A Theoretical Model for Research in Intercultural Decision Making

Ralph C. Ennis

LEAD Consulting, Raleigh, NC

Abstract

The fields of intercultural communications and relations, decision making and consumer behavior have addressed issues related to the process of decision making in an intercultural context. Though contributing many conceptual constructs, these fields have not focused on constructing an intercultural decision making model that is applicable for intercultural research. This article focuses on constructing a culture-general intercultural decision making model (ICDM model). This process model focuses on three intersecting three-dimensional axes: logic of intellect, logic of emotions, and imagined outcomes. Each of these axes systems suggests three interactive continua that function as a process for making decisions. The logic of intellect has the continua of powerful-powerless, good-evil, and accuracy-intuition. The logic of emotion has the continua of trust-fear, honor-shame, and freedom-bonding. Imagined outcomes, which will briefly be put forth, have the continua of desired identity-undesired identity, surviving-thriving, and meaningful-meaningless.

Introduction

Edward Stewart (1985) posited, "The differences in decision making pose a greater challenge for international relations than communication" (p. 21). Regardless of the relative importance that one assigns to decision making, decision making is a primary factor for consideration in intercultural relations. Intercultural relations can be conceptualized as the sequencing of decisions that form these relations. Internal and behavioral communicative decisions become the grounds for negotiating relations with those of other cultures. This article deals with the construct of decision making as it relates to intercultural relations. The following question will be addressed: What is a theoretical model of decision making that is applicable for use in future research on intercultural decision making? Models from decision making science, consumer behavior and cultural and intercultural literature will be considered.

Bennett (1998) proposed, "Culture-general approaches to interaction describe general cultural contrasts that are applicable in many cross-cultural situation" (p. 9). A culture-general ICDM model will be constructed for the purpose of facilitating research of decision making that will distinguish differences in cultural patterns and draw implications for intercultural interactions.

Regarding the process of decision making, interculturalists have conceptualized a variety of elements pertinent to that process. Many of these elements will be used in forming a process model of decision making. This ICDM model involves logic and imagination. People use a culturally adapted logic in the process of making decisions. The goal of their logic is imagined outcomes of decisions. Logic, in this ICDM model, is conceptualized as two three-dimensional axes systems: logic of intellect and logic of emotion. Furthermore, imagination is conceptualized as a three-dimensional axes system. Explanations of each axis follow in the proceeding sections.

Logic of Intellect

The conceptual category of logic of intellect can be construed as a culture-general category. Benjamin Lee Whorf (1998) viewed all people as logicians. Kolb (1984) conceptualized thinking on a continuum from abstract conceptualization to concrete experience as styles of learning. Expected utility theory (Fishburn, 1970) positioned logic as the means of arriving at the right decision. Though the rules of logic of intellect are not universal from culture to culture, the logic of intellect can nevertheless be conceptualized as a culture-general category since all languages have an internal logic of grammar that affects decision making.

The logic of intellect in this ICDM model has three axes: power axis, moral axis, and certainty axis (see Figure 1 on the next page). The power axis is a continuum from powerful to powerless. The moral axis is a continuum from good to evil. The certainty axis is a continuum from accuracy to intuition. And the central construct of the logic of intellect is space. Each of the specifics of the axes is defined by every culture. However, the model posits that all cultural logics involve these three sets of continua. The purpose of the model is not to distinguish the specifics of each culture, but rather to suggest that some cultures place more importance on one axis of intellectual logic than other cultures. The specifics of each culture's perception of power, morality and certainty should be a matter for ongoing research regarding intercultural decision making.

### Power Axis: A Continuum from Powerful to Powerless

Power is conceptualized as an element in the decision making process. Power is an implied factor in violation of expectancy values. From a position of power, one can either empower or violate others. From a position of powerlessness, one can be either empowered or violated by others. Prospect theory conceptualizes power in terms of maximizing gains and minimizing losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Nuckolls (1996) suggested that "Power is the desire of every individual for control over persons and things, and it is strongly influenced by the environment and the social organization of competition" (p. 8). Power is conceptualized not only as a possession (those who have it and those who do not) but also as a process – the will to power. "Will this decision enhance my personal power?" "How can I enhance the power of others?" These and other questions are the concerns of one with a Power Preference in decision making. For instance, as a person decides who his friends will be, a preference for power will lead him to ask, "Is this person one who will help me get to where I want to go? How can he benefit me?"

To reason with the Powerless Preference is to take the position of empowering another at one's own expense. This is often the case when dealing with a child. The adult may choose to lose a game so the child can grow in confidence. Often for the sake of others, we make decisions of sacrifice that place us temporarily in the powerless position. This sacrifice, though, can lead to long-term benefit for everyone.

Morality Axis: A Continuum from Good to Evil

Every culture conceptualizes good and evil. Stewart and Bennett (1991) have stated, "While cultural assumptions refer to basic beliefs about the nature of reality, cultural values refer to the goodness or desirability of certain actions or attitudes among members of the culture" (p. 14). What is

Figure 1 Logic of Intellect

(3-d axis)
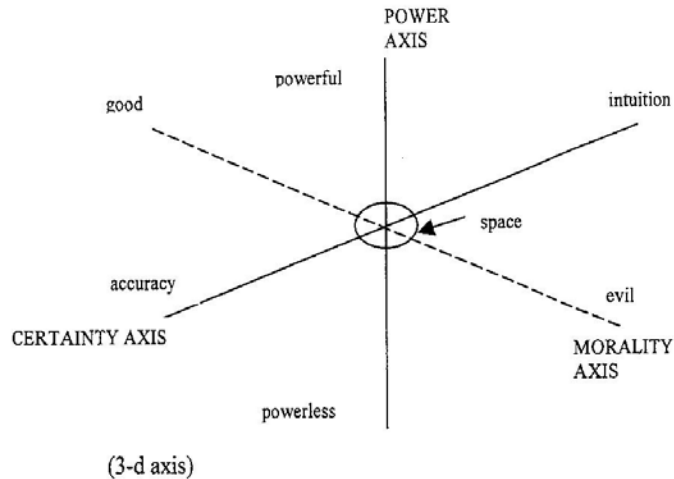
good in one culture may not be good in another. Morality is implicated in expected utility model of decision making in that it posits what decisions should be made (Brynes, 1998). Moral development models (Evans et al., 1998; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981) contend morality as a panhuman developmental issue. Morality is implicated in the decision making process by Quinn (1992). She stated, "Obligations are ordained by the moral order; their fulfillment is right and necessary" (p. 92). "What is morally good in this situation?" "How can I maintain high moral standards?" "How can we as a people develop a moral society?" These and other questions dominate the reasoning of those with the Good Preference. A preference of evil refers to considering the presence of evil within or around oneself. It is a worldview that recognizes that evil exists. It reasons that everyone has the capacity to do evil. It is a sensitivity to evil in a system. "What evil needs to be dealt with in this situation?" "What evil is in my own psyche?"

Certainty Axis: A Continuum from Accuracy to Intuition

The intellectual axis of certainty is posited to be a continuum from accuracy to intuition. The extreme of accuracy is a belief in absolute description and explanation of reality with the use of language. These descriptions and explanations are often classified as "facts" within a culture. The extreme of intuition is a belief in internal hunches for describing, explaining and/or constructing reality. The ICDM model posits the intellectual continuum from accuracy to intuition as a factor in the process of decision making.

Inherent in anxiety/uncertainty theory (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988) is the conceptual notion of certainty. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) conceptualized universalism and particularism as dimensions of culture. The preference of particularism can be conceptualized as a preference for accuracy in establishing particular categories. Stewart and Bennett (1991) cited the use of "empirical, observable and measurable" facts as a distinctive of American culture (p. 31). The use or lack of reliance on facts is inherent in the intellectual certainty involved in the decision making process.

Accuracy is concerned with verifiable facts. In order to make a reasonable decision many people need to know the facts of the matter. These facts are more than impressions. They are conceptualizations that are recognizable by others as certainties. For instance, when purchasing a new piece of clothing, some people need to know the facts regarding the type of material – how long does it last, is it easily washed, do the colors fade, etc. Intuitions are often the means by which people make decisions as opposed to accurate facts. For instance, many people buy furniture for reasons that are obscure. They don't research readily available facts. They go with their impressions. This intuitive decision making is usually quicker than gathering facts.

Central Construct of Logic of Intellect: Space

This ICDM model proposed that space is a central construct of the logic of intellect. In order for space to serve as a central construct the logic of intellect, it must be shown that space is: 1) a panhuman intellectual construct, 2) involves all the elements of intellectual logic, and 3) there are threads of spatial reasoning involved in all decisions. Is space a panhuman intellectual construct? The philosopher Wittgenstein (1958) referred to the "spatial and temporal phenomenon of language" (p. 47). Since all language systems are purported to contain a spatial quality, it can be reasoned that space is a panhuman intellectual construct.

From a cross-cultural comparative perspective, Osgood, May and Miron (1975) supported the claim of the universality of space as a construct in decision making. In analysis of 21 language/culture communities they found, "The two most common modes of qualifying right across the world are *good* and *big* (or some close synonym)" (p. 189). Bigness is a spatial construct. Does space involve each of the elements of logic of intellect from the ICDM model? Space can be conceptualized as powerful or powerless space, a good or evil space, or an accurate or intuitive space. Stated differently, power or lack thereof resides in spatial objects, persons, and concepts held by one or more people. Good and evil are spatially linked constructs (as in "this" or "that" is good or evil). And the degree of intellectual accuracy can be restricted to descriptions of spatial objects, persons, or concepts held by people. Are there threads of spatial reasoning in all decisions? Clearly, all economic decisions involve spatial reasoning. Economics hinges on the construct of possessiveness. Possessiveness implies objects, persons or ideas held by people. So directly or indirectly, as in the case of ideas, space is implicated in all economic decision making. Furthermore, all mathematical decisions can be linked to real or imagined space in various dimensionality. All relationship decisions can be seen to involve spatial decision making. Relationships are between objects, people and idea held by people. Thus, relationships explicitly or implicitly involve the spatial concept of distance.

Overall, the position that space is involved in all logic of intellect is an abstract reach and not a concept that most people consider in their verbal deliberations. However, the concept of space is quickly accessed as people make non-verbal decisions. All nonverbal decisions are displayed in space. The space between people in intercultural interactions has received much consideration. Facial expressions and their meanings are also a spatial concern in intercultural decision making. Research into spatial considerations in intercultural decision making may yield relatively sketchy data. Since most people are

unaware of the spatial nature of verbal and nonverbal language and since most means of research rely on verbal responses of respondents, the abstraction of space will most likely go underreported.

Logic of Emotion

Similarly, the logic of emotion is posited to involve three axes: relational, hierarchal and liberty (see Figure 2 on the next page). The relational axis is a continuum from trust to fear. The hierarchal axis is a continuum from honor to shame. The liberty axis is a continuum from freedom to bonding. And the central construct of the logic of emotion is jealousy. Kolb (1984) viewed feeling in concrete experience as an element in learning styles. Using the PAD Emotional-Stat model, Mehrabian (1995) translated fifty-eight emotions using pleasure, arousal and dominance factors. Lutz (1983) extended personal emotions to the cultural level. Lutz concluded, "Thus emotion in the individual may be said to have its parallel, on the cultural level, in values; the concept of emotion, then, can provide a critical nexus for understanding the individual's creation of, and participation in, social institutions" (p. 247). Emotions can play an important role in the decisions that lead to and establish cultural values. Each emotion is culturally constructed and varies across cultures by the degree of descriptive detail. Levy (1984) distinguished between hypercognized and hypocognized emotions (p. 219). "Anger is, relative to some other emotions, 'hypercognized' – that is, there are a large number of culturally provided schemata for interpreting and dealing with it" (p. 219). For instance, the concept of shame in the American context is relatively hypocognized when compared to the concept of shame in the Mainland Chinese culture that is relatively hypercognized. Though emotions may be hypocognized or hypercognized, Levy (1984) claimed emotions could be recognized across cultures. Without this assumption of general understanding through central tendency of emotions, intercultural empathy would not be a viable concept.

Liberty Axis: A Continuum from Freedom to Bonding

The logic of emotion employs the emotional continuum of freedom and bonding. This axis of liberty can be conceptualized as the emotions of attachment where freedom and bonding are not necessarily good or evil. For instance, to be free from one's family may seem good at a certain age in a particular culture but evil, or at least unhealthy, at another age within the same culture. Nevertheless, freedom and bonding are associated with interpersonal and group attachments.

This ICDM model positions the emotional continuum of freedom and bonding as a culture-general factor in the process of decision making. The specific conceptualization between particular cultures may vary, but emotions related to attachments are perceived as culture-general and are posited to be conceptually related to the emotions of freedom and the emotions of bonding. This is a continuum since one can experience various levels of freedom while also having an emotional bonding attachment. To pursue freedom is to reason with the emotion of feeling free. "How can I feel more alive?" "How can I feel free?" "How can I avoid being trapped?" People who highly value personal freedom reason with such questions. Likewise, societal freedom can dominate one's decisions. "Will others feel more freedom?" "How can I ensure my friends are free?" "If it feels like freedom, one should do it." For instance, "If I buy this car, will I feel freer to travel and does this offset any lack of freedom I have in my finances?"

Figure 2   Logic of Emotion

(3-d axis)
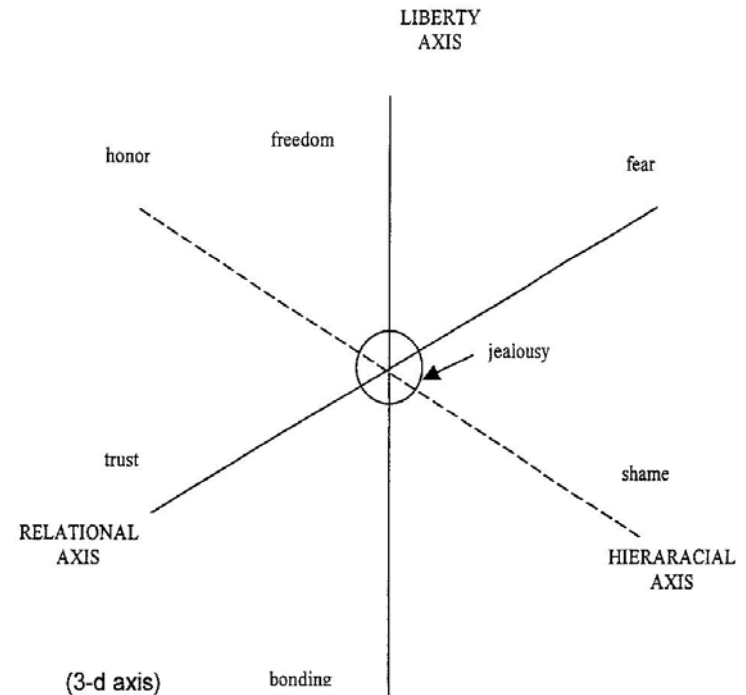
This Bonding Preference considers the possibility of forming bonds when making decisions. "Will I be bound to something or someone?" "Will this decision restrict my freedom?" "Will I be obligated to someone?" For instance, "If I choose to take a particular job, will that lead to bondage to the demands of the job?" "If I choose to be this person's friend, will I be bound to him in a way I do not wish to be?"

Relational Axis: A Continuum from Trust to Fear

Within the logic of emotion, trust and fear play an important role and have been conceptualized as a relational axis of emotions. Trust and fear imply relationships – interpersonal, group, intra-personal, and impersonal relationships. The impact of trust and fear within relationships dynamically affects the

nature of these relationships. In the ICDM model, trust and fear are conceptualized as factors integral to the process of decision making.

Anxiety/uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988) positioned the emotional element of anxiety as a significant factor in decisions that manage intercultural experiences. Howard and Sheth (1974) suggested consumer confidence as a factor in consumer behavior. Anxiety and fear and confidence and trust are assessed to be related emotional elements.

Some people have a high preference for trusting others in decision making. Their initial response may be to trust a friend, an authority figure, or a fellow worker. They believe people are basically trustworthy and give almost everyone the benefit of the doubt. The preference of fear in decision making is to take a suspicious position. "What might go wrong here?" "Who might get hurt?" "What is the worst that can happen in this situation?" "How can I avoid more pain?" These are the questions of one who emotionally reasons with fear.

Hierarchical Axis: A Continuum from Honor to Shame

In a hierarchical group system, honor and shame are continually at play. This ICDM model positions the continuum of these two emotions as a culture-general factor in the process of decision making. A psychosocial crisis in Erikson's (1997) life cycles is the crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Erikson put forth shame as a central construct in human development. Huang (1994) identified shame and face as group-oriented constructs. This ICDM model conceptualizes honor and shame as emotional constructs that are akin to the constructs of pride and loss of face.

The Honor Preference is a decision making pattern of seeking to show honor to others and/or to be honored by others. "Who is the person of highest honor in this situation?" "Do people respect me?" "How can I honor another person?" These are the questions of a person with the Honor Preference. Some people make decisions from a Shame Preference. This perspective asks such questions as "How can I keep from being embarrassed in this situation?" "How can I embarrass another to get them to behave?" "How can I keep another from losing face in this situation?" "I don't deserve this much attention or honor, do I?"

Central Construct of Logic of Emotion: Jealousy

The central construct of the logic of emotion in this ICDM model is conceptualized as jealousy. Jealousy is a complex emotion that employs a combination of all the emotional axes. To be jealous for or of someone or something involves trust and fear, honor and shame, freedom and bonding. In order for jealousy to serve as a central construct for the logic of emotion in decision making, it must be shown that jealousy: (1) is a panhuman emotion construct, (2) involves all the elements of emotional logic for decision making, and (3) there are threads of jealousy involved in all decisions.

Can jealousy be substantiated as a panhuman emotional construct? In their analysis of world folk literature from over 100 cultures, Johnson and Price-Williams (1996) make a case for the Oedipus complex as ubiquitous across cultures. The Oedipus complex is based on the struggle between a father and a son over wife-mother. The central emotional element of this complex, according to Freud, is jealousy. Pines (1992) stated "Freud believed that jealousy is rooted primarily in childhood events associated with the Oedipal conflict" (p. 52).

Regarding the universality of jealousy Buss (2000) asserted, "Even among the Ammassalik Eskimos in Greenland, sometimes held up as a culture lacking jealousy, it is not unusual for a husband to kill an interloper who sleeps with his wife. And contrary to Margaret Mead's assertion that Samoans are

entirely lacking in jealousy and 'laugh incredulously at tales of passionate jealousy,' jealousy on Samoa is a prominent cause of violence against rivals and mates; they even have a word for it, *fua*" (p. 31). Does jealousy involve all the elements of emotional logic in decision making? Margaret Mead (1931) in her work on jealousy stated:

In this paper I shall adhere to the more catholic and less special view foreshadowed by Shand: "If it is difficult to define jealousy by its feeling, which sometimes inclines more to fear, sorrow and shame, at others to anger, suspicion and humiliation--we can still define it by its end or function. It is that egoistic side of the system of love which has as its special end the exclusive passions of the loved object, whether this object be a woman, or other person, or power, reputation, or property." I would only amend his definition to expunge the word "exclusive," for many people are jealous of a privilege which they share with others but which they maintain against outsiders (p. 116). It follows that Mead perceived jealousy to involve fear, shame and bonding (a privileged relationship).

But does jealousy involve trust, honor and freedom? In these regards Buss (2000) propose a theory of bond testing through inducing jealousy. "Eliciting jealousy intentionally emerged as an assessment device to gauge the strength of a mate's commitment. Both sexes do it, but not equally" (p. 211). Referring to strategically inducing jealousy, Buss stated, "And it can test the strength of the bond because she can use a man's jealousy as a barometer of the depth of his love. If he reacts to her flirtations with emotional indifference, she knows he lacks commitment; if he gets jealous, she knows he's in love" (p. 214). When jealousy is viewed through the lens of bond testing, this emotional construct takes on positive emotional qualities. The purpose of evoking jealousy is to increase a sense of confidence in the other's commitment--to better trust the other's bonding intentions. The result of bond testing, if successful, is a sense of honor. That the other is truly committed and thereby honors the person with privileged access. That honor and trust affords a sense of freedom within the privileged bond. Jealousy can thereby be viewed as equally involving trust and fear, honor and shame, freedom and bonding.

The last criterion for jealousy as a central construct for the logic of emotions is that treads of jealousy must be evident in all decisions. There is weak logic for such a direct claim. However, if the treads of jealousy can be linked directly to two other emotions, a case can more readily be made. First, jealousy can be associated with the negative emotion of envy. Second, jealousy can be associated with the positive emotion of delight.

Clanton (1998) made a connection between jealousy and envy. He stated: It is widely believed that jealousy and envy are the same emotion. In fact, although jealousy and envy often are mixed together in real life, they are responses to quite different situations. Jealousy always involves an attempt to protect a valued relationship (especially marriage) from a perceived threat (especially adultery). Envy is resentment toward someone who has some desirable object or quality that one does not have and cannot get (p. 305). Though jealousy, in Clanton's view, is often misinterpreted as envy, he established that the two are often mixed together. The treads of jealousy can be seen in the emotion of envy. By extension, the treads of envy can be seen in all economic decision making and all relational decision making that involve any form of economics.

Treads of jealousy can also be established in the positive emotion of delight. Delight has the quality of desirability. All decisions can be construed to meet some desirable criteria. The test of bonding through invoking jealousy has the desirable consequence of knowledge of a commitment to a privileged relationship. Overall, the position that jealousy can be viewed as the central construct of the logic of emotion is tenuous. Nevertheless, jealousy is a panhuman emotion that is easily perceived across cultures but not easily perceived as involved in the emotional logic of all decisions. Intuitively, jealous is posited as a central construct that will yield rich research data in intercultural relations.
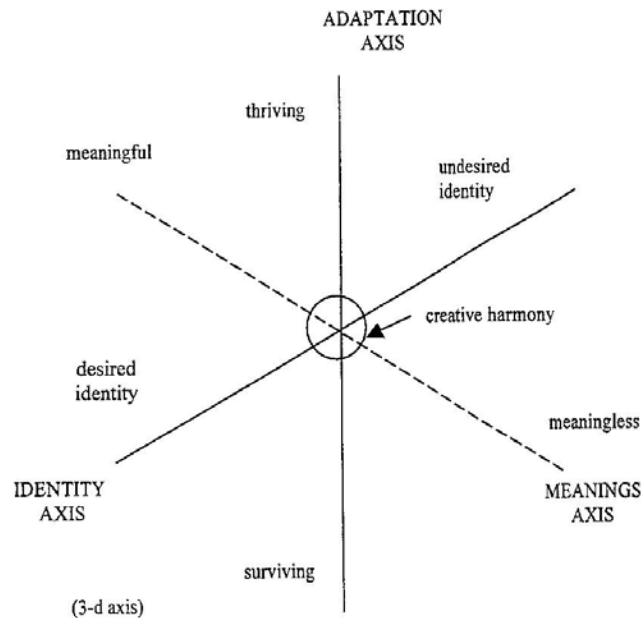
Imagined Outcomes

Likelihood of outcomes is an element of expectancy-value theory (Feather, 1982). And consumer outcomes are conceptualized as an essential factor within the Engle-Kollat-Blackwell consumer behavior model. The construct of imagined outcomes in the ICDM model is posited to involve three axes: adaptation, meanings and identity. The central construct of imagined outcomes is posited as creative harmony (see Figure 3).

As a process, the logic of intellect and emotions both have a time element embedded in them. That time element can be conceptualized as imagined outcomes. While acknowledging that the duration of time implicit in imagination is culture-specific, this ICDM model positions imagination into the non-present as a culture-general construct. That non-present can be either in the past or the future. A future imagined outcomes emphases the possibility of decisions changing the present. A past imagined outcomes emphasis the possibility of re-interpreting the past with present decisions.

Briefly, the reasonableness of these three axes may be approached from an analysis of human conflicts. Conflicts fought defending or extending identities include racial, ethnic, caste and gender alienations as well as national borders struggles. Conflicts involving meanings include ideological struggles, such as capitalism versus communism, and religious

Figure 2 Imagined Outcomes

ADAPTATION AXIS

thriving

meaningful

undesired identity

creative harmony

desired identity

meaningless

IDENTITY AXIS

MEANINGS AXIS

surviving

(3-d axis)

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struggles, such as Christianity versus Islam. Furthermore, adaptation struggles may be conceptualized to include economic class struggles. Most wars involve a combination of these elements of identity, meaning, and adaptation.

Ideas for Future Research

Many research possibilities flow from the ICDM model. Mapping decision making preferences for numerous cultures and subcultures is a possibility. The comparison of results can then lead to implications for intercultural relations. Multicultural teams can be trained using the ICDM model to help develop their abilities to decide together.

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