

Relational Economics and Organization Governance

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Tobias Grünfelder
Josef Wieland *Editors*

A Relational View on Cultural Complexity


Implications for Theory and Practice



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Relational Economics and Organization Governance

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Preface

This book is a manifestation of a learning journey that has been underway for a couple of years now, gathering people from different backgrounds around discussions on the implications of a relational view on cultural complexity. This started with the idea of conducting a Delphi study to look at concepts and determinants of transcultural competence. This project was made possible by Zeppelin University's Leadership Excellence Institute, where a theory of Relational Economics is being developed under the lead of Josef Wieland. In this context, the research group on transcultural competence with Josef Wieland as well as Julika Baumann Montecinos working as a research associate and Tobias Grünfelder and Jessica Geraldo Schwengber as doctoral students was established in 2019 to conduct various projects, one of them being the Delphi study.

With 50 experts participating in the Delphi study, the results have since driven our work and exciting academic and practical debates, including in this book, showing us that we asked relevant questions at the time. Based on the initial findings of the study, published in 2022 under the title "What if we focus on developing commonalities? Results of an international and interdisciplinary Delphi study on transcultural competence" in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, we have now invited the members of the Delphi group to link the common findings back to their own work.

As we did in the Delphi study, we consider it promising if the focus is not only on consensus building, but also on aggregating ideas and connecting different perspectives in processes of exchange and discussion. We thus aim to drive the spirit of sharing, learning from and with each other, and co-creating meaning across cultures and disciplines—as lies at the core of our transcultural approach—and we could not be more grateful that so many experts have accepted this invitation and developed high-level contributions to this book. Taking the time to conduct an intragroup peer review process was again in line with our transcultural approach and has given us further shared insights which we appreciate a lot.

And so, this book represents an important next step on our learning journey, which we are already very excited and curious to continue. We welcome everyone to join us in this project and contribute to an ever better understanding of the potentials of a relational view of cultural complexity.

Villingen-Schwenningen, Germany
Friedrichshafen, Germany
Friedrichshafen, Germany

Julika Baumann Montecinos
Tobias Grünfelder
Josef Wieland

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Shifting Towards a Relational View

Delphi Study on Transcultural Competence: Summary and Reflections on a Call for a Relational Approach



Tobias Grünfelder and Julika Baumann Montecinos

Abstract In a world shaped by cultural complexity, knowledge about, and tolerance of, cultural differences seem to be insufficient to successfully cooperate and create value across borders. In this spirit, an international and interdisciplinary Delphi study on transcultural competence was conducted with a panel of around 50 experts. This article summarizes the main findings of this Delphi study that lays the foundations for the contributions collected in this book. As a main insight and common denominator of the study, a relational view on cultural complexity could be identified as a promising step for further debate and research. Such a relational perspective includes considering individuals and organizations in their relational context and invites cross-cultural scholarship to address cultural complexity (differences, commonalities, similarities, etc.) in its relational nature. The study findings thereby highlight that while striving for similarities would end up in homogenization, a pursuit of commonalities involves connecting and building relations that allow differences to co-exist. Against this backdrop, transcultural competence could be particularly associated with the connotation of “beyond” and thus be defined as referring to a general competence of individuals or organizations to intentionally develop new commonalities in contexts of cultural complexity. It refers to the ability and willingness to engage in context-specific processes of constructing new shared meaning and action beyond existing practices by shared experience and mutual learning as a means and result of being in relation. Accordingly, the process that the Delphi group has undergone together, including the preparation of this edited book, represents a transcultural approach in the sense of shared learning stemming from shared experience, the development of new commonalities in contexts of cultural complexity as well as the formation of a community of practice.

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1 Why a Relational View on Cultural Complexity?

“A Relational View on Cultural Complexity”—the title of this book builds on the findings of an international and interdisciplinary Delphi study conducted in 2020 with a group of around 50 experts, and is meant as an invitation to our field. This invitation refers to the theoretical and practical implications of a relational approach, whose possible relevance was highlighted in the results of the Delphi project. The study, which was launched as a contribution to the conceptual work on “transcultural competence”, had the stated goal of exploring the determinants of developing commonalities in contexts of diversity and of engaging in transcultural cooperation and learning.

The starting point and motivation for the Delphi study arose from previous research carried out at the Leadership Excellence Institute Zeppelin (LEIZ) on transculturality and transcultural leadership. The term “trans” was used precisely to go beyond comparative analyses of cultures and to look closer at the processes of how opportunities for cooperation can be identified and newly established. Against this background, exploring what a shift in focus to commonalities rather than differences can bring forth to pursuing such aspirations has been the research group’s agenda for several years. Thus, the Delphi study built on previous works (cf. Wieland, 2016; Wieland & Baumann Montecinos, 2019, etc.) that shaped its conception and design, and that now allow the framing of the research questions at that time to be understood. Likewise, these conceptual origins elucidate the circumstances from which the need was derived to ask rather new, commonalities-focused questions and embark on corresponding research directions.

The substantial interest in understanding the cultural composition of cooperation constellations and in deriving corresponding implications for the productive use and expansion of cooperation corridors can thus be placed on the epistemological agenda of a theory of relational economics, which has always seen itself as an interdisciplinary project (Baumann Montecinos, 2022; Biggiero et al., 2022; Wieland, 2020, 2022). The rationale for this interest seems obvious, given the observation of complex global networks of economic and social value creation that literally cross borders, involving not only manifold challenges but possibly also opportunities for individual and organizational cooperation and learning. It is against this background that the Delphi study questions were formulated, and the extent and quality of participation in the study allow the interpretation that these are relevant questions to our field.

Over many decades, researchers from different disciplines (social psychology, organizational theory, communication studies, anthropology, and many others), as well as practitioners, have produced a wealth of knowledge helping to understand cultural differences and their effects on various aspects of business, management, and communication in general. Accordingly, intercultural management and intercultural training for organizations have, for a long time, very often been concerned with the identification of and appropriate, effective handling of cultural differences. Pioneers and advocates of the recognition of the factor “culture” in management literature, such as Geert Hofstede (1991), Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner

(2012), Richard Lewis (1996), the authors of the Globe study (2012), and others, have provided cultural dimensions with comparative concepts for national cultures. These are undoubtedly seminal concepts, and the result of decades of thoughtful and thorough work that are now increasingly facing the desire for approaches that move beyond comparative concepts and take into account the complexity and fuzziness of cultural belonging and co-creation (e.g., Bolten, 2020; Bennett, 2017, 2020; Philipps & Sackmann, 2015). In this context, the call for “more positive cross-cultural scholarship” (Barmeyer & Franklin, 2016; Stahl & Tung, 2015) or “reconciliation of cultural dilemmas” (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) that strengthens the productive potentials of diversity, e.g., in terms of innovation and creativity and of leveraging the benefits of cultural diversity, is receiving increasing attention, including current debates on corresponding concepts of competence and learning (Bennett, 2020; Bolten, 2020; Deardorff, 2020; Henze, 2020; Nazarkiewicz, 2020; Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 43).

The Delphi study findings point in this direction and indicate that taking a relational view of cultural complexity could be a promising step for further debate and research. Such a relational perspective includes considering individuals and organizations in their relational context and invites cross-cultural scholarship to address cultural complexity (differences, commonalities, similarities, etc.) in its relational nature. Following the work of Kenneth J. Gergen, “the relational view offers an alternative to the individualist tradition (methodological individualism)” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 43) and is “grounded in a constructionist epistemology which holds that meaning (i.e., how people make sense of themselves and the world) is generated and sustained in the context of ongoing relationships” (Gergen, 1994). Accordingly, in relational theory, individuals are not merely independent entities who enter into relationships, but rather relational constructions themselves that are made and remade in unfolding relational processes (Crevani & Endrissat, 2016; McCauley & Palus, 2021). Such an approach does not consider “individuals as being detached from context and as possessing a fixed set of competences, and thus ties in with an ongoing discussion in the field of intercultural relations (Chi & Suthers, 2015; Martin, 2015; Szkudlarek et al., 2020) and the social sciences in general (for examples in relational sociology see Emirbayer, 1997; Donati, 2011; Donati & Archer, 2015; Stegbauer, 2002, 2008; in relational psychology see Gergen, 2009; in relational cultural studies see Bolten, 2014; in linguistics see Spencer-Oatey, 2011; in relational leadership see Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; in relational economics see Biggiero et al., 2022; Wieland, 2020; in sustainability studies see Walsh et al., 2020)” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 43). It is against this backdrop that a relational approach, as it similarly resulted throughout the Delphi project and thus confirmed the aforementioned trends in the field, could be considered “as a method used to understand, analyze and productively deal with cultural complexity” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 43).

Culture is then in itself a complex relational process, which can be described after Jürgen Bolten (2014) as a network of multiple dynamics of reciprocity between poly-relational collectives and multi-relational individual actors. The concept of cultural complexity, as Sonja Sackmann puts it, “encompasses both ideas: simultaneously

existing multiple cultures that may contribute to a homogenous, differentiated, and/or fragmented cultural context” (Sackmann, 1997, p. 2). In a nutshell, the use of the term cultural complexity is intended to be a call to rethink static categories and boundaries that often simplify and do not adequately reflect the conditions of real life. This call rather aims to consider aspects such as contextuality, the role of practical experience, as well as dynamic processes of relationing and belonging, which might already be indicated here as some central insights from the Delphi project. This includes the assumption of a co-existence and interdependence of differences and commonalities which may lead to the creation of new commonalities beyond existing cooperative realities.

It is against this backdrop that this book aims to take the results of the Delphi study further and offers the authors the opportunity to elaborate on those findings from their particular perspectives. All contributions to this book involve experts from the Delphi study group and take the findings as a common reference point. This represents our intention, as editors and initiators of the Delphi project, to provide a space for further theoretical and practical reflection and interpretation of its results. In addition, the authors were invited to formulate a few “Questions to ponder” at the end of each chapter to trigger further thoughts and research and maintain this shared explorative spirit.

In order to pave the way for this endeavor, this introductory chapter will summarize the main Delphi findings and provide an overview of the book’s content. In doing so, we will combine the overall results, which have already been published elsewhere,¹ with some aspects that we would like to highlight from the qualitative data from Delphi Round 3 and which, especially with regard to individual in-depth chapters in this book, provide what we consider to be a helpful introduction to the content of this volume.

2 Structure and Composition of the Delphi Study on Transcultural Competence

In order to contextualize the Delphi results, some background information about the methodological approach, the composition of the expert group, and the content structure of the study will be provided.

As for the method, a Delphi study is a multi-stage written process for structuring anonymous communication within a larger group of experts, which can be used

¹ The following elaborations are based in part on a journal article published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022). There, the first results of the Delphi study are presented, including access to the questionnaires of all rounds. Permission to reuse parts of this article was granted to us by the journal editor. In this introductory chapter to the book at hand, we summarize those findings and cite this article as a reference and for further analysis.

for different reasons and purposes, such as idea aggregation, prediction of facts, determination of expert views, and consensus finding (Häder, 2014, p. 30). For the Transcultural Competence Delphi process, a combination of idea aggregation, determination of expert views, and consensus finding types was used, and it followed the appropriate methods as introduced by Michael Häder (2014, p. 31ff): The idea aggregation type uses only qualitative questions and evaluations, aiming to produce as many ideas as possible. In the case of the determination of the expert views type, various expert opinions are subjected to quantifiable evaluation and subsequently tested to ascertain whether or not they are accepted by a majority. The consensus finding type triggers the group process through feedback and aims to achieve the highest possible degree of consensus among the participants. Delphi studies have been used in several disciplines (e.g., Hunter, 2005; Kozak & Iefremova, 2014; etc.). In the field of intercultural communication, the Delphi study of Darla Deardorff (2006) on intercultural competence and how it is measured is well known and has inspired further research and debate (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 43).

The present study was conducted in three rounds in 2020,² and an internal conference was subsequently held to discuss the interim results within the group of experts. In the first round, four open-ended questions were asked to generate input and ideas from the experts, and the responses were analyzed using qualitative methods. In the second round, the items and some comments derived from the first round were presented to the experts for quantitative rating and further qualitative input. Building on that, the third round compiled the highest ranked items and selected comments from round two for bundled assessment. In all rounds, the experts were free to comment. Thus, in addition to the goal of reaching consensus, the aim was always to aggregate further input and ideas.

2.1 Composition of the Group of Experts

The understanding and choice of the Delphi method goes hand in hand with the recognition that the experts' input has a central role, from the combination and moderation of which the results emerge collaboratively across the study rounds. Accordingly, Theodore J. Gordon describes the expertise of the Delphi participants as being key to the success of such studies (Gordon, 2009).

The composition of the group of experts for this Delphi study is summarized in the following overview:

² For a detailed description of the three rounds and the respective questionnaires, see Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 44 and appendix).

Composition of the expert group of the Delphi study on Transcultural Competence

Delphi group size and country of origin:

47 experts (23 female and 24 male) from 14 different countries (Austria, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovakia, South Africa, Sudan, UK, USA, and Zambia).

Different disciplinary backgrounds:

- Anthropology (9 experts),
- Cultural sciences (11),
- Economics (10),
- Psychology (13),
- Sociology (11)
- Others (e.g., philosophy, communication theory, and linguistics).

Practitioners with extensive experience:

Over 30 experts have experience in practice as a cross-cultural trainer or consultant.

Selection criteria (following Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Gordon, 2009):

To participate, at least two out of these three criteria had to be fulfilled:

- (a) high level of relevant education and experience
- (b) expertise recognized by a third party and/or
- (c) academic contributions to the field of interculturality or transculturality

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, pp. 44–45).

2.2 Delphi Study Questions

The Delphi study on transcultural competence explored four questions that built on each other.

Questions of the Delphi study on Transcultural Competence

Question 1: “Cultures and their diversity impact social interactions between people. In your opinion, why do people perceive and/or evaluate this cultural diversity as being negative or positive?”

Question 2: “In social interactions, culture is characterized by both differences and commonalities. In your view, what are the defining characteristics of cultural commonalities? What can be new cultural commonalities developed in social interactions?”

Question 3: “In your opinion, which competences are required to identify existing cultural commonalities, and which competences are required to develop new cultural commonalities, on an individual level and on an organizational level?”

Question 4: “What differences do you see between (the terms) intercultural competence and transcultural competence?”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 44).

All Delphi study questions were pre-tested, and the whole process was accompanied by a monitoring team composed of four academics with expertise in qualitative and quantitative analysis (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 44). The qualitative analysis was guided by the works of Mayring (2008, 2015) and Gläser and Laudel (2010). In the following, the qualitative and quantitative results of the Delphi study are presented, and some notable observations added.

3 Findings of the Delphi Study on Transcultural Competence

In the following, the main findings of the Delphi study are presented and will be linked to the chapters of this book. As mentioned, the book aims to take the common findings of the Delphi study further and invites the authors to elaborate on those from their particular perspectives.

3.1 *Question 1: Determinants of the Perception and/or Evaluation of Cultural Diversity*

The first question was intended to aggregate ideas on the multiple causes that shape a negative or positive perception and/or evaluation of cultural diversity. The answers of the experts were categorized, and a distinction between individual and collective factors was made. At the individual level, the following factors were considered to be most important (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 45):

Answers to Delphi question 1: Individual-level determinants of the perception and/or evaluation of cultural diversity³

- “Feeling threatened (negative) or affirmed (positive) e.g., concerning one’s own identity or group identity, stability, belief and value system, etc. [4.34 | 0.62]
- Socialization and the social environment, especially in early stages [4.32 | 0.82]
- The worldview (an ethnocentric worldview leading to a more negative and an ethno-relative worldview leading to a more positive evaluation and/or perception of cultural diversity) [4.26 | 0.78]
- Negative or positive experiences [4.19 | 0.78]

- Personality traits such as curiosity and openness (towards diversity, uncertainty, novelty, ambiguity) [4.11 | 0.77]
- Self-image and self-assurance [4.02 | 0.83]
- The frequency of exposure to cultural diversity [4 | 0.89]
- The qualitative level of exposure to cultural diversity [3.96 | 0.93]
- Ability to bond with others and get along in situations that are ‘outside one’s comfort zone’ [3.96 | 0.79]”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 45).

At the collective level, the following factors were considered to be most important (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 45):

Answers to Delphi question 1: Collective-level determinants of the perception and/or evaluation of cultural diversity

- “Media portrayals [4.13 | 0.93]
- History/collective memory [4.06 | 0.77]
- Public discourse/public debate [4.04 | 0.73].
- The level of inequality (e.g., distribution of wealth, political and economic power) [4 | 0.79]”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 45).

In Round 3, 78% of the experts agreed with this aggregation and evaluation of factors considered important in Rounds 1 and 2, while 2% disagreed and 20% were undecided.

Based on these findings, selected observations, statements, and further insights from all three Delphi rounds regarding Question 1 are briefly introduced (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, pp. 45–46). This includes specific aspects that were highlighted by members of the expert group in their comments throughout the study, as well as perspectives that some authors of this book will elaborate on further in their respective chapters.

To begin with the individual determinants, it seems pertinent to emphasize the contextual nature of the perception and evaluation of cultural diversity. As the group of experts continued to point out in the course of the study, the specific situation and context play an important role here—an aspect that is consistent with the basic assumptions of a relational view and thereby confirms existing literature and long-standing discussions in our field (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Harush et al., 2018; Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021).

³ The results of the quantitative analysis for Round 2 are presented in square brackets: [mean | standard deviation], the mean referring back to the Likert scale used in Round 2 (1 = Not important, 2 = Slightly important, 3 = Moderately important, 4 = Important, 5 = Very important).

This context-dependency is considered to be especially relevant with regard to the role attributed to individual personality, to which the following ‘strongly agreed-on’ statements refer when they remark that “[o]ne and the same person may perceive and evaluate cultural diversity as being positive or negative, depending on the situation and context” [4.06 | 0.90], and that “even within the same culture, members’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards specific cultures and cultural diversity, in general, can fundamentally differ” [4.51 | 0.54]. As far as contextuality is concerned, one aspect to be mentioned is that experts pointed to the relevance of determinants that are not mainly connected to cultural differences, but that goal or interest compatibility may also impact the perception and evaluation of diversity. Accordingly, one expert stated that “[w]hen the goals and interests of different cultural groups are not sufficiently compatible or aligned, differences tend to be seen as negative.” In addition, another expert emphasized that “some elements might be tagged with ‘different culture’ that are rather based on ‘different interests’”.

At the same time, the experts specifically stressed that the experiences that individuals have then matter for their perception and evaluation of cultural diversity. However, one expert pointed out that “it doesn’t have to exclusively be a positive experience; what is more important is that people have reflected on the experience and been able to find meaning in it” [4.43 | 0.57] (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 45).

The contributions of Sabine Aydt as well as Nadine Binder and Jana Hollá in this book, which address the central role of experiences and experience-based learning for the thematic fields of the Delphi study, should already be referred to at this point. In her chapter, Sabine Aydt argues that if we intentionally use “felt meaning” in the process of creation of meaning, we can also create a sense of belonging. She thereby answers what is meant by experiencing and “felt meaning” building on Eugene Gendlin’s theory (1962). Nadine Binder and Jana Hollá show in their chapter, from a practitioner’s perspective and informed by their combined experiences of designing and facilitating learning interventions, how experiential learning methodology can contribute to the development of relational competences and how it should be favoured when seeking to design effective intercultural learning events.

Furthermore, aspects related to selected collective determinants were also pointed out during the study, especially concerning the role of history, collective memory, and inequality. One expert’s comment highlights “the role of historical and biographical experiences (individual and collective) and projections following from these. In my view, the differentiation between positive co-construction of commonalities in the here and now and any evaluation (either negative or positive) is a question reacting to a present challenge or to a historical/biographical established and formative pattern.” This statement seems to hint at a discussion on the impact of power relations and power distribution, which has also accompanied the debate on the other Delphi questions and will be taken up further later in this chapter.

In addition to the important role of context and historical backgrounds, a process perspective that moves beyond binary concepts is given high relevance when it comes to the perception and/or evaluation of cultural diversity. To briefly address some

responses to Question 1, including rather critical voices, this quote from an expert may trigger further thoughts: “Focusing on evaluations of diversity along the positive/negative binary does not seem to be a productive way to engage in it, since it forecloses insights into the complexity of experiencing, evaluating and living diversity.” In this spirit, the idea of considering “diversity as a process - neither negative nor positive - to build something else, a negotiated cultural heterogeneity, depending on context and resources of the actors” was positively pointed out.

Based on this brief account of selected discussions within the Delphi study, a number of follow-up questions can be formulated which, in turn, are intended to underline the character of the project, namely, to offer starting points for further, more far-reaching research.

Questions to ponder

- How are the individual and collective perception and evaluation connected?
- How do perception and evaluation relate to each other?
- Are attitudes fixed in the individual? What is the role of context?
- What implications can be made from these findings for specific areas such as politics, education, business, economics, etc.?

3.2 *Question 2: Cultural Commonalities and New Cultural Commonalities*

The second question of the Delphi study “focused on the defining characteristics of cultural commonalities, as well as new commonalities developed in social interactions. ... [I]ts intended purpose was to shift the focus to the potential and role of commonalities in culturally diverse settings. As an overall observation on this question, the ambiguity but also the potential of the term ‘cultural commonality’ became apparent in all three rounds. There seems to be both a universal and a constructive understanding of the term. Although the group of experts agreed on certain aspects that are shared by all humans, and thus referred to a universal understanding of commonalities for these attributions, it should be noted that the group mainly adopted a constructive perspective in the sense that cultural commonalities were assumed to be developed in social interactions. Consequently, the following results largely reflect such an understanding” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 46).

In terms of the characteristics of cultural commonalities, 74% of the experts agreed with the following definition, 11% disagreed, and 15% were undecided (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 47):

Answers to Delphi question 2: Characteristics of cultural commonalities

“Cultural commonalities can be shared, acquired, disseminated, integrated, negotiated or changed, and involve a means of coordinating meaning. They can be shared ways of thinking, feeling and/or acting. Cultural commonalities can consist of affective, cognitive and/or behavioral components: there can be a feeling of similarity, familiarity or belonging (affective); a shared understanding of a concept, value, norm or belief (cognitive); and/or somewhat similar expressions - routines, practices, ways of solving problems - of that shared understanding (behavioral). In particular, cultural commonalities manifest themselves in shared experiences, practices and ways of solving problems; shared values and assumptions; shared belief systems; shared behaviors, rituals and habits; and shared norms.”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 47).

In terms of this proposal for a compiled definition of new commonalities developed in social interaction, 78% of the experts agreed with this definition, 4% disagreed, and 18% were undecided (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 47):

Answers to Delphi question 2: Characteristics of new commonalities

“New cultural commonalities developed in social interaction require a willingness to continue learning from each other. They can emerge (unconsciously) and/or be developed (consciously) and can be described as a process of co-creation. New cultural commonalities can be a result of learning processes (learning together, learning from each other), dialogue, as well as shared experiences, especially emotionally rich ones, that pave the way for new shared experiences. However, developing new cultural commonalities should not imply homogenization. There are many different ways in which people can learn from each other and beneficially grow through social interactions, resulting in new commonalities that are not merely destructive of the old ways.”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 47).

As an important remark to start with, during the group process of elaborating on these definitions over the three Delphi rounds, it was pointed out that the terms “commonalities” and “culture” overlap somewhat and that this might be a promising field for future conceptual work.

In the overall view of the results for Question 2, the following aspects should be particularly emphasized: Firstly, it was pointed out that similarities are not the same as commonalities. As was highlighted throughout the rounds, there is a distinction between being similar and sharing a commonality. Accordingly, while striving for similarities would end up in homogenization, a pursuit of commonalities involves connecting and building relations that allow differences to co-exist.

This concept of coexistence is taken further in the following expert quote: “[I]t’s like deciding to focus on left rather than right. Similarity and difference are complementary definitions, which is why it only makes sense to ask how we construct similarity/difference dialectics.” This call to move beyond binary concepts is also reflected in the following ‘strongly agreed-on’ statement: “In the present era of interconnectedness and interdependence, and with the trends of migration, globalization and internet-based dissemination of common frames of reference, concepts of third culture building are needed rather than a binary opposition of ‘either/or’ [4.04 | 0.92]”.

The question of how to deal appropriately with the coexistence of, and particularly with the relationship between differences and commonalities were intensively discussed throughout the study. One statement that met with high approval in the expert group referred to the observation that “[a]s regards the relationship between differences and commonalities, there is a tendency to over-emphasize the importance of cultural differences, which makes people ignore or be ‘blind’ to commonalities. Self-awareness and reflection are needed to understand the real differences and commonalities to/with others [4.13 | 0.64]”, as well as to the call that “[w]e need to understand differences AND commonalities, including the fluid and situation-dependent co-creation of cultural commonalities, which the actors discover together in order to build new cultural commonalities [4.09 | 0.99]” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 47).

Importantly, one expert noted that “[t]he idea of ‘commonality’ as transcendent as opposed to integrative of cultural differences is marginal in the responses. For example, the respondents mostly agreed on the importance of maintaining the idea of cultural difference, but complexifying it and adding an interactive dimension”. Given all of the different aspects, it was further pointed out “that, depending on the situation and context, developing new cultural commonalities may not always be an appropriate objective” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 51). This is clearly connected to the observations that commonalities are not similarities, not an end per se and the relation between differences and commonalities needs to be considered.

For all the strong agreement with these quotes on the role of commonalities, there were also voices observing that this focus should not prevent us from recognizing and further exploring the importance of cultural differences, and the question was raised as to how feasible it is to focus on new commonalities without missing the opportunity for a deeper understanding and identification of cultural differences (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 47). Accordingly, one expert emphasized that “[m]ost of these statements seem to include the idea that ‘new commonalities’ are co-constructions that serve an interactive purpose beyond simple identification, while they do not seek to supplant (complex) cultural identification.” In this context, one expert referred to Laray M. Barna (1994) who described the “‘assumption of similarities’ as one of the most important stumbling blocks in intercultural communication. If we focus on new commonalities without respecting differences, e.g., in communication style or understanding of leadership etc., we might not understand

the cultural reasons for (future) conflicts created by existing differences and thus attribute these conflicts to ‘personality traits’, ‘human nature’, ... I believe the challenge is in making constructive use of the differences as a tool for understanding others’ value systems without fostering deterministic or static views of these differences serving as an excuse for failure in cross-cultural cooperation. This is where finding and addressing commonalities can help. So the best approach will be to balance between commonalities and differences.”

On the other hand, the experience was shared that “it is possible for a leader to create new commonalities without necessarily having an in-depth understanding of the nature of the differences. The new commonalities are born out of shared experiences.”

In an attempt to summarize this discussion raised by the Delphi group concerning the role of cultural differences, their relevance should not be neglected, while on the other hand, they should not be considered as preventing possible cooperation and learning opportunities. The briefly outlined considerations on the coexistence of differences and commonalities and the corresponding aspect of balancing, mentioned by several Delphi experts, are taken further by Yih-Teen Lee and Shawn Quinn in their chapter in this book. The authors apply the principles of dynamic balancing to “seeking commonality while preserving difference (求同存異)” in intercultural interaction, and discuss how this approach can enable managers to foster collaboration more effectively when leading across cultures.

With all this, however, the risk was described that “commonalities may reflect assumptions and power identities more than they reflect truly shared understanding. In short, it is about verbs (e.g., appreciating cultural differences and recognizing commonalities) rather than nouns (differences and commonalities) [4.07 | 0.81]” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 47). The issue of whether a call for a focus on commonalities can sometimes be seen critically, a question associated with the power relations addressed several times in the study, is reminiscent of the concerns of an intersectional approach and accompanied by the interpretation of the Delphi results throughout the process. It remains a crucial question of how to handle the balancing between differences and commonalities when unequal partners cooperate. The contributions of various authors to this volume take up this question and discuss it more intensively, including insights from post-colonial approaches.

These are Valerie V. V. Gruber, Gilbert Shang Ndi and Rigoberto Banguero Velasco, who argue in their chapter that transcultural interactions should strengthen diverse identities and enable a mutually respectful (re)invention of cultural practices to which different social groups can contribute on an equal footing. In this way, they emphasize that transculturality must come with conditions regarding historical awareness and inclusion in order to be considered attractive and beneficial by all participants. In their chapter, Werner Zips and Angelica V. Marte identify and analyze the fact that “tempocentrism” can be described as a key impediment for triggering cultural competence for substantial participatory co-creation. Finally, their departure from anthropocentrism and tempocentrism can be translated into implications for inclusive leadership transformation and transcultural organizational change.

Michelle J. Cummings-Koether and Oscar Blanco address the topic of “gatekeeping” in the scientific world and provide an analysis of the discussions that took place during the Delphi expert group conference. They conclude that more awareness and further examination into how gatekeeping manifests itself would be necessary in order to make the community more inclusive and thus pave the way to finding solutions.

Based on the presented observations on the Delphi study findings and outlooks on chapters of this book, some questions for further research can also be suggested following question 2:

Questions to ponder

- What are the implications of assuming the coexistence of commonalities and differences as being mutually related?
- What could further conceptual sharpening not only of the understanding of “cultural commonality” and “cultural difference”, but particularly of their interrelation look like?
- What role can commonalities play as vehicles to build connections and relationships among members from different cultures?

3.3 *Question 3: Competences for Identifying and Developing Commonalities*

Delphi Question 3 “aims at creating a list of competences that are required for the identification of existing cultural commonalities and the development of new ones. In this regard, both the individual level and the organizational level are investigated. As for the background to this question, the distinction between ‘identification of existing commonalities’ and ‘development of new commonalities’ can be traced back to previous conceptual work on transcultural leadership (Wieland & Baumann Montecinos, 2019). Naturally, and this was confirmed by the group’s feedback, the two are closely interconnected. The same is stated for the listed items, which the experts considered to be interrelated” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 48).

In Round 3, the following lists of individual-level competences for identifying existing commonalities and developing new ones were reflected back to the group of experts (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, pp. 48–49).⁴

⁴ The square brackets represent the sum of all assessments in Round 2, in which the experts were asked to select and rank the items that resulted from Round 1.

Answers to Delphi question 3: Individual-level competences: Identifying commonalities

- **“Cultural self-awareness and self-reflective consciousness [240]**
Being aware of yourself and your own culture, and assuming agency
 - **Empathy and perspective-taking abilities [207]**
Demonstrating empathy and appreciation for other people(s) and seeking to understand how they feel and what informs their perspective
 - **Open-mindedness [123]**
Being open-minded and curious about others and the world
 - **Active listening [116]**
Listening actively, carefully and with maximum receptivity
 - **Critical self-reflection [111]**
Demonstrating critical self-reflection
 - **Meta-level thinking [101]**
Being able to think in overarching contexts, to see beneath the surface and explore underlying intentions
 - **Recognizing differences and commonalities [98]**
Recognizing the coexistence of differences and commonalities
 - **Context sensitivity [85]**
Being sensitive of the specific situation and context
 - **Being non-judgmental [79]**
Being able to withhold and postpone judgment
 - **Respect [77]**
Articulating your understanding and behaving in a way that shows respect for others.”
- Source: Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder (2022, pp. 48–49).

Answers to Delphi question 3: Individual-level competences: Developing commonalities

- **“Ambiguity tolerance [203]**
Tolerating and embracing ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity
- **Learning and growth mindset [184]**
Cultivating a learning mindset and remaining ready and willing to learn and grow
- **Flexibility and adaptability [169]**
Remaining flexible and adaptive in your interactions with others

- **Creativity [127]**

Being creative and using creative thinking to develop new solutions, strategies and alternatives

- **Meta-communication [101]**

Being willing and able to engage in meta-communication to review the development process of new cultural commonalities, e.g., by using metaphors to bridge gaps

- **Openness towards change [97]**

Being convinced that changing the status quo is possible

- **Creating a “third culture” [91]**

Intentionally working toward the creation of a “third culture” that is neither “yours” nor “mine”

- **Shared practical experience [83]**

Doing something together and creating shared meaning and memory out of this shared practical experience

- **Facilitating relational processes [77]**

Being able to motivate others to take part in the process of relationship building and being able to facilitate such a process

- **Meta-cognitive ability [72]**

Being able to see interactions from the outside and demonstrating higher-order thinking skills”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, pp. 48–49).

“In Round 3, 81% of the experts agreed with the list of competences required for identifying existing commonalities, whereas 4% disagreed and 15% were undecided. In addition, 83% of the experts agreed with the list of competences required for developing new commonalities, while 6% disagreed and 11% were undecided” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 48).

Also, for “the organizational level, the competences determined by the experts in Rounds 1 and 2 to be particularly important were bundled into one list and reflected back to the experts in Round 3” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 48).

Answers to Delphi question 3: Organizational-level competences: Identifying and developing commonalities

- **“Inclusive atmosphere [219]**

Creating an inclusive and sharing atmosphere and environment that emphasizes positive learning towards cultural diversity

- **Organizational learning [134]**

Strengthening organizational learning, e.g., with a diversity management program and other provisions integrated into business processes

- **Openness [133]**

Being open to developing a (partly) new corporate culture and new ideas on working together

- **Diversity-leveraging structures [132]**

Changing the structures, processes and rules to safeguard and leverage diversity

- **Leadership skills [126]**

Conducting active and trustworthy leadership capable of accommodating group dynamics, managing conflict and building consensus

- **Shared corporate culture [121]**

Involving people with different backgrounds in shaping the organization's culture

- **Collective self-reflection [109]**

Establishing critical structural and cultural self-introspection within the organization

- **Collective self-awareness [105]**

Establishing a collective self-awareness of the organizational culture and brand

- **Awareness and acceptance of power distribution [97]**

Strengthening awareness of issues concerning power and privilege

- **Awareness and acceptance of power distribution [97]**

Consciously making decisions and taking actions to develop new commonalities

- **Focus on commonalities [86]**

Focusing on common goals, objectives and values to promote the organization's effectiveness and wellbeing"

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 48)

"In Round 3, 70% of the experts agreed with this bundled list, while 6% disagreed and 24% were undecided. The relatively high proportion of undecided responses here is remarkable, and may indicate that the experts found it difficult to attribute competences to organizations" (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 49).

In the following, selected observations and statements from all three Delphi rounds, as well as connections to book chapters can be made on these results. First and foremost, the limited suitability and explanatory power of competence lists need to be addressed. As highlighted during the group process, every competence list carries the risk of incompleteness, oversimplification and incoherence (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 50). Sometimes causal links between different components are erroneously drawn (e.g., certain knowledge leads to certain attitudes). Furthermore, competence lists may lack the consideration of specific contexts, all reasons to recommend interpreting the presented competence lists carefully. Keeping this rather limited claim of explanation in mind, a few selected aspects concerning competences as addressed in this Delphi study will be highlighted and discussed.

Regarding the important question of how the described competences relate to the aspect of contextuality, one expert suggested "thinking in terms of higher-order competencies, i.e., what enables us to have better relations, communication, and

collaboration in contexts characterized by varying degrees of perceived familiarity, complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty. (...) it might help us to identify what we should teach and foster from a young age as general competencies that help individuals to manage all sorts of diversity, complexity, ambiguity, etc.” Such a view can be related to the “cultural self-awareness and self-reflective consciousness”, “learning and growth mindset”, “meta-communication” and “meta-cognitive ability” and other items that resulted as part of the competence list. In this regard, the listed competences could be seen as a collection aiming at the description of a general competence to deal with cultural complexity and to develop new shared meanings and actions. One expert critically adds here that “[s]eeing competencies as individual characteristics, such as a mix of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, is very Western individualistic. What about notions like harmony of psychology notions such as ‘extended mind’?” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 50).

Against the backdrop of viewing competences as a mix of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, it was noted that the expert group had placed considerable emphasis on behavioral aspects. Furthermore, one expert also took the discussion further by stating that “[i]n the next step, this perspective could be combined with a call to move away from competences fixed in a person (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge) and instead use relations as the unit of analysis, which would then lead to viewing competences as a more general ‘condition’” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 50).

As already mentioned, one expert pointed out that the combination of different competence components is crucial: “ambiguity tolerance needs to be combined with knowing where there is certainty” and “flexibility needs to be combined with stability”. Moreover, the influence of a concrete context on the required competences (e.g., listening skills or specific language skills) is also reflected in the list with the call for “Context sensitivity - Being sensitive of the specific situation and context”.

The importance of shared experiences, which had already been emphasized in response to Question 1, was also echoed in the responses to Question 3, and one expert commented that “from today’s perspective, I would rank shared practical experience much higher. Doing something together is the basic framework in which it is important to find common ground. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether this is a competence or a framework condition”.

As far as controversial discussions on particular aspects are concerned, it can be emphasized for Question 3 that the listed competence “Being non-judgmental - Being able to withhold and postpone judgment” was highly debated in the expert group. It was mentioned by the experts that being judgmental is not always negative, should be seen as a temporary state in a process (otherwise, it could lead to cultural relativism), is to some extent part of human nature and not being judgmental does not mean that a person has no judgmental opinions at all. Awareness of judgments and how they could hinder cooperation seems to be crucial here. One expert shared that he or she was “uncomfortable thinking we have solved the problems that inure to cultural relativism so as to be able to avoid it, or that we should assert that being judgmental is inherent to human nature, as some people develop being non-judgmental as a spiritual practice.”

Another competence that was discussed intensively on the organizational level was “the awareness and acceptance of power distribution - strengthening awareness of issues concerning power and privilege”, a debate that had already been raised concerning the first two Delphi questions and continued at this point. One expert concluded that “it has always been important to critically reflect upon who defines differences and commonalities, but especially when we talk about commonalities we need to include a critical view on who has how much power and if it is a true co-creation between members of social groups who might have different perceived power and authority, this once more reinforces my feeling that we need a truly interdisciplinary view, which also includes insights and ideas from areas such as post-colonial studies”. In this regard, we perceive the interdisciplinary Delphi study as one initial step in an ongoing discussion and that the term commonality could also foster fruitful discussion around power distribution, tying into ongoing debates about intersectionality. In addition, it was made clear that also the wider social context, which allows organizations to exist and function, has not been sufficiently addressed. Judith N. Martin (2015) concluded in a similar way that we need to “acknowledge that power relations are part of every intercultural encounter and that all encounters (and notions of competence) are impacted (and constrained) by larger societal, historical, political forces”.

On a further note, we would like to particularly emphasize the listed competence “Creating a third culture - intentionally working toward the creation of a ‘third culture’ that is neither yours nor mine”, as it refers to the understanding that the openness and willingness to go beyond simple recognition and tolerance and develop new shared meanings and understanding was evident throughout the Delphi study. The listed item “Openness towards change. Being convinced that changing the status quo is possible” can be interpreted accordingly and hints at the potential offer of a transcultural approach that highlights the intentional creation of new commonalities beyond existing realities.

On the organizational level, the item “Leadership skills - conducting active and trustworthy leadership capable of accommodating group dynamics, managing conflict and building consensus” was perceived as highly relevant by the Delphi group. As an outlook, it can be indicated here that Sonja Sackmann elaborates in her contribution to this book on the observation that a certain kind of leadership and leadership behavior is needed to benefit from cultural complexity and to overcome its associated challenges. In her chapter, the multiple cultural contexts of an organization are addressed with a relational understanding of leadership—a “mutual dance” is needed to achieve results when leading in a culturally complex work setting. In another contribution to this book, Nikola Hale provides an approach for collaborative spaces, named multilogue, to enable transcultural learning through collaboration in diversity. A “collaborative multilogue space” needs to be carefully created and can foster psychological safety for inclusive collaboration, building on the attributes of quality, intention, composition, context, and purpose that she identifies in her chapter. And finally, Eithne Knappitsch shows how leaders and workers in remote work environments are being unmade, made, and remade through dynamic relational processes mediated by technology and embedded wholly or partly in new virtual contexts.

Understanding leadership in global virtual teams is critical as more and more organizations are using culturally diverse, dispersed teams to remain flexible and agile while reducing costs, to share knowledge and information efficiently, and to acquire talent.

The observation that the formulation of a corresponding list of competences raises the follow-up question of how this can be reflected in practical implementations is of concern to many experts in our group, and also to authors in this book. In her chapter, Darla K. Deardorff introduces the tool UNESCO Story Circles, as a way to deepen connections and relationships among humans through practicing intercultural competencies. Uwe Ulrich, Hartmut Stiffel and Blerina Buzhala use the example of the German Armed Forces to show how the topic of culture and cultural exchange is addressed in their education programs. The authors give an overview of their experiences with cultural didactics and conclude that certain didactics must be consolidated and further developed through the lens of a relational approach. In another chapter that follows the Delphi results introduced here, Fons Trompenaars and Peter Woolliams take a relational perspective on the recruitment process of organizations and propose a new conceptual framework centred around Dyer and Singh's approach to achieve relational rents.

The presented synopsis of selected results for Question 3 should also be further opened with a collection of possible follow-up questions:

Questions to ponder

- How are the competences and their components interrelated and interdependent, both within the lists and between the individual and the organizational level?
- If the unit of analysis is not the individual, but the relationship, what are the consequences in terms of competences?
- To what extent are competences fixed in a person (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge), and how far do they reside “between” and even “beyond” people in a context?
- What are the implications of the discussed aspects for training and practice?

3.4 Question 4: Observations and Reflections on the Term “Transcultural Competence”

Finally, the fourth question addresses possible terminological and conceptual differences between “intercultural competence” and “transcultural competence” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 51). This question was

discussed among a subset of the Delphi group (20 experts) without the goal of arriving at a final distinction or definition, but rather of mapping the current state of discussion. Concerning conceptual considerations on the terms transculturality and transcultural competence, previous works (Ortiz, 1947/1995; Welsch, 1999; Benes-saieh, 2010; Glover & Friedman, 2015; etc.) have provided starting points for our debate.

In the following section, only a brief overview of certain tendencies that emerged from Question 4 is provided. A deeper analysis of the data on this question is beyond the scope and goal of this introductory chapter, so as to appropriately present the entire conceptual discussion and its implications. This is left to further chapters of this book and to future publications that may take these topics further. Accordingly, our aim for this introductory chapter is to provide aggregated insights concerning the use of the two terms in order to inform the debate and pave the way for possible new definitions and understandings in the future. This short overview should therefore be considered as an invitation to take the discussion further and not to arrive at a terminological consensus.

When looking at the findings on Question 4, some overall observations will be made. First of all, it needs to be highlighted that “some experts saw a clear distinction between the terms and concepts of intercultural and transcultural competence, while others considered them to be interchangeable” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 51). To some experts, the distinction is etymologically simple: “trans = beyond” refers to creating a third way (common or not), while “inter = between” often refers to knowledge, acceptance and tolerance.

Furthermore, some experts argued that intercultural competence refers more to culture-specific knowledge, and transcultural competence refers more to culture-general knowledge. In this sense, intercultural competence would focus on the specific attributes of cultures, while transcultural competence rather involves being able to adapt to any culturally complex situation, regardless of the specifics. In this regard, however, one expert asked: “In a multicultural group (diversity) there is the question to whom you adapt? We have to go further than adaptation”. Another expert highlighted that “the term transcultural competence is not a necessary alternative if the meaning is still ‘the successful pursuit of intercultural relations’, where such relations necessarily recognize both cultural commonalities and cultural uniqueness. (...) A use of the term transcultural competence that I find interesting is to refer to the quality of ‘transaction’ rather than ‘interaction’ across cultures. In this use, the outcome of a transaction is some form of mutual adaptation or third culture, while the outcome of interaction is simply acceptance of the difference”. It seems that this nuance of the “trans” ties in with the idea of co-creating new commonalities beyond simply accepting existing realities.

Finally, another expert suggested that “both interculturality and transculturality are possible perspectives for observing and interpreting human interaction. Neither interculturality nor transculturality are phenomena that precede interaction but are

produced jointly by the participants in the course of human interaction. The observational perspective of interculturality focuses on cultural differences that are introduced, enacted (on) or also modified by the participants. The observation perspective of transculturality asks how and with what consequence cross-cultural commonality is interactively produced by the participants” (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 53).

After this short overview of some interpretations of the two terms, we would like to share the observation that transculturality and transcultural competence might be seen as an offer to sharpen the discussions in our field by emphasizing a relational understanding. This includes a process and constructive concept that focuses on the development of new shared actions and meanings in contexts of cultural complexity. In this regard, one expert concluded that “transculturality and transcultural competence [...] could fulfill a need in the intercultural mainstream, but still await a distinguishing conceptualisation and, in particular, entry into the research into, and the exercise of, intercultural competence and its development”. As Heinz Antor puts it in his latest article, the relation between intercultural competence and transcultural competence is not oppositional, but the difference is just a gradual one (Antor, 2020).

Some of the presented thoughts are also discussed further in contributions to this volume. Rafael Mollenhauer, in his chapter “Transcultural Competence: Present-at-hand and Ready-to-hand”, offers a communication-theory-based starting point for a concept of transcultural competence, while Milton Bennett’s text offers to correct some misapprehensions of intercultural communication theory that have arisen as various ideas of “intercultural relations” or “intercultural competence” have percolated into academic and practitioner fields outside communication studies. In addition, Yolande Steenkamp and Willem Fourie explain very clearly in their chapter that the relational turn in the social sciences finds a dialogue partner in the relational ontologies of some more collectivistic cultures by viewing the traditional African concept of Ubuntu as a relational ontology with a resulting ethic. Gert Jan Hofstede, in his contribution “A Relational View on Culture and Transculturality” brings a bottom-up relational perspective, based on Theodore Kemper and Alan Fiske, in line with a comparative society-level framework. Josef Wieland argues in his chapter that transcultural competence as the willingness and ability to engage in cooperation under conditions of cultural complexity can only be understood as a relational competence aiming at the continuation of cooperation. Building on Gabriel Tarde’s considerations on the co-evolution of the free exchange of cultural ideas and economic goods, he describes cooperation upon the successful relationalisation of diversity and commonality. Furthermore, Kirsten Nazarkiewicz offers a culturally reflexive view of transculturality and argues that transculturality requires three approaches to create common ground in concrete groups: an interpretative, a deconstructive, and a constructivist approach. She uses the example of listening to illustrate how to make use of these resources and offers a meta-perspective of power-reflexive practices. This meta-perspective anticipates the power constellations and cultures of dominance embedded in knowledge structures and discourses as well as identity-creating diversity aspects. Also to Question 4, some follow-up questions can be raised:

Questions to ponder

- What might “trans” and the nuance of the “beyond” offer to our field?
- How can the transcultural concept based on a relational understanding be elaborated further?
- How can a relational understanding of differences and commonalities be fostered in practice?
- What are the conceptual and practical implications if we look at the individual in relations or at the relations themselves?

4 Overall Findings and a Preliminary Definition of Transcultural Competence

Overall, the Delphi findings confirm many trends in our field and may be interpreted as a starting point for further theory building and debate, putting additional emphasis on a relational understanding of our social world.

In a nutshell, the following overall Delphi study results are presented (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 52):

Summarized findings of the Delphi study on Transcultural Competence

“Relational focus: The assumption that all being is relational puts the focus on the quality and implications of socio-cultural encounters as context-dependent relational constellations.

Process perspective: These encounters are events in an ongoing, unfolding process of relationing, rather than static ties among entities.

Constructivist understanding: These processes refer to the construction of shared meaning and action.

The nuance of “trans” as meaning “beyond”: A transcultural understanding puts emphasis on the creation of new commonalities beyond existing cultures.”

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 52).

Following on from the described observations and our current perspective, transcultural competence could be defined as referring to a general competence of individuals or organizations to intentionally develop new commonalities in contexts of cultural complexity. It refers to the ability and willingness to engage in context-specific processes of constructing new shared meaning and action beyond existing practices by shared experience and mutual learning as a means and result of being

in relation. These new commonalities are based on a sense of belonging to a heterogeneous community of experience rather than on overcoming one's own identity in a process of homogenization. New forms of cooperation and the expansion of existing cooperation corridors may be the goals and results of applying transcultural competence.

5 Limitations

As previously mentioned, the modified Delphi method had multiple objectives (gathering ideas, gathering expert opinions, defining key questions, proposing further solutions and research, and finding consensus) and therefore has different limitations. The following list presents an overview of the main limitations (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, pp. 53–54):

Main limitations of the Delphi study on Transcultural Competence

- The Delphi study results can only reflect the current discussion, opinions and thoughts within the established group of experts and are limited to the data they contributed.
- The study cannot be expected to deliver an objective and complete consensus; rather, it captures a “snapshot” group opinion.
- The quality of data may vary depending on the time and priority that the participants invested in responding to the questions.
- The Delphi group consisted of 47 experts from different countries and disciplines; nevertheless, there were still key voices missing for a variety of reasons. As already indicated, the different regions of the world were not equally represented. It must be emphasized that most of the experts in the group work and live in the Northern Hemisphere.

Source: Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, pp. 53–54).

“In terms of the analysis of data on the part of the authors, it must be recognized that despite their using the ‘four-eyes principle’ (cross-checking) and the monitoring team, which presumably improved the results’ validity, research bias and initial assumptions have to be acknowledged in the preparation of the study and in the formulation of the questions. The study was also influenced by the conceptual framework outlined above, which may have introduced further bias. Other limitations were the use of English as the language of moderation for the entire process and the clash of different discipline-specific languages. Having mentioned some of the main limitations, the findings presented in this paper need to be viewed with them in mind (Baumann Montecinos & Grünfelder, 2022, p. 54)”.

6 Conclusion and Outlook

In conclusion, we may recall what this book is supposed to be about: It is the continuation of the Delphi process, the results of which have been briefly described in this introductory chapter. This brings us back to what we consider to be the essential strength of the Delphi method, which Theodore Gordon (2009) already noted when he described the expertise of the participants in a Delphi study as being central. Accordingly, the potential of exposing an interdisciplinary and international group of experts to such a process of joint conceptual work is shown not only by the Delphi results, but also by this book.

However, against the background of our topic, we would even go one step further in interpreting the Delphi method and its strengths. If the transcultural approach is about shared learning processes stemming from shared experience, about the development of new commonalities in contexts of cultural complexity and about the formation of a community of practice, then this corresponds exactly to what this Delphi group has undergone together. The Delphi method then seems to be a highly suitable approach especially given the claim of implementing transculturality not only in terms of content but also in terms of method, and so this book can itself be seen as the attempt to prove these multi-layered potentials. The book is thus an intermediate result of such an ongoing learning process, and it remains to be seen how the community of practice of those involved in it and those interested in joining may further develop. Everyone is invited to be part of this ongoing cooperative journey.

Questions to ponder

Chapter “Delphi Study on Transcultural Competence”, by Tobias Grünfelder and Julika Baumann Montecinos

Determinants of the perception and/or evaluation of cultural diversity:

- How are the individual and collective perception and evaluation connected?
- How do perception and evaluation relate to each other?
- Are attitudes fixed in the individual? What is the role of context?
- What implications can be made from these findings for specific areas such as politics, education, business, economics, etc.?

Cultural commonalities and new cultural commonalities:

- What are the implications of assuming the co-existence of commonalities and differences as being mutually related?
- What could further conceptual sharpening not only of the understanding of “cultural commonality” and “cultural difference”, but particularly of their interrelation look like?
- Considering commonalities as a vehicle, what role can they play to build connections and relationships among members from different cultures?

Competences for identifying and developing commonalities:

- How are the competences and their components inter-related and inter-dependent, both within the lists and between the individual and the organizational level?
- If the unit of analysis is the relationship and not the individual, what are the implications for the development of competences?
- To what extent are competences fixed in a person (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge), and how far do they reside “between” and even “beyond” people in a context?
- What are the implications of the discussed aspects for training and practice?

Observations and reflections on the term “transcultural competence”:

- What might the “trans” and the nuance of the “beyond” offer to our field?
- How can we develop a transcultural concept based on a relational understanding?
- In practice, how can a relational understanding of differences and commonalities be fostered?
- What are the conceptual and practical implications if we look at the individual in relations or at the relations themselves?

Source: Some questions are cited from Baumann Montecinos and Grünfelder (2022, p. 54).

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