

# Ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate

## A study of New Zealand management students

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### Abstract

The author investigated the level of ethnocentrism and the willingness to communicate interculturally of management students (N = 438) at a university in New Zealand. The 22-item Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) scale and the 12-item Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWTC) scale were used. Results show that respondents were not highly ethnocentric and were moderate in their willingness to communicate with people from other cultures. Respondents were also asked additional questions regarding intercultural interaction on campus and in the workplace. The results suggest that they recognized the importance of intercultural communication in the workplace but that their attitudes toward interaction with students from other cultures were not conducive to developing intercultural communication skills. Implications for educators are discussed.

**Keywords:** *ethnocentrism, intercultural willingness to communicate, international students, management students, domestic students, intercultural communication, global citizen*

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### Introduction

This paper reports on a study that investigated ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate among management students at a university in New Zealand. In today's increasingly globalized world, cultural diversity — and, consequently, intercultural communication, or communication that occurs between people from different cultures—is becoming the norm in the workplace and in business contexts (Chen & Starosta 1998). New Zealand is no exception. New Zealand is one of the countries that receive the highest proportion of migrants in the world (Singham 2006), and it is projected that by 2021, ethnic minority people other than Māori and Pacific peoples (who, according to the 2013 census, comprise 14% and 7% of the population respectively (Statistics New Zealand 2014)) will make up 18% of the population (Singham 2006). Not only is there change in the proportion of ethnic minorities but there are also changes in the types of cultures that make up New Zealand as more and more migrants are coming from countries other than the traditional sources such as Britain and other European countries. As well, New Zealand has been a study destination of a large number of international students from all over the world (Butcher 2009). New Zealanders, therefore, require skills — including intercultural communication skills — to cope with opportunities and challenges such diversity brings.

Given New Zealand's increasingly multicultural nature, as well as its participation in international trade and relations in this “new era of unprecedented global economic interactions” (Cant 2004:177), a willingness to communicate with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds is essential to the success of both interpersonal relations and business operations. Such a willingness is a basic motivation required for competent intercultural communication (Lustig & Koester 2006). A major barrier to effective communication, however, is ethnocentrism (Taylor 2006), a term coined by Sumner (1940) to refer to

“[the] view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled<sup>2</sup> and rated with reference to it” (27-28).

Ethnocentrism has been the subject of much research; however, there are not many studies that make a connection between ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate. Furthermore, the few that do are not set in the New Zealand context. While insights gained from research in other countries are useful in general, they are not specifically relevant to New Zealanders. Also, previous research has not been conducted with a focus on business or management students. Such a focus is significant because not only are these students currently in the social and educational contexts that are culturally diverse (Singham 2006) but on graduation they will enter the workforce that is likely to require them to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds. As managers, they will be working in cross-cultural teams or negotiating with other international business leaders (McLean & Lewis 2010).

Given the gap in the literature outlined above, the aim of the current study, therefore, is to investigate ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate of New Zealand management students in order to assess their preparedness for today’s culturally diverse workplace and to recommend strategies that management educators may employ to foster intercultural sensitivity and skills in these students. To that end, the following research questions were explored:

1. How ethnocentric are New Zealand management students?
2. How willing are they to communicate with people from other cultures?
3. What are their perspectives on intercultural communication on campus and their preparation for a culturally diverse workplace?

## Literature review

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one’s own culture is centrally important and is superior to other cultures (Taylor 2006). Consequently, ethnocentric people tend to use their culture as a benchmark against which to judge those from other cultures (Gudykunst & Kim 2003; Lin & Rancer 2003a; Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). Many researchers believe that ethnocentrism is universal and some degree of it is experienced by all members of society (e.g., Fluck, Clouse, & Shooshtari 2007; Gudykunst 2004; Gudykunst & Kim 2003; Neuliep, Chaudoir, & McCroskey 2001; Neuliep & McCroskey 1997).

Ethnocentrism influences how people would communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds (Butcher & Haggard 2009; Lin & Rancer 2003a) and, therefore, is a major factor affecting the understanding of intergroup communication (Neuliep et al. 2001). It has both positive and negative potential, functions and dysfunctions (Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). On the one hand, it can, for example, patriotism or nationalism (Gudykunst & Kim 2003; Pan 2007) and motivate an individual to sacrifice for his or her group, whether it is national, ethnic, religious, or anything else (Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). On the other hand, ethnocentrism can be a barrier to effective communication because individuals are not open to new information (Taylor 2006). In organizational contexts, Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005) found that ethnocentrism negatively influences interpersonal perceptions of attractiveness, credibility, and managerial effectiveness. These findings have important implications for manager-subordinate relationships and interactions.

Closely related to ethnocentrism, the second major concept investigated in this study is intercultural willingness to communicate. Intercultural willingness to communicate is defined as “one’s predisposition to initiate intercultural communication encounters” (Kassing 1997:400). There are many reasons why individuals might choose not to communicate with people from other cultures. One of these is that such communication involves an increased level of stress, as it takes more of an effort to communicate with someone who does not speak the same language or have the same cultural values (Kassing 1997). Another reason could be their ethnocentrism, as mentioned earlier. If people hold a high level of ethnocentrism, their prejudices may influence their willingness to communicate. Ethnocentric individuals may choose not to communicate with someone from another culture because they see this culture as inferior to their own (Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). Ethnocentrism can also influence willingness to

participate in another way: the more ethnocentric people are, the more they become anxious when <sup>3</sup> interacting with strangers (Gudykunst 2004). Consequently, to avoid anxiety, ethnocentric individuals may choose not to interact at all.

In today's world cultural diversity characterizes most facets of life. It is important that its inhabitants, including—or perhaps in particular—those in business and management spheres, accept such diversity and develop cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence. Both ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate are highly relevant to these endeavours. There is a small volume of research that studies these two concepts together. For example, Massengill and Nash's (2009) study on American students has shown that there is a significant relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural willingness to communicate. Lin and Rancer (2003) found that among American students in their study, men were more ethnocentric and less willing to communicate interculturally than women. Other studies focus on cross-cultural comparisons. It has been found, for example, that Korean students (Lin, Rancer, & Lim 2003) and Chinese students (Butcher & Haggard 2009) were significantly less ethnocentric and less willing to communicate interculturally than American students. Romanian students, in a study by Lin, Rancer, and Trimbilas (2005), were also found to be less willing to communicate interculturally than their American counterparts. However, they were more ethnocentric than American students.

As can be seen above, previous research has been restricted to the USA and a small handful of other countries. Insights from the New Zealand-based research reported in this paper will help to widen our knowledge and understanding of these concepts in a different global context, and, at a more practical level, help educators to better prepare students to live and work successfully in the 21:st century.

## Method

Following ethical approval of the research project, a questionnaire survey was conducted. Details of the sample and the measures used are described below.

### Sample

A total of 438 domestic students from a management school at a mid-sized university in New Zealand were surveyed. This university was chosen because of the diversity of its student population, with international students from 50 countries constituting 17% of overall enrolments in 2014 and 27% of business/management enrolments (M. Mu, personal communication, 24 February, 2015). Such a culturally diverse community provides an ideal site for research into ethnocentrism and intercultural communication. The sample, a convenience one recruited from various locations around the university (e.g., the library, computer labs, and campus cafeterias and shops), consisted of 188 females (43%) and 250 males (57%) from a range of departments. The majority (69%) were Pākehā (those of European ancestry), 16% were Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand), 5% were Pacific Islanders, 5% were Asian (mainly Chinese and Indian), and the rest (5%) were "Other" (mainly those of dual ethnicities). Participants were aged between 18 and 47, with those in the 18-21 years constituting 76% of the sample.

### Measures

Neuliep and McCroskey's (1997) Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) scale was used to measure participants' ethnocentrism. The GENE scale, designed to measure ethnocentrism regardless of culture, consists of 22 items, 15 of which are measurement items and 7 of which are fillers (Lin et al. 2005). The items are in the form of statements and respondents are asked to indicate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they agree or disagree with them, 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree". Based on the 15 measurement items, scores can range from 15 to 75, with a mid-point of 45. The higher the score is, the higher the ethnocentrism is. Examples of the items are "People in my culture could learn a lot from people of other cultures" and "I have many friends from other cultures." Eleven of the items are phrased positively and 11 negatively.

The GENE scale was chosen because its validity and reliability have been comprehensively tested and accepted (Lin et al. 2005). As the scale was developed specifically to measure “generalized” ethnocentrism, it was suitable for use with people of any cultural background, unlike its predecessor, the U.S. Ethnocentrism scale (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). It has been used with participants from a variety of cultures, such as American, Korean, Chinese, Romanian, and Japanese, and its reliability has been confirmed, with Cronbach’s alpha scores between .76 and .90 (e.g., Butcher & Haggard 2009; Dong et al. 2008; Justen 2009; Lin & Rancer 2003a, 2003b; Lin et al. 2003; Lin et al. 2005; Massengill & Nash 2009; Neuliep et al. 2001; Pan 2007; Pettijohn & Naples 2009). For a scale to be considered reliable, the value of its Cronbach’s alpha must be at least .70 (Field 2009). For the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha was .83, confirming that the scale was reliable as an instrument for measuring ethnocentrism.

Kassing’s (1997) Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWTC) scale was used to measure participants’ willingness to communicate with people from other cultures. The IWTC scale consists of 12 items, 6 of which are fillers. The items represent different communication situations in which a person might engage in, and respondents are asked to indicate the percentage of time they would choose to initiate communication in each situation, 0 being “never” and 100 being “always”. Possible scores range from 0 to 600. Examples of the items include “Talk with someone I perceive to be different from me” and “Talk with someone from a culture I know very little about.”

Like the GENE scale, the IWTC scale was chosen for its proven validity and reliability. The scale was developed to improve on the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC) by McCroskey (1992). McCroskey’s scale was deemed too general and not refined enough to capture the intercultural aspect of willingness to communicate (Kassing 1997; Lin et al. 2005). In terms of its reliability, the IWTC scale has been applied to various groups, both in the U.S.A. and in other countries, such as China, Korea, and Romania (Butcher & Haggard 2009; Lin & Rancer 2003a, 2003b; Lin et al. 2003; Lin et al. 2005; Massengill & Nash 2009; Roach & Olaniran 2001), with Cronbach’s alpha scores between .88 and .90, which are well above the minimum value of .70 generally accepted as demonstrating a scale’s reliability (Field, 2009). For the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha was .85, which was also above the minimum acceptable value, thus confirming that the scale was reliable.

In addition to the two scales, the survey included 12 other Likert-type questions relating to intercultural communication on campus and in the workplace. In particular, they were designed to elicit information about the participants’ views on the importance of intercultural communication, experiences interacting with students from other cultures, and opinions about the preparation for their future careers. Examples include the following: “In today’s workplace, how important do you think the ability to communicate with people from other cultures is?” “For group assignments, how likely are you to choose someone from a different culture to be in your group?” “How well do you think your study at this faculty prepares you for a career in today’s culturally diverse workplace?” Respondents were asked to give answers from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the least positive (e.g., “not important at all”, “not well at all”, or “not likely at all”) and 5 being the most positive (e.g., “very important”, or “very well”, or “very likely”). See Appendix 1 for the full list of questions. The survey concluded with an open-ended question inviting comments from respondents.

## Results and Analysis

Data from the two scales and the other 12 Likert-type questions were coded, entered, and analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 program. Mean scores for the two scales were computed. The GENE score for the sample was 32.07 (SD = 7.98). A GENE score above 55 is considered a high level of ethnocentrism (Neuliep 2009; Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). None of the participants in this study had a score of 55 or higher. The sample score, which is well below the mid-point of 45 and represents the 51:st percentile, shows that the participants were not very ethnocentric. The IWTC score was 380.34 (SD = 117.19), not much above the mid-point of 300. This means that the sample has a moderate level of intercultural willingness to communicate. The score represents the 60:th percentile.

There were no significant differences among the ethnicities of the sample for either the GENE scores or the IWTC scores. There was, however, a significant difference in IWTC scores between male (365.48, SD

= 119.48) and female (391.58, SD = 114.80) participants ( $t = -2.32$ ,  $df = 436$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that females were more willing than males to communicate with people from other cultures. To find out whether the level of ethnocentrism among the New Zealand sample is related to their willingness to communicate with people from other cultures, a test of correlation between the GENE score and the IWTC score was performed. The Pearson test shows that there is a modest but significant negative correlation between the two ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .01$ ), which means the higher the ethnocentrism, the lower the intercultural willingness to communicate, and vice versa.

Mean scores were also computed for the 12 additional questions, which are grouped into four dimensions and presented in Table 1. The results indicate that for dimension 1, participants had a neutral attitude about their experiences with students from other cultures (the overall mean being 3.11), although they were slightly negative about working with them ( $M = 2.68$ ). In terms of intercultural choices on campus (dimension 2), they were also somewhat negative (the overall mean being 2.87). They were the most negative about choosing someone from a different culture to do group work with ( $M = 2.52$ ). For dimension 3, participants acknowledged the linkage between intercultural communication and today's culturally diverse workplace (the overall mean being 3.85). In particular, they rated the importance of intercultural communication in that context highly ( $M = 4.08$ ). However, for dimension 4, the overall mean of 2.80—the lowest of the four dimensions explored—suggests that participants felt that they were not being prepared adequately for such a workplace. Yet, they were not likely to take pro-active measures, such as taking an intercultural communication paper ( $M = 2.38$ ) or participating in a “buddy program” ( $M = 2.68$ ), to foster intercultural competence.

**Table 1:** Responses to questions about intercultural experience on campus and in the workplace

Question	Mean	SD
<b>1. Intercultural experience on campus (overall M = 3.11, SD = 0.95)</b>		
How negative or positive has your experience communicating with students from other cultures been?	3.61	0.88
How negative or positive have you found group work experiences that involve students from other cultures?	3.05	0.98
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It is easy to work with students from other cultures?”	2.68	0.98
<b>2. Intercultural choices on campus (overall M = 2.87, SD = 0.90)</b>		
How likely are you to befriend a classmate who is from a different culture?	3.29	0.97
In tutorials/workshops, how often do you choose to sit with someone from a different culture?	2.79	0.84
For group assignments, how likely are you to choose someone from a different culture to be in your group?	2.52	0.91
<b>3. Intercultural communication and the workplace(overall M = 3.85, SD = 1.05)</b>		
In today's workplace, how important do you think the ability to communicate with people from other cultures is?	4.08	0.95

How relevant do you think working in culturally mixed groups at university is to your future career? 3.61 1.14

#### 4. Preparation for culturally diverse workplace(overall M = 2.80, SD = 1.09)

Overall, how well do you think your study at this faculty prepares you for a career in today's culturally diverse workplace? 3.22 0.99

How well do you feel lecturers and tutors encourage interaction between New Zealand students and students from other cultures? 2.95 1.08

How interested would you be in volunteering to participate in a "buddy program" (where a domestic student is paired with an international student)? 2.68 1.18

How likely are you to enrol in the paper "Communicating Across Cultures?" 2.38 1.09

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The results show that, overall, participants were not enthusiastic about initiating intercultural communication on campus, which is consistent with their IWTC score, and that what intercultural experience they had, while not negative, was not positive. Clearly, this is not a desirable state of affairs in today's culturally diverse world and is an area for improvement. However, the results also show that participants were not against the idea of intercultural communication itself, as they conceded that such communication would be important to their future careers. It is also clear that to improve their intercultural preparation, which they perceived to be currently inadequate, some kind of intervention may be needed, as it is unlikely that, left to their own devices, they would be availing themselves of opportunities on campus to equip themselves with knowledge and skills in intercultural communication.

In addition to the GENE and IWTC scores and the means for additional questions relating to intercultural experience above, responses to the last question in the survey, an open-ended question inviting respondents to comment, were analyzed, using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Owen 1984). Two prominent, related themes emerged from the comments of 50 participants who responded to this question. One was language barriers and the other was participants' attitudes towards working with peers from another culture.

For the first theme, roughly a third of the comments identified language as the main factor affecting participants' willingness to communicate intercultural. These comments emphasized that it was not the culture itself that caused the problems or difficulties in intercultural communication on campus but rather the inadequate proficiency of non-native English speaking students. The following comments are typical:

*"It is not so much the cultural differences in people but more so the language barriers we face."*

*"The problem is not the cultures; it is the struggles with the language barrier."*

*"Language is more of a barrier than culture."*

*"The biggest issue is the language, but otherwise it is all good."*

The second theme, also evident in a third of the comments, was about participants' attitudes toward working with students from another culture, such as in group work. Again, language barriers featured prominently as the main issue. Nine participants conceded that communicating intercultural and working in mixed-culture groups might be interesting, beneficial, or important; however, they acknowledged that the language barrier would make it "challenging," "frustrating," or "difficult", as exemplified by the following comments:

*“It is good that the university promotes cross-cultural group work, but [it] can be extremely <sup>7</sup> difficult when the person does not understand English well.”*

*“Group work with people from other cultures can be good but challenging and frustrating if they cannot do [sic] English well.”*

Three participants confessed that if peers from other cultures did not have adequate English, they would try to avoid working in a group with them:

*“It would largely depend on whether there was a language barrier or not. If there was, I would probably be less likely to choose to work with them in a group project.”*

*“I try to avoid being in a group with Asians—their English and knowledge usually slows us down.”*

*“Interaction between cultures is a vital part of life; however, if the person speaks little English I am likely to avoid them if possible in a group work situation.”*

Six participants made their concern about grades clear, as the following comments show:

*“Trying to organize group work with international students can affect domestic students’ grades, e.g., presentations, as they don’t understand what they are doing or saying.”*

*“Although getting involved with other cultures is great and an advantage to some people, doing assignments in groups with them can be a huge disadvantage to grades and group atmosphere as no one understands each other.”*

*“I think we are all interested in learning about and interacting with people from other cultures; however, we are hesitant when it comes to group work because our marks mean so much to us. Our marks are our future.”*

One participant felt particularly strongly about group work with international students:

*“It’s not fair when we are put into groups with international students because every group I’ve been in with international students, I have done most if not all the work. It just straight isn’t fair. If I didn’t have any international students in any groups I would get a better overall mark.”*

A few participants, however, were more positive about communicating or working with those from other cultures:

*“Culture in a group is important whether we like it or not; we need to learn to adapt to situations.”*

*“Interesting with other cultures—it is beneficial because you can learn a lot from other people.”*

These qualitative results show that participants were, generally, not positive about their communication experience with peers from other cultures. These results are consistent with the findings from the 12 Likert-type questions outlined earlier. They also highlight language barriers and group work as the participants’ main concerns.

## **Discussion**

The GENE and IWTC scores demonstrate that although participants in this study were not very ethnocentric, they were not very willing to communicate with students from other cultures either, even female participants, who have been found to be more willing than male participants. Responses to the other Likert-type questions also suggest that they were not enthusiastic about intergroup interaction. These responses are further supported by participants' comments, which clearly show a high level of unwillingness to engage. While it can be argued that the participants may have been "passively unwilling" (e.g., they did nothing, or they did not actively seek contact), these comments strongly indicate that many were against intercultural contact, and some would even deliberately avoid it, as they perceived it to be problematic—too demanding but less rewarding than intracultural contact (Dunne 2009). The results, both quantitative and qualitative, provide compelling evidence for a previously documented observation that domestic students in New Zealand "appear to be reluctant to initiate contact" with international students (Brebner 2008:4) and help to explain, at least in part, why international students in New Zealand find it difficult to socialize or make friends with them (e.g., Butcher 2002; Ward & Masgoret 2004; Ward, Masgoret, & Gezentsvey 2009).

The less-than-desirable level of willingness to communicate may be explained by anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst 2005). The theory posits that while interaction with someone always involves a certain level of uncertainty—about what to expect and how to behave, for example—individuals experience greater uncertainty when communicating with strangers than with people they know, and they experience more uncertainty when the strangers are from different groups from their own (Gudykunst 2005; Gudykunst & Shapiro 1996).

Uncertainty leads to anxiety, and the higher the level of uncertainty is, the more anxious a person feels (Dumont, Nishida, & Nakaya 2005). Those in an intercultural situation are likely to feel more anxious than those in an intracultural situation (Dumont et al. 2005; Gudykunst & Nishida 2001), and communication can, therefore, be stressful, even threatening (Kassing 1997; Samochowiec & Florack 2010). If either uncertainty or anxiety is too high, individuals may deal with the situation by avoiding encountering the strangers altogether (Dunne 2009; Dumont et al. 2005; Samochowiec & Florack 2010). In the present study, qualitative results, which reveal participants' concerns about difficulties in communication and about grades, indicate that domestic students did, indeed, employ avoidance as a strategy to manage their uncertainty and anxiety.

The domestic students' concern about communication difficulties is not without basis. Language barriers have been reported as a major issue affecting the level of intercultural contact on campus (e.g., Dunne 2009; Hyland, Trahar, Anderson, & Dickens 2008; Montgomery 2010). Likewise, their concern about grades is consistent with the claim that students' interests are "likely to be of a more immediate nature" (Marcotte et al. 2007:658). Therefore, although domestic students in the current study believe that they will require intercultural competence and skills in their future careers, it seems they are more influenced by the immediate goal of maintaining their grades. The emphasis on grades is in line with New Zealand's high ranking in terms of Hofstede's (1994) individualism orientation (6:th among 50 countries and 3 regions), which values personal achievement and competitiveness.

It is clear from the participants' comments that anticipation of communication difficulties and the desire to protect their grades are major contributors to a tendency to avoid forming groups with international students. This finding lends support to a similar tendency discussed in the literature (e.g., Otten 2003; Volet & Ang 1998). Otten, for example, suggested that domestic students avoid mixed-culture groups for assignments because they believe that without factors such as foreign languages and different learning styles to deal with, it would be easier for them, either alone or with same-culture peers, to achieve course requirements. Some are reluctant to be in such groups for fear of having to "carry" international students (Ramsey, Ramsey, & Mason 2007), and others do not want to be "dragged down" by them (Hyland et al. 2008:17).

Because domestic students are not so willing to engage in intercultural interaction, and some even actively avoid it, they will miss out on the potential benefits of international students' presence, "not only in terms of cross-cultural competence and general enhancement of their university experience, but also in terms of future employment prospects around the world" (Sovic 2009:748-749). Such a presence "creates ideal social forums for fostering the development of cross-cultural awareness and communication skills"

(Volet & Ang 1998:5). However, these students are not taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by having peers from different cultures studying alongside them to develop the “world-mindedness” (Sharma & Jung 1985:377) required for future participation in our “globally interdependent world” (Olson & Kroeger 2001:116). The relative lack of intercultural willingness to communicate among management students in this study supports Brown and Daly’s (2005) assertion that New Zealand domestic students tend to be “apathetic in relations to establishing friendships with foreign students” (95).

The apathy is by no means unique to domestic students in New Zealand. Bargel’s (1998, cited in Otten 2003) survey of German students, for example, showed that more than 60% had little or no contact with international students. However, what is particularly significant about the present study is that the apathy is *in spite of* the participants’ own recognition that intercultural communication is important in the workplace and that intercultural experiences such as those from mixed-culture group work are relevant, even beneficial, to their future careers. In other words, there is a gap between the students’ “theory” and their “practice”—a discrepancy between cognitive and behavioral aspects of their intercultural development. Such a discrepancy has significant implications for educators if they are to help students become more willing to communicate interculturally.

## Implications

There is no denying that being able to communicate interculturally is becoming increasingly important. Kim (2010) even goes so far as to say that “intercultural communication is arguably the most serious of all the problems confronting humankind” (177). Living and working in the 21:st century’s culturally diverse world, future leaders and managers are likely to need to build and maintain relationships and partnerships worldwide. Therefore, they need to appreciate other cultures (Cant 2004) and develop cultural sensitivity (Olson & Kroeger 2001). Yet, as Olson and Kroeger recognized, such sensitivity “does not come naturally” (116). Educators preparing students for “global citizenship” (Volet & Ang 1998:6) can play an important part in assisting them to foster that sensitivity and develop intercultural communication competence. To do that, they need to address the gap between the students’ theory and their practice discussed above so as to help them reduce their ethnocentrism and increase their intercultural willingness to communicate. There are many strategies, exercises, and assignments that can be explored and adopted.

### Getting domestic students’ “buy-in”

In order to increase contact between the two groups of students, it may be necessary to get domestic students’ “buy-in” first. This means these students have to believe that the effort required in communicating and working with international students is worth it. Although they may already believe that intercultural communication is relevant in their future careers, the importance and benefits of contact with international students *on campus* may need to be reiterated explicitly and emphatically so that they do not feel that the development of intercultural communication skills can wait until after graduation. As students are usually concerned with getting a job at the end of their study, focusing on future employment opportunities, both domestically and globally, may be strategic. By discussing the issue explicitly, domestic students may be helped to recognize the “flow-on” effect their effort might have on their future employment or on their becoming global citizens in general.

### Raising cultural awareness and fostering cultural sensitivity

Getting student buy-in is only the start, however. Educators need to also increase opportunities for exposure to other cultures, as such exposure fosters cultural awareness, which is the foundation for intercultural communication sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 2000, cited in Dong et al., 2008). Intercultural sensitivity, a pre-requisite for intercultural communication competence, plays an important role in overcoming individuals’ ethnocentrism (Dong et al.2008). Research has shown that the higher the sensitivity is, the better individuals tend to perform in intercultural settings (Peng 2006, cited in Dong et al. 2008).

Educators can help raise awareness and sensitivity in a number of ways. The simplest is to include in the syllabus topics or assignments that involve another culture or that have an intercultural dimension.

Students in an intercultural communication course in Borden's (2007) study, for example, showed a significant difference in pre- and post-tests of ethnocentrism when they were required to participate in a service-learning project within a culture different from their own. In Campbell (2008) study, in which New Zealand students engaged in a collaborative learning exercise through email for a period of five weeks with American counterparts, students from both countries found the experiential learning very helpful toward developing their intercultural communication competence.

## **Promoting and facilitating intercultural contact**

Although interaction between cultures has been found to facilitate and encourage an international outlook, or world-mindedness, the presence of international students on campus does not necessarily translate into contact, as the present study has shown. Intervention is required, and institutional support is seen as important (Sharma & Jung 1985).

Such support could include anxiety-reducing interventions recommended by host students in Dunne's (2009) study. Class exercises, assignments, and special programs or projects can be designed to incorporate contact with students from other cultures. At the very least, teachers can easily ensure that in-class small-group exercises and discussions consist of students from more than one culture. Bigger and more involved activities can be embedded in more formal and structured assignments. Holmes and O'Neill (2010), for example, had first-year business students interview a "cultural other" a number of times over the semester and writing a report on the experience. Campbell (2012) had fourth-year domestic students pair up with a newly arrived international student for the whole semester, with overwhelmingly positive results in terms of intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and skills.

Interventions such as those mentioned above need to start early in the students' study programs—"right from day one," as host students in Dunne's (2009:230) suggested. Dunne's students also argued that the interventions should involve *forced* rather than voluntary interaction on the basis that voluntary interaction typically resulted in students interacting with, or choosing group members from, those of the same cultural background. This argument has had support from recent research. Campbell (2012), for example, reported that domestic students in her intercultural project advised that a class-based intervention such as that needed to be compulsory to be successful as students would otherwise not have chosen to participate.

The findings of the present study suggest that another avenue for making use of diversity as a classroom resource to ensure intercultural exposure and contact is to incorporate mixed-culture group assignments into the course syllabus. This suggestion is supported by studies in which domestic students have reported benefits of mixed groups. Many students in Montgomery's (2009) study, for example, recognized that their experience in mixed-culture groups could provide them with important transferable skills. Culturally diverse group work is also in line with current thinking in business and management literature, which proposes that one of the five key competencies required to succeed as a global manager is the ability to lead and participate in multicultural teams (Cant 2004). It is, therefore, essential that educators provide students aspiring to operate successfully in the global workplace with opportunities to experience working in culturally diverse groups as part of their business or management education.

However, as discussed earlier, domestic students tend to be reluctant to be in mixed-culture groups, despite potential benefits. It may, again, be necessary to make mixed-culture group assignments compulsory. A further implication is that mixed-culture groups need to be designed with care to ensure positive experience and outcomes for both domestic and international students. Unless the benefits of the cultural mix are perceived to outweigh any potential drawbacks or extra effort required, it is likely that students will choose to form teams with other students from the same cultural background, an option that would be less demanding or challenging (Volet & Ang 1998). The role played by staff, in terms of explaining the benefits, outlining the process, and providing support to deal with difficulties, real or perceived, is crucial to encourage all students to accept mandatory multicultural teams.

In addition to in-class activities, institutions can help to further promote intercultural awareness and sensitivity by providing out-of-class opportunities for domestic and international students to mix. According to Volet and Ang (1998), to foster social cohesion, students need to be encouraged to mix not

only formally but also informally. Klak and Martin (2003) advocate a large-scale, university-sponsored series of events which celebrate cultural diversity on campus to help develop or deepen students' intercultural awareness and appreciation. Others have used volunteer peer-supporter peer-mentoring programs successfully (e.g., Devereux, 2004). Such special events and programs, together with in-class measures, can help facilitate greater intercultural interaction and understanding among students (Klak & Martin 2003).

## Limitations and future research

The study reported in this paper was limited to students at only one business/management school in New Zealand. Findings can at best be treated as indicative. Future research could look to include more, if not all, business/management schools in New Zealand. The results would then be more representative. International comparisons in relation to both ethnocentrism and intercultural communication willingness would also be interesting. In addition, research to investigate whether New Zealand students behave differently when they go abroad would be worthwhile.

## Conclusions

This research has shown that New Zealand management students are not very ethnocentric. However, they are not very willing to communicate with people from other cultures either. In terms of their perspectives on intercultural communication, they believe that intercultural communication in the workplace is important. Yet, they do not have positive attitudes toward interacting with international students, nor do they behave in ways that are consistent with or conducive to the development of cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence. They also feel that they are not being prepared adequately for today's increasingly diverse workplace.

These findings have significant implications for management education. As Neuliep (2009) states, "although the challenges of an increasingly diverse world are great, the benefits are even greater" (4). To reap the benefits of diversity and meet the challenges diversity brings, domestic management students, as current learners and as future professionals, need not only to recognize the importance of cross-cultural communication but also to actually *engage* with it (Sovic 2009). To help students engage, educators may need to engineer intercultural contact as part of the curriculum (Volet & Ang 1998).

To enable such engineering, this paper has outlined measures that can be taken to (1) convince domestic students that intercultural communication is worth the effort, (2) raise cultural awareness and foster cultural sensitivity among these students, and (3) encourage and facilitate interaction between them and peers from other cultures. An increase in meaningful engagement should help toward reducing students' ethnocentrism, raising their intercultural willingness to communicate, and developing their intercultural communication competence, thereby better preparing graduates for management roles in today's culturally diverse workplaces.

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## Appendix 1

In addition to the GENE and IWTC scales, the survey included 12 other Likert-type statements requiring responses from 1 to 5, 1 being the least positive and 5 being the most positive.

1. In tutorials/workshops, how often do you choose to sit with someone from a different culture?
2. How likely are you to befriend a classmate who is from a different culture?
3. How negative or positive has your experience communicating with students from other cultures been?
4. How negative or positive have you found group work experiences that involve students from other cultures?
5. For group assignments, how likely are you to choose someone from a different culture to be in your group?
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is easy to work with students from other cultures"?
7. How relevant do you think working in culturally mixed groups at university is to your future career?
8. In today's workplace, how important do you think the ability to communicate with people from other cultures is?
9. How well do you feel lecturers and tutors encourage interaction between New Zealand students and students from other cultures?

10. The university offers an undergraduate paper called “Communicating Across Cultures”. How<sup>6</sup>likely are you to enrol in this paper?
11. Overall, how well do you think your study at this faculty prepares you for a career in today’s culturally diverse workplace?
12. A “buddy program” involves a domestic student volunteering to pair up with a newly arrived international student to help him or her adapt socially to the new environment. At the same time, the domestic student gains intercultural experience. If this faculty were to set up such a program, how interested would you be in volunteering?

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