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Kristen Eis Cvancara

Minnesota State University, kristen.cvancara@mnsu.edu

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Book Review

Kristen Eis Cvancara

***Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence: Exploring the Cross-Cultural Dynamics Within Organizations*, Moodian, M. A. (Ed.) (2009). Los Angeles, CA: Sage**

Individuals who hold leadership roles in education need to be sensitive to and skilled in negotiating cultural differences across majority and minority cultures. *Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence* (Moodian, 2009) is an edited collection of chapters that function to enable a reader to identify cultural differences, to understand what cultural differences exist in an interaction and why, and to prescribe creative and positive behaviors to resolve differences that can be integrated into daily interactions. The lessons facilitate an understanding of communication processes that can maximize the potential for intercultural dynamics to enhance productivity and outcomes within organizational systems.

Strengths of the book include concise chapters that use visual and theoretical models to convey information, a pragmatic approach to the application of concepts and theories, and an array of assessment tools (many of which can be accessed online). Weaknesses of the book include limited application beyond corporate organizations and a lack of discussion regarding culturally relevant gender issues. Accounting for these weaknesses, the book offers a worthy amount of information from which educational leaders can benefit due to a focus on fostering communication competence.

Competence can mean many things in different situations, however, when used in a communication sense it generally incorporates three basic tenets: motivation to communicate, knowledge regarding effective means of communication, and skill to successfully perform communication behaviors (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). Most people tend to think they are competent communicators and often forget that competence is judged by the recipient, not the sender, of a message. Judgments of communication competence are positively correlated with perceptions of a leader's credibility and ability to influence others (Singer, 1998), which makes the topic crucial for educational leaders. Within educational contexts, communication competence is essential for leaders who wish to impact positive changes in educational systems that are more culturally diverse than ever before.

About the Author

Kristen Eis Cvancara, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Minnesota State University Mankato. *kristen.cvancara@mnsu.edu*.

Summarizing the Content

Moodian divides the book into five sections: Part I (Chapters 1–3) provides an introduction with definitions of contemporary cultural understandings, Part II (Chapters 4–7) contextualizes cultural diversity in increasingly global organizations through different lenses, Part III (Chapters 8–12) applies theory to various organizational functions, Part IV (Chapters 13–19) discusses how to assess dimensions relevant to intercultural training and competence development, and Part V (Chapter 20) provides a brief conclusion and summary.

Part I serves to orient the reader to the topic of communication competence and culture. Chapter 1 briefly defines leadership and intercultural competence—linking both directly to the communication process. An underlying assumption of the book is that “. . . the most critical element of the success of a high-performing organization is the level of engagement among the organization’s employees” (Moodian, 2009, p. 4). Essentially, Moodian argues that leaders must not only illustrate communication competence, but train others in an organization to be interculturally competent as well. Chapter 2 discusses seven perspectives that help a reader to recognize what shapes and influences changes in culture. Chapter 3 argues that attaining a multicultural perspective involves a shift in consciousness that requires a person to gain an objective view of one’s own cultural positions—positions to be examined dialectically in relation to the worldviews of others. In tandem with an individual’s shift, the authors also address shifts in organizational consciousness to help readers more concretely recognize how an organization may facilitate a multicultural vision.

Part II illustrates how culture can be understood from both individual and organizational perspectives, and how culture can be applied across different types of organizations. Chapter 4 introduces the many layers of diversity that can exist when humans interact, and presents a framework involving (1) individual attitudes and behaviors, (2) managerial skills and practices, and (3) organizational values and policies through which diversity can be managed. Chapter 5 provides an illustration of how religious and spiritual diversity influences an organization. The illustration demonstrates how culturally competent communicators can shift the focus from *the topic* to addressing *how the topic can or should be integrated into the organization?* Shifting how the topic is addressed serves to focus the managerial discussion to strate-

gies that recognize and integrate the differences in meaningful ways for the organization and its members. The illustration foregrounds prescriptive competencies associated with successful attempts to manage topics of diversity across many kinds of organizations. Chapter 6 illustrates and compares differing legal systems in global organizations. Chapter 7 provides readers with knowledge regarding managing human resources issues (e.g., hiring, firing, training, development, compensation) due to increasing diversity within, and also across organizations.

Part III speaks directly to facilitating individual and organizational transformation from cultural incompetence to intercultural competence. Chapter 8 is focused on training to develop interculturally competent workforces. Chapter 9 features a discussion of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta, & Associates, 2004) and concludes with a call for global leadership perspectives to integrate across organizations in an effort to maximize outcomes for those involved. Chapter 10 illustrates how to facilitate and apply intercultural competence in a process of interactions—the point is to investigate how it occurs, how it can be expressed, and how to be aware enough to recognize when “intercultural competence” is necessary and at play. Chapter 11 describes how stress is associated with intercultural communication and suggests ways to manage the stress associated with training or engaging in intercultural interactions. Chapter 12 speaks to the transformation that needs to occur if a person is to become globally aware and comprehend the dynamics of intercultural communication to insure effective and prosperous teamwork and cooperation to achieve a joint goal. Prominent issues relevant to understanding the nature of intercultural communication are reviewed in the chapter, including degree of formality when interacting, concepts of time, business etiquette (grooming, dress, greetings, goodbyes, gifts, dinner manners), and navigating onsite as well as geographically dispersed teams (GDT).

Educators will appreciate Part IV (the largest in the book) because it adds assessment tools to the discussion of intercultural competence development. Chapter 13 conveys that intercultural competence is not just about confirming and raising awareness of differences, but also requires a willingness and ability to reframe and reconcile the differences and communicate in ways that are acceptable and feasible to meet the goals of the people involved. Chapter 14 provides a list and description of assessment tools to assist in (1) the selection of people with intercultural competence and (2) the selection of tools to assist in the development of intercultural competence. Chapter 15 focuses on specific leadership behaviors, discusses behavioral characteristics fundamental to intercultural competence, and provides a descriptive list of different assessment tools that measure behavioral and cognitive aspects

relevant to intercultural competence. Chapter 16 argues that effective organizations must become interculturally competent at the individual and organizational levels, as well as the business and political levels. Chapter 17 offers a trouble-shooting approach to identifying problems and resolving conflict. Chapter 18 launches into an epistemological discussion of assessment development. Bridging back to topics advanced in the beginning of the book, Chapter 19 conveys how intercultural competence must develop through a sensitivity to cultural differences.

Part V briefly presents a method through which organizations can conduct an analysis to measure an individual's current mindset regarding the issues of diversity and intercultural competence. Chapter 20 is the only chapter in this section and it is quite limited in its scope.

Assessing the Utility of the Content

The strengths and weaknesses of the book can be aligned under three main themes. The first theme involves communication competence as a process, the second theme involves the application of intercultural competence to educational organizations, and the third theme involves the combination of gender, leadership, and culture. While the book is not written for educational leaders specifically, the content merits attention from this audience due to the principles which can be applied to promote intercultural competence in educational organizations.

Communication Competence as a Process

Consistent with the tenets of communication competence mentioned in the beginning of this review, the definition of intercultural competence advanced in the book reflects the combined need for a person to have knowledge, skill, and motivation to become interculturally competent, but overlooks the role of the perception of other people. For leaders in education, the information provided in the book is important because it identifies a pathway to increase ones' own intercultural competence. For example, educators seeking to select and advance people with intercultural competence skills will benefit from using the assessments reviewed in Part IV. However, the assessment and development of intercultural competence must include an interactive approach that looks beyond individual leaders and involves the various people with whom leaders will be communicating in school districts, departments, higher education administrations, and various other organizations.

Also relevant for readers to further understand the communication process is the 2-tiered nature of communication. Every time a message is sent it involves both a denotative meaning (literally, explicitly what the words mean)

and a connotative meaning (a contextual, relational meaning that is implicitly conveyed) that is enmeshed within the message. Educational leaders can benefit by considering the denotative and connotative meanings they communicate within their organizations. Cultural diversity will likely impact how the communicated messages are received by others, thus impacting not only perceptions of leader competence, but also the effectiveness and appropriateness of what the leader communicates. The same message may be construed differently depending on the setting and audience, so leaders must take care to frame messages with a consideration for how cultural backgrounds and worldviews may influence recipient understanding.

Applying Intercultural Competence to Educational Organizations

Although the chapters throughout the book are written to enable readers to understand aspects of culture and communication in organizations, a drawback for educational leaders is that the content is primarily applied to corporate organizations. Even though the majority of presented research has been conducted in corporate settings, there are many principles that can be applied to all types of organizations, especially educational organizations. For example, the journey metaphor described in the book is broadly applicable because it focuses on individuals as humans. The transformation involved in becoming interculturally competent hinges on personal growth via an understanding of aspects of culture and cultural differences that are likely not recognized by many individuals in organizations. Regardless of type of organization, it is important to keep in mind that an individual journey to becoming interculturally competent may or may not occur simultaneously with an organizational transformation. In this sense, the metaphor of personal growth and shifting perspective is critical for a leader to understand when attempting to shape organizational growth and change. As new insight is gained, incremental adjustments in how an individual and the broader organization (e.g., school boards, administrations) communicate may be required along the way to realign the two levels.

Beyond the journey metaphor, another set of applicable principles reviewed in the book involves the development of materials to train individuals and assess intercultural competence. The practical training information in Part III will be useful to educational leaders, especially if leaders pay special attention to motivating members of an organization to become more culturally aware. Leaders need to be properly trained, open-minded, and culturally knowledgeable to understand the motivations behind different ways of conducting business and communicating when working with diverse groups of people, especially when training individuals to be more culturally aware. Educational leaders are poised to thrive under these situations, as they hold

socially prescribed roles that support training and empathy to learners.

Consistent with educational maxims of planning learning objectives, measuring learner growth and development, and assessing training tools and strategies, Part IV also provides valuable information to educational leaders. Two dimensions upon which development should be assessed include individual to organizational behavioral competencies and mono- to multi-cultural behavioral competencies. Educators are likely to appreciate the content addressing how to handle the conflict prompted by the transformative growth of becoming more interculturally competent. For example, the book suggests an approach to engage individuals in communication that will enable a leader to help navigate tough questions involving diversity (such as, who should adapt to whom in a situation?). While the approach indicates how leaders can ask additional questions to prompt a more productive discussion, the approach does not brainstorm additional behaviors to reconcile contentious differences. A troubling weakness is a lack of guidance regarding how each of the assessments could be aligned in a program to develop a strategy for increasing intercultural competence within an organization. With this in mind, readers must be creative in developing plans to promote intercultural competence within an educational system by linking use of the assessments listed in a manner that will promote growth and development in each unique situation.

Combining Gender, Leadership, and Culture

While the book has strengths relevant to advancing an understanding of culture and how culture links to leadership styles, a major weakness is that it does not address gender as a factor that may influence how culture is understood, experienced, or perceived—an element that should not be overlooked by female leaders in educational contexts. The enactment of gendered roles in culturally diverse organizations can quickly become confusing, especially when biological sex is not congruent with the gendered role a person maintains. While biological sex specifically refers to “male” or “female,” gender is typically referenced as “masculine,” “feminine,” or “androgynous” in nature—concepts that are culturally constructed and defined. Gendered stereotypes are prominent throughout all cultures and impact the expectations individuals bring to each interaction they have in an organization. With this point in mind, readers should be careful to contextualize the information in the book according to the gendered assumptions and definitions relevant to their own situations. A female leader is wise to recognize the various worldviews that may be embraced by the individuals with whom she communicates since gendered expectations play an influential role in how people communicate and leaders are perceived.

Implications Regarding Gender, Leadership, and Communication Competence

Moodian's (2009) edited book provides critical information for JWEL's readership for two reasons: (1) women are more likely to incorporate leadership styles that will foster greater engagement and relationship building among employees, and (2) the last century has witnessed women moving into positions of leadership within previously male-dominated educational systems. Of the meta-studies conducted to examine differences in leadership styles and effectiveness between women and men, Northouse (2007) identifies that women are typically found to illustrate more democratic and participatory management styles than men, and that women are considered equally effective leaders as men (as long as they are in leadership positions congruent with their gender). Since women tend to be more sensitive to the relationships between people and lead with more participatory styles, it is speculated that feminine leadership tendencies may naturally lend themselves to be more perceptive in situations involving cultural diversity. It is not argued here that males or individuals displaying masculine leadership styles are not capable of intercultural communication competence. Rather, it is argued that being perceptually aware of relationship dynamics, displaying empathy toward and understanding of personal positions and perspectives, and seeking participation from all members involved are behaviors that manifest due to interpersonal and intercultural sensitivity and understanding—characteristics identified in the book as essential for a leader to become interculturally competent. Once a leader is empathetic to and understands how cultural differences are expressed, a leader may move to the next step to creatively reframe and resolve the differences in a positive light.

It is in the process of reframing and resolving a cultural difference when women leaders may find themselves in a bind, if they are required to step outside of gendered boundaries. While Moodian's book does not provide insight to issues of gender, research exists to clarify aspects of gender often misunderstood. While male leaders are not necessarily more effective than female leaders, men are perceived in our culture to be more persuasive (Carli, 2004). Carli's finding implies that in order for women to be considered equally effective they must out-perform men using only feminine gendered characteristics (e.g., women can't be too direct, assertive, or forceful or it backfires and credibility is lost). Women are noted to communicate differently from men, such that they typically use more hesitations, hedges, intensifiers, tag questions, disclaimers, and polite forms of request—all forms of communication referred to as powerless language (Gass & Seiter, 2010). As leaders in educational settings, women are granted the power to

make decisions and have influence—as long as they are perceived to be in a gender stereotyped position.

The point here is that while women may have natural tendencies that lend themselves to identify and empathize with cultural differences, notably in educational settings, it is important that women learn to communicate competently in order to reframe and resolve the cultural differences among those involved. Frustration is likely to occur if an individual sees a problem clearly, but cannot convey the solution with enough integrity, clarity, and status such that others are influenced to act on the suggested solution. A strategy for women to overcome frustrations associated with obstacles (e.g., people or systems) to increasing intercultural competence is to convey messages focused on the shared goals, resources, and individual benefits at play in the interaction (Cody, Seiter, & Montagne-Miller, 1995). For example, when reframing a culturally diverse situation to cast a solution into a positive light, women leaders should avoid the powerless language associated with devalued feminine stereotypes and seek to communicate in affirming ways that reveal the common goals of the people involved. Once common goals are on the table and adversarial positions are diminished, communication can incrementally address the less agreed upon points of interest to slowly resolve the points of contention. This kind of approach is enhanced by a leader being able to help the involved parties who are in disagreement to build empathy for each other's position. That is why it is so essential that a woman begin by focusing relationship growth on the aspects that individuals have in common to structure an environment that promotes social acceptance among the parties involved. Once a social bond has been forged and trust is established between the parties involved, specific differences will seem less threatening and there is a higher opportunity for a leader to facilitate discussions to obtain mutually acceptable resolutions.

Although the book is recommended as a useful resource to awaken the role that women stand to play in bridging cultural divides, there are many questions that remain to be answered. For instance, how can women use this information to maximize effectiveness in leadership roles? How can women use this information to change leadership styles? And, how might women leaders extend the opportunity in educational settings to transform people into more interculturally competent communicators? While we continue to seek answers to these questions, women remain in a unique position in educational spheres—a position that simultaneously affirms their place without fully confirming their leadership. To overcome this lack of female leadership in educational systems, readers are encouraged to read Moodian's book and build their intercultural competencies in order to develop educational systems that flourish in the richness provided by the culturally diverse communities in which we live and work.

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