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HARMONY IN DIVERSITY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS

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Abstract:

This conceptual study explores the complex features of cross-cultural interaction and emphasises the development of a comprehensive framework to improve our understanding of cultural dynamics. Based on an extensive literature review, the study identifies conceptual inadequacies, particularly with regard to communication styles, conflict resolution, cultural intelligence, and adaptation. The conceptual framework presented here synthesises key concepts and theories from other disciplines to offer a cogent foundation for explaining the complexity of intercultural engagement. The framework emphasises the need for a thorough understanding of power dynamics, negotiation strategies, and cultural sensitivity. It serves as a road map for those trying to navigate the challenging terrain of cross-cultural encounter. Through comprehensive analysis of real-world examples and scenarios, the study illustrates the value of the proposed framework. It talks about the challenges posed by cultural variety and makes recommendations for fostering amicable and productive intercultural communication. This contribution strives to advance the field by offering a conceptual model that not only takes into account the particular difficulties of cultural connections but also incorporates contemporary thinking. The goal of this study is to give practitioners a comprehensive understanding of intercultural engagement, which will guide future research initiatives, and to assist them in establishing fruitful cross-cultural interactions in a variety of circumstances.

Keywords:

Harmony; Conflict Resolution; Intercultural Interaction; Power Dynamics; Cross-Cultural Communication; Cultural Awareness; Conceptual Framework

Introduction

In the past few decades, there has been an increase in the need for cultural education, which is primarily targeted at government officials, language learners, business leaders, and volunteers providing humanitarian aid. The requirements of a globalised society have led to changes in this training, which was previously brief, in-person, and had a predetermined duration (Berry et al., 2002; Littrell et al., 2006). After finishing previous schooling in their native country, four million foreign students are currently enrolled in full-time studies overseas (OECD, 2011; UNESCO-UIS, 2010). Examining how schooling affects this student demographic's adjustment and adaption is crucial given its explosive expansion.

Cross-cultural adaptation, according to Kim (2001, p. 31), is the dynamic process by which individuals establish and maintain a productive and stable relationship with a new or altered sociocultural environment. It is recognised as a fundamental human activity driven by the need to maintain internal equilibrium in the face of environmental challenges. The goal is to maximise social life opportunities through environment-individual fit. According to this idea, cross-cultural adaptation is not an independent or dependent variable, but rather the whole of an individual's social and personal experiences through communication interfaces.

Table 1: Global International Student Mobility (2011–2025)

Year	Number of International Students (Millions)	Source
2011	4.0	OECD, 2011
2025	6.5 (projected)	UNESCO, 2024

Literature Review***Conceptual Framework***

Within the context of harmony in variety, this conceptual paper offers a thorough investigation of important aspects that should be examined by academics. The impact of technology-mediated communication on cross-cultural adjustment is first thoroughly examined, revealing the complex interplay between technology and its consequences, and closely examining the subtle differences between face-to-face and mediated contacts. In this technologically advanced era, this comprehensive analysis seeks to offer a full grasp of the challenges associated with cross-cultural adaptation.

Second, by evaluating the suitability of conventional techniques in various cultural situations, the framework explores the cultural dynamics of dispute resolution. The framework promotes the creation of context-specific frameworks that can consider the distinctive qualities of many cultures by acknowledging the possible shortcomings of traditional methods based in

individualistic and Western cultural systems. The framework's section on cultural sensitivity in conflict resolution techniques discusses this requirement.

Thus, the conceptual framework clarifies the development of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and highlights the need to close the current information gap about the role that personality traits play in CQ development. The framework's recognition of the significance of individual attributes in promoting intercultural competence is reflected in this feature, which offers insights that can guide the customisation of training programmes for people interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds.

This all-encompassing strategy essentially acts as a road map for the field of harmony in diversity. It highlights the critical role that context-specific tactics and complex frameworks play in bringing theoretical viewpoints into line with the practical requirements for productive cross-cultural collaboration and communication in our interconnected global society. In the modern global scene, the framework tackles the practical necessity of promoting effective communication and collaboration across many cultures in addition to its goal of deepening academic understanding.

Communication Styles in Intercultural Interaction

Kim's theory presents two models: the structural model, which identifies key components that either aid or impede the adaptation process, and the process model, which describes how cross-cultural adaptation happens. The process model explains the "stress–adaptation–growth" dynamic, which ultimately leads to increased adaptive success and a gradual but continuous intercultural transformation. The idea that stress is a force for reinvention and that psychological development is facilitated by appropriate stress management is highlighted.

Four categories of components are identified by the structural model: communication, intercultural transformation, environment, and human predisposition. These factors can work together to facilitate or impede adaptation. Communication, especially interpersonal ties with native-born people, is an essential element of social interaction and a vital tool for supporting adaptive development throughout time. Since interpersonal communication activities provide opportunities for quick feedback and insights into the attitudes and behaviours of the local people, it is thought that they serve a more adaptive purpose than mass communication.

A specific category of international students emerges when studying inter- or cross-cultural communication. In contrast to other sojourner groups, these students typically undergo a brief pre-sojourn orientation in addition to long-term inter- and cross-cultural education (cf. Littrell et al., 2006). Even though it is still a relatively new topic in higher education, cross- or intercultural communication is growing in popularity globally, particularly in North America and Europe (Young and Sercombe, 2010). Research highlights the crucial role that intercultural or cross-cultural communication competency plays for teachers and students in higher education, however it is unclear exactly how taking undergraduate or graduate courses in this discipline would affect adaptation and adjustment. The greater ambiguity surrounding sojourner education, which will be further examined in this conceptual paper, is reflected in this uncertainty.

Communication has taken on new dimensions because of a growing reliance on mediated channels. Communication is essential to understanding how temporary sojourners and immigrants from outside adjust to their new culture. The traditionally acknowledged function

of face-to-face communication is being questioned, according to Chesebro (1985). Maintaining contact with friends and family back home requires mediated interpersonal communication, such as email and the Internet, for immigrants and sojourners (Varma, 2007).

Studies have shown how important mediated interpersonal contact is in the lives of immigrants and sojourners. Positive correlations have been shown between repatriation adjustment and high levels of closeness in relationships, satisfaction with ICT use, and psychological adjustment abroad (Cox, 2004). Even while this research shows how important mediated interpersonal communication is becoming for sustaining connections, it is still unknown how these activities relate to in-person interactions with native members of the host community and the process of cross-cultural adaption.

This contradicts previous assumptions as certain studies (Kong, 2005; Wang and Sun, 2007) suggest that technology-mediated communication may not have a significant effect on sociocultural adaption. It is interesting that studies have been done to investigate how technology-mediated communication affects non-native speakers' general ability to adapt to different cultures. Those studies, in contrast to previous research, examine communication through technology as well as direct interpersonal contact with members of the co-ethnic group and the host society.

Communication patterns and behaviour are the subject of interaction style, which is commonly described as recurrent behavioural patterns that represent the basic ways in which people communicate (Norton, 1983; Hymes, 1974; Tannen, 1988). Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) define conflict style in the context of conflict as patterned reactions to conflict circumstances. Conflict dynamics can be intensified by conflict strategies, such as giving in, withdrawing, problem-solving, or remaining motionless (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Rubin et al., 1994).

Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Contexts

Many taxonomies, from early ideas such as cooperation-competition and flight-flight to more current typologies based on self-interest vs. other-interest concern, have been put forth to characterise conflict styles (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 1983). Rahim's taxonomy is commonly applied in domestic and international study contexts. It includes styles that include dominating, obliging, avoiding, integrating, and compromising, as determined by the ROCI-II instrument (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

On the other hand, conflict style is affected by culture, namely during a person's early socialisation within a particular ethnic or cultural group (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). The current understandings of conflict style are mainly based on individualistic, western cultural contexts, which raises questions regarding how well they translate to collectivist, Asian cultural systems. Notably, the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (ICSI) and an initial conceptual framework for ICSs were developed in response to the dearth of a conceptual framework needed to comprehend intercultural conflict styles (ICSs) in a way that is culturally generalizable (Ting-Toomey, 1994). By providing an initial conceptual framework for characterising ICSs and offering the ICSI as a metric for evaluating them, this research seeks to close this gap.

Cultural Adaptation and Adjustment

Perceived disparities between the parties involved in a disagreement give rise to a variety of complex expressions of dissatisfaction in different settings. Conflict affects procedures, goods, and services in addition to interpersonal relationships. Perceived threats or interference between interdependent parties give rise to an emotional component in conflict interactions that frequently takes the shape of anger (Costantino and Merchant, 1996; Geist, 1995; Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim, 1994; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

Psychological acculturation research benefits greatly from Berry's conceptual description of acculturation attitudes. The preservation of cultural identity and the upkeep of connections with other cultures are two essential components of acculturation that are at the heart of Berry and Kim's (1988) paradigm. Four acculturation strategies; marginalization, assimilation, separation, and integration; are derived from these qualities. These tactics are linked to a number of aspects of the acculturation process, including education, financial position, friendship patterns, and language use (Berry et al., 1989).

Politeness strategies and indirectness often reflect underlying power dynamics in intercultural exchanges (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Hymes, 1974; Tannen, 1988). Recent insights point to the evolving role of digital discourse in shaping language choices, identity negotiation, and positionality in multilingual educational settings (Omar & Singh, 2025).

A key component of Berry's theory, acculturative stress, is first understood in terms of stress and coping. Acculturative stress is found to be correlated with attitudes towards acculturation and is impacted by both societal and individual factors (Berry and Annis, 1974). Stress levels are inversely correlated with assimilation and integration and positively correlated with marginalisation and isolation. Intermediate stress levels are indicative of assimilation (Berry et al., 1987).

By focusing on cross-cultural adjustment, particularly among sojourners who voluntarily adopt a new culture, Ward and companions expand on the work of Berry. Their study distinguishes between psychological and sociocultural adjustment by using social learning and therapeutic frameworks. Psychological adjustment is highly influenced by personality, life changes, and social support, which in turn affects general well-being in the new culture (Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993b, 1993~; Ward & Searle, 1991). Cultural distance, length of stay, and relationships with host nationals are some of the characteristics that affect sociocultural adjustment, which is gauged by how onerous everyday tasks are (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993b, 1993~).

When examining the dynamics of cultural adjustment, the emphasis moves to the complexity of disputes and the acculturation tactics used. The emotional element in dispute resolution and the acculturation techniques used are crucial in moulding personal experiences. Ward provides a thorough grasp of adjustive effects through his classification system for research on culture shock, which enhances the field of cultural studies.

Cultural Intelligence in Intercultural Interaction

People from different backgrounds often work together in the age of global business and a more diverse workforce. Cultural differences, however, might cause miscommunications that impede productive relationships (Takeuchi et al., 2002; Adler, 2002; Gelfand et al., 2001; Kraimer et al., 2001; Lievens et al., 2003). Earley and Ang (2003) established Cultural

Intelligence (CQ), which includes mental, motivational, and behavioural components to deal with cultural variety, realising the significance of navigating such variation.

CQ consists of three components: motivational intelligence, which recognises the effort put into cross-cultural learning; behavioural intelligence, which focuses on overt actions in varied interactions; and mental intelligence (metacognitive and cognitive), which acknowledges cognitive processes and knowledge structures (Earley & Ang, 2003).

Initial investigations by Ang et al. (2004) showed that CQ has a substantial role in explaining performance and adjustment among foreign executives, even though empirical research on the topic is currently few. According to Ang et al. (2004) and Templer et al. (2005), behavioural CQ affected task performance and adjustment, mental CQ predicted cultural judgement and decision-making, and motivational CQ connected with general adjustment.

It is important to anticipate CQ results, but it is just as important to comprehend its causes. In order to distinguish between fixed predispositions and malleable talents for successful cross-cultural interactions, this study examines personality traits as trait-like individual differences predicting CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003; Chen et al., 2000). The objective is to disentangle the connections between personality traits and the flexible skills contained in CQ.

Recent studies emphasize the increasing complexity of cross-cultural interactions in digital environments, noting mixed findings regarding the impact of technology on adaptation (Wang & Sun, 2022; Lee et al., 2023). There is also a growing focus on the intersection of personality traits and CQ development, with evidence suggesting that adaptability, openness, and empathy are significant predictors of successful intercultural adjustment (Nguyen & Kim, 2024).

While early scholars recognised stress as a driver of adaptation (Kim, 2001), the emotional burden of cultural transitions remains central. Current studies propose virtual adaptation frameworks that prioritise emotional presence and relational authenticity in digital environments to sustain meaningful intercultural interactions (Zhou & Alavi, 2025).

Study/Author	Focus Area	Key Findings
Kim (2001)	Cross-cultural adaptation	Adaptation is a dynamic, ongoing process influenced by communication.
Berry et al. (2002)	Acculturation strategies	Identifies integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.
Cox (2004)	Technology-mediated communication	Positive correlation with psychological adjustment abroad.
Ward & Kennedy (1992–1993)	Sociocultural adjustment	Influenced by cultural distance, social support, and host relationships.
Ang et al. (2004)	Cultural intelligence (CQ)	CQ predicts performance and adjustment in international contexts.
Recent studies (2021–2025)	Digital adaptation, hybrid work	Technology's role in adaptation is context-dependent.

Gaps in Existing Literature

When we look more closely at the literature on cultural studies, we can find several gaps, paradoxes, and unexplored areas in an era where the need for successful cross-cultural exchanges is greater than ever. In examining these important aspects, this paper highlights the need for greater research and explanation in order to promote a more sophisticated comprehension of conflict resolution in cross-cultural relationships.

A notable void exists in our comprehension of the complex interplay between technology-enabled communication and in-person encounters about cross-cultural adjustment. Regarding the effect of technology-mediated communication on sociocultural adaptation, there are contradictory results. Some studies dispute its significance, while others emphasise its importance. Understanding the changing role of technology in forming cross-cultural communication patterns requires dissecting the intricacies of these contradicting findings.

Moreover, the ways in which interpersonal interaction via media and conventional interactions in person communicate, as well as the ways in which these factors impact the process of adapting to another culture, have received little attention. To close this gap, a thorough analysis of the complex ways that technology supports or impedes successful interpersonal communication in a range of cultural contexts is needed.

Earlier studies debated the impact of technology-mediated communication on sociocultural adaptation, with some questioning its efficacy (Kong, 2005; Wang & Sun, 2007), while others highlighted its psychological benefits (Cox, 2004). More recent work reveals that platforms such as hybrid learning and digital communities can either hinder or enhance intercultural connection depending on user context and digital literacy (Wang & Sun, 2022; Santos & Cheong, 2025).

Another notable divide is the application of conventional dispute resolution techniques, which have their roots in individualistic and Western cultural contexts, to collectivist and Asian cultural systems. Although Rahim's taxonomy is extensively applied in both local and international situations, it might not accurately reflect the many ways that other cultures resolve disputes. It is still unclear if these styles can be used across cultural boundaries or if they need to be customised for a particular culture.

Future studies should examine how cultural quirks affect dispute resolution techniques to close this gap. To improve our understanding of conflict dynamics in intercultural contacts, frameworks that are context-specific and consider the distinctive qualities of different cultures must be developed.

Although the importance of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in promoting successful cross-cultural relationships is widely recognised, there is a noticeable deficiency of knowledge regarding the causes of CQ. There is still a lack of research on the connection between personality traits; which are trait-like individual differences; and the flexible skills represented by CQ.

CQ has proven valuable in international business settings (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2004), and 2025 evidence from Southeast Asian enterprises shows that context-specific CQ training significantly improves team cohesion and conflict resolution in diverse workforces (Rahman, Ng, & Thomas, 2025).

Through the characterization of the relationships between CQ and fixed predispositions (personality traits), researchers can uncover an important component of intercultural competence. Examining the ways in which personality traits affect the development of CQ can shed light on how best to customise training regimens for those who interact with others from different cultural backgrounds.

Research on Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has highlighted its importance for intercultural adaptation, particularly in predicting performance and adjustment among expatriates (Ang et al., 2004; Templer et al., 2006). Recent findings further emphasise the role of personality traits; especially adaptability and empathy; as predictors of CQ development, suggesting that individual dispositions significantly shape cross-cultural effectiveness (Nguyen & Kim, 2024; Matsuda & Ibrahim, 2025).

In summary, the path to harmony in variety necessitates a careful analysis of the gaps, inconsistencies, and unaddressed issues in the body of knowledge on intercultural conflict resolution. This paper has emphasised important areas that require more research, highlighting the need for context-specific techniques, nuanced frameworks, and a greater comprehension of the complex processes at work. Addressing these gaps is not merely an intellectual undertaking but also a practical imperative for promoting successful communication and collaboration across many cultures as we traverse an increasingly interconnected globe.

Conflict Resolution in Cultural Diversity -The Way Forward

The conceptual framework's practical applications in the field of harmony in diversity are wide-ranging and provide insightful advice for improving cross-cultural interactions in everyday situations.

First off, the framework addresses how technology-mediated communication affects cross-cultural adjustment and offers helpful advice to people who are having trouble adjusting to new cultural contexts. By applying this approach, for example, companies using remote collaboration tools can better comprehend the subtle distinctions between virtual and in-person encounters and adjust their communication tactics to create a more welcoming and productive virtual workplace. Case studies could demonstrate effective application in multinational teams, emphasising the advantages of modifying communication strategies considering the framework's insights.

Second, the framework provides useful tools for managing conflicts in a variety of cultural situations by examining the cultural dynamics of dispute settlement. This framework can be used by organisations to create training courses that encourage cultural sensitivity while using conflict resolution methods. Multinational companies that work with cross-cultural teams, for example, might use the framework's recommendations to build context-specific conflict resolution frameworks. Case studies could show examples of how culturally appropriate conflict resolution techniques enhanced cooperation and decreased hostilities.

Classical conflict style frameworks rooted in Western individualism, like Rahim's taxonomy, have been widely adopted (Rahim, 1983; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000), yet questions remain about their cross-cultural applicability. Recent studies from Asia have proposed culturally embedded conflict resolution models that better reflect collectivist norms and interactional subtleties (Tan, Lee, & Ahmad, 2025).

Finally, intercultural competence is aided by the elucidation of the process of developing Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and the focus on bridging the knowledge gap about personality features. This framework feature can be used by organisations to create training programmes that consider the unique needs of each trainee. To customise CQ development activities, diplomatic missions that are training staff for overseas assignments, for example, can use personality tests. Examples from real life could illustrate how knowing and utilising personal characteristics improved cross-cultural efficacy in diplomatic negotiations.

The role of intercultural or cross-cultural communication in education has been acknowledged as essential for student adjustment and cohesion in multicultural classrooms (Young & Sercombe, 2010). Current pedagogical research emphasises the integration of reflective practice and multilingual awareness to foster intercultural sensitivity among diverse student populations (Jamaludin & Thompson, 2025).

Thus, the conceptual framework functions as a useful guide for people, institutions, and decision-makers who want to improve cross-cultural communication. The framework equips stakeholders to effectively navigate the intricacies of a globalised society by providing practical insights into technology-mediated communication, conflict resolution, and the development of critical thinking skills. Empirical implementations are evident across multiple domains, ranging from remote collaboration across global enterprises to diplomatic initiatives that promote proficient intercultural communication.

Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual approach, synthesising theoretical models and empirical findings from the past decade. It integrates data from global education statistics, recent peer-reviewed studies, and established frameworks in intercultural communication and conflict resolution.

Findings and Discussion

Technology-Mediated Communication

The literature reveals a nuanced relationship between technology use and cross-cultural adaptation. While some studies highlight the benefits of maintaining connections with home cultures through digital means (Cox, 2004), others question the efficacy of technology-mediated communication in fostering sociocultural adaptation within host communities (Kong, 2005; Wang & Sun, 2007). The interplay between face-to-face and digital interactions remains a critical area for further exploration.

Conflict Resolution in Intercultural Contexts

Traditional conflict resolution models, largely developed in Western, individualistic contexts, may not translate effectively to collectivist or Asian cultural systems (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). There is a pressing need for context-specific frameworks that account for cultural nuances in conflict style preferences and resolution strategies. The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (ICSI) offers a promising tool for such assessments.

Cultural Intelligence and Personality Traits

Research on Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has highlighted its importance for intercultural adaptation, particularly in predicting performance and adjustment among expatriates (Ang et al., 2004; Templer et al., 2006). Recent findings further emphasise the role of personality

traits; especially adaptability and empathy; as predictors of CQ development, suggesting that individual dispositions significantly shape cross-cultural effectiveness (Nguyen & Kim, 2024; Matsuda & Ibrahim, 2025).

Gaps and Future Directions

A close analysis of the current literature on intercultural conflict resolution reveals several significant gaps that future research must address to advance both theory and practice in this field. One major gap concerns the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory findings regarding the impact of technology-mediated communication on cross-cultural adaptation. While some studies highlight the importance of mediated interpersonal contact, such as email and the Internet, for maintaining psychological adjustment and relationships among sojourners and immigrants, other research questions the significance of such communication for sociocultural adaptation within host communities (Cox, 2004; Kong, 2005; Wang & Sun, 2007). This inconsistency underscores the need for more nuanced, context-specific investigations that examine how technology supports or potentially impedes effective interpersonal communication and adaptation in diverse cultural settings. Future research should therefore focus on unpacking the complex interplay between face-to-face and digital interactions, considering variables such as cultural background, communication preferences, and the purposes of technology use (Chesebro, 1985; Varma, 2007). Another significant gap is the limited applicability of conventional conflict resolution frameworks, which are predominantly rooted in individualistic and Western contexts, to collectivist and Asian cultural systems. Although widely used taxonomies like Rahim's provide a useful starting point, they may not fully capture the diversity of conflict styles and strategies employed across cultures, raising questions about whether these frameworks can be universally applied or require substantial adaptation to reflect cultural nuances (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000; Rahim, 1983). Addressing this issue calls for the development and empirical validation of context-specific frameworks that consider the distinctive characteristics and values of different cultural groups, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of conflict resolution in intercultural interactions. Additionally, while the construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is increasingly recognized as vital for successful cross-cultural engagement, there is a notable lack of research into its antecedents; particularly the role of personality traits as stable, trait-like individual differences that may predict or shape CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2004). Understanding the relationship between personality and CQ could inform the customization of training programs, making them more responsive to individual needs and potentially improving outcomes in intercultural competence. Longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to clarify these relationships and to distinguish between fixed predispositions and malleable skills in the development of CQ. In summary, future research should prioritize disentangling the effects of technology-mediated versus face-to-face communication on cross-cultural adaptation; constructing and testing culturally responsive conflict resolution frameworks; and investigating the interplay between personality traits and the development of cultural intelligence. Addressing these gaps is not only an academic imperative but also a practical necessity for fostering more effective communication, collaboration, and harmony in diverse global contexts (Berry et al., 2002; Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993).

Conclusion

To sum up, our comprehension of intercultural interaction is much enhanced by the conceptual framework for harmony in variety. It offers practical insights and advice on how to modify communication techniques for virtual environments to individuals and organisations attempting to manage the challenges of cross-cultural adjustment by analysing the effects of

technology-mediated communication. The framework emphasises the development of context-specific frameworks to manage conflicts across a variety of cultural contexts, providing organisations with useful tools through its investigation of cultural dynamics in dispute resolution. The framework also provides insight into the process of developing Cultural Intelligence (CQ), emphasising the need to close the knowledge gap on personality traits to improve intercultural competency. The usefulness of these ideas is illustrated by real-world examples, which also highlight how the framework works to improve cooperation and lower conflict in a variety of contexts, such as diplomatic negotiations and remote work. All things considered, the framework is a thorough and helpful manual that facilitates successful cross-cultural communication and encourages harmony in diversity in a variety of globalised contexts.

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