

# Communicating in Collectivistic Culture: Relationship between Interdependent Self-Construal and Cooperative Communication in Cross-Cultural Communication Model

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**Abstract.** This concept paper proposes that when companies have expanded their business and operation throughout the Asian countries, the success or failure of a company abroad depends on how effectively its business negotiators can apply their cross-cultural communication skills in a new cultural environment. At the forefront of this change is interdependent self-construal, which stands as communication medium on interaction goals (international business negotiation outcome) in collectivistic culture. The international trade may bring about a lot in terms of cross-cultural communication and international business negotiation, but adopting cooperative communication in the international business negotiations will create more integrative agreements between the international business negotiators. Many scholars believe that if both parties have similarities in communication styles, it will lead to positive interaction (cooperative communication) that contributes to cooperation and influences the interaction goals (negotiation outcome). This paper offers critical insight into the theoretical link between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals. The proposed cross-cultural communication model uses interdependent self-construal and cooperative communication to understand when collectivistic business negotiators develop relationships that promotes positive interaction goals (negotiation outcome).

## 1 Introduction

Every culture is concerned with the presentation of their face and in negotiation; the impact of face concerns is likely to happen because there are many opportunities for a person's face to be threatened [13]. Despite the extensive studies on negotiation, the literature only focused within the tradition of research on international organizational behaviour focusing on single-culture descriptive studies and multicultural comparative studies rather than examining cross-cultural interaction [10]. In addition, past literature suggested applying

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Hall's low-high context cultural dimension to study East Asian countries in intercultural collaboration as it was claimed that people from different cultural backgrounds have different communication styles [12]. However, Hall's low-high context cultural dimension only focuses on the impact of culture on communication but it fails to explain the face concerns during the cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, at least there are three situations that explain why the need to have inclusive cross-cultural communication model that identified as important step to understand cross-cultural communication especially in international business negotiation. First, in previous interdependent self-construal studies had linked with building a relationship [11]. However, the interdependent self-construal studies yet to recognize how people deal, negotiate and communicate across cultures with their business counterparts with different communication styles in collectivistic culture. Each individual has both independent and interdependent self-construal [11]. Therefore, a model that emphasizes interdependent self-construal that predicts the communicative behaviour of collectivistic culture is needed. Second, the cooperative communication is important to be examined in cross-cultural communication because it explains positive interactions by linking cooperative behaviour to cooperative relationship. Previous studies indicated that interdependence self-construal emphasizes individual goals [6], however it is suggested that priority should be given on how to connect self-construal with relationship, especially in understanding the differences for intergroup relations, business and peaceful coexistence in diverse and interconnected world. Finally, within cross-cultural communication interaction goals that emerge from interaction during cross-cultural negotiation and how conflicting goals shape communicative behavior. A study by [9] indicated that conflicting interaction goals shape interaction tactics and outcome. The link between goals and negotiation outcomes is more complicated when identity of the counterpart is concerned [9]. Therefore, this present paper will address the negotiators' interdependent self-construal and how they predict communicative behavior, communication styles and interaction goals to reach cooperative approach in negotiation.

## **2 Objectives**

This paper aims to provide a proposition model that identifies the impact of differences in communication styles in reaching cooperative outcome in international business negotiations. Specifically, the aim of the article is to answer the following question: What are the underlining mechanisms of the relationship between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals? By answering this question, it will enable us to understand towards advancing the current knowledge of cross-cultural communication especially in negotiation within collectivistic cultural context.

## **3 Review of Literature**

### **3.1 Relationship of Interdependent Self-construal and Cooperative Communication**

Self-construal is one's self-image and consists of independent and interdependent self-construal [7]. Self-construal is used in previous studies to explain differences in communication styles [7]. The study of interdependent self and cooperative communication, however, has two other highly significant consequences for the field of cross-cultural communication in collectivistic context, and they are the focus here. First, the study of interdependent self and cooperative communication has renewed and extended cross-cultural communication understands of interdependent self or culture and casts it as

central to analyse communication behaviours of business negotiators in international business negotiations. Second, the study of interdependent self and cooperative communication has led to the realization that people are not separated but instead they are linked together. H.R. Markus [6] suggested that we require each other to complete each other even though culture shapes our thinking, feeling and action. Although [6] claimed that there was no direct link between face or face work and self-construal, it was found that when communicating with others, there was indirect influence of individualism-collectivism with personal goals, communication styles and face concerns. Thus, independents tend to be more self-face oriented than other-face oriented while high interdependent people value other-face and mutual-face concerns. For that reason, high interdependent people prefer to appeal to other-face concerns in conflict situations in order to maintain the harmony of the relationship. This study investigates the relationship with others which defines the interdependent self-construal.

There are limited evidence that provide explanation about relationship between interdependent self-construal and perceived cooperative communication in collectivistic culture. Past literature defined cooperative communication as communicative behaviours lead to sharing of achievement of workgroup goals [8]. Scholars (e.g., [4]) asserted that cooperative communication is an interaction in a way that encourages mutual goals and solve issues for mutual benefit. In our model, cooperative communication, directly influenced by interdependent self-construal exerts an immediate impact on group's interaction goals.

In conclusion, interdependent self-construal serves as an important factor influencing the cooperative communication but remain minimal attention in past literature, it was proposed that individuals with an interdependent self-construal begin building a relationship [11] which is important in managing, negotiating and communicating across cultures to achieve the corporations' goals in global business [3]. Within the framework of face-negotiation theory studies, it was suggested that face concerns are very important as it determines the communicative behaviour of international business negotiation. However, there are many significant queries remain unaddressed in the literature of face-negotiation theory and one of the questions is how and whether similarities and differences in communication styles will influence the cooperative communication which produce positive interaction goals and vice versa. Therefore, this current study addresses this gap contributes to an enhanced understanding of the mediating relationship of the cooperative communication with the interdependent self-construal and interaction goals (negotiation outcome) in collectivistic culture. A consideration of the relationship between interdependent self-construal and cooperative communication may open doors to new understanding of the role of the self in cross-cultural communication and business negotiation in collectivistic culture.

On the basis of the above literature review, it may be postulated that interdependent self-construal and cooperative communication have direct dynamic link to define the relationship of cultural norms and communication styles as it remains an uncertain issue in the research. Hence, if the relationship of interdependent self-construal and cooperative negotiation is positive, it positively affects the communicative behaviours. Likewise, if it is negative, it will negatively affect the communicative behaviours. Thus, this paper proposes the following proposition.

**Proposition 1:** Interdependent self-construal has positive association with cooperative communication.

### **3.2 Relationship of Dimensions of Culture and Interaction Goals**

There is limited literature that provided the link between cooperative communication and interaction goals in collectivistic culture. In previous studies, cooperative communication generally focused on workgroup research as a communication technique which considers cultural sensitivities, values and practices [5]. Cooperative communication is also considered as the key objective of international business negotiations as it leads to positive negotiation outcome to the negotiators. The cooperative communication is defined as individuals become more cooperative in reaching work-related goals with other group members by exchanging more information, sharing ideas and resources, showing concern and interest in what others want to achieve and give assistance, tend to be more responsive, supportive, and open to each other's needs, and consult and discuss issues to reach mutually fulfilling agreements [1]. Tjosvold explained cooperative as collaborators who are open to being influenced by one another, use their power to facilitate each other's goal accomplishment, accurately, perceive each other's needs, view the relationship as being characterized by trust and mutual helpfulness and like each other [1]. Therefore, this is also the aim of the international business negotiators to enhance cooperative communication as it can probably increase the frequency of communication and collaboration.

On the other hand, interaction goals are considered as negotiation outcome of international business negotiations in this study. Interaction goals are defined as capability to engage in acting, thinking or behaving in certain ways with others that will also influence the other party's attitudes or behaviours [9]. Generally, when people enter negotiation, the negotiators believe they hold incompatible goals but to produce positive outcome, both parties must cooperate for mutual agreement [9]. These studies demonstrated that goals were the key to motivation in negotiation [2] and interaction goals were the negotiation outcome [9]. However, past literature remains less explanatory in term of international business negotiations link between both concepts of cooperative communication and interaction goals. Research has shown that a step onward is needed to provide explanation and identification of emotions on the interaction goals which indicates that how negotiators' trust and distrust affect an individual's positive and negative perceptions on willingness to cooperate [9]. Despite the fact that cooperative communication impacts on interaction goals is less examined in many previous studies, this study improves the initiative to examine the role of cooperative communication on interaction goals (negotiation outcome).

Based on the extensive reviews, previous studies had not measured the relationship between cooperative communication and international business negotiation outcomes (i.e. interaction goals) in a collectivistic business culture and environment. Therefore, it is necessary to examine interdependent self-construal, cooperative communication and interaction goals from collectivistic cultures among the international business negotiators. Hence, if the relationship of cooperative communication and interaction goals is positive, it positively affects the communication behaviours. Likewise, if it is negative, it will negatively affect the communication behaviours. Based on this, this paper proposes that:-

Preposition 2: Cooperative communication associates with interaction goals in international business negotiations.

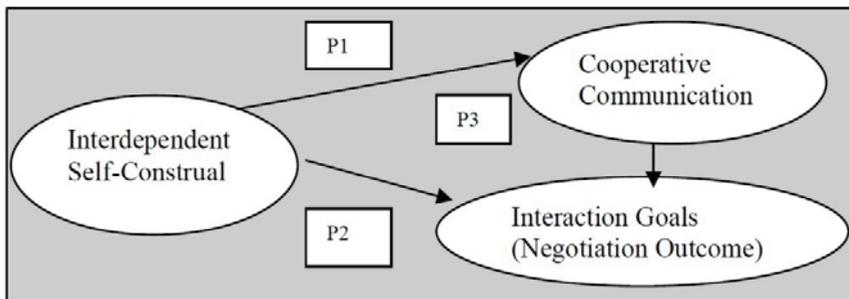
### **3.3 Cooperative Communication as Mediation**

Cooperative communication is the key factor of the interaction goals as it serves as the significant predictor of it as suggested in communication styles across culture. In addition, it was found that in previous studies by many researchers that cooperative communication

is a significant fact that cooperative communication also have role to explain the relation of the cooperative behavior [5]. However, there is no empirical compilation and enough studies in the past have been conducted to explain the mediating role of cooperative communication in the connection of the exposure of interdependent self-construal to interaction goals which is proposed in this present study. Based on this, this paper proposes that:-

Preposition 3: Cooperative communication mediates the relationships between interdependent self-construal and interaction goals.

On the basis of the above arguments, we put forth the idea of the following preposition.



**Fig.1.** Relationship between Interdependent Self-construal, Cooperative Communication and Interaction Goals (Negotiation Outcome)

## 4 Limitations and Suggestions

In spite of the fact that this paper is a theoretical contribution, but this is still not without the some prospective limitations. The key limitation of this paper is conceivably it is focused on cross-cultural communication in international business negotiations, in explaining the link of the interdependent self-construal as the main factor that impacts the international business negotiation outcome but it is not the only predictors for the negotiation outcome.

Secondly, literature recommended some other imperative factors which also need explanation of their relationship with antecedents like cooperative communication and goal-oriented group behaviour [5]. It is proposed that cooperative communication should be treated as the mediator and interaction goals as the outcome behaviour. Thus, it would be enviable for future research to study the influence of cooperative communication other than interdependent self-construal in defining and clarifying certain other components which have link with the communication behaviour.

Thirdly, this paper is only temp to explain the relationship of exposure of interdependent self-construal and interaction goals in literature it remains in consistent to explain some elements like interdependency between the two parties for the purpose of effective communication processes which are operationally defined as equal participation, cooperation and respect [7]. Even though study had proven that interdependence was positively associated with cooperation, there were other important factors which were being acknowledged that will influence the communication process which are ethnic, gender and age [7]. Thus, it would be suggested that future research should focus on relationship among situation, self-construal, and communication process. The reason is it may be that

cooperation and respecting a group lead to a feeling of interdependence with the other members or the feelings of interdependence lead to cooperation and respect [7].

Lastly, this paper is only a theoretical exploration as it further deepens our understanding of the impact of interdependent self-construal on international business negotiations. It is expected that this work leads towards explanation of the role of interdependent self-construal, cooperative communication and interaction goals in collectivistic culture to address the relation of exposure of the cross-cultural communication which may be studied further to determine the empirical findings about the other dynamics of cross-cultural communication in international business negotiations. According to [12] international negotiators require additional skills and cultural competence compared to those who are involved in domestic business negotiations. When there is frequent communication between two parties, both parties already adjust to each other communication styles [7].

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