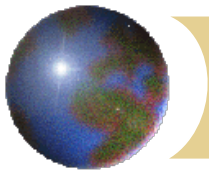# *Intercultural supervising*

Consultant Jan Opsal
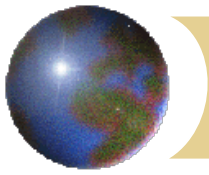
Religion, Culture and Communication

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What is culture?

- Culture as artefacts
- Culture as habits
- Culture as norms
- Culture as values
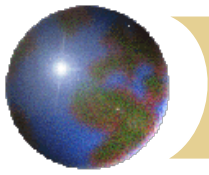- Culture as meaning

- Culture is everything that can be learned

Two understandings of culture

- **Culture as a thing**
- Culture seen as a static phenomenon making human behavior predictable

- **Culture as a process**
- Culture seen as a dynamic phenomenon continuously being shaped and negotiated by those living in the actual cultural context

Stereotypes

- Stereotypes are preconceived perceptions of typical traits of a group.

- Open stereotypes are adjusted in encounters with people from the actual group, or credible new information.

- Closed stereotypes are rigid and are not adjustable.
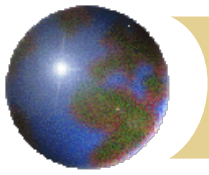
Supervising as communication

- Supervising is (also) a process of communication between the candidate and the supervisor(s).

- One of the keys to success is the communicative competence of the persons involved in the supervising process.
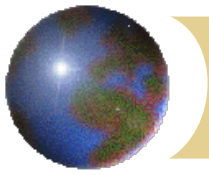
Intercultural communication

- Three different models for understanding intercultural communication:
- The linear process model
- The semiotic model
- The hermeneutic model
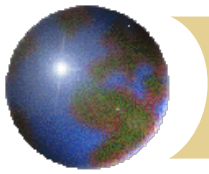
The linear process model

- A has a message to convey to B.

- A seeks to understand the dynamics of intercultural communication in order to make sure that (s)he is able to make the intended message understood by B.
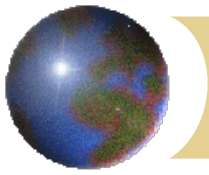
Linear process model:

Intended Cultural Channel Cultural Perceived

Message   Filter   (Medium) Filter   Message
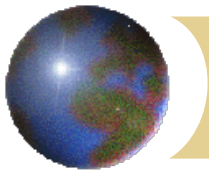
The semiotic model

- Communication is interpretation of signs
- Both parties are active in producing and interpreting signs

The hermeneutic model

- Interpretation develops in a circle, from preunderstanding (prejudice) through a process of (new) understanding to an afterunderstanding, which in turn becomes a new preunderstanding…
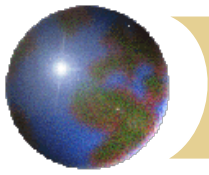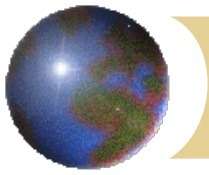
Structurally based cultures Individualistic cultures

Right

- Rule
- Law
- Commandment
- Instructions
- Delegation
- Procedure

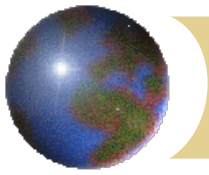## **Wrong**

- Guilt
- Debt
- Settlement
- Revision
- Compensation

Structural perspectives

- Apersonal system – the person is interchangeable
- Structural position – often based on formal competence – determines what a person can (or can not) do
- Distinguish between person and issue
- Close relations create problems

Structures and conflicts

- Direct language – calling a spade a spade
- Transparency – gjennomsyn og innsyn
- Confrontation as a tool of conflict management
- Dialectic philosophy: thesis – antithesis – synthesis
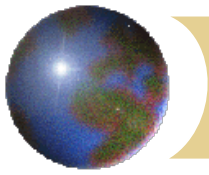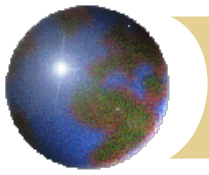
Relationally based cultures Collectivistic cultures

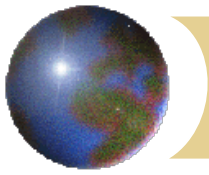**Honour**

- Respect
- Recognition
- Reputation
- Dignity
- Status

Shame

- Humiliation
- Insult
- Loss of face
- Loss of relation
- Loss of social existence

Culture: Sanction system

- Honour as positive sanction (encourage)
- Shame as negative sanciton (discourage)
- As a person's honour is the foundation of the social interaction of that person, but is defined by (significant) others, honour is a very sensitive issue
- Keeping one's honour by defending it

Culture: Collective honour and shame

- Collectives like families, clans, companies, countries also have honour and shame
- The honor of the collective unit needs to be developed, protected and defended
- The leader of the collective unit is responsible for the honour of the unit
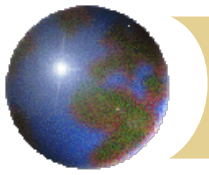
Tournaments of honour

- If the honour of a group is challenged, and the challenge is not met – the honour is lost

- If the honour is attacked, the retribution will adress the physical damage and the damage to the honour

- The conflict may escalate to a feud, which will have its own dynamics
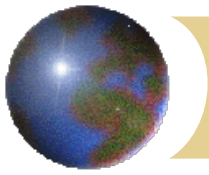
Culture: Negotiating honour

- Honour is the basis of a working relationship

- Honour is continually negotiated and developed in each relationship

- Honour is developed by giving, demanding and receiving respect
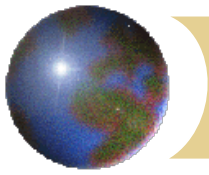
Culture: Relational approach

- Developing mutual respect is the basic process in all interaction.

- Making efforts to know the other and the context of the other generates respect.

- Every project needs a sufficient basis of mutual trust in the relationships relevant to the project.
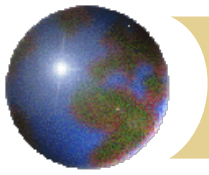
Culture: Conflicts

- Conflicts represent risks of shame.
- Conflicts are treated like minefields.
- The person and the issue cannot be separated from other.
- Personal issues first, then other issues
- The way a conflict is handled is often more important than the conflict itself.
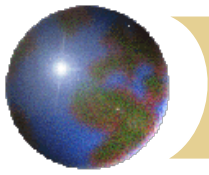
Recruiting international candidates

- Ideally all new candidates should be evaluated concerning these issues:

- Academic standard

- Language competence

- Personal integrity and qualities

- Ability to change and adapt

- How can the recruiting process be evaluated and improved?
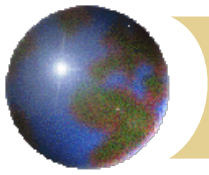
Introducing international candidates

- Coming from a collectivistic to an individualistic context
- Understanding needs of personal introductions and relations
- Supervisor as academic parent
- Research fellowship as academic family
- (Inter)national/ethnic fellowship possible?
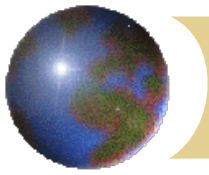
Cultural dynamics in supervising process

- Different cultural filters
- Different styles of communication
- Different ways of handling sensitive issues

- Differences as problems or possibilities
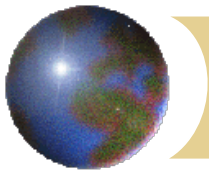
Negotiating style in supervising

- Negotiating is a way of developing mutual respect
- Negotiating is a way of sharing responsibility
- Negotiating is a way of sharing ownership of solution
- Negotiating is a way of preventing misunderstanding
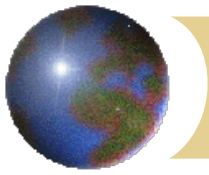
Language issues

- Working professionally in one's second or third language
- Inadequate language level discovered
- Are both the supervisors and the candidate intercultural speakers?
- The candidate's responsiblity to develop language skills in writing and speaking
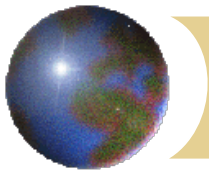
Gender perspectives

- Candidates from patriarchal traditions
- Female candidate – male supervisor(s)
- Male candidate – female supervisor(s)
- Should there be at least one supervisor with same gender as the candidate?
- Experiences of authority issues related to gender
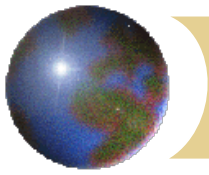
Sensitive issues and conflicts

- In many cultural contexts sensitive issues and conflicts are avoided.

- Sensitive issues and conflicts are often dealt with in indirect manners, for example indirect communication (like coded language and/or mediators)
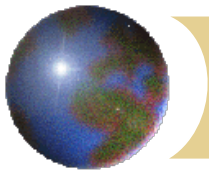
Group dynamics in supervising

- Several supervisors related to one project
- Dynamics in communication within the group
- When should the entire group meet?
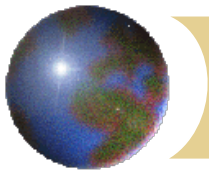
Developing supervising competence

- Defining needs of intercultural supervising competence on different levels (all supervisors, some supervisors, available external resources)

- Acquiring competence in a systematic way
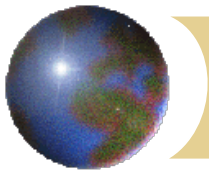
- Institutionalizing intercultural supervising competence
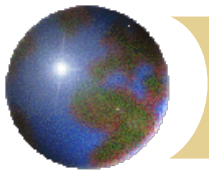
Two approaches to communication

- Technical approach
- A person seeks to master a techique in order to control or influence another

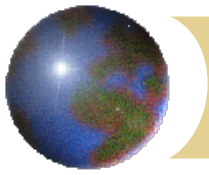- Process approach
- A process in which two subjects together seeks to interpret a situation

Linear process model – cultural filter

- Sender – intended message
- Coding – cultural filter of sender
- Signal – sign, communicated through a channel or medium, affected by noise
- Decoding –cultural filter of recipient
- Recipient – received/perceived message

Cultural filters and stereotypes

- All expressions go through the cultural filter of the sender as they are formed and go through the cultural filter of the recipient as they are interpreted.

- Stereotypes are preconceived sets of ideas about the Other, they may be open to adjustment or fixed and not adjustable.
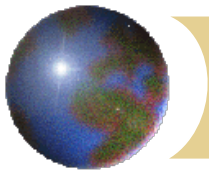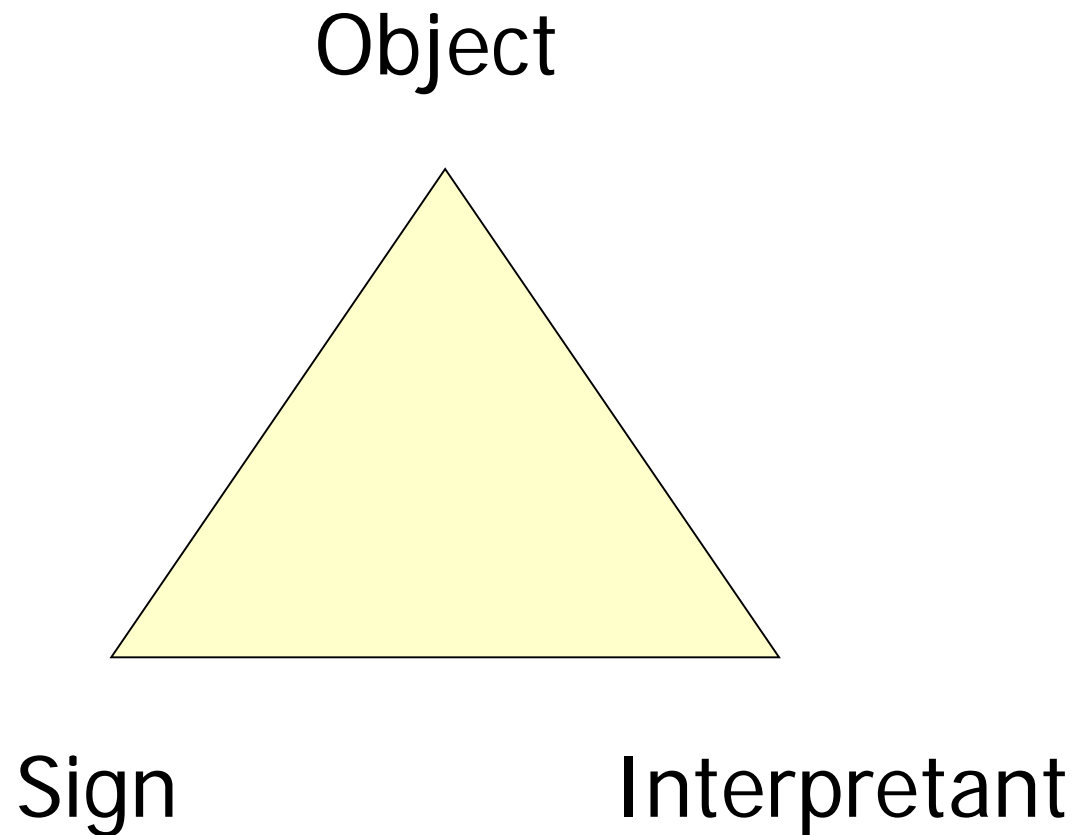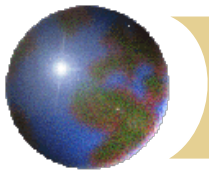
Object, sign and interpretation

- Semiotic understanding of communication
- Relationship between object, sign and interpretation (Peirce: interpretant)
- Same sign
- Different interpretation
- Different objects
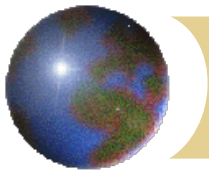
# *Peirce's semiotic triangle*

Object

Sign   Interpretant

Hermeneutics and communication

- Hermeneutics as approach to interpretation and communication
- Preunderstanding (prejudice), new understanding, afterunderstanding becoming a new preunderstaning -> hermeneutical circle
- Communication: Both parties are developing their own hermeneutical circle.
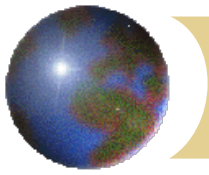
Non-leading communication

- Leading communication may result in misunderstandings when response as requested is given
- Advice:
1 Avoid yes/no-communication
2 Open alternatives for response
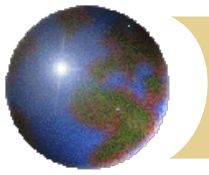
Types of questions in communication

- Explorative questions – questions that are inviting the other(s) to explore a field and reach new understanding
- Indicative questions – questions that are making the other(s) aware of something that seems to be neglected
- Rhetorical questions – questions with an answer that is obvious to everyone
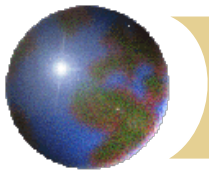
Conflicts and honour-shame

- Conflicts represent risks of shame
- The person and the relational issues are in focus
- The way a conflict is handled is more important than the actual solution
- The honour-shame dynamic makes it difficult for the conflicting parties to meet
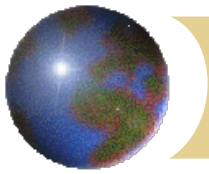
Indirect communication

- Indirect communication – a specific communication strategy aiming at a real clarification between the parties by indirect coding of meanings/messages
- Three types of indirect communication:
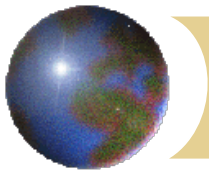1. Coded language/terms
2. Stories or parables
3. Mediation
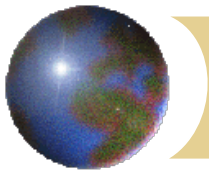
Coded language

- Sensitive topics are covered by using non-sensitive terms as codes for the sensitive topics
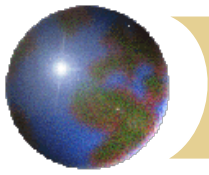
Stories or parables

- Sensitive issues may be treated by making use of a story or a parable as a case study over the type of problem that is too sensitive to be dealt with i a direct manner.
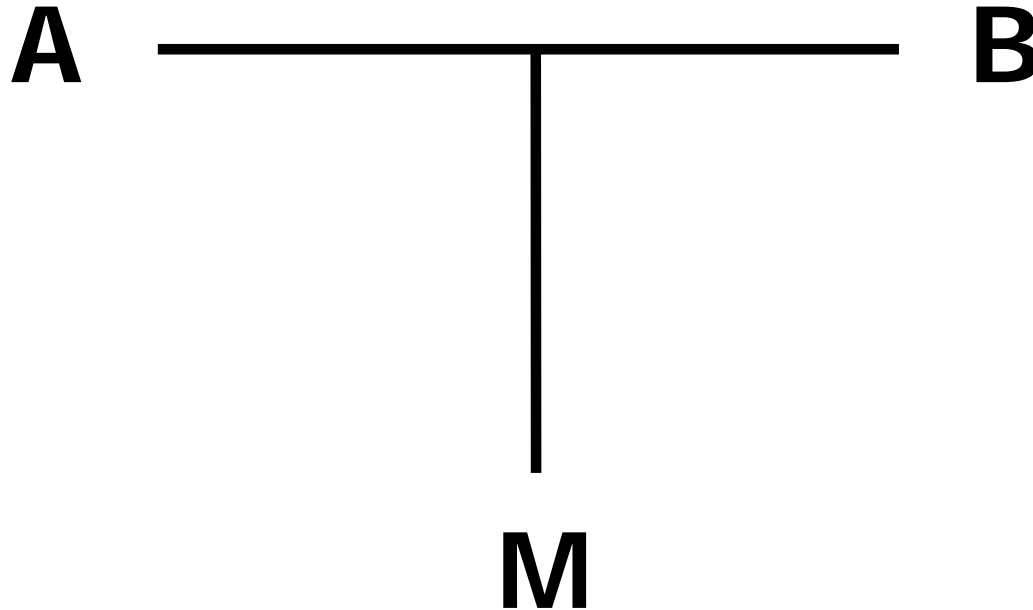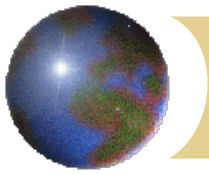
Mediation as communication

- The goal of mediation is to enable the parties to function together and to communicate without external assistance.

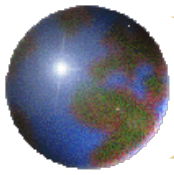- Different mediation models correspond with different perceptions of conflicts and communication.
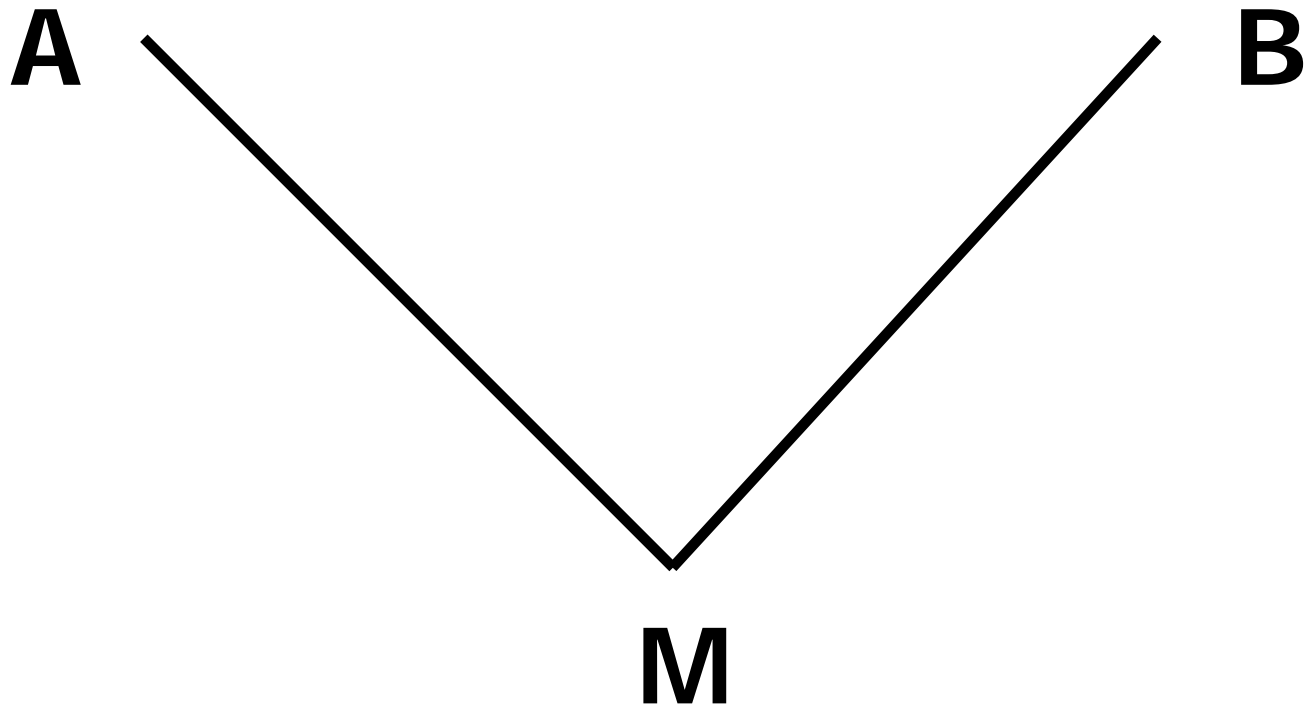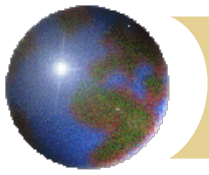
T - mediation

A ——————————————————— B

|
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M
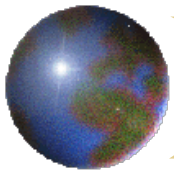
T – mediation characteristics

- Mediator as a moderator and catalyst of communication.

- Controlled confrontation as a tool in conflict resolution.

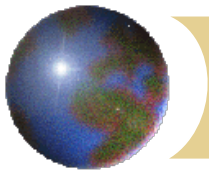- Hegelian dialectics – confrontation of thesis and antithesis leads to a new synthesis.
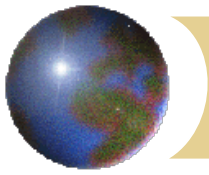
V – mediation

V – mediation characteristics

- Shame/Risk of shame leads to potential loss of face.

- Direct communication between parties is dangerous.

- The parties can not be present in the same room or context.

- The mediator is the channel of communication between the parties

The mediator

- Basic qualifications:
1 Confidence/trust of both parties
2 Cultural insights
3 Impartiality

Hermeneutical perspectives

- The hermeneutical circle describes the dynamics of the individual's interpretation of life experiences

- Svane has applied hermeneutical theory to communication processes

- Opsal has included the mediator in a hermeneutical analysis of mediation processes
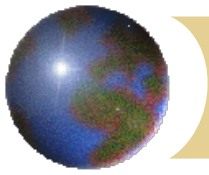
The mediation process

1   Balance time and interest

2   Balance of power

3   Establish procedure and trust

4   Clarify preunderstandings

5   Seek (new) understandings

6   Develop a potential solution

7   Bringing the parties together

8   Announcing the solution
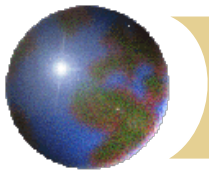
Respect as project

- Respect as foundation for and product of coexistence, collaboration and cooperation
- All encounters and processes increase or reduce the mutual respect between the actors.
- Systematic institutional strategy: Making the development of mutual respect an institutional goal
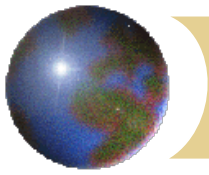
Relational conflict management

- Person and issue cannot be separated, the person will always come before the issue.

- The way a conflict is resolved, is more important than the actual solution.

- Reconstruction of relations is the primary project, reaching a specific solution is the secondary project.
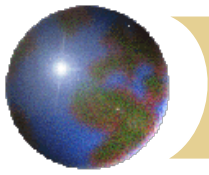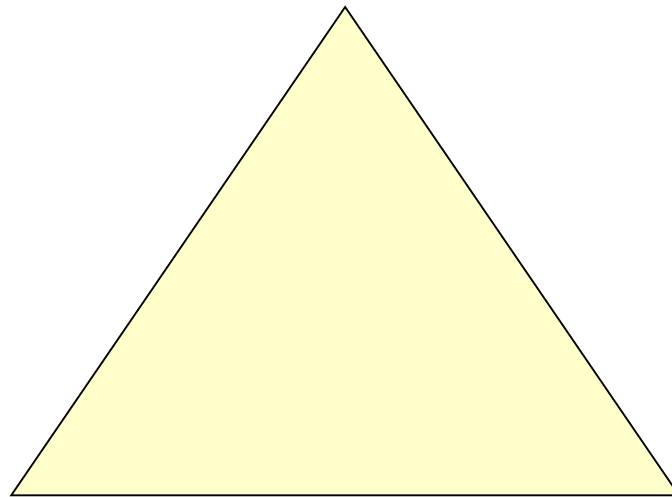
Structures og relations

- All structually oriented cultures have some emphasis on relations
- All relatonally oriented cultures have some emphasis on structures.
- An institution needs to find a balance between structural og relational aspects of institutional processes.
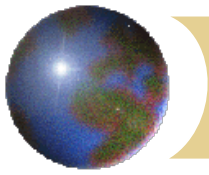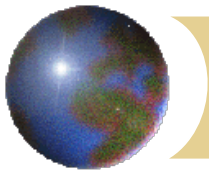
The professional balance

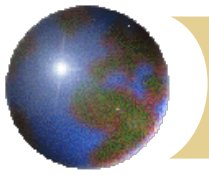.   Professional

                                 Structural   Relational

Summary

- Developing relevant and functional competence in intercultural supervising with particular emphasis on:

- Cultural understanding

- Intercultural communication competence

- Gender sensitivity

- Negotiating skills

Literature

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- Drønen, Tomas (red. m.fl) 2011: *Forståelsens gylne øyeblikk. Festskrift til Øyvind Dahl.* Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag