements, such as technology, art, and religion, spread across societies, leading to cultural change and adaptation.	Anthropology
Sewell's Theory of Culture²¹⁴	William H. Sewell	Role of structures as both the medium and outcome of action; historical narrative in culture shapes and is shaped by events; culture is changeable.	Anthropology / Sociology / History
Cultural Landscape Theories²¹⁵	Carl Sauer; Yi-Fu Tuan	Landscapes are transformed and given meaning by human activity, reflecting the culture and values of the people who inhabit them; landscapes are integral to formation of cultural identities and reflect continuity, as well as adaptation.	Cultural Geography / Human Geography
Cultural Transmission Theory²¹⁶	Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Marcus W. Feldman	Cultural information (language, customs, beliefs, etc.) are passed on through vertical (parents), horizontal (peers of same generation), or oblique transmission (teachers, mentors, etc.).	Cultural Anthropology / Sociology
Theory of Basic Human Values²¹⁷	Shalom H. Schwartz	Ten values that guide human behavior include security, power, hedonism, tradition, stimulation, self-direction, benevolence, achievement, and conformity.	Social Psychology / Cross-Cultural Psychology

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Value-Oriented Theory²¹⁸	Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck	Cultures can be understood based on responses to common human problems, offering value orientations related to human nature and man-versus-nature relationship, as well as time, activity, and relational orientations.	Cultural Anthropology
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Cultural Dimensions²¹⁹	Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner	Seven cultural dimensions include concepts such as universalism versus particularism, degree of overlap in personal and professional lives, and sequential-versus-synchronous time.	Organizational Behavior / Cross-Cultural Management
Action Chain Theory²²⁰	Edward T. Hall	Different cultures have different action chains for the same situation, resulting in intercultural misunderstanding and conflict; can include business practices, conflict resolution norms, and social interactions.	Anthropology
Roots of National Cultures			
Imagined Communities Theory²²¹	Benedict Anderson	Nations are “imagined communities” in which most members do not know each other, but share a sense of belonging; symbols and stories often shared via print media create a sense of national identity.	Sociology / Political Science / History / Anthropology
Theory of Cultural Nationalism²²²	John Hutchinson	Distinguishes cultural from political nationalists; role of cultural revival movements and intellectual elites in shaping national consciousness.	Interdisciplinary
Theory of Nationalism²²³	Ernest Gellner	Role of industrialization and need for a standardized language, culture, and education to maintain social cohesion and facilitate economic progress, leading to creation of national cultures and identities.	Political Science / Sociology / History / Anthropology
Banal Nationalism Theory²²⁴	Michael Billig	Everyday representations through the display of flags, sports, and other artifacts reinforce national identity in subtle ways, crucial to maintaining sense of nationhood.	Sociology / Political Science / Cultural Studies
Cultural Identity Theory²²⁵	Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas; Stuart Hall	How individuals use communicative processes to construct and negotiate cultural identity through ongoing, dynamic processes; Hall explored the role of colonial histories, diasporas, and migration.	Cultural Studies / Sociology / Communication
World-Systems Theory²²⁶	Immanuel Wallerstein	Interactions among core, periphery, and semi-periphery nations within a capitalist world economy shape global culture, with powerful nations playing a dominant role.	Sociology
Postcolonial Theory²²⁷	Edward Said; Frantz Fanon; Gayatri Spivak	Impact of colonialism on colonizers and colonized nations; focus on loss of indigenous identities and formation of power dynamics.	Interdisciplinary
Theory of Hybridity²²⁸	Homi Bhabha	Linked to Postcolonial Theory; national identities are often constructed in “contact zones” between cultures, shaped by forces, such as colonialism and migration, through hybridity, mimicry, and the “third space.”	Cultural Studies / Anthropology

Roots of Organizational Cultures			
Model of Organizational Culture ²²⁹	Edgar Schein	Organizational culture operates on three levels: artifacts (visible structures and processes), espoused values (strategies, goals), and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious beliefs, perceptions, etc.).	Organizational Psychology / Social Psychology / Anthropology
Institutional Theory ²³⁰	Philip Selznick	Organizations are shaped by their institutional environments; become stable when goals, values, and norms become embedded in their structure and culture; symbolic and expressive systems can reflect the values, norms, and beliefs of their members.	Sociology
Cultural Dynamic Model ²³¹	Kai Hammerich and Richard D. Lewis	Corporate culture that resonates with a national culture tends to perform better and encounter less resistance; mismatches can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, or strategic failure; encourages leaders to harness strengths of both national and corporate cultures.	Organizational Behavior / Cross-Cultural Management
The Cultural Web Concept ²³²	Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes	Six interconnected elements influence organizational culture: stories, rituals and routines, symbols, organizational structures, control systems, and power structures.	Organizational Behavior / Anthropology / Sociology
Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model ²³³	Benjamin Schneider	Organizations tend to attract, select, and retain individuals whose personalities are congruent with the organization's culture, leading to a homogenous culture over time.	Organizational and Social Psychology
Roots of Individual Culture			
Individualism-Collectivism Theory ²³⁴	Harry C. Triandis	Role of individual-versus-collectivist orientation and the impact on achievement, relationships, and well-being; considers the impact of these dimensions within horizontal/egalitarian-versus-vertical/hierarchical cultures.	Cross-Cultural Psychology
Possible Selves Theory ²³⁵	Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius	Individuals have multiple representations of themselves, including their current, past, and future selves and are cognitive representations of what individuals hope or expect to become or fear becoming; relates to cultural identity.	Social Psychology
Social Identity Theory ²³⁶	Henri Tajfel and John Turner	Individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from their group membership; categorize into groups; membership influences perceptions, attitudes, behaviors; leads to "us" versus "them" comparisons.	Social Psychology
Cultural Capital Theory ²³⁷	Pierre Bourdieu	Posits cultural capital (knowledge, tastes, and preferences); a form of capital that can be used to gain social advantages and status.	Sociology
Identity Negotiation Theory ²³⁸	Stella Ting-Toomey	Individuals negotiate their cultural, ethnic, and personal identities in interactions with others; conflicts can arise from perceived threats to this identity.	Communication Studies / Social Psychology / Cross-Cultural Psychology

The Interplay of Cultural Layers and Their Influence

Understanding an individual or organization requires examining the complex interplay of cultural influences, including regional, national, organizational, generational, religious, and ethnic factors, among others. To navigate this complexity, IC professionals should first define the specific intercultural task or challenge they face to scope their learning journey. Jeannie L. Johnson and Matthew T. Berrett’s article, “Cultural Topography: A New Research Tool for Intelligence Analysis,” provides a useful framework for planning cross-cultural inquiry. By focusing on the mission need, such as assessing a foreign intelligence partner’s receptivity to US engagement, IC members can tailor their learning to focus on the most relevant factors needed to accomplish the mission.²³⁹

Regional Cultures

Literature on regional cultures offers valuable insights into the deeply ingrained societal values, worldviews, and motivations that originated in early local communities, often pre-dating modern national boundaries. These influences continue to shape the nations, organizations, and individuals within them today.

Several studies have explored the origins of global cultural differences, often linking them to early economic practices such as trade or agriculture. For example, Richard E. Nisbett’s *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently... and Why* examines the evolution of Western and Confucian cultures, highlighting their differing thought processes and perceptions.²⁴⁰ Some critics argue that Nisbett’s work oversimplifies the complexities of cultural differences, however, neglecting regional similarities and internal diversity.²⁴¹ In contrast, more recent work by Thomas Talheim takes a nuanced approach, considering the differences between wheat-growing and rice-growing economies to explain variations within nations and similarities across cultures.²⁴² David Livermore’s *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* provides a useful framework for understanding the anthropological origins of 10 primary global clusters and their distinct characteristics (Table 16).²⁴³ Although such categorizations are helpful starting points, they are generalizations, and significant variations can exist within each cluster, influenced by national and subnational preferences.

Table 16: Global Cultural Clusters from *Leading with Cultural Intelligence**

Regional Cluster	Sample Nations	Key Characteristics
Anglo	United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	Tend to value individualism and personal autonomy; strong emphasis on achievement, direct communication, low-power distance, and a preference for egalitarianism.
Confucian Asia	China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan	Tend to place high value on respect for tradition, hierarchy, and familial piety; strong emphasis on hard work, discipline, and collective focus over individual achievement.
Nordic Europe	Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland	Tend to be egalitarian and value cooperation, consensus, and social welfare; high degree of gender equality and low-power distance.
Eastern Europe	Russia, Poland, Hungary, Greece, Croatia	Tend to value group loyalty, respect for authority, and a focus on relationships; often exhibit conservatism and traditionalism with a mix of collectivism and individualism.

Germanic Europe	Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands	Tend to value performance, assertiveness, and precision; strong sense of discipline, order, and a focus on planning and strategy.
Latin America	Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala	Tend to emphasize family ties, community-oriented values, and hierarchical structures; express emotions openly and place high value on relationships over tasks.
Latin Europe	France, Italy, Spain, Portugal	Tend toward a paternalistic orientation with belief that those with more power should use their resources to care for those less fortunate; preference for hierarchical social structures; place high value on family and interconnectedness.
Middle East	Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, UAE	Tend to value high degree of respect for authority, family loyalty, and collectivism; religion plays central role in daily life; emphasis on honor and dignity.
South and Southeast Asia	India, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines	Tend toward paternalistic orientation, respect for hierarchy, value interdependence within the family and community; generally respectful of diversity and cultural differences, particularly in Southeast Asia.
Sub-Saharan Africa	Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa	Tend to emphasize communalism, interdependence, and connectivity; respect for elders and group harmony; strong oral tradition and emphasis on extended family and kinship.

*Note: * The “clusters” represent general trends and cultural tendencies and can risk stereotyping various cultures; bear in mind that much diversity can be found within each “cluster” and the characteristics presented should be considered only as a starting point for relative comparisons among cultural blocs.*

Source: David Livermore, Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success, 2nd Ed. (American Management Association, 2015).

National Cultures

When assessing cross-cultural differences, much academic work focuses on nation-states as the primary unit of analysis. Hofstede suggested that this is largely a matter of convenience, as national data are more readily available than data on unbound cultures. National cultures can be useful starting points for understanding a foreign actor’s possible orientations, particularly for those seeking to facilitate relations with representatives of nation-state interests. Nations with strong integrative forces, such as a shared language, government, and education system, may exhibit more shared cultural traits among their constituents. Additionally, nations founded on specific values or identities, such as survival-of-the-fittest mentality in the United States, may shape organizations that reflect those key characteristics. A nation’s cultural influence over its constituent organizations and individuals can vary, however, particularly among newer nations, and academic scholars caution against overreliance on national profiles alone.²⁴⁴

Many organizations, including think tanks, consultancies, and academic institutions, provide helpful country profiles or data on national values that can be a useful starting point. As of 2026, the US Air Force Culture and Language Center offers an accessible and regularly-updated platform—available via a mobile app—which explores specific national cultures and cultural value dimensions.²⁴⁵ Other academic works also dive into subnational narratives and worldviews. Seminal publications, such as Lewis’s *When Cultures Collide*, provide national profiles, although some dynamics may have shifted and should be read with dates of publication in mind. The World Values Survey Foundation (WVSF) is another potentially rich source of data. WVSF is a

US-based nonprofit research organization that collects waves of data from approximately 90 countries—plus one “European Union” aggregate—every two or three years, measuring relative values, such as openness to change, role of the family, self-interest and achievement, respect for authority, and gender roles.²⁴⁶

Organizational and Professional Cultures

Academic researchers have also explored how national or professional cultures impact an organization’s culture, but the degree to which organizations mirror or deviate from them is nuanced. Some studies have found a strong correlation between national cultures and organizational cultures, particularly in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, which affect hierarchical structures and decisionmaking habits.^{247, 248} Lewis’s tripartite model illustrates how national cultures shape business practices, with linear-active cultures (such as the Netherlands) focusing on facts and planning, multiactive cultures (such as France) emphasizing discourse and reputation, and reactive cultures (such as Japan) prizing self-sacrifice and internal cooperation. Organizational leaders play a crucial role in inculcating and signaling these values, beliefs, and worldviews through resource allocation, recruitment, and formal statements.²⁴⁹ Observable artifacts, such as the design of workspace and rituals, can also reveal an organization’s cultural values. For instance, the location and size of a manager’s office can indicate the organization’s concept of hierarchy.

Organizational cultures can be diverse, even within a nation, due to professional and mission needs. Private sector organizations, for example, may be more likely to take risks and diverge from national or societal norms to maintain a competitive edge, whereas public sector survival may depend on a leader’s ability to navigate politics.^{250, 251, 252} Additionally, organizations with unique professional origins, such as medical or security sectors, may develop cultures that diverge from national cultural norms. The concept of *isomorphism* can help explain how organizations in the same industry develop similar structures, processes, and cultures. Industry standards or government regulations (*coercive isomorphism*), imitation of successful organizations (*mimetic isomorphism*), or influential professional associations or industry training (*normative isochronism*) can drive these shared professional cultures.²⁵³ This concept is particularly germane for organizations adopting technologies or materiel from countries with different cultural practices.²⁵⁴ The IC itself is a notable example of organizational divergence within a specific national and professional sector with significant cultural differences among IC agencies in attitudes, workstyles, and priorities, as well as between the specific workforces within each, such as between operations officers and analysts.

Professional cultures can transcend national borders, binding organizations to a shared professional community, even in a foreign context. For example, the exclusive nature of clandestine work can lead to unique operational cultures, at times distinct from their national cultures, and facilitate bonds among foreign intelligence services from different countries.²⁵⁵ Military service branches also tend to demonstrate distinct characteristics, often owing to their missions and operational environments, and may share characteristics with the same service branches of other nations’ militaries.^{256, 257}

These characterizations are generalities, however, and not all organizations will fit into these patterns. The complex overlay of regional, national, organizational, and professional influences on any given organization underscores the need for careful consideration of various cultural profiles when seeking to understand

a potential partner or adversary service. No shortcut exists for understanding an organization's culture, and a nuanced approach is necessary to appreciate its unique characteristics.

Other Cultural Influences

Beyond the cultural influences mentioned above, other factors—such as gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and generation—also play a significant role in shaping an individual's or organization's cultural identity. A substantial body of research has explored the impact of these factors on behavior, values, and cultural norms. The cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles in a foreign society can have a profound impact on the behavior of individuals and organizations. For example, differences in societal expectations of masculinity and femininity can influence communication styles, leadership approaches, and decisionmaking processes.^{258, 259} Socioeconomic class can also shape cultural tastes, language use, values, and behaviors, as well as influence an organization's and individual's cultural DNA.^{260, 261, 262} On the impact of religious influence, Max Weber's seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) examined the relationship between Protestantism and the development of modern capitalism. More recent studies have investigated the interplay between religion and secular, national cultures.²⁶³ Additionally, generational differences, particularly in today's rapidly changing technological landscape, can significantly influence cultural values and organizational culture. For instance, younger generations exhibit distinct preferences for work-life balance, communication styles, and leadership approaches.^{264, 265}

A Brief Word on National Security Cultures

National security cultures refer to the shared identities, values, and worldviews that shape a state's perception of threats and its security policies. This category includes the cultures of law enforcement, security, defense, and intelligence entities, and how they make decisions and respond to threats. Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling advanced a helpful framework in their work, *National Security Cultures: Patterns of Global Governance*, that considered four key criteria: worldview, national identity, instrumental preferences, and interaction preferences.²⁶⁶

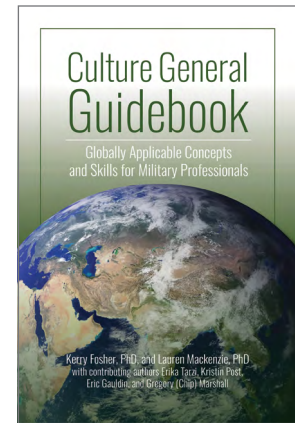
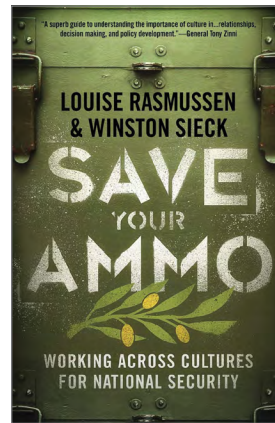
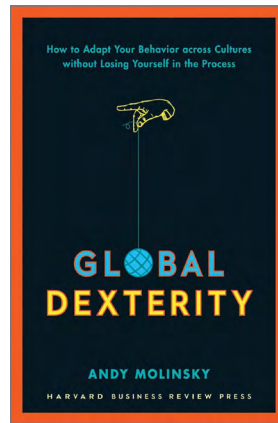
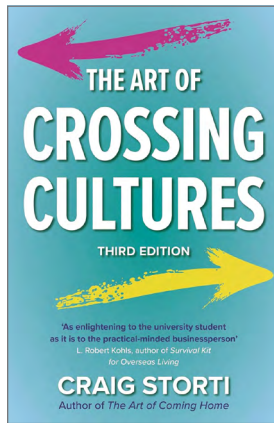
Two complementary theories have been advanced to understand the impact of both cultural and societal factors on national security cultures. The concept of strategic culture, first introduced by Jack Snyder, highlights the role of a state's history, traditions, and institutional patterns in shaping its strategic behavior.²⁶⁷ Cultural factors, such as religious and ideological influences, as well as legal and institutional traditions, can influence moral imperative, adherence to international law, policy formation, and internal structures.²⁶⁸ In another camp, societal factors, such as demographic composition, social hierarchies, and public attitudes, can also impact the behavior and effectiveness of security organizations. The degree of trust between civilian and security institutions, as well as a country's historical experiences, can shape security doctrine and policy.^{269, 270, 271} The extent to which societal influences affect security organizations, however, can vary and depend on the degree to which an organization mirrors national demographics and its level of isolation from the general population.²⁷² The below presents a brief overview of the dynamics that shape national security cultures (Table 17).

Table 17: Conceptualizations of National Security Cultures

Theory/Model	Origin/Key Scholar(s)	Core Concept	Discipline
Cultural Dynamics Shaping National Security Cultures			
Strategic Culture Theory ²⁷³	Jack Snyder; Colin Gray; David Jones; Lawrence Sondhaus; Alastair Iain Johnston	Beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of behavior derived from a nation's geography, ethno-cultural characteristics, history, society, military institutions, and civil-military relations, which influence how it understands and handles security issues; some academic scholars critiqued earlier literature and definitions as unwieldy and unclear on its interplay with strategic discourse and elite behavior.	International Relations / Political Science
Societal Dynamics Shaping National Security Cultures			
Civil-Military Relations ²⁷⁴	Samuel P. Huntington	Explores professional military culture and its relationship with civilian society and government; examines how societal factors, including political institutions, impact military behavior and organizational culture.	Political Science / International Relations
Culture of National Security ²⁷⁵	Peter J. Katzenstein	How societal norms, identity, and culture influence the behavior of states and security organizations, in particular military strategy, alliances, and security policy.	International Relations / Security Studies / Constructivism
Coercion and Capital Theory ²⁷⁶	Charles Tilly	Posits interplay of coercion and capital was crucial to state formation and development of political structures; security culture can be understood via the norms, values, and institutional practices that develop within a state to maintain security and use force.	Sociology / Political Science
Sources of Military Doctrine ²⁷⁷	Barry Posen	Ideology, historical experience, and identity contribute to shaping a state's military doctrine and posture.	International Relations / Political Science / Military Relations

A Resource Guide for Global Intercultural Work

Building on the frameworks laid out in Table 17, the following books offer insights into global intercultural work:



Craig Storti, **The Art of Crossing Cultures**, 3rd Ed. (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2021). An outstanding overview of what to expect when moving abroad, addressing the challenges of country shock and culture shock. The chapters on the impact on spouses and families are invaluable references to help them navigate challenges alongside the IC member.

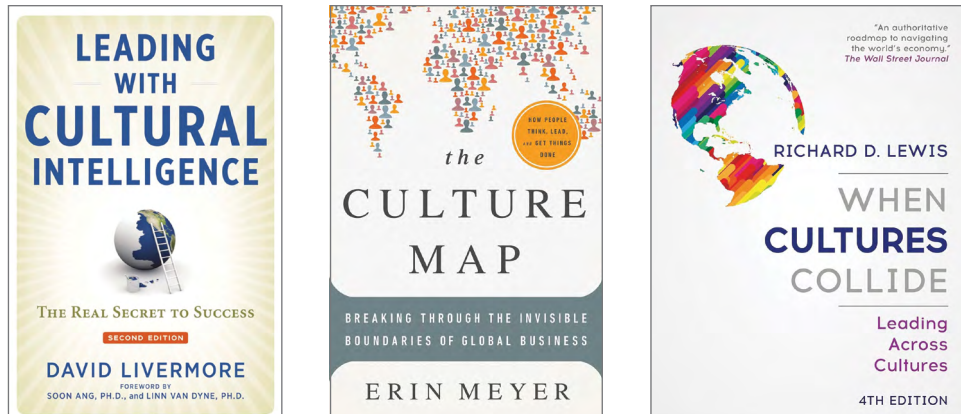
Andy Molinsky, **Global Dexterity: How To Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process** (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013). Another succinct guide to when and how to adjust specific behaviors in intercultural contexts without losing oneself in the process.

Louise Rasmussen and Winston Sieck, **Save Your Ammo: Working Across Cultures for National Security** (Global Cognition, 2019). An excellent, succinct guidebook tailored for navigating intercultural challenges in service to national security missions.

Kerry B. Foshier and Lauren Mackenzie, **Culture General Guidebook: Globally Applicable Concepts and Skills for Military Professionals** (Marine Corps University Press, 2023). A great introduction to “culture-general” concepts and skills, drawing on real-world case studies. Although focused on the value for military missions, IC personnel managing foreign intelligence partnerships will find significant overlap and utility. For example, the sections on social control, managing conflict, and communicating offer key lessons for combat-zone collection.

A Resource Guide to Regional and National Cross-Cultural Differences

Building on the frameworks laid out in Table 17, the following works offer insights into regional and national cross-cultural differences:



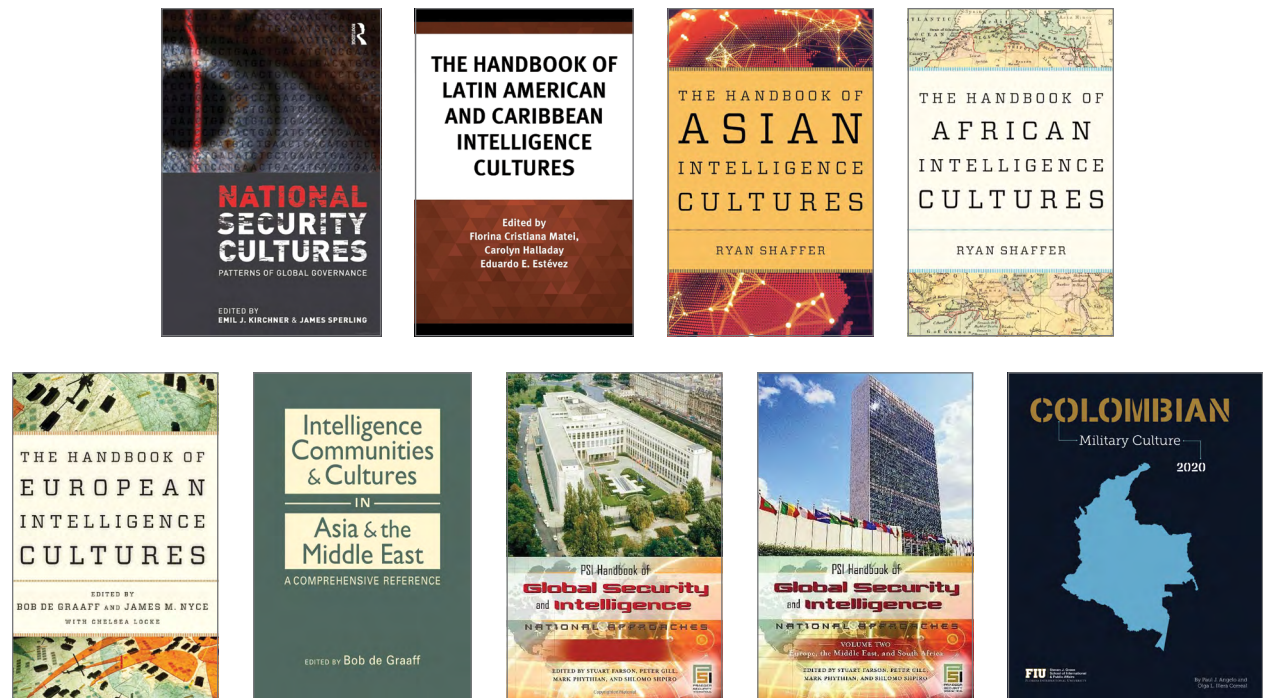
David Livermore, **Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success**, 2nd Ed. (American Management Association, 2015). An easy-to-read, how-to guide to develop cultural intelligence, including an overview of 10 primary cultural-value dimensions and how they influence the behavior of the 10 largest cultural clusters in the world.

Erin Meyer, **The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business** (Public Affairs, 2014). Although this work is focused on business practices, its discussion of how cultures differ regarding feedback, leadership, decisionmaking, trust-building, and persuasion offers critical insights for evaluating and tailoring behaviors to match foreign partner preferences. Excellent overviews of this author speaking on her work are available on YouTube.

Richard D. Lewis, **When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures**, 4th Ed. (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2018). Chapters 1-3 offer a valuable breakdown of national clusters into three categories: linear-active (mostly Western cultures), multiactive (mostly African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American cultures), and reactive cultures (mostly Asian cultures), with associated qualities. Chapter 7 notes different models of leadership—with diagrams—across various countries. Lewis unpacks how various concepts, such as communication, use of time, status, and motivation, differ among these cultures. Part 3 provides more than 90 country profiles, although should be read with the caveat that some may be dated.

A Resource Guide to National Security, Defense, and Intelligence Cultures

Building on the frameworks laid out in Table 17, the following works offer insights into national security, defense, and intelligence cultures:



Emile J. Kirchner and James Sperling, *National Security Cultures: Patterns of Global Governance* (Routledge, 2008).

Florina Cristiana Matei et al., *The Handbook of Latin American and Caribbean Intelligence Cultures* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

Ryan Shaffer, ed., *The Handbook of Asian Intelligence Cultures* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

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Bob de Graaf and James M. Nyce, *The Handbook of European Intelligence Cultures* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Bob de Graaf, *Intelligence Communities and Cultures in Asia and the Middle East: A Comprehensive Reference* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020).

Stuart Farson et al., eds., *PSI Handbook of Global Security and Intelligence: National Approaches, Vol. 1: The Americas and Asia* (Praeger, 2008).

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