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Introducing the Cross-Cultural Soft Skills Wheel: A Framework for Context-Sensitive Measurement of Communication

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Abstract In an increasingly globalized and culturally diverse world, effective communication transcends linguistic proficiency to encompass a constellation of interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies collectively termed soft skills. This article advances a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing and measuring soft skills as integral components of communicative competence, with particular emphasis on culture sensitive assessment. Building on foundational theories of communicative competence and integrating recent insights from intercultural communication and intelligence research, I propose the Cross-Cultural Soft Skills Wheel (CCSSW) as a dynamic, context sensitive model. The CCSSW organizes seven core soft skills, emotional intelligence, verbal intelligence, narrative intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, cultural intelligence, and magnitude intelligence, in relation to Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, highlighting which skills are particularly salient in each cultural context. The model offers a conceptual tool for educators, trainers, and researchers seeking to bridge the gap between theoretical conceptualizations of communication and real-world intercultural practice. It emphasizes that soft skill assessment must be culturally weighted and context dependent.

Keywords: *Soft skills, Communicative competence, Intercultural communication, Cross cultural soft skills wheel, Hofstede's dimensions*

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1. Introduction

Effective communication is widely recognized as a foundational element for success across educational settings, professional environments, and everyday social interaction. Yet communication is not merely the transmission of information; it is a dynamic process in which meaning is co-constructed and interpreted within specific social and cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2020). To achieve effective communication, it is essential to master a range of soft skills that extend far beyond basic language proficiency. While grammar and vocabulary provide the structural foundation for expression, they alone cannot guarantee mutual understanding, particularly in diverse interpersonal or professional contexts (Dewey, 2007). Soft skills such as emotional regulation, active listening, and cultural adaptability enable

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individuals to interpret context and respond appropriately to subtle social cues (Goleman, 1995). Without these competencies, even technically correct language use can result in miscommunication or failed collaboration (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Thus, effective communication is not merely about what is said, but how, when, and why it is conveyed within a specific social setting (Hymes, 1972).

The broader view of communication, grounded in Dell Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, extends beyond grammar to include social and cultural rules. Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) expanded this framework to include pragmatic and strategic skills, emphasizing that successful communication depends on adapting language to varying situations (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). This has led to a multidisciplinary focus on seven soft skills: emotional (Goleman, 1995), verbal (Gardner, 1983), narrative (Randall, 1999), interpersonal (Gardner, 1983), intrapersonal (Gardner, 1983), cultural (Earley & Ang, 2003), and magnitude intelligence (Pishghadam, 2025, 2026). However, the importance of these skills varies across cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). Individualistic cultures value verbal and intrapersonal intelligence (Hall, 1976), while collectivist cultures prioritize emotional and cultural intelligence (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). High power distance cultures require interpersonal and cultural intelligence, whereas low power distance cultures favor direct exchange (Hofstede et al., 2010). Uncertainty-avoiding cultures value verbal clarity, and long-term oriented cultures rely on narrative intelligence (Hofstede et al., 2010). Thus, no single soft skill profile is universally applicable (Hofstede et al., 2010).

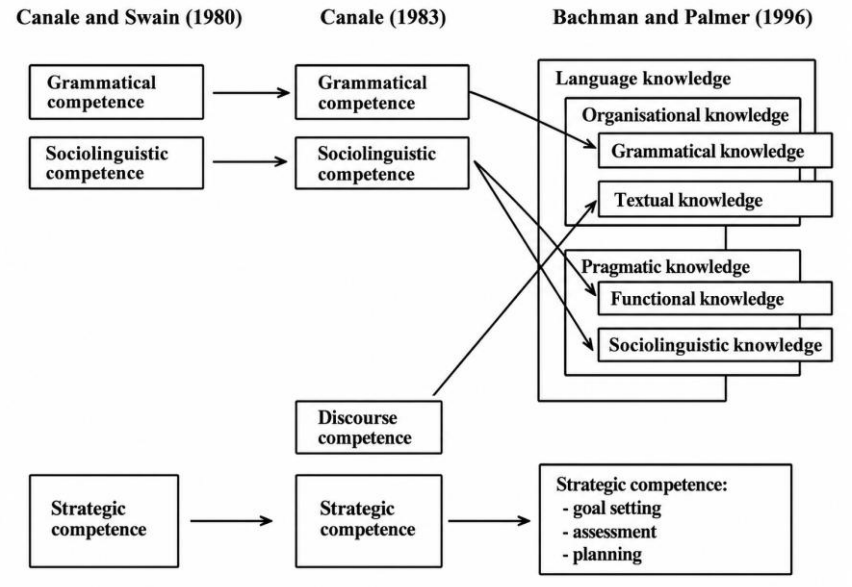
Drawing on the literature in communicative competence and cross-cultural communication, this study introduces the Cross-Cultural Soft Skills Wheel (CCSSW). The framework integrates the seven soft skills and systematically maps them onto Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, indicating which skills are particularly salient in each cultural configuration. By synthesizing insights from Hymes' (1972) ethnography of communication, Canale and Swain's (1980) multi-component framework, Bachman's (1990) emphasis on pragmatic and strategic competence, and contemporary cross-cultural validation studies (Merkin, 2017), the CCSSW offers a conceptual, theory-informed framework for developing adaptive and effective communication across global and multicultural settings. A central aim of the paper is to show how this model can guide culture-sensitive measurement of soft skills, moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches.

2. Communicative Competence

The development of communicative competence as a theoretical construct reflects a progressive shift from structuralist views of language toward a multidimensional understanding of communication as socially, culturally, and strategically situated behaviour. This evolution is synthesized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Models of Communicative Competence (Adapted from Ahmad et al., 2019)



As a starting point, Hymes (1972) introduced communicative competence in response to the limitations of Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence. Hymes argued that language ability must be understood in relation to its social function, emphasizing that speakers require knowledge of *when*, *how*, and *to whom* language is appropriately used. Although Hymes did not formalize his model into discrete components, his framework established the foundational principle that communicative competence integrates grammatical knowledge with sociocultural appropriateness. The earliest formalized model in Figure 1 is that of Canale and Swain (1980). Their framework consists of three components: grammatical competence (knowledge of lexical items, morphology, syntax, and phonology); sociolinguistic competence (the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts, considering status, politeness, and cultural norms); and strategic competence (a set of compensatory strategies used to address communication breakdowns or enhance effectiveness). As illustrated by the directional arrows, Canale (1983) expanded this model by introducing discourse competence, thereby transforming the framework into a four-component model. Discourse competence captures the ability to produce and interpret coherent and cohesive texts, emphasizing connections across sentences rather than isolated utterances. This addition marks a critical theoretical shift toward viewing communication as extended interaction rather than sentence-level production (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

The last section of Figure 1 presents the model of Bachman and Palmer (1996), which reconceptualizes communicative competence within a broader construct of Communicative Language Ability (CLA). Language ability is divided into language knowledge and strategic competence, with language knowledge further subdivided into organizational knowledge (grammatical and textual) and pragmatic knowledge (functional and sociolinguistic). Pragmatic knowledge encompasses illocutionary competence (the ability to perform communicative acts such as requesting, apologizing, or persuading) and sociolinguistic knowledge (sensitivity to dialect, register, cultural norms, and figurative language). A particularly important feature of this model is the elaboration of strategic competence into metacognitive processes, goal setting, assessment, and planning, which function as higher-order regulatory mechanisms that coordinate linguistic and pragmatic resources during communication. This reconceptualization aligns with contemporary cognitive and interactionist perspectives, which view communication as dynamic, adaptive, and goal-oriented (Taguchi & Roever, 2020). Recent research further extends this trajectory by integrating communicative competence, intercultural competence, and soft skills (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013)

3. Soft Skills

Soft skills have become a central construct in contemporary research on education, employability, and intercultural communication. Soft skills have also been identified as central to organizational quality, adaptability, collaboration, and leadership effectiveness in contemporary workplaces (Cimatti, 2016). Research in organizational training and professional development further suggests that soft skills often exert a greater influence on workplace effectiveness and training transfer than technical competencies alone (Laker & Powell, 2011). In general, soft skills refer to non-technical, transferable competencies that enable individuals to interact effectively, manage relationships, and navigate social and professional contexts (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Robles, 2012). Early perspectives often treated soft skills as personality traits or behavioural tendencies, but more recent research views them as developable, context-dependent competencies that emerge through social interaction and experience. Succi and Canovi (2020) argue that soft skills should be understood as dynamic capabilities shaped by workplace demands and cultural expectations rather than fixed attributes.

For the purposes of this study, I adopt a framework of seven core soft skills that are essential for effective communication. These skills are derived from established theories of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), emotional and social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995), and recent advances in magnitude psychology (Pishghadam, 2026). Table 1 presents each skill, its definition, and its constituent components. The sections that follow provide a detailed description of each skill, with illustrative examples embedded in the discussion.

Table 1
The Seven Soft Skills for Effective Communication

Skill	Definition	Components
Emotional Intelligence	Managing one's own emotions and understanding others' emotional states	Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Empathy, Social awareness, Relationship management
Verbal Intelligence	Using spoken or written words clearly and effectively	Clarity, Conciseness, Active listening, Questioning, Assertiveness
Narrative Intelligence	Structuring information as stories to engage and persuade	Storytelling, Context-setting, Metaphor and analogy, Sequencing, Perspective-taking
Interpersonal Intelligence	Building and maintaining productive relationships through interaction	Non-verbal communication, Rapport building, Conflict resolution, Giving/receiving feedback, Collaboration
Intrapersonal Intelligence	Understanding and managing one's internal mental landscape	Self-reflection, Internal emotional regulation, Boundary setting, Authenticity, Self-motivation
Cultural Intelligence	Adapting communication across different cultural contexts	Cultural knowledge, Cultural mindfulness, Adaptability, Respect, Metacognition
Magnitude Intelligence	Perceiving and responding appropriately to proportion and context	Scale (size/scope), Significance (importance/urgency), Complexity (variables/layers), Holism (whole picture), Accuracy (right level of precision)

Emotional intelligence, as conceptualized by Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997), refers to the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Pishghadam, 2009). Its components include self-awareness (accurately perceiving one's feelings), self-regulation (controlling impulsive reactions), empathy (sensing others' emotional states), social awareness, and relationship management (Shademan et al., 2019). In communication, emotional intelligence enables individuals to remain calm under pressure and respond constructively to emotionally charged situations. Research shows that emotional intelligence significantly predicts academic success, professional performance, and intercultural adaptability (Naji Meidani et al., 2022; Pishghadam et al., 2022; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). For instance, a project manager who notices a team member becoming unusually quiet during a tense meeting might wait until afterward and say, "I noticed you seemed a bit quiet earlier. Is everything okay? If there's something on your mind, I'm happy to listen." This response demonstrates self-regulation (choosing the right moment), empathy (recognizing the emotional cue), and relationship management (opening a supportive dialogue).

Verbal intelligence, one of Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences, encompasses the ability to use language effectively for expression and comprehension. It includes clarity (articulating ideas without ambiguity), conciseness (economy of words), active listening (fully concentrating on the speaker), questioning (asking relevant, open-ended or clarifying questions), and assertiveness (expressing one's needs respectfully) (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Verbal intelligence is crucial for presenting ideas, negotiating, giving feedback, and building trust. A technical lead explaining a software bug to a non-technical stakeholder, for example, might avoid jargon and say: "The core problem is that our system slows down when it processes more than 10,000 records at once. We need to split the data into smaller batches. This will take about two days, and the system will be back to normal speed afterward." By using plain language, focusing on impact, and providing a clear timeline, she demonstrates high verbal intelligence.

Narrative intelligence is the capacity to structure information as stories to engage, persuade, and create meaning (Randall, 1999). It involves storytelling (crafting compelling narratives with characters, conflict, and resolution), context-setting (providing relevant background), metaphor and analogy (making abstract ideas concrete), sequencing (logical or emotional ordering of events), and perspective-taking (adapting the story to the audience). In intercultural communication, narrative intelligence helps bridge differences by framing shared experiences. A diversity trainer working with a

multicultural team might share a personal story: "When I first moved to Japan, I kept asking direct questions in meetings, assuming I was being efficient. A colleague later explained that my directness was perceived as rude. That taught me the importance of reading the room before speaking." This narrative makes the abstract concept of contextual communication tangible and invites reflection.

Interpersonal intelligence refers to the ability to interact effectively with others, build rapport, and manage relationships (Gardner, 1983). Its components include non-verbal communication (interpreting body language, eye contact, tone), rapport-building (establishing trust and connection), conflict resolution (navigating disagreements constructively), giving and receiving feedback, and collaboration. This skill is essential for teamwork, leadership, and any context that requires cooperation and mutual understanding (Robles, 2012). Consider a scenario where a German engineer's blunt criticism of a Brazilian colleague's work causes offence. A third colleague with high interpersonal intelligence might mediate: "I know Marco's feedback can sound abrupt, but he values your technical expertise. He was trying to quickly resolve a safety issue. Let's sit together and go through his concerns so we can find a solution that works for both of you." This approach acknowledges cultural differences, preserves face, and redirects the conversation toward collaboration.

Intrapersonal intelligence involves understanding and managing one's internal mental and emotional states (Gardner, 1983). It includes self-reflection (examining one's thoughts, biases, and motivations), internal emotional regulation (calming oneself before speaking), boundary-setting (knowing when to say no or step back), authenticity (aligning words with values), and self-motivation (maintaining drive despite setbacks). This skill is particularly important in high-stress intercultural encounters where one may feel provoked or misunderstood. A negotiator who is publicly contradicted by a counterpart from a culture that values direct debate might feel anger rising, but silently count to ten, remind herself that the contradiction is not personal but stylistic, and then respond calmly: "I appreciate your perspective; let me clarify where I'm coming from." By regulating her internal reaction, she prevents escalation and maintains constructive dialogue.

Cultural intelligence, as defined by Earley and Ang (2003), is the capability to function effectively across different cultural contexts. Empirical research has further demonstrated that cultural intelligence predicts intercultural adjustment, cultural judgment, decision-making, and task performance in multicultural environments (Ang et al., 2007). Its components are cultural knowledge (understanding norms and values), cultural mindfulness (being aware of cultural cues), adaptability (adjusting behaviour accordingly), respect (valuing cultural differences), and metacognition (thinking about one's own cultural assumptions). Cultural Intelligence is essential for global professionals who must navigate diverse communication styles. An expatriate manager assigned to a subsidiary in Thailand, for instance, learns that direct refusal is considered face-threatening and that subordinates will say "I will try" when they mean "no." Recognizing this, she adapts by asking open-ended questions ("What challenges do you foresee?") rather than demanding yes/no answers, thereby gaining more accurate information while respecting local norms.

Magnitude intelligence is a recently conceptualized cognitive framework that refers to the ability to evaluate the scale, impact, complexity, and relevance of events, decisions, and communicative acts through a multi-dimensional lens (Pishghadam, 2026). It comprises five dimensions: scale (the size or scope of the issue), significance (importance, urgency, or triviality), complexity (the number of variables and layers), holism (seeing the whole picture and interconnections), and accuracy (the appropriate level of precision for the situation). In communication, magnitude intelligence enables individuals to judge whether a matter warrants formal attention or a brief comment, how much detail to provide, and whether to escalate or de-escalate emotionally. A manager who receives an email reporting a minor typo in a non-critical document recognizes the low scale and significance of the issue, responds briefly with "Thanks, corrected," and moves on, rather than calling a meeting or issuing a formal reprimand. Conversely, when the same manager discovers a potential safety violation, they escalate immediately, recognizing the high stakes. As Pishghadam (2025) demonstrates in the context of migration, magnitude thinking helps individuals assess the true weight of challenges they face, distinguishing between temporary inconveniences and life-altering decisions (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi,

2026). Similarly, in business communication, magnitude intelligence allows professionals to avoid overreacting to minor setbacks or underreacting to strategic risks (Ebrahimi et al., 2025).

4. Cultural Dimensions

To understand why certain soft skills are emphasized in different cultures, I draw on the framework of cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede et al. (2010). Over decades of research involving more than 70 countries, Hofstede identified six fundamental dimensions that capture enduring differences in national value systems. These dimensions (i.e., individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint) have been extensively validated and are widely used in cross-cultural communication research (Merkin, 2017).

Individualism versus collectivism describes whether a society prioritizes individual achievement and autonomy (individualist) or group harmony and interdependence (collectivist). In individualist cultures such as the United States or Australia, communication tends to be direct, task-oriented, and explicit. In collectivist cultures such as Japan, Oman, or Guatemala, communication is often indirect, relationship-oriented, and implicit; empathy and the ability to maintain group harmony are paramount (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Power Distance, as the second dimension, refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In high power distance cultures like Malaysia or Mexico, hierarchical structures are respected; communication is formal, deference is shown to superiors, and direct contradiction is avoided. In low power distance cultures such as Denmark or New Zealand, egalitarianism is valued; communication is informal, and subordinates are encouraged to speak openly and challenge ideas (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Uncertainty Avoidance indicates how comfortable a culture is with ambiguity and unstructured situations. Strong uncertainty-avoidance cultures, such as Greece and Germany, prefer clear rules, detailed plans, and precise communication to reduce uncertainty. Weak uncertainty-avoidance cultures, such as Singapore or Sweden, are more comfortable with ambiguity; they rely on flexibility, tolerance for different viewpoints, and a less formal communication structure (Hall, 1976; Hofstede et al., 2010). Masculinity versus Femininity, as the next dimension, contrasts societies that value competitiveness, achievement, and material success (masculine) with those that value cooperation, quality of life, and relationships (feminine). Masculine cultures such as Hungary and Japan often use assertive, competitive, and results-oriented communication. Feminine cultures such as Sweden or the Netherlands prioritize consensus-building, inclusiveness, and work-life balance, and their communication styles reflect these values (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Long-term versus Short-term orientation captures a society's time horizon. Long-term oriented cultures such as China or South Korea value perseverance, tradition, and future rewards; communication emphasizes patience, context-building, and indirect persuasion. Short-term oriented cultures such as the United States or Australia focus on immediate results, directness, and quick feedback loops (Hofstede et al., 2010). As the last dimension, Indulgence versus Restraint refers to the extent to which a society allows free gratification of basic human desires. Indulgent cultures like Mexico or Sweden encourage emotional expression, optimism, humour, and informal communication. Restrained cultures such as Russia or Japan emphasize emotional control, formality, and careful wording; communication is more reserved and neutrality is valued (Hofstede et al., 2010). On the whole, these six dimensions provide a robust framework for anticipating which soft skills are likely to be most critical in a given cultural context (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2024). They also serve as the foundation for the CCSSW, which maps the seven soft skills onto these dimensions to offer practical guidance for culturally attuned communication and measurement.

5. The Cross-Cultural Soft Skills Wheel (CCSSW)

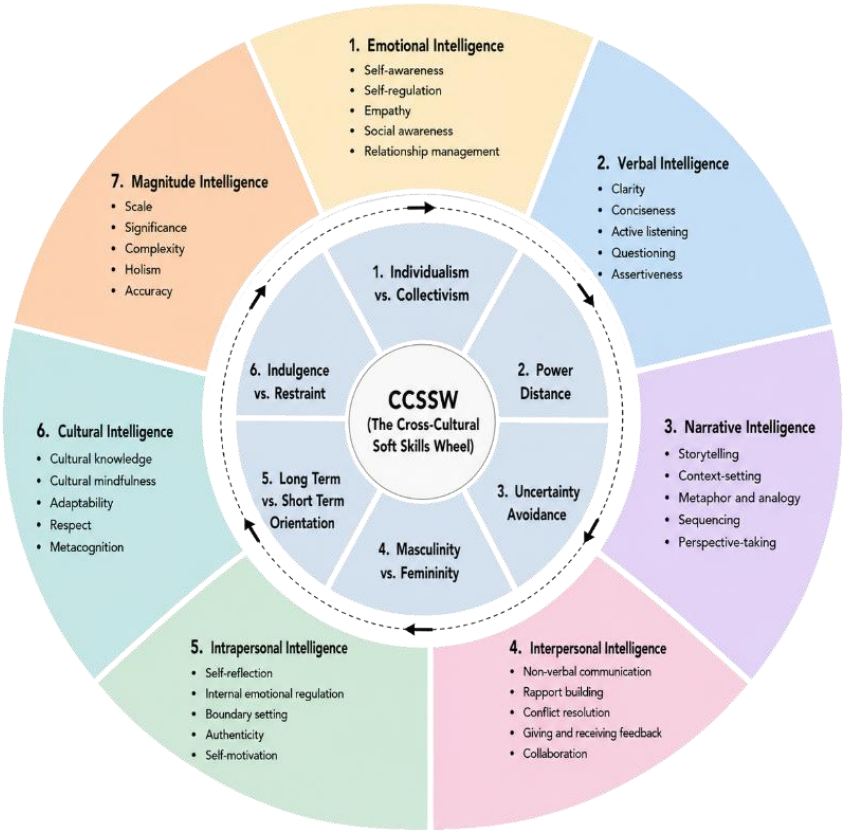
5.1. The Structure and Logic

Building on the theoretical foundations of communicative competence and the practical insights gained from soft skills taxonomies, this study introduces the CCSSW as a novel, integrative conceptual model

(Figure 2). While earlier frameworks (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972) expanded the notion of competence beyond grammar to include sociolinguistic and strategic dimensions, they remain limited in their ability to account for the behavioural enactment of communication in complex, real-world, and intercultural contexts. The CCSSW addresses this limitation by positioning soft skills not as peripheral attributes, but as the operational core through which communication is realized, negotiated, and evaluated, and by explicitly linking these skills to cultural context.

Figure 2

The CCSSW for Communication (The outer ring, including the soft skills, rotates to align with any cultural dimension in the inner ring)



The CCSSW maps the seven soft skills described in Section 3 onto Hofstede's (2001) and Hofstede et al.'s (2010) six cultural dimensions. Rather than designating skills in a fixed hierarchy, the framework highlights which skills are particularly salient in each cultural context, while acknowledging that the actual importance of a given skill will vary depending on the specific situation, individual differences, and the interaction of multiple cultural dimensions. Among these seven skills, one stands out as uniquely integrative: magnitude intelligence across multiple cultural contexts. This skill functions as a meta-competence: the capacity to calibrate one's communicative response appropriately to the scale, significance, complexity, and holistic context of a situation. In every culture, communicators must judge when a matter is trivial versus critical, when to be precise versus flexible, and when to escalate versus de-escalate. However, the expression of magnitude intelligence differs across cultures. In individualist and low-power-distance cultures, it may manifest as knowing how much directness is appropriate; in collectivist and high-power-distance cultures, it may manifest as knowing how much indirectness is needed to preserve harmony without sacrificing clarity. Thus, while the underlying meta-skill is universally important, its behavioural enactment is culturally shaped, which explains its recurrent appearance across diverse cultural contexts in the wheel. This mapping is further elaborated in Table 2.

Table 2

Mapping of Seven Soft Skills onto Hofstede's (2001) and Hofstede et al.'s (2010) Six Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimension	Orientation	Relevant Soft Skills (Illustrative)
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Individualist	Verbal Intelligence (clarity, assertiveness); Intrapersonal Intelligence (authenticity, self-motivation); Magnitude Intelligence (assessing scale and significance)
	Collectivist	Emotional Intelligence (empathy, social awareness); Interpersonal Intelligence (rapport, conflict resolution); Cultural Intelligence (adaptability, respect)
Power Distance	High PD	Interpersonal Intelligence (respectful tone, non-verbal cues); Emotional Intelligence (patience, self-regulation); Cultural Intelligence (knowledge of hierarchy)
	Low PD	Verbal Intelligence (directness, questioning); Intrapersonal Intelligence (confidence, authenticity); Magnitude Intelligence (judging complexity and appropriate directness)
Uncertainty Avoidance	Strong UA	Verbal Intelligence (precision, clarity); Magnitude Intelligence (accuracy, complexity assessment); Cultural Intelligence (understanding rules)
	Weak UA	Narrative Intelligence (storytelling, metaphor); Emotional Intelligence (tolerance for ambiguity); Cultural Intelligence (adaptability)
Masculinity vs. Femininity	Masculine	Verbal Intelligence (assertiveness, conciseness); Magnitude Intelligence (prioritizing goals); Intrapersonal Intelligence (self-motivation)
	Feminine	Emotional Intelligence (cooperation, inclusiveness); Interpersonal Intelligence (conflict resolution, consensus); Cultural Intelligence (respect)
Long-Term vs. Short-Term	Long-Term	Narrative Intelligence (context-setting, patience); Cultural Intelligence (metacognition); Emotional Intelligence (self-reflection)
	Short-Term	Verbal Intelligence (conciseness, urgency); Magnitude Intelligence (scale, significance); Intrapersonal Intelligence (authenticity)
Indulgence vs. Restraint	Indulgent	Emotional Intelligence (enthusiasm, open expression); Interpersonal Intelligence (humour, warmth); Narrative Intelligence (storytelling)
	Restrained	Intrapersonal Intelligence (emotional regulation, boundary setting); Verbal Intelligence (neutrality, careful wording); Magnitude Intelligence (accuracy, holism)

The mapping in Table 2 can be interpreted with concrete examples. Consider an interaction in an individualist culture, such as the United States. Verbal intelligence (clarity, assertiveness), intrapersonal intelligence (standing by one's own view, authenticity), and magnitude intelligence (judging significance and scale) are particularly salient. For instance, an American manager giving feedback to a peer might say directly, "Your report was late, and it impacted our deadline. I need you to prioritize timely submissions going forward." This clarity and directness are culturally appropriate. Emotional and narrative skills may also be used strategically to soften the message if needed, but the emphasis is on directness and individual accountability. Conversely, in a collectivist culture such as Japan or Oman, emotional intelligence (empathy, social awareness), interpersonal intelligence (rapport, conflict resolution), and cultural intelligence (adaptability, respect) come to the fore. A Japanese manager addressing the same issue would likely use indirect language: "We noticed the report arrived after the deadline, which made things difficult for the team. Perhaps we can discuss how to support each other to ensure smoother workflows in the future." This approach preserves harmony while still conveying the message, reflecting the cultural emphasis on group cohesion and face-saving.

In high-power-distance cultures, such as Malaysia or Mexico, interpersonal intelligence (respectful tone, nonverbal cues), emotional intelligence (patience, self-regulation), and cultural intelligence

(knowledge of hierarchy) are especially relevant. A junior employee in such a context would use formal titles, avoid direct contradiction, and phrase disagreements as questions ("Would it be possible to consider an alternative approach?"). In low-power-distance cultures like Denmark or New Zealand, verbal intelligence (directness, questioning), intrapersonal intelligence (confidence, authenticity), and magnitude intelligence (assessing complexity) are more prominently displayed. A junior employee might say directly, "I have a different idea; could we discuss it?"

In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures such as Germany or Greece, verbal intelligence (precision, clarity), magnitude intelligence (accuracy, complexity assessment), and cultural intelligence (understanding rules) are highly valued. For example, a German project manager launching a new initiative might open a meeting by distributing a detailed agenda and a milestone timeline, stating, "We have identified three potential bottlenecks in Phase 2. Each has a designated contingency owner, and we will review progress against these milestones every Thursday at 10:00 sharp." In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures like Singapore or Jamaica, narrative intelligence (storytelling, metaphor), emotional intelligence (tolerance for ambiguity), and cultural intelligence (adaptability) become more central. A Singaporean manager facing the same project launch might instead sketch a broad vision on a whiteboard and say, "Think of this as sailing in open waters: we know the destination, but the winds may shift. Let's set a general heading and adjust our sails as conditions change."

For masculine (task-focused) cultures such as Hungary or Japan, verbal intelligence (assertiveness, conciseness), magnitude intelligence (prioritizing goals), and intrapersonal intelligence (self-motivation) are particularly emphasized. Communication tends to be competitive and results-oriented. For instance, a Hungarian team leader might open a meeting by stating, "We missed two of our five targets. I expect each of you to bring concrete solutions next week, and we will not leave this room until we have a recovery plan." In feminine (relationship-focused) cultures like Sweden or the Netherlands, emotional intelligence (cooperation), interpersonal intelligence (conflict resolution, inclusiveness), and cultural intelligence (respect) are more prominent. A Swedish manager addressing the same performance gap might instead say, "The results this quarter weren't what we hoped for, but I want us to reflect together on what made things difficult and understand how we can support each other better. And let's be mindful of not overloading anyone."

In long-term-oriented cultures such as China or South Korea, narrative intelligence (context-setting, patience), cultural intelligence (metacognition), and emotional intelligence (self-reflection) are especially salient. For example, a Chinese manager introducing a business partnership might begin a meeting by acknowledging shared challenges overcome in the past, and then say, "This collaboration is not a sprint but a long journey we are embarking on together. Let us take the time to build a foundation of mutual trust, and the results will follow naturally in the years to come." In short-term-oriented cultures like the United States or Australia, verbal intelligence (conciseness, urgency), magnitude intelligence (scale, significance), and intrapersonal intelligence (authenticity) are more directly expressed. Communication is direct, with emphasis on immediate results. An American manager launching the same partnership might instead open with, "Let's get straight to it, here's what we bring to the table, here's what we need from you, and here's the value we can deliver together in the next six months. I want to walk out of this room with a clear action plan."

For indulgent cultures such as Mexico or Sweden, emotional intelligence (enthusiasm, open expression), interpersonal intelligence (humour, warmth), and narrative intelligence (storytelling) are particularly evident. For instance, a Mexican team leader kicking off a new initiative might greet everyone and then say with excitement, "I have a really great feeling about what we're going to create together. I want us to enjoy the process as much as the outcome. Let's dream big and have fun along the way!" In restrained cultures like Russia or Japan, intrapersonal intelligence (emotional regulation, boundary setting), verbal intelligence (neutrality, careful wording), and magnitude intelligence (accuracy, holism) are more carefully applied. A Russian manager addressing the same team about the same initiative might instead adopt a measured tone and say, "We have analyzed the situation thoroughly. The objectives are clear. Let us proceed methodically and avoid unnecessary speculation until we have concrete data."

A complex cultural setting, such as the Sultanate of Oman, illustrates how multiple dimensions interact to shape the salience of soft skills. Oman is characterized by high power distance, collectivism, and

moderate uncertainty avoidance (Al Abduwani, 2009; Hofstede et al., 2010). In such a context, skills such as emotional intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and cultural intelligence are particularly salient. This theoretical prediction aligns with empirical findings from Al Abduwani's (2009) study of soft skill development in Omani banks and oil companies. In that study, managers self-assessed their competencies across 31 soft skills before and after training interventions. The largest skill gaps and the most significant post-training improvements were observed in interpersonal and situational skills such as empathy, conflict management, and negotiation, all of which fall under emotional and interpersonal intelligence in the CCSSW framework. In his study, senior managers, who occupy higher power positions, showed stronger profiles in authority-related skills (e.g., decision-making, delegation), consistent with the importance of cultural intelligence in high power-distance settings. Junior managers, on the other hand, demonstrated the greatest gains in interpersonal skills, reflecting the collectivist value of learning from elders and maintaining group harmony. Thus, the CCSSW offers a framework that can help explain observed patterns and can serve as a diagnostic tool for designing targeted interventions.

5.2. Implications for Measurement

A central contribution of the CCSSW is its potential to guide culture-sensitive measurement of soft skills. Traditional assessment tools often assume a universal set of competencies and apply the same weighting across all contexts. This approach overlooks the fact that what constitutes effective communication varies significantly across cultures. The CCSSW addresses this limitation by providing a framework for weighting skills according to their cultural relevance. To operationalize measurement based on the CCSSW, evaluators can follow a three-step protocol:

1. *Profile the cultural context:* Determine the relevant cultural dimensions (e.g., using Hofstede's scores or country-specific data) for the setting in which communication will occur.
2. *Identify skill relevance:* Consult Table 2 to understand which skills are likely to be salient in that cultural context.
3. *Design or adapt assessment instruments:* Create situational judgment tests, behavioural observation rubrics, or self-report scales that reflect the culturally relevant skills. For example, in a collectivist culture, an assessment of conflict resolution might give more weight to indirect, harmony-preserving strategies than to direct confrontation. In an individualist culture, the opposite weighting might be applied.

Table 3 provides sample assessment items for two skills, empathy (a component of emotional intelligence) and assertiveness (a component of verbal intelligence), illustrating how the same underlying behaviour might be evaluated differently across cultural contexts.

Table 3
Sample Culture-sensitive Assessment Items for Empathy and Assertiveness

Skill	Cultural Context	Sample Item / Observation Indicator	Weighting Rationale
Empathy	Collectivist	The participant *indirectly* acknowledges the other's feelings before proposing a solution (e.g., "I understand this has been difficult for the team; let's find a way forward together.")	Indirect, relationship-preserving expressions of empathy are highly valued.
Empathy	Individualist	The participant *directly* names the other's emotion and proposes a solution (e.g., "I see you're frustrated; let's fix this.")	Direct, task-oriented empathy is valued as efficient and authentic.
Assertiveness	Collectivist	The participant expresses a differing view using hedging, questions, or deferential language (e.g., "Would it be possible to consider an alternative?")	Assertiveness that maintains hierarchy and harmony is considered effective.
Assertiveness	Individualist	The participant expresses a differing view directly and with clear ownership (e.g., "I have a different perspective; here's why.")	Direct, unambiguous assertion is valued as honest and efficient.

Such culturally weighted assessments can be developed using standard psychometric methods, with expert judgment or empirical weighting based on cultural dimension scores. Cross-cultural measurement frameworks also emphasize the importance of equivalence, construct validity, and cultural comparability when designing assessment instruments across societies (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). This approach aligns with recent calls for more context-sensitive assessment in intercultural competence research (Deardorff, 2020; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Moreover, the CCSSW can serve as a reflective tool for individuals to diagnose their skill profiles in relation to the cultural demands of their environment. For instance, an expatriate preparing to work in a high-power-distance, collectivist culture (e.g., Oman) can use the wheel to identify which skills to develop and to self-assess progress over time.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study has advanced a reconceptualization of communicative competence as a dynamic, context-sensitive, and skill-mediated construct, culminating in the development of the CCSSW. By foregrounding soft skills as the operational mechanisms through which communication is enacted and interpreted, and by explicitly situating these skills within culturally defined contexts, the CCSSW significantly extends existing theoretical frameworks. The model responds to the long-recognized limitation that communicative competence frameworks, from Hymes (1972) to Bachman and Palmer (1996), have historically emphasized linguistic and pragmatic knowledge while giving insufficient attention to the behavioural and interpersonal competencies that mediate real-world interaction (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2020). The CCSSW addresses this gap by positioning soft skills not as ancillary attributes but as the core enactors of communicative effectiveness.

The implications of the CCSSW extend across multiple domains of practice. For educators, the wheel offers a template for designing curricula that integrate culturally attuned soft skills alongside traditional linguistic and pragmatic instruction, an integration that scholars have increasingly identified as essential for preparing learners for globalized professional environments (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Van Laar et al., 2020). For human resource professionals and cross-cultural trainers, it provides a diagnostic framework for tailoring development programmes to the specific cultural profiles of individuals and teams, responding to the well-documented need for context-sensitive approaches in intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2020; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). For researchers, it opens avenues for designing culture-sensitive assessment instruments that capture communicative competence in ways that reflect the values and norms of diverse populations, a direction that aligns with calls for more ecologically valid measurement tools in intercultural communication research (Fantini, 2020; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

A parallel and complementary development can be found in the field of aptitude testing, where scholars have argued that traditional cognitive measures overlook the very competencies that enable individuals to thrive in culturally diverse environments. In a significant step toward addressing this gap, Pishghadam et al. (2023) introduced the Pishghadam Language-based General Aptitude Test (PL-GAT), which integrates cultural and emo-sensory constructs alongside cognitive abilities. Their work demonstrates that it is both feasible and empirically sound to assess non-cognitive dimensions that resonate deeply with the soft skills central to the CCSSW.

The CCSSW is presented as a conceptual model intended to generate further inquiry rather than as a finalized instrument. Its current instantiation invites several directions for theoretical and empirical elaboration. Future work may extend the model by incorporating alternative cultural frameworks. While Hofstede's (2001) and Hofstede et al.'s (2010) dimensions remain among the most widely used in cross-cultural research (Merkin, 2017), complementary frameworks such as Hall's (1976) high-context and low-context typology, Schwartz's (2014) value orientations, or the GLOBE study's nine cultural dimensions offer additional lenses through which the salience of soft skills might be examined. In particular, the GLOBE project provides a large-scale comparative framework linking cultural values to leadership expectations and communicative practices across societies (House et al., 2004). Similarly, the range of soft skills considered could be expanded to include emerging competencies such as digital communication proficiency, creativity, and resilience, skills that are increasingly recognized as critical

in twenty-first-century workplaces (OECD, 2021; WEF, 2020) and that may carry distinct cultural weight across different contexts.

Moreover, the empirical validation of the CCSSW remains a necessary and promising undertaking. Systematic efforts to operationalize the seven skills, to develop reliable and context-sensitive measurement tools, and to test the hypothesized relationships between skill salience and cultural dimensions would substantially strengthen the framework's credibility and practical utility. Such efforts would align with established traditions in communicative competence research that have successfully moved from theoretical conceptualization to empirically validated instruments (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). Comparative studies across national, organizational, and professional contexts would further illuminate how the interplay of cultural dimensions shapes communication practices in nuanced and sometimes unexpected ways, contributing to a more refined understanding of intercultural communication as a situated and adaptive process (Jackson, 2020; Taguchi & Roever, 2020).

In conclusion, effective communication across cultures demands more than technical proficiency; it requires the capacity to read context, manage relationships, regulate one's own responses, and calibrate expression with precision and sensitivity. The CCSSW offers a coherent, theoretically grounded framework for understanding and cultivating these capacities. By placing soft skills at the heart of communicative competence and grounding them in the realities of cultural diversity, the CCSSW provides a foundation for more context-aware and ultimately more effective approaches to intercultural communication in education, professional practice, and research.

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Data Availability

No new data were generated or analyzed in this conceptual study. All theoretical claims and illustrative examples are based on previously published literature, which is fully cited in the references.

Ethics Declaration

This study is a conceptual article and did not involve human participants, primary data collection, or experimental procedures. As such, ethical approval was not required.

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