

Coming together

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Power, rank and intercultural interaction: developing inclusive approaches in higher education

Increasing global migration and interconnectedness presents us with the challenge of finding ways to incorporate diversity and its inherent potential for change. The higher education field exemplifies these global trends as international students from a variety of cultural backgrounds choose to study overseas. One of their important motives in doing so is the opportunity to gain intercultural experiences. Yet consistently they report dissatisfaction with the nature and frequency of their interactions with and among members of the host culture. Educational institutions face losing a lucrative market if they do not pick up the opportunity to engage differently with this diversity. The challenge is to facilitate interactional experiences that will improve working relationships and provide potential for ongoing collaboration between all students and between students and staff of all backgrounds. University of South Australia recognises the potential of inclusivity in developing qualities of global citizenship among all students and is researching critical elements that make a difference. This paper explores alternative interactive strategies being developed at UniSA that explore the effect of differing worldviews on interaction among international and local students and staff. This inclusive model is based on Process Oriented Psychology which emphasises change through increasing awareness among participants. It discusses the critical role of intercultural interaction in developing awareness about cultural assumptions and expectations of themselves and others, and how these shape ongoing and future interactions. Central aspects that have previously received little attention are the role and impact of rank in determining a dominant communication style and how each person's culturally defined understanding of power and rank impact their ability and choices to contribute in any given context.

Keywords :Intercultural Interaction, Power, Rank Communication

Introduction

The rapidly changing face of global interconnectedness in the twenty-first century requires not only new and inclusive understandings about people, culture and community but also new methods of interaction that reflect and promote these understandings. Central to this endeavour is the need for new approaches that embrace what Edward Said (2004:45) describes as 'the slow seismic change in humanistic perspective'. In particular they need to incorporate the shifting orientation between the public and the private through understanding more deeply how the public and the private are linked in intercultural interaction.

The following paper explores the interface between the public and the private in communication with particular emphasis on the relationship between international and local students in the higher education sector. It contributes valuable new understandings of these communication patterns. Using the Process Oriented Psychology perspectives on rank and power, it describes the ways in which the culturally determined rules of engagement and differing forms of rank impact meaning making and mutual understanding in intercultural interactions. New approaches for inclusive interactions that respect these inherent complexities are outlined with a view to future development and research.

1. The significance of culturally differing understandings in communication.

The contribution that personal interpretations of rank, culture and context make in understanding communicative behaviours has been overlooked in the literature about intercultural communication. Generally speaking, 'culture' is considered as an homogenous factor, implying that all members of a particular culture subscribe to cultural values in the same manner. In so doing the literature spearheaded by eminent sociologists such as Hofstede (1984, 1997) and Gudykunst (1998) fails to recognise the significance of personal interpretation in the understanding of cultural values.

Embracing the changing relationship between the private and the public requires the ability to recognise and adapt to the fact that each person's relationship to their cultural values, ie public values, is mediated through their personal interpretations or private perspectives.

With regard to the relationship between rank and interaction references to date have typically focused on the binary split between the dominant and the oppressed (Guirdham, 2005; Carr, 2004) and the added complexity of cultural differences is omitted. For instance there is little or no consideration of way rank differentials influence interactions between those who are fluent in the dominant communication style and those who are not. Differing interpretations of power and rank are relevant to communication for their influence on the personal or private interpretations of beliefs that are generally assumed to belong to the public realm such as cultural values.

Kraidy (1999:472) calls for enquiry into the "messy reality" of power differentials 'as they manifest in everyday life; an enquiry that leads to understanding about 'how' power dynamics are perpetuated, rather than 'why' and 'in whose interest'. With cultural research now exploring the nuanced experiences of individuals as they encounter the interface between cultures(Bhabha,1994, Appadurai,1996,Jamieson, 1998, Kraidy 1999) it is timely to extend this inquiry into the relationship between power rank and intercultural interaction.

Goffman (1959:236) states 'Life might not be much of a gamble, but interaction is.' By this he is referring to the fact that communication is essentially an interpretive process and there are no guarantees that the messages sent from one participant will be interpreted as intended by the receiver. In intercultural contexts, differing cultural assumptions all but guarantee that the messages sent from one participant will be interpreted differently by the receiver. Goffman determined that all interactions are underpinned by unstated patterns in communication, ie rules of engagement, that are based on shared codes of behaviour. In intercultural contexts participants have differing understandings of these rules of engagement leading to differing interpretations of communicative behaviours.

People adopt their notions of power as they develop relationships with those around them, beginning in childhood but continuing throughout life. They internalize these notions as the rules of engagement which they then use in their interactive behaviour. These culturally specific rules situate individuals in the consensually determined order of social importance. They function to preserve the specific cultural expression of the relative power balance in a manner that is acceptable for that culture as well as to internally govern interactive behaviour both consciously and unconsciously.

When it comes to making meaning of another's behaviour we rely on our assumptions about the rules of engagement being conveyed through their words and actions. These 'tacit assumptions' depend on participants having similar cultural and experiential histories to inform their understandings about what are and are not relevant rules of engagement (Denzin,1989:107). The tendency to gravitate into relationships with others who have similar cultural perspectives and maintain friendships over time by which we develop a shared history of experiences, is testament to the ease with which tacit assumptions facilitate communication.

However when people do not share a common cultural background, ie have 'discontinuous historical realities' (Bhabha,1994:217) tacit assumptions are not relevant. The rules of engagement used as premises for ordering behavior cannot be meaningfully assumed. Difficulties arise as people automatically make tacit assumptions about another's communicative behaviour without realizing that these assumptions cannot meaningfully facilitate the communication process because of the lack of shared history and/or similar cultural understanding. Typically participants strive to understand each other through the use of these assumptions without exploring or negotiating the differences in the rules

of engagement being employed. They try to overlook any moments that feel uneasy between them rather than recognising that these moments may be signals of differences that can be meaningfully explored.

To date attempts to increase understanding of cultural differences in intercultural communication have tried to explain aspects of culture as if there is one homogenous response by all individuals (Hofstede, 1984, 1997, Gudikunst, 1998). The use of cultural generalizations enables concessions to be made for cultural difference. This practice is becoming increasingly problematic in a world where the relationship between the individual and the collective is not static. Each person's interpretation of their cultural underpinnings is navigated through their heritage and their experiences. It is the lack of negotiation of these personal differences that can lead to massive misunderstandings as the following example illustrates.

I conduct orientation classes for newly arrived international students at university. In one exercise for post graduate students we explore the rules of engagement they have used in their previous university, comparing the differences and explaining what is expected in Australia. At the beginning of this year I shared this exercise with two groups, both of which contained students from China. In the first instance the Chinese students stated that students have the highest rank in the university whereas the second group outlined a structure with the President of the university at the top. Recognising the rank of the president was clear to me because this person ultimately makes the decisions that shape and run the organisation. When I asked for an explanation for why the students had most rank, the first group of students stated that this was because they were paying for their education. One of the Chinese students in the second group, who had been a university lecturer, explained that students who can now afford to pay for education have a sense of entitlement borne of the prestige associated with this wealth in today's China. This entitlement informs the rules of engagement the students in the first group were using even in the Australian university. Clearly there is not a shared cultural consensus between the two groups of Chinese students and to assume one would be misleading.

Variation in usage of rules of engagement directly affects the behaviours and expectations of individuals. I have been involved in several instances where some Chinese students have demanded to be passed in a course because they have paid their fees. Now that I am more aware of possible rules of engagement that support such expectations of a university, I can better understand what previously appeared to be a baffling demand.

The practice of relying on cultural generalizations to inform intercultural interactions also fails to recognise the critical role that negotiating differences can play in developing inclusive and relevant understanding between those involved. The above illustration emphasises the importance of making explicit individual differences in the rules of engagement being used in order to create better understanding. Such exploration between participants enriches interactions through providing specific information about expectations and assumptions directly relevant to the circumstances and expected outcomes of the interaction and its context.

Strategies that make explicit the various rules of engagement are central to inclusive intercultural communication. It is through negotiating these differences, not ignoring them, that their potential to create shared meaning and mutual understanding unfolds.

Why have these differences remained hidden until now? Goffman (1959:21) provides a possible explanation when he outlines the rule of engagement that prohibits disclosure of difference in interactions. He stated that the development of a 'working consensus' between group participants is based on two critical premises: each person has unchallenged authority regarding comments about their private domain and there is a tacit agreement to avoid open conflict about definitions. Under these conditions silence about difference, keeping to the known and safe, is preferable to offending anyone.

This practice however has the unintended consequence of perpetuating the rules of engagement of the dominant communication style at the exclusion of deeper understandings that reflect the differing

cultural values present. Research into how these rules of engagement are changing in the current shift between the private and the public is called for and timely.

2. Rank and the dominant communication style

Another factor that perpetuates this practice is the impact of rank on communication. Researchers in Process Oriented Psychology (Mindell, 1995, Diamond, 1996, Camastral, 2000) have studied personal behaviour to describe the impact of rank differentials upon individuals in interactions. They have outlined common dynamics found consistently during intercultural interactions in a wide range of cultural settings.

Camastral (2000) states that, in the Process Oriented Psychology framework, those with rank take for granted their capacity to dominate communication. Their dominance is evident through their ability to determine the place, time and communication style of an interaction. They are often unaware of exactly how their behaviour perpetuates the style with which they feel comfortable and the inequity this creates for the ones who are marginalised. Those with less rank, on the other hand, are obliged to comply by observing the rules of engagement of the dominant communication style. They are well aware of how the behaviours of the dominant group perpetuate their advantages in both access and fluency with the dominant communication style.

She also points out that the marginalised are required to translate their contribution into the communication style of those with rank. In so doing, they are forced out of their comfort zone while perpetuating the comfort zone of those with rank. This means they are the ones to make psychological adaptations to the social ordering. Individuals respond differently to such pressures – some thrive with the challenge while others develop a sense of hopelessness. The variation in adaptive responses is reflected in the fact despite being highly successful in their previous studies international students attain both the best and the worst grades of the entire university student body (GCEQ, 2006).

Strategies that seek to explain the complexities of intercultural communication work towards addressing these rank imbalances. By making transparent some of the practices participants actually experience in these interactions, all parties have equal access to knowledge about previously unexplained communication dynamics. The objectivity that comes with knowing about underlying dynamics frees people to see them as only one way of communicating and this gives participants choice about how they want to respond to these conventions.

On the basis that all styles are relevant and appropriate, discussions of the differences will encourage more equitable access to expression for all participants. After all communication is the interchange of thoughts, opinions and information (Macquarie Dictionary, 1982: 243) and it is through exploring difference and encouraging negotiation that common meaning and mutual understanding develop.

3. Western communication style in higher education

The Australian tertiary education sector is an arena where cultural difference, with all its complexities, is clearly manifest. Australian universities are having difficulty grappling with the seemingly insurmountable transition problems of international students from differing cultural heritages (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Dalglish & Chan, 2005, Bodycott & Walker, 2000). At University of South Australia alone there are students from over 50 different countries with an even wider variation in cultural perspectives when you consider their personal affiliations –such as Indians from Gujarat or Kerala or Chinese from Beijing or Szechuan etc.

The need to improve interactive capacity, along with intercultural awareness, is receiving increasing prominence as a significant factor in the frenzy to maintain high levels of onshore international student enrolments. (Marginson, 2006). In this competitive academic environment, were discrepancies in understanding impact the learning goals, interactivity and global competence for all, international and local students have a lot to gain from exploring alternative interactive styles.

Australian universities adhere to a teaching style based on a Western communication style that both attracts and precludes students from other cultures. They are attracted because this style is the lingua franca of the powerful cultures throughout the world. Understanding the modus operandi of the Western communication style is a passport to future global success. They are precluded because of the inability of those using the Western communication style to value and effectively include the contribution of their cultural diversity (Bodycott & Walker, 2000:87). As Camastral pointed out the dominant rank of the Western communication style all too frequently perpetuates lack of awareness of the ways in which its use dominates over those who are not fluent in understanding its rules of engagement.

For the purpose of this article I will define the Western communication style as the direct, linear and descriptive style that is used in conjunction with the academic orientation of Western universities. Through centuries of development it has evolved as the vehicle of delivery serving the requirements of the academic environment. It facilitates the educational methodologies of debate and comparison favoured in the Western education system. For example the common style in Western tertiary classrooms emphasises imparting, understanding and reflecting upon contemporary knowledge in a specific field. Interpretations associated with personal experiences and reactions are often seen as outside the public arena and not encouraged.

I acknowledge there are limitations in developing such a narrow definition as it mistakenly conveys a sense of uniformity between Western cultures. It excludes many culturally differing styles that could also identify as 'Western' such as the French style or the Australian perhaps. In reality there is no homogenous Western communication style, each language being a vehicle of cultural expression conveying a richness of nuances and specificities and adapting to ever-changing contexts and climates.

The Western academic style described above is relevant to this discussion because international students require mastery over this vehicle of communication as a passport not only in their education but to all that such an education promises for the future. Gaining this passport however, comes at a price. The process of adopting one style means forsaking aspects of themselves that may not be expressed adequately in the new style. This can be a significant loss for individual personality and self esteem. Many international students talk to me of their experiences of inadequacy, shame and silencing when they realise that their version of English is not well understood. Even when they have spent years learning English prior to arrival they are quite astonished at how difficult it is to converse with the locals.

The Western communication style, perpetuates Western rules of engagement. These rules influence who speaks, when they speak, what they say and how they position themselves. Its use in the Australian university context implicitly dictates the mode of communication in all educative settings. While this is inevitable, failing to make explicit its rank differentials means the significance of the process of marginalisation is not addressed adequately for its impact on the educative experiences of students, in particular international students. The impact of feelings of exclusion and the long-term effects of not being able to adequately convey one's thoughts upon ongoing relationship are important areas for future research.

Feedback given during intercultural communication sessions suggests that local staff and students at ease with the Western style are aware they have an advantage of rank. They may also recognise a responsibility to be inclusive of those who are marginalised. However they interpret this responsibility as a need to inform them of the appropriate rules of engagement of the Western style thereby attempting to create inclusion on their own terms. A more embracing model would be for locals to use their awareness of rank to encourage exploration of alternative styles which incorporates discussion of all participants' relevant rules of engagement, expectations and assumptions.

Here is an example taken from a series of intercultural communication classes I conducted for postgraduate business students. These classes are comprised of two distinct groups of students - highly articulate, older, local students with managerial experience and younger, newly graduated,

inexperienced international students, studying this degree as a point of career entry. Class discussions on the impact of rank across cultures have revealed very different responses from members of the two groups. In-class feedback, after culturally mixed small group discussions, revealed both the unconscious use of rank by members of the local group and the marginalisation of those from differing cultural heritage.

In every instance the group feedback was conveyed by a local student who commented that the group did not discriminate against the international students - on the contrary, locals took much time and effort to explain what is expected of the international students in Australian business interactions. They believed they were being inclusive in the reporting process by soliciting agreement for their comments from their international student group members. At no point did the local students consider the relevance of exploring with the international students their actual experiences or expectations.

An alternative interpretation of this reporting behaviour would be that in seeking consensus with the international students while reporting to a lecturer, the local spokesperson is co-opting this agreement to bolster their relative rank in the interaction with the lecturer – a conversation where *they* have less rank. Such agreement by the international students can be seen as compliance with the dominant perspective not, as asserted, consensus among all group members.

A truer indicator of the degree of exclusion students of differing cultural heritage may have experienced during these encounters is the fact that at no stage during the feedback were these students asked to speak personally and local students did not see any problem with speaking collectively on behalf of all group members.

The self reported experiences of the international students in the groups gave a very different perspective. Certainly they acknowledged coming to Australia in part to learn about appropriate behaviours for the Western business culture. They also spoke freely, in the classroom and in evaluation, about the extent and impact of their feelings of marginalisation in these experiences. Notably they commented on the way they further internalized this sense of exclusion as a personal inadequacy; a conclusion that led to diminished self-esteem, further undermining their courage to speak out. Despite their awareness of this problem they expressed a lack of skills to overcome it.

Such marginalisation can have many and varied consequences for the educational experience of international students. Consider the common practice of assessing student class participation on their verbal contribution. This practice constructs situations which marginalise those students with little knowledge of the rules of engagement being employed as well as those from cultures where verbal participation in class is considered rude. A common university response has been to offer education to these marginalised students in verbal presentation skills.

While making these rules more transparent is an important step there also needs to be some recognition of the personal implications for those who are new to this culture or culturally constrained. In effect these students are double bound. They report a sense of great discomfort because in order to succeed in the West they must fail their cultural selves: if they speak out in oral presentations they go against their cultural understanding of the appropriate rules of engagement - if they don't, they will be penalized by a loss of marks. Acknowledging these internal tensions poses the question - is it reasonable for the Western academic system to grade students on their capacity to stretch beyond their cultural comfort zones? There is currently no way to take into consideration the unfair advantage this gives to local students with greater communicative rank.

The above examples clearly show that students who do not share the social rank of the dominant culture, are undoubtedly at a double disadvantage. They are excluded by their lack of familiarity with the rules of engagement of the Western style as well as the unconscious, unintended use of rank to maintain a status quo that prevents any consideration of the experiences of those with differing cultural understandings. The assumption that all students must learn the rules of engagement of the Western communication style serves to perpetuate the status quo but not addressing the implications for those who face a steep learning curve cannot be justified through blind acceptance of this assumption.

Recognising the importance of addressing communicative imbalances is a constructive way to use the rank of the Western communication style. With this in mind, educators can design more inclusive interactive strategies favouring shared meaning over Western perspective.

Incorporating the input of all requires clear acknowledgement of the fact that the dimensions of rank and the rules of engagement are not fixed determinates reflecting only the Western perspective. Educators can encourage exploration of the complexities differing understandings present in intercultural understanding as an alternative to the current status quo where they are either ignored or reduced (Crichton et al 2004). This provides an inclusive interactive scaffolding with which to promote mutual understanding specifically relevant to the particular interaction and context. Understanding that is instrumental for developing ongoing, working relationships. This is a practical approach to increasing internationalisation, intercultural competency with tangible skills in intercultural relating for the development of global citizenship.

4. Expanding notions of rules of engagement in communication: the importance of rank

Paradoxically, the direct and open qualities of the Western communication style, provide a suitable framework within which to developing inclusive models. This style favours practices that can deal with differences such as explanation, exploration, examination and making explicit that which is implicit. It is not the Western communication style per se that is problematic, merely the inherent unexamined power balances and cultural assumptions.

Some rules of engagement are essential for academic success in the Western system and are therefore not negotiable. These are the rules involved with critical thinking, analysis and the ability to debate. Rules which pertain to interpersonal engagement, such as greeting behaviours and collaborative strategies however, vary across cultures. By exploring differences in these rules and incorporating greater understanding of how rank interfaces with communication, we are creating ways for the spaces between cultures to become more explicitly understood and meaning can become open for negotiation.

The generally accepted definition of rank as social status or 'the power derived from socially defined value systems' (Diamond 2004) is uni-dimensional. Its dominance in Western cultures has led to the assumption that social rank is the only 'legitimate' form but this is blind to other forms of rank which incorporate the development of personal power. The expanded definition of rank developed in Process Oriented Psychology encompasses personal attributes and is therefore more relevant for explaining the complexities of interpersonal communication. In this definition rank is 'a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power arising from culture, community support, personal psychology and/or spiritual power' (Mindell 1995:42)

Mindell's definition accounts for the use of personal powers that cut across the style of those with social rank and can have significant influence in interactions. These forms are available for all participants, independent of their social status. Diamond (2004) discusses two forms of rank of particular relevance to educational interactions. These are psychological rank (qualities developed through self reflection about experiences) and spiritual rank (the inner conviction borne out of deep personal religious or spiritual alliances). These forms of rank are developed within the individual as personal power that is adaptable within a wide range of contexts (Diamond 2004:15) enabling those with less social rank to have influence on their own terms.

Psychological rank develops with the insight gained from our personal experiences, such as examining communication skills or struggling with cultural disparities. The processes of coming to terms with differing expectations and assumptions, developing adequate understanding of the rules of engagement and expressing ones self appropriately are all instrumental in developing personal psychological rank. Paradoxically, through their initial exclusion, those who are marginalised by the Western academic style must engage in the kinds of inner reflexive dialogue which develops personal

strengths or psychological rank. Over time this assist them to express themselves despite their lack of social rank.

Spiritual rank is relevant to communication because it encourages inclusiveness. Those with spiritual rank bring to interactions an understanding of interconnectedness that values all perspectives for their contribution to the whole. They display qualities of eldership to expand beyond one-sidedness.

Both psychological and spiritual rank are factors that shape each individual's personal power. They are available for use across many social contexts unlike social rank which predominates in arenas where a material worldview is paramount and is limited because its status and power relate only to that particular context and cultural orientation (Diamond, 2004:15).

Schupbach (1998) states that the net effect of rank on communication is cumulative, representing the combined impact of social, psychological and spiritual rank of the participants that is relevant for that particular context. The interplay of various partial forms of rank within a conversation is an important dynamic through which intimacy or connectedness between individuals develops. Each exchange provides valuable information with which participants are located within the rank matrix of the interaction.

Now let us consider the forms of rank being employed in the original example of the Chinese students who believed they have the highest rank in the university. It is evident that these students are equating access to money with social status but are unaware that this social rank has no currency in the Australian university system. Their ability to easily communicate their needs suggests that they have developed a strong sense of personal power or psychological rank with their inner reflexive dialogue being based on a sense of supremacy or entitlement. However their spiritual rank is underdeveloped as they show little awareness or interest in the perspectives of others.

Such an analysis of the combined rank variables provides a nuanced understanding of benefit to future interactions. For instance if I were to engage with these students, knowing this would enable me to use my social rank as a member of staff constructively by including both theirs and the universities' perspectives in discussion. Showing that I understand where they are coming from as well as how this is discontinuous with the Australian situation provides a sense of relativity with which to bridge the cultural divide. This creates a more equitable platform for negotiation for all parties.

On the other hand, if the Chinese students were to learn and reflect on the various forms of rank and rules of engagement they may recognise that there are more than one way to view situations. Recognising differences in rules of engagement and being willing to consider these differences will assist them to develop their spiritual rank or interconnectedness

5. Towards inclusive approaches in higher education.

Crichton et al (2006) found that engaging with the process of self-reflection and reflexive dialogue is extremely beneficial for developing an open attitude to intercultural communication. International students are currently in a position where they have to engage in more reflection than locals in their struggle to determine the relevant rules of engagement and consider appropriate responses within interactions. In contrast, the need for such personal reflection is less of an imperative for locals and those comfortable with the Western communication style.

All students and staff can develop greater interactive competency through reflexive understanding about their relative position and differences in rules of engagement. The process of self-reflection can be facilitated by making them aware of the ways in which rank and rules of engagement are embedded in communication and the leverage they will gain through understanding their own and other's positions. Providing a conceptual framework that focuses students' attention on their capacity for increasing their personal and psychological rank is a positive proactive alternative that can counteract the hopelessness that comes from seeing social marginalisation as a personal deficit.

Other benefits of this approach include:

- encouraging early participation of all participants on their own terms
- creating a supportive environment which normalizes the effect of difference
- establishing rank dynamics within a group that reflect personal capacities as well as differing social norms
- opportunities for inner reflection about the self and others based on stated information, not inference and assumption.

This can be accomplished through the use of introductory practices that foreground the personal and cultural differences among people from discontinuous backgrounds and provide opportunities for the relevant rules of engagement and rank differentials to be negotiated. The proposed introductory practices are based on respect for individual experiences as portrayed through the adult learning principles of Paulo Freire (1972) and are also consistent with the current global shifts in the relationship between the personal and the public (Said 2004, Bhabha, 1994, Jameson, 1998).

Such inclusive introductory practices are made possible through the use of an interactive scaffolding with three critical elements. These are 1) an awareness of the ways in which rank and culture interface in communication, 2) expression of personal position and 3) negotiation between perspectives.

Some suggestions of how this scaffolding can be created follow.

1. Setting up the interaction -conscious use of rank

Inclusive interactions require forethought and advocacy because they do not conform to currently accepted communication patterns. Those responsible for designing the interactive environment can consider how to both construct opportunities that facilitate inclusivity as well as advocating for its significance.

Aspects to be considered within introductory practices include:

- Seating arrangements where all participants can be seen equally
- Actively constructing culturally mixed groups.
- Providing education and advocacy to staff and students regarding the relevance of aforementioned elements for intercultural competency.
- Modelling and fostering an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity, open mindedness and goodwill in the interactive environment

2. Theory Component

Two aspects are important here:-

- Explaining the importance of current interactions in developing intercultural competence in order to become global citizens, an increasingly evident necessity of future career success.
- A theoretical explanation of differing forms of rank and their relevance to communication in that context.

3. Providing opportunities to explore notions of relevant rules of engagement

This practice cuts across the Western communication style by foregrounding differences, rather than similarities from the beginning. These are opportunities for everyone to share and listen to relevant information about themselves through explaining what they see as appropriate or expect of others and themselves in this context. It enables participants to hear the salient interpretive differences between them and therefore better determine what is required for their ongoing interactions

Conclusion

This paper discusses the nature of and relationship between personal experiences and interpretations of participants in intercultural communication. It offers deeper insight into how the previously unexplored dimensions of power and rank are critical in the development of inclusive approaches.

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Exploring the ways in which rank and rules of engagement structure communication provides insight into the relationships between culture, power and communication behaviours, with which to bridge the personal and the interpersonal that is relevant and timely for the changing interface between private values and public expectations.

This approach is central to developing communicative strategies that are neither reductive nor parochial (Said, 2004:50) but contribute to the creation of a global environment where collaborative engagement can mean working with similarities, differences and the deep-seated needs of all involved.

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