

Game Design & Cross-Cultural Competencies

IU CIBER “Global Bazaar” Game Design Project

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Before proceeding with each of the individual game design proposals, I wish to take a moment to describe revisions to the cross-cultural competency list that provides the basis for these game concept documents, as well as the overarching philosophy of educational game design that pervades my work. This will hopefully provide added context that will illuminate the commonalities and differences between both of the game concept documents.

First, a list of cross-cultural competencies was provided by Sara Reeves (IU CIBER program manager), based upon a literature review conducted last academic year. The competency list provided by Ms. Reeves was a very helpful start, breaking down cross-cultural competencies into four major categories — "cognition," "mental characteristics," "behavior skills," and "international experience." These categories seem generally appropriate, but for precision and clarity I have renamed them here to better represent the competencies that can drive elements of the game design (e.g., "cognition" is less about cognitive performance and much more about knowledge of other cultures that would allow one to participate meaningfully in another culture).

In Table 1, below, I have renamed the four general categories of cross-cultural competencies and briefly described each.

Original Competency	Revised Term	Brief Description
<i>Cognition</i>	<i>Cultural content</i>	A wide-ranging information base about a variety of people and their cultural customs, knowledge that allow him/her to function effectively in a new culture
<i>Mental Characteristics</i>	<i>Motivation</i>	The impetus to adapt to a different cultural environment such as healthy self-efficacy, persistence, goals, value questioning and integration
<i>Behavior Skills</i>	<i>Adaptability</i>	Capacity to interact in a wide range of situations, environments and diverse groups
<i>International Experience</i>	<i>Immersion</i>	Working experience, (e.g. international assignments, international business travel), and personal experience that engages international interactions, (e.g. overseas education, personal travel)

The descriptions of each are largely the same as the original descriptions for the cross-cultural competency list I received when beginning this project, and the revised term column reflects a “reskinning” of the core competency toward an actionable design element in an educational game. Since *cultural content*,

motivation, adaptability, and immersion all map onto or are connected to potential in-game activities, please refer to this list throughout both concept documents.

Also, as can be seen through both the original and the revised list, a key element of each of these competencies is the understanding of others' perspectives and acknowledgment that one's social experience in the world is shaped by a set of rules or assumptions. This is a central, clear goal for any educational experience aimed at fostering cross-cultural competencies to address, regardless of the specific context of the experience. While it is very difficult to conceive of a single experience that could be used to foster an understanding of, say, the international oil trade in the Middle East as well as South American coffee trade or environmental concerns in East Asian emerging markets, the simple underlying goal for all seems to be developing competencies that drive learners to *consider others' perspectives and cultural backgrounds*.

And so, central to all of the game designs presented here is the idea that game mechanics can and should model not just information about other cultures, but the *process of exploring cultural differences* that are at the core of meaningful cross-cultural interactions. For both of the game concept documents proposed here, the central conceit is that individuals operate under a "different set of rules" depending upon one's cultural and social context. That is, each game helps the player recognize (1) their cultural assumptions that can impede interaction; (2) the cultural assumptions that others bring to interactions with them; and (3) that *resolution* of these assumptions is beneficial for understanding and, potentially, developing advantageous financial relationships.

In each of these designs, I have aimed to create *two* game proposals with distinctly different game genres, each based upon the idea that the player investigation of "hidden game rules" can help to model and teach the resolution of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Through play with either of these games, participants would learn first and foremost that these different sets of rules have distinct consequences in terms of potential misunderstandings, miscommunications, and missed opportunities for productive relationships. The

games will, thus, model the difficulties in communication as challenges for players to learn to overcome. Note that while the games feature different degrees of overt international business theming to provide added context for each game, none of the games are *mechanically* about "business" per se — no financial trading occurs in either game design, and players do not compete for simulated financial gain in either game concept. Both concept documents describe games in which gameplay models the overcoming of cross-cultural communicative challenges.

In this way, both game concepts are less "delivery devices" for educational content (in this case, international business content) and are intended to be thoughtful "designed experiences" (à la Kurt Squire's notion of the term; Squire, 2006). Designed experiences serve less as means to deliver textual content and instead drive prospective players toward new, embodied understandings of the issues encoded in the game activities. Reading game text will not achieve the same goal as actually *playing* the game multiple times, iterating one's choices and strategies, making mistakes and learning from them, as well as wrestling with the difficult task of trying to understand a real or fictitious other "player's" set of rules. For, effective game design is less about designing a product that simulates the details of the real world experience, and more about crafting *systems* that can motivate a participants through play, then guide them to future reflection and discussion.