



METROPOLIS 2009

16.9.2009

Workshop:

**Acculturation and mutual accommodation:
immigrant and host-national perspectives**

***Intercultural Communication Challenges
of Host Culture Nationals:***

The Finnish Civil Servants Mult-ethnic Customer contacts

Kielo Brewis, PhD



Kielo Brewis

Stress in the Multi-ethnic Customer Contacts of the Finnish Civil Servants

Developing Critical Pragmatic
Intercultural Professionals



DOCTORAL THESIS: Publication and Thesis Defence info

**Stress in the Multi-ethnic Customer Contacts of the Finnish
Civil Servants:**

Developing Critical Pragmatic Intercultural Professionals

Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities 103

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Jyväskylä University

Faculty of Humanities

Communications Studies; Intercultural Communication

Opponent: Dr Milton Bennett, IDRI, Milano, Italy

Custos: Professor Liisa Salo-Lee





Empirical data & research method

- ◆ **Customer contact personel in two govt. dept. with ethnically non-Finnish clients**
 - ❑ **The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri / DOI)**
 - ❑ **The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA)**

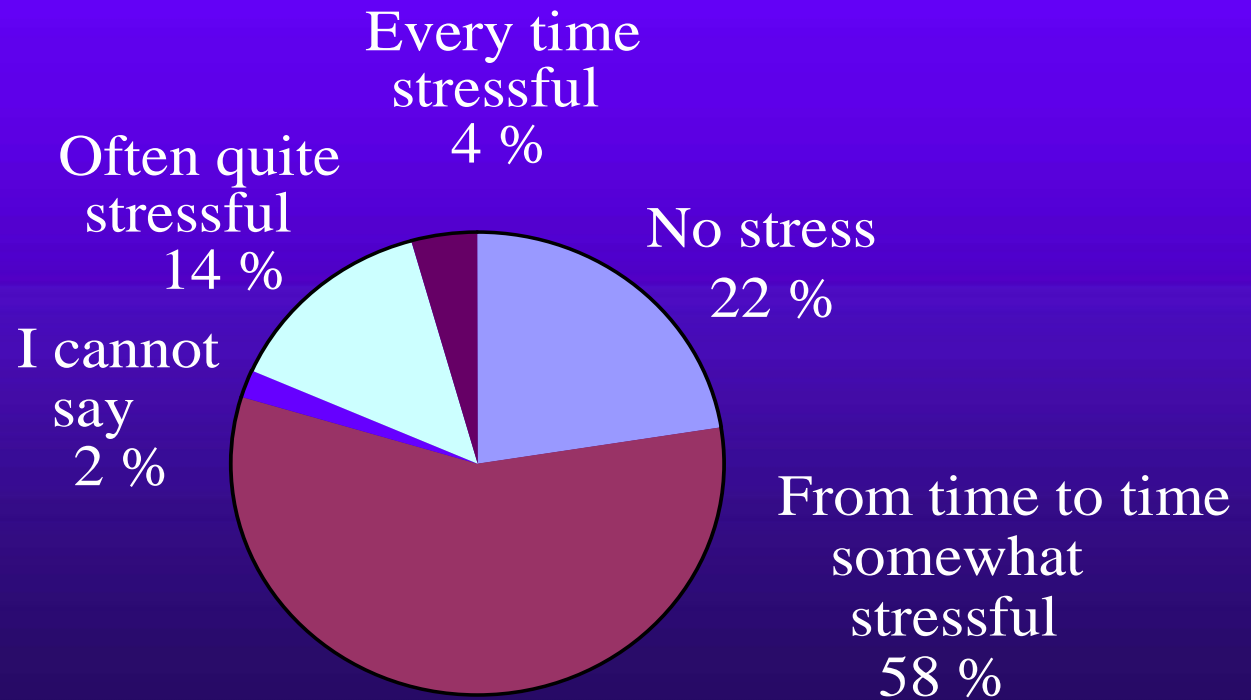
- ◆ **Questionnaire: quantitive and qualitative data**
 - ❑ **General stressfulness of multi-ethnic customer contacts**
 - ❑ **Respondents views on:**
 - ❑ **Good and bad communication in official contexts**
 - ❑ **Pros and cons of multi-ethnic customer contacts**
 - ❑ **Tackling the challenges of intercultural communication**
 - ❑ **Ten pre-set stress factors**
 - ❑ **Estimating subjective feeling of stress with each factor**
 - ❑ **Placing the factors in order of stressfulness**
 - ❑ **Free comments on how and why stress is experienced**



MIGRI & KELA

Multiethnic customer contacts

General stressfulness: Telephone contacts



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Multiethnic customer contacts



GENERAL STRESSFULNESS

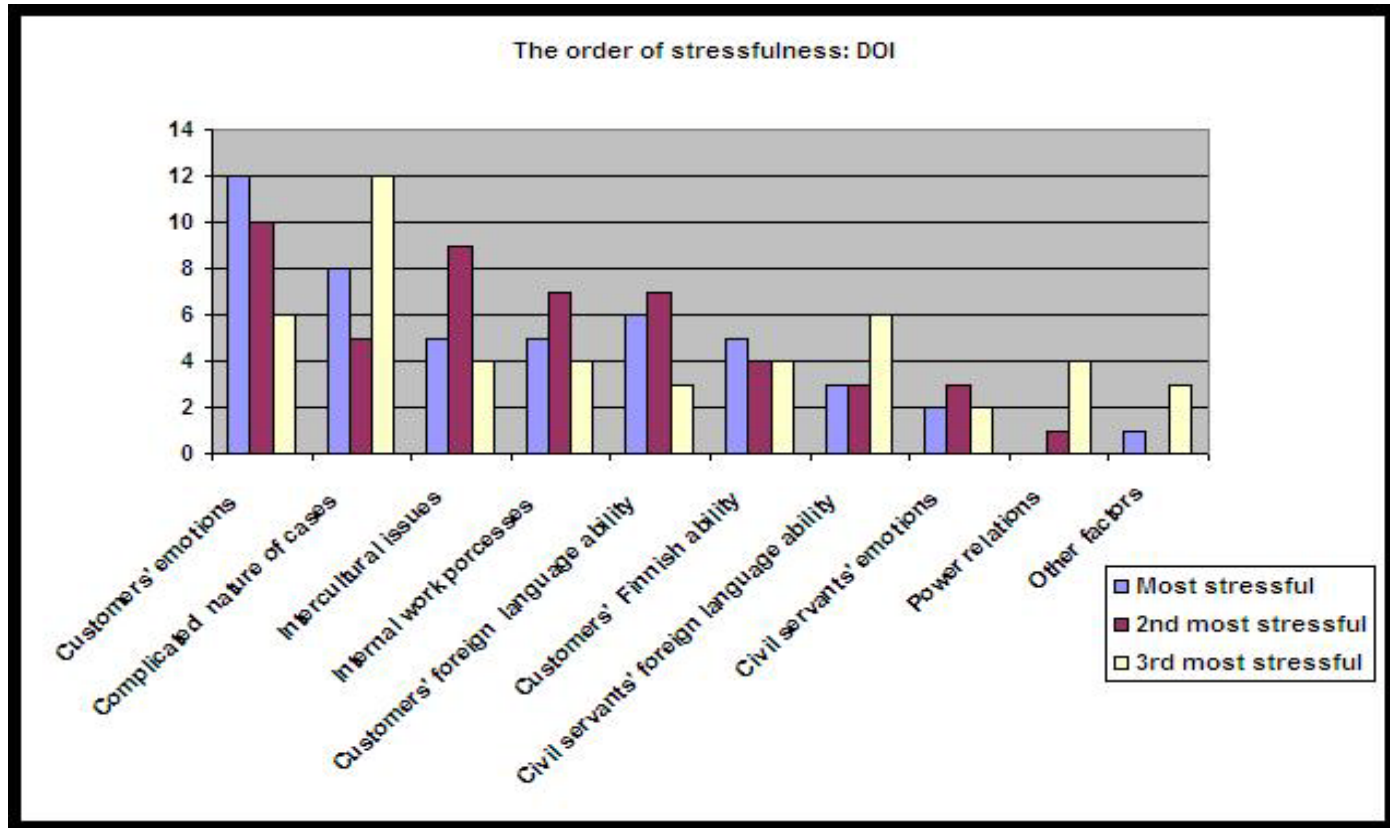
Face-to-face contacts

- **Every time stressful** **0 %**
- **Often quite stressful** **5 %**
- **From time to time** **38 %**
- **somewhat stressful**
- **I cannot say** **33 %**
- **No stress** **24 %**

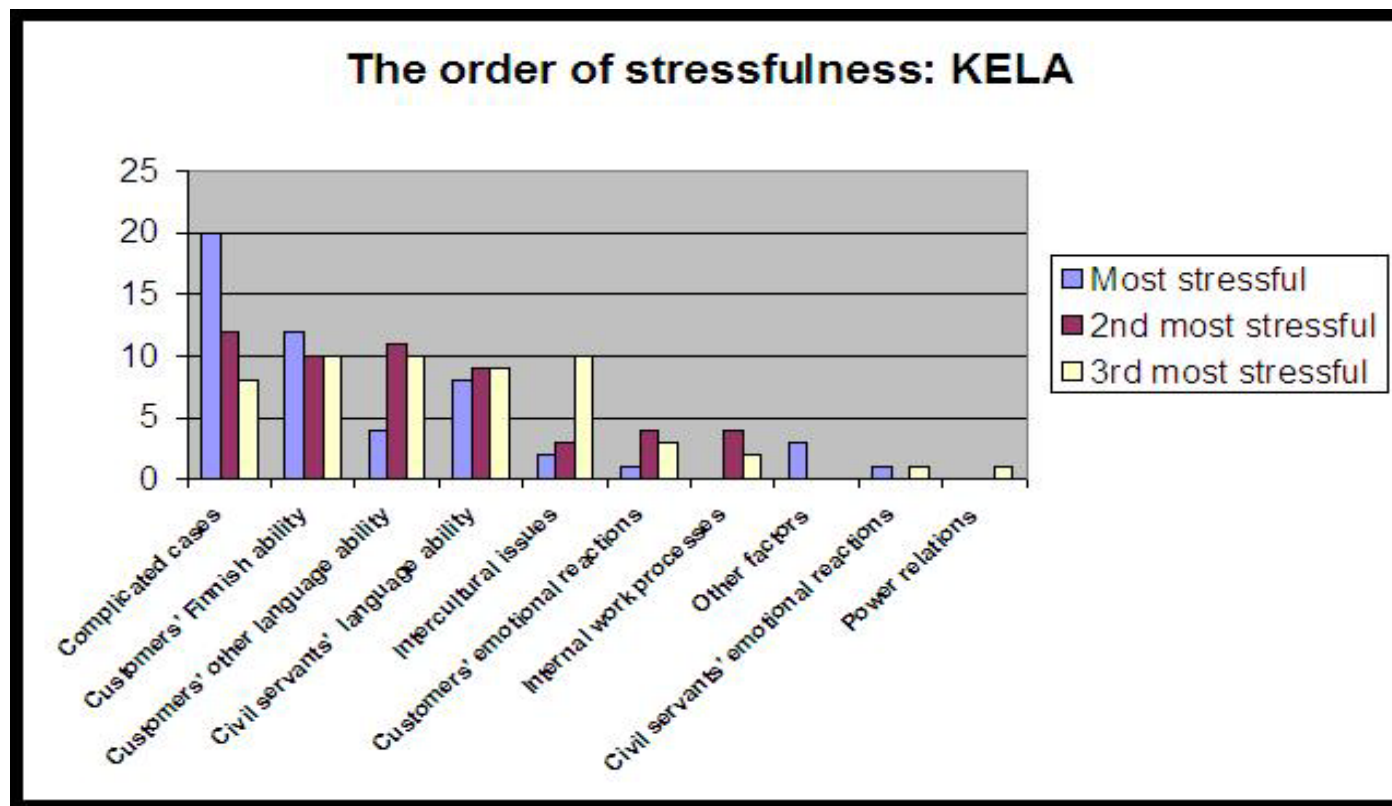


STRESS FACTORS IN MULTI-ETHNIC CUSTOMER CONTACTS

Directorate of Immigration (UVI)



STRESS FACTORS IN MULTI-ETHNIC CUSTOMER CONTACTS Social Insurance Institution (KELA)



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Multiethnic customer contacts

Total stress percentages



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◆ Telephone contacts

- Language (cs) **79 %**
- Complicated case **76 %**
- Work process **68 %**
- Emotional reactions (c) **62 %**
- Foreign language (c) **54 %**
- Cultural differences **61 %**
- Emotional reactions (cs) **56 %**
- Finnish language (c) **54 %**
- Other factors **44 %**
- Power relations **29 %**

◆ Face-to-face contacts

- Complicated case **73 %**
- Language (cs) **65 %**
- Emotional reactions (c) **54 %**
- Foreign language (c) **53 %**
- Work processes **49 %**
- Cultural differences **47 %**
- Emotional reactions (cs) **47 %**
- Finnish language (c) **46 %**
- Other factors **44 %**
- Power relations **25 %**



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Stress factors in intercultural customer service



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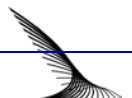
DATA SAMPLE:

Civil servants' emotional reactions:

Only 8th place from the 10 stress factors listed !!!

What does this indicate about the Finnish communication style?

- ❖ Finnish officials do not show emotions in their customer contacts. They take care of the 'business' as neutrally and effectively as possible, applying the 'equal service to all' principle
- ❖ How could ethnically non-Finnish customers possibly misinterpret this kind of communication strategy?



Migri : COMMENTS ON CUSTOMERS' EMOTIONAL REACTIONS



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'Working with non-Finnish customers is stressful, if the customer shows emotional reactions, but if one takes care of the case with a matter-of-fact attitude, without any emotion, even a very difficult matter does not cause stress at all.'

'Often clear pretense is detected.'

'I take an extremely negative view on crying customers. I really do not understand why it should be our job to play a psychologist and try to understand the customers emotional reactions and try to pacify them. I do not think it is part of a civil servant's task. We have neither the training nor the preparedness for this. I personally do not feel that I studied at the university to be doing this kind of task.'

'I do not understand why the customers can not behave rationally when dealing with the authorities. What do they think to gain with their strong emotional expressions? Or, if they cannot prevent their emotions, why can they not avoid dealing with the authorities until they have gained better control of themselves!'



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What is 'good' communication in customer contact?

How is the opposite conceived?



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- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CLEAR , FEW WORDS | vs. TOO VERBOSE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MATTER OF FACT | vs. OVERLY EMOTIONAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CALM QUIET | vs. TOO NOISY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PRECISE | vs. UNNECESSARY REPETITION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXPERT ADVISE | vs. TOO PERSONAL |

What is good communication in customer contact?

Example answers:

- Who speaks, whose concern, what facts, what is asked?
- One phone call ought to be enough to clarify everything!
- Precise, impartial, consistent, neutral communication



KELA

**What is 'bad' communication?
How do the customers perceive it?**



- Blabbering, overly polite** vs. **What IS polite?**
- Speaking 'non-business'** vs. **What IS business**
- Negative feelings** vs. **The role of personal touch**
- Mumbling** vs. **Showing respect to officials**
- Assuming things** vs. **Whose role to ask**
- Withholding information** vs. **Whose role to give info**
- Unclear expressions** vs. **Cultural 'Yes' and 'No'**





Qualitative data from the free comments

In the free comments, intercultural issues were mentioned under **ALL** the stress factors

□ Indicates lack of intercultural awareness

- Limited knowledge or ignorance concerning cultural issues:
 - cultural misinterpretations concerning how things are handled
'Their culture is not rational'
 - cultural factors mistaken as other issues, e.g. personality factor
'He is rude to me!'

□ Need for awareness raising & training in various areas





INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

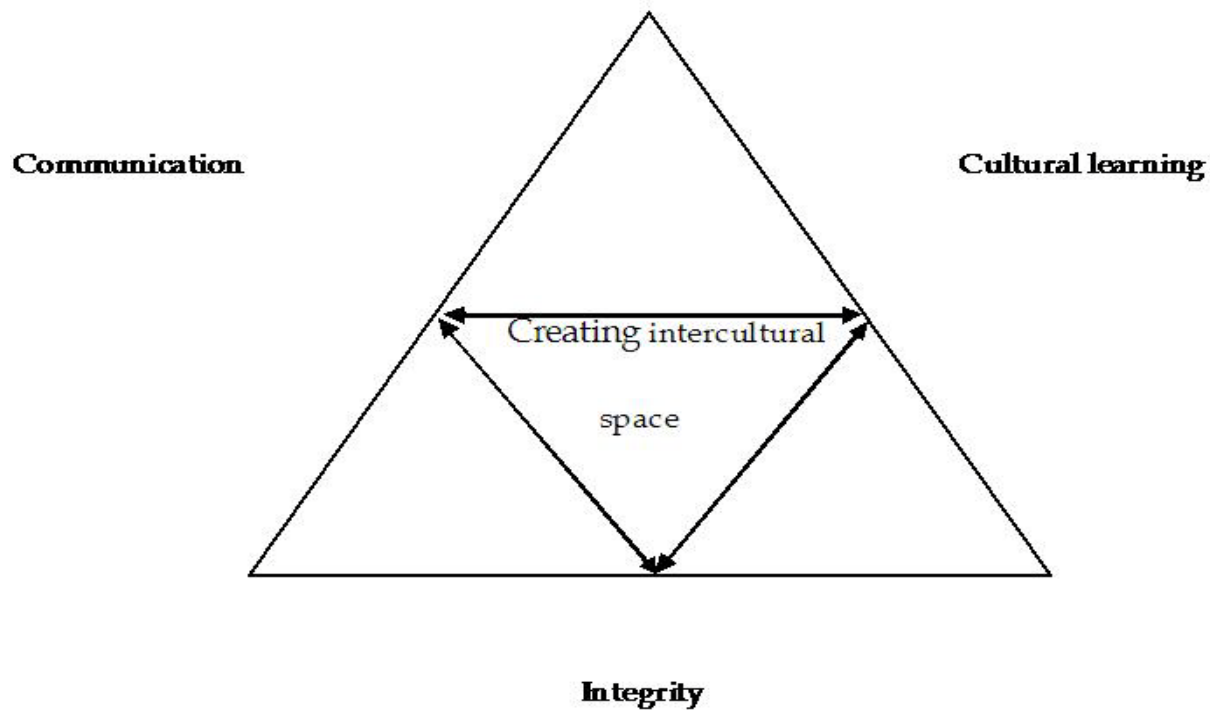
CRITICAL PRAGMATIC INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE		
	Surface level: EFFECTIVENESS	Deep level: SENSITIVITY
	COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE	IDENTITY ISSUES
Readiness: Intercultural professional currency	SKILLS	AWARENESS
Activated state: Mindful intercultural communication	BEHAVIOUR	ATTITUDES

Figure 1. The intercultural competence of a critical pragmatic intercultural professional





INTERCULTURAL LEARNING VISTAS



CREATING INTERCULTURAL SPACE

a dialectic view

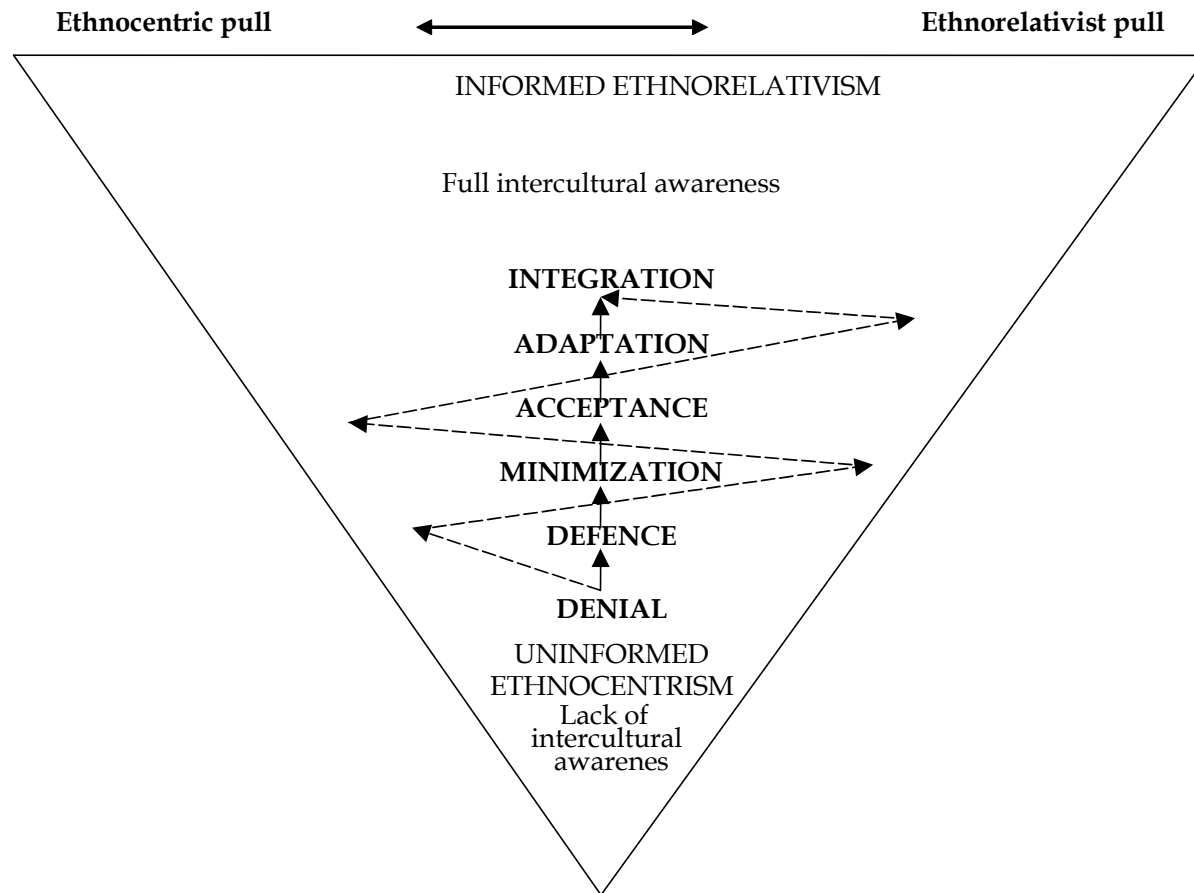


FIGURE 24. A dialectic view of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity:
Creating intercultural space between the ethnocentric and ethnorelativist pull





INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AS A TWO-WAY PROCESS

- ❖ **Mutual critique**



- ❖ **Self-reflection**

on cultural issues by both the host culture adaptees and the immigrant in intercultural communication situations.



- ❖ **Mutual adaptation**

&

- ❖ **Mutual change**



CRITICAL PRAGMATIC APPROACH



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STRATEGIC PROFESSIONAL INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE :

Critical pragmatic intercultural professional as agents of change

- ✓ **INTERCULTURAL METACOMMUNICATION COMPETENCE**
- ✓ **INTERCULTURALLY SENSITISED PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**
 - ❖ How to discuss the issues at hand
 - instead of what is the 'right' thing to say
 - ❖ How to display intercultural sensitivity & respect
 - vs. apparent mono-culturalism
 - ❖ How to get results with wider effect
 - Instead of responding to the immediate situation only



A TRAINING MODEL FOR INTERCULTURAL PROFESSIONALISM

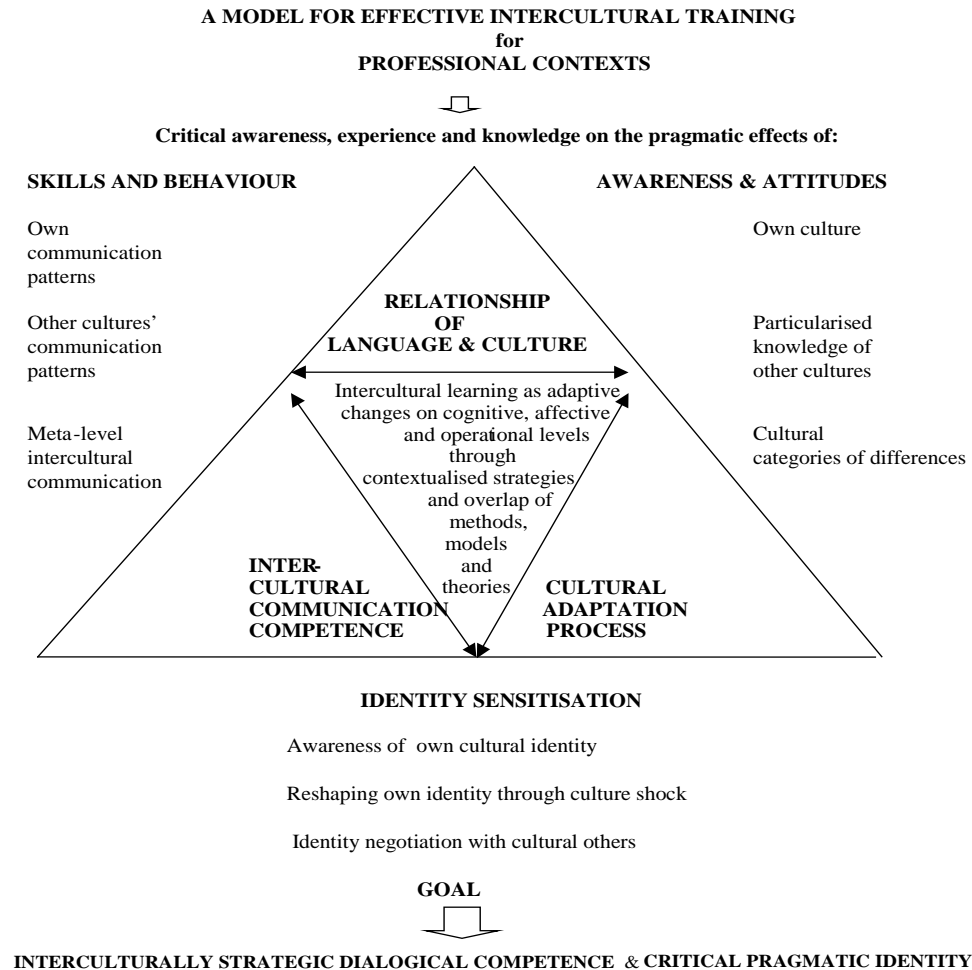


Figure 29. Training for critical pragmatic intercultural competence

