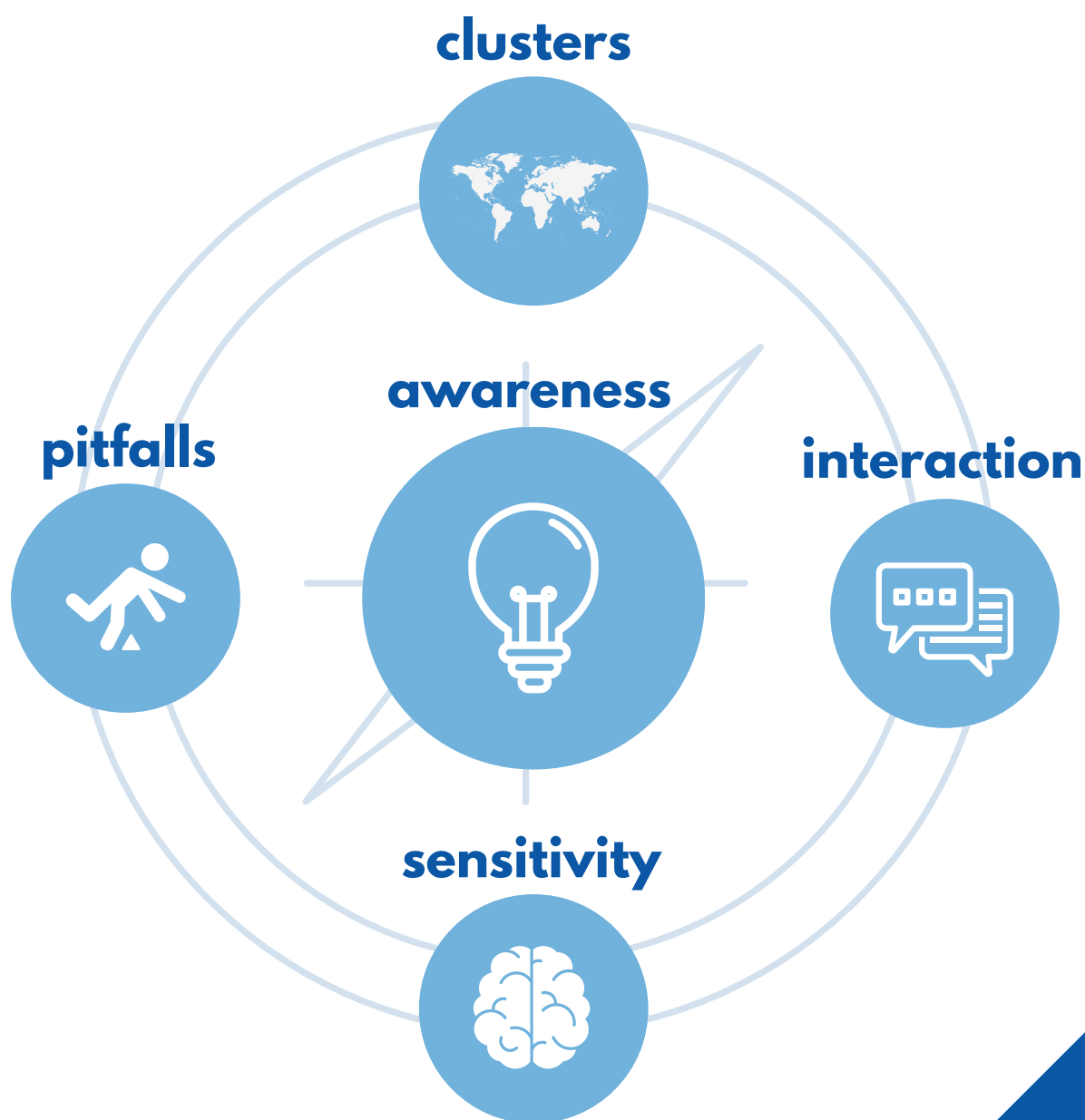


The PACIS model

Effective navigation between
different cultural contexts



Intercultural communication is a crucial skill in today's world. With globalisation, migration, international politics shaping our societies, workplaces and interactions, cultural diversity has become a feature of daily life. Whether you are a diplomat, entrepreneur, teacher, or a military, the ability to engage effectively across cultures is essential for building relationships, fostering cooperation, and achieving shared goals. Hence there is an increased need for knowledge and improved skills. The Clingendael Academy has developed a theoretical framework to support professionals in building their intercultural competence, enabling them to collaborate effectively and sensitively across cultural boundaries. This document introduces the framework and outlines the key elements we address in all our training programmes.

It is not about do's and don'ts, but about intercultural awareness

Approaches to intercultural communication training and intercultural competence has evolved in recent decades. Whereas cultures were traditionally viewed through an essentialist lens—as fixed, national entities—we now see a shift toward a non-essentialist approach that recognises culture as fluid and dynamic. This perspective acknowledges that individuals can hold multiple cultural identities, shaped by personal experiences, social contexts, and interactions.

Many intercultural communication training courses are still based on such an essentialist view of the subject. Examples are courses such as 'How to negotiate with the Chinese' and 'Dealing with the Dutch'. At Clingendael Academy we believe that such an approach is not only outdated but also counterproductive. The focus on national cultures reaffirms stereotypes, disregards the complexity of the subject, and the existence of differences.

Clingendael Academy has devised a new training approach by drawing on its decades of practical experience of intercultural communication, combined with its in-house academic knowledge of the subject.

Our training methodology features a high degree of interaction: the various areas of the PACIS model are highlighted by means of anecdotal examples from intercultural practice and explored together with participants through individual reflection, plenary case studies, role play and simulations.

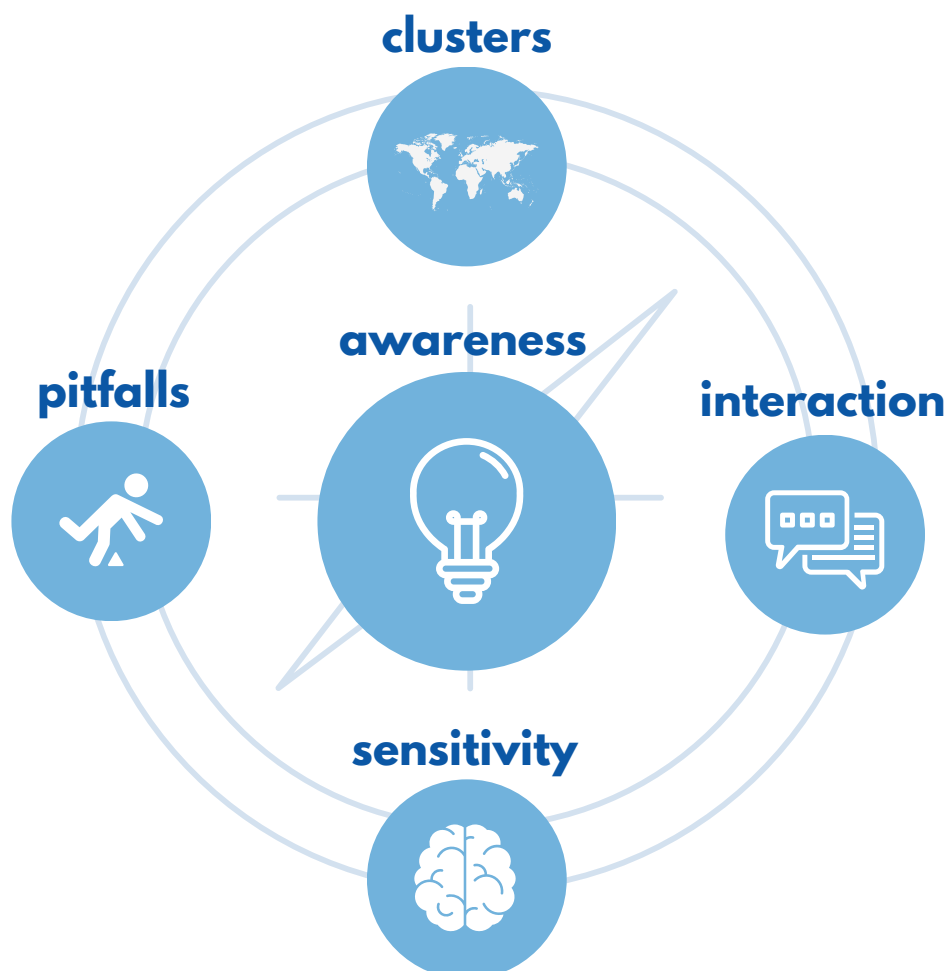
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The PACIS model for intercultural capacity facilitates a non-essentialist approach to intercultural issues. With this model we offer an integral method to deepen and broaden knowledge and skills in the field of intercultural communication. Participants in our training courses are given tools and insights that help them successfully navigate within different cultural contexts.

For more in-depth knowledge it is possible to add a culture-specific component to our training courses on request. In fulfilling such requests Clingendael Academy works only with local experts, who can provide a culture-specific interpretation of the non-essentialist framework facilitated by the PACIS model.

The PACIS model for effective intercultural communication

The PACIS model consists of five elements: Pitfalls, Awareness, Clusters, Interactions and Sensitivity. Investing in all areas leads to increased intercultural capacity.



3

Pitfalls

We believe that, in order to facilitate effective intercultural communication, we must first look at possible pitfalls - or stumbling blocks - in interactions. Unlike in a traditional training approach, this does not refer to do's and don'ts in specific cultures, but to certain attitudes and behavioural pitfalls that may negatively impact the course of intercultural interactions. Examples include stereotypes, ethnocentrism and essentialism. When exploring this topic, we focus not only on recognising these pitfalls to avoid them but also on adequately responding to the behaviours associated with them.

Awareness

Before we can understand how culture impacts the other person's behaviour and communication style, it is crucial to be aware of our own cultural lens. We are all shaped by our surroundings and experiences.

Whether it is our educators, teachers or teammates, consciously and unconsciously our social environment largely shapes our cultural conditioning. This cultural conditioning then informs our behaviour, our communication and our interpretation of the other person. We help participants become aware of their own cultural lens and how it can influence intercultural interactions, partly by exploring intercultural case studies and conducting a communicative self-assessment.

Clusters

Professionals looking for a training course in intercultural communication often find themselves in work situations where they have to deal with interlocutors whose cultural conditioning differs from their own. This can lead to incomprehension, frustration and a deteriorated working relationship or atmosphere.

Understanding where those differences come from and how we can deal with them in intercultural interactions can increase the chance of intercultural success.

Based on a clustering of traditional and recent scientific research, Clingendael trainers help the participants to analyse the potential source of any miscommunication or conflict.

We have identified six clusters that can impact intercultural interaction if the differences between the interlocutors are too wide: Power, Values, Communication, Time, Society and Space.



By acquiring knowledge of these six clusters, participants are able to understand cultural differences, recognise miscommunication more quickly and deal with it in their own working practice.

5

Interaction

Culture can impact the course of interaction in different ways. A good understanding of the communication process is important to understand this influence. The process consists of different stages and actors. Culture shapes every stage of communication, from how we formulate messages to how we interpret them.

Misunderstandings can occur because of differences in language, tone, or unspoken expectations about what is appropriate or polite. Even when people speak the same language, cultural perspectives can lead to very different interpretations of the same words or behaviour.

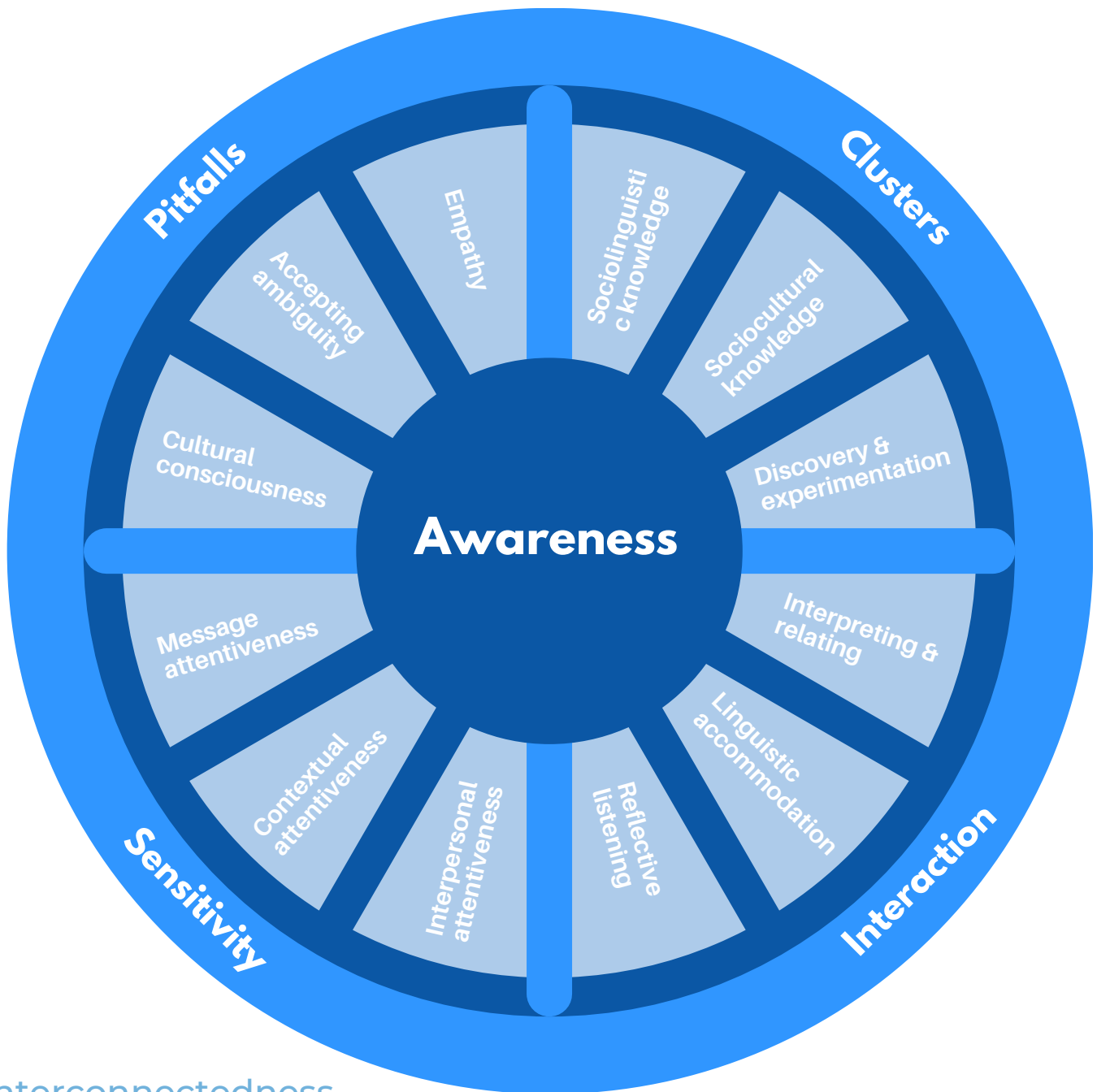
During our training courses, participants investigate the influence of culture on the communication process and understand their own communication style.

Sensitivity

There are a variety of conversational and listening techniques that can be employed to communicate with intercultural sensitivity.

For example, someone skilled in reflective listening can help create a collaborative dialogue — a conversation where participants work toward a shared understanding of the message. This involves asking thoughtful questions and checking whether the intended meaning aligns with how it is interpreted. Rather than assuming immediate understanding, reflective listening is used to gradually build clarity and mutual insight.

There are several ways to deal with miscommunication or conflict in intercultural interactions: we can ignore it, try to dominate the situation, accommodate the other person, seek compromise or explore other possible solutions. We make participants aware of the choices they have in dealing with intercultural conflict and help them choose the right strategy.



Interconnectedness

The PACIS model offers an integrated approach to the development of intercultural competences.

The emphasis is not only on cultural differences, as is common in essentialist training approaches, but rather on how the different areas of the model can reinforce each other and thus contribute to successful intercultural interactions. An increased knowledge of clusters, for example, leads to more awareness, while the recognition and acknowledgement of pitfalls contributes to enhanced intercultural sensitivity. The subjects are thus interrelated and influence each other.

The PACIS model as an analysis tool

The PACIS model is useful not only as a framework for our training courses but also as an analysis tool to understand intercultural conflict or miscommunication.

This a fictionalised anecdote from a former student that lends itself to systematic intercultural analysis using the PACIS model.

Case: I'm not doing anything wrong, am I?

"I worked remotely for a French organisation, with a French boss and colleagues of many different nationalities around the world. The working relationship with one of my colleagues was very difficult. He did not keep appointments and often responded rudely to my requests to carry out tasks. I discussed this with my manager. This was followed by an angry e-mail, sent to both me and my colleague, in which our manager criticised the way we worked. I was very surprised, as I was sure I hadn't done anything wrong. Although I didn't understand why I was being criticised, the working relationship between me and my colleague improved after the e-mail from our boss."

Pitfalls

Ethnocentrism may have been a pitfall here. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view one's own culture as central, superior, or the norm, while judging other cultures by those standards I saw my way of working as the right way of working. I was used to a certain way of interacting that did not match my colleague's way of working.

Awareness

*Although I thought I communicated quite indirectly – compared to my Dutch colleagues – I realised that my **communication style** was still quite direct compared to people from other cultural contexts.*

Clusters

*I suspect there is a subconscious difference in the way my colleague and I view **hierarchy**. I am younger [than my colleague], but I do have more work experience. Maybe my colleague finds it difficult when a more junior colleague asks him to perform tasks. I have always worked in flat organisations, and I am used to everyone being able to have their say in the workplace.*

Interaction

*When I asked my boss why the e-mail was also sent to me, I realised it was a case of so-called **pragmatic miscommunication**. My manager told me he wanted to protect my colleague from losing face, so did not want to put the blame on him alone.*

*His **intention** was to make clear that my colleague needed to change his attitude to work, whereas my **interpretation** was that I was not doing my job properly.*

Sensitivity

My boss's statement initially felt like a very clumsy way to tackle my colleague about his behaviour. I really had to read between the lines to understand his intention. I now realise that this kind of communication can be effective, as our working relationship is a lot better now. I find that we now approach each other more as equals.

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