

**CULTIVATING SELF AS RESPONSIVE INSTRUMENT:
WORKING THE BOUNDARIES AND BORDERLANDS FOR ETHICAL BORDER-CROSSINGS**
Excerpt from the Sage *Handbook of Social Research Ethics*
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KEY RESOURCES IN THE JOURNEY TOWARDS ETHICAL PRACTICE AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

Effective self-presentation, and appropriate uses of the self vis-à-vis others, are critical pathways towards ethical practice and inclusive excellence.* These considerations are especially important in communications-based professions like social research, evaluation and education. Bringing a well-endowed professional toolkit is surely necessary but not sufficient. Even if top of the line, that expert toolkit is all for naught if not complemented by interpersonal validity-enhancement work, i.e., the soundness and trustworthiness of the uses of self as knower, inquirer and engager of others. The vitality and efficacy of the toolkit can be eclipsed by problematic perceptions of the person. So, who do the persons that you seek to communicate with and engage perceive you as being? These questions are at the heart of bridge-building border crossings which over time and adaptive praxis culminates in one becoming a more fully endowed border-crossing bridge builder and excellence-grounded ethical researcher.

A critical challenge involves recognizing and working with the frequent tensions between your own self-image and others' image of you. Regardless of the truth value of others' perceptions, they still rule until authentically engaged in ways that *speak-into-their-listening*. Of course, knowing others' images of who they think we are does not compel us to embrace and own such views. Nevertheless, we need full awareness of such views since they inform and influence how people relate to us, or not. This is particularly critical for the accuracy and integrity of research, and especially evaluative research processes, because such awareness determines prospects for gathering "good" and relevant data in order to make sound and trustworthy interpretations and judgments about merit, worth, value, significance, congruence, etcetera.

Understanding how others perceive us requires moving beyond unilateral self-awareness into multilateral self-awareness in order to enhance authenticity, productivity and excellence. Such images and judgments are culturally and contextually-conditioned so the figure-ground examination of self in context is crucial. Culture is one critical context which reflects diverse socially patterned ways of knowing, doing, being, thinking, engaging. Doing this work challenges each of us to engage in dynamic assessment and evaluation at multiple levels – micro/macro scanning, monitoring and responsive discovery and adaptation processes at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational/institutional levels.

Embracing such practices as part of the natural rhythms of life moves one towards cultural competence which is much more a stance than a status—i.e., it is much more about one's orientation towards diversity than facts and figures about diverse places, spaces and peoples. Moreover, cultural competence is not simply a matter of who one perceives oneself as being and what one believes one brings to any given situation. Again, that is unilateral self awareness. Even more important for the viability, vitality, productivity and trust-building capacity of a transaction and relationship cultivation is multilateral self awareness: self in context and self as pivotal instrument. These foundational issues are distinct from and should precede deliberations and choices regarding methodology and strategy.

SELF AS INSTRUMENT PORTFOLIO. What are the strengths/gifts—vis a vis the limits/constraints—of the perceptual/conceptual and interpretive prisms that you bring into a particular communications context: e.g., situational, relational or spatial/geographic context?

- ❖ **CONCEPTUAL PRISM: *Who and What matters When and Where?***
 - **Lenses:** Your sensing portals through which you connect with the physical, social and spiritual worlds—*What is the nature of your pathways for perceiving and receiving the *VOICES* as well as other data?*
 - **Filters:** Your sifting and winnowing processes and protocols based upon your operational definitions of what is substance and worthy of attention (“signal”) versus noise and extraneous variation—*What do you look at and actually see, listen to and actually hear, touch and actually feel versus not fully and accurately seeing, hearing or feeling? To what extent would which voices agree with your self-assessment?*
- ❖ **INTERPRETIVE PRISM: *Why, How and How Much “It” matters?***
 - Frames:** Your meaning-shaping/meaning-making resources and “infrastructure”—*What are your personal thinking and feeling practices, perspectives and processes, i.e., your constellation of relevant values, beliefs, attitudes, orientations as well as social-structure locations vis a vis what the context is calling for from you?*

These self-calibration questions represent a starting point within a given context, not an endpoint. We each need to create a comprehensive generic, as well as context-specific, **Self As Instrument Portfolio**. It will serve as a resource for mapping out what one personally has available to **work with** versus **work on** in a given research setting. It is worth investing some time brainstorming and listing one’s salient social roles, identities and orientations (habits of mind and practice)—both from one’s own vantage point and also the vantage points of others in a particular context. To move beyond swift auto-pilot assessments, complete such an inventory as a foundation for more mindfully identifying and exploring attributes that may have important implications for one’s data collection, analysis and interpretation work as a researcher. Together, these constitute the ***FORCEFIELD OF PREPAREDNESS AND READINESS*** for the tasks at hand.

What can you call upon from your self as instrument portfolio for both *appropriate and effective* engagement and professional practice?

- ❖ **Appropriate:** Behaviors and initiatives that are congruent with the expectations, demands and codes of engagement in a particular situational, relational, temporal or spatial/geographic context
- ❖ **Effective:** Behaviors and initiatives that yield the intended or desired outcomes

Let us invest quality time in the ongoing development of our Self As Instrument Portfolios as an essential complement to our professional research toolkits. Each of us can start with a listing of our salient social roles and identities—both from our own vantage points and also the vantage points of relevant stakeholders in a given research context.

Most important is the extent to which our meaning-making transactions and interpretations resonate with lived realities (experiential validity) and, thus, are perceived as appropriate by others. Those who stand and sit on the privilege- and power-connected sides of diversity divides typically have not a clue regarding either diverse perceptions or their implications for social relations and outcomes. In contrast, those not so situated within a power-privilege hierarchy tend to maintain high consciousness given its survival-framing consequences, i.e., abridged life-chance opportunities for access and success. Such divergent realities often manifest in persons vigorously talking past each other even when seeming to use the same words.

JOHARI WINDOW AS A SKILLS-BUILDING RESOURCE. The dynamic insights and potential wisdom embodied in the *Johari Window* communications model offers a resource for pulling many of these disparate pieces together. This long-established communications model offers a useful developmental framework for cultivating multilateral self-awareness. It uses a four-paned window metaphor to facilitate processes for proactively giving and soliciting feedback to reduce the "hidden" and "blind" domains (Luft, 1982, p. 34).

We can think of this model in two ways: as a window through which we look inward to see ourselves more clearly, and as a window through which others observe us. Through looking inward and disclosing to others what we perceive in ourselves, and through inviting feedback from them about what they notice in us, we gain in self-awareness. (Bell, 1)

Disclosing *personal INTENT* and simultaneously seeking insights into the frequent blindspots of *interpersonal IMPACT* helps interrupt nonproductive default responses. Left unchecked, defensive responses erode prospects for continuous learning, for personal responsibility and for commitment to change. This model can be flexibly used to increase the "Open Window" of communications between and among individuals, groups, organizations, etc. It can be used to facilitate more authentic border-spanning communications that more effectively discern, navigate and negotiate salient "diversity divides." The Johari Window has long served as a powerful resource for skill-building as a bridge-building border crosser.

TRUST-BUILDING AND QUALITY. Much research is grounded in social relations and trust is the glue and fuel for cultivating viable and productive social relations. Researchers need to mindfully attend to *trust-building* as a foundation for quality research because their roles and responsibilities often engender fear and mistrust, especially in evaluation-oriented research. Lack of trust reduces access to important data and networks and undermines the perceived value and utility of research processes and findings. In what ways and to what extent do one's communications and research processes, practices and products enhance versus erode trust? Answering this question calls for the triangulation of ongoing multi-way dialogues with key stakeholders, especially with those who are being researched.

Dennis and Michelle Reina¹ (1999), in *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace*, provide a comprehensive and highly nuanced framework for trust-building work along with a battery of assessment instruments for individuals, teams, organizations and internal/external customers. Among their three major types of trust—intrapersonal, interpersonal and transformative, the Transactional (interpersonal) Trust components are especially relevant: Contractual Trust (trust of character), Competency Trust (trust of capability), Communication Trust (trust of disclosure).

¹ See Dennis and Michelle Reina's Trust website (www.trustinworkplace.com) and book for more information.

Insights from the Reina model will help us more mindfully amplify trust-building behaviors and processes while reducing potential trust-breaking factors.

IN SEARCH OF AN INTEGRAL RESEARCHER-SELF AS RESPONSIVE INSTRUMENT

Ethical practice and inclusive excellence in research commands us to deepen our awareness of “*interpersonal validity*” as a critical complement to the more conventional *methodological validity*. This includes the soundness and trustworthiness of understandings warranted by one’s uses of the SELF *vis a vis* one’s uses of research tools, techniques and strategies. (See attached table of “Who”-centered sources of invalidity.) A productive starting point for a research project involves dynamically scanning, monitoring, and reading the relational, situational, temporal and spatial/geographic contexts. Doing so calls for more than “facts and figures” knowledge or do’s-and-taboos checklists. Like other social relations, it matters WHO is carrying WHAT and HOW in determining the extent to which research processes will be embraced as a resource, rejected or suspiciously tended to in perfunctory ways. Dynamic awareness and knowledge of the social topography *vis-à-vis* one’s own and others’ boundaries lays the groundwork for working the borderlands (free-flow zone) and ultimately for engaging in appropriate border-crossings.

The most important challenges involve identifying salient and impactful diversity dimensions in a given context and implementing processes that will *appropriately and effectively* engage the full spectrum of stakeholders and, thus, responsively shape research processes and practices. To what extent are you hearing and heeding the voices of all stakeholders in full voice and to what extent would which stakeholders agree with your self-assessment?

This chapter closes with a glimpse of a holistic researcher model of the self as responsive instrument. Crafted from the vantage point of an individual researcher, the model builds upon Ken Wilber’s Integral Quadrant Model. (Wilber, 2007, p. 2) I have focused on the most underdeveloped and untended dimensions of an integral model: notably, the interconnections among interior environments, both the individual and the collective. In this **Integral Researcher-Self** table, I have mapped many of the chapter concepts across the 4 quadrants, e.g., unilateral self-awareness in the upper left quadrant and multilateral self-awareness, in the lower left.

This model offers a framework of sensitizing concepts and questions for mindfully scanning, tracking and monitoring WHO factors—notably, the human systems dynamics. These items speak to the multiple dimensions of diversity that live in the interpersonal interface among human beings: the researcher and those who are researched; the data-seekers and the data providers.

As you move into a new research context, the sensitizing concepts and questions associated with each quadrant provide the beginnings of a comprehensive self-assessment framework, with heads-up alerts, for checking in with ourselves. Such assessments need to occur before, after and during the research process in order to check out one’s self-in-action while being and doing self. Most importantly, what are the relevant assets and resources in your researcher portfolio—professional, intercultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal—as well as your needs, challenges, blankspots and blindspots? What is the status of your *FORCEFIELD OF PREPAREDNESS AND READINESS* for the sociocultural context as well as the tasks embodied in the research questions and agenda? Who says so and how do you know?

CONNECTING THE DOTS: DATA → INFORMATION → INSIGHTS. To move beyond *Data-Land* isolation to the expansively interconnected and engaging *World of Insights* calls for empathic perspective-taking: notably, shifting the boundaries of one's self to stand in others perspective. This calls for the ability to manifest, facilitate and foster border-spanning communications and actions via flexible use of multifaceted lenses, filters and frames. Doing so involves *cognitive frame-shifting* (border-crossing in the mind), *affective frame-shifting* (border-crossing in the emotions/spirit) and *behavioral code-switching*. More specifically, we are summoned to engage in empathic perspective-taking and, thus, ethnorelative rather than ethnocentric communications and social relations. Such skills are demonstrated, for example, via *speaking-into-the-listening* from multiple vantage points.

Through empathic speaking and doing, disembodied data can be transformed, for many, into interlinked information that is intrapersonally embraced, embedded and unleashed as insights. Learning how to and actually using appropriate diverse codes of engagement allows one to speak and behave in ways that are perceived and received as trustworthy, respectful, competent, caring, credible, compelling from multiple vantage points. Such skills inform and undergird how we craft data-grounded pathways through convoluted information fields enroute to insights. These considerations speak to how we respectfully navigate and negotiate contested terrain and mindfully unleash generative provocative possibility thinking, being, doing.

With vigilance and clear-eyed honesty, let us continually assess our empathic perspective-taking skills *vis a vis* the ways we are aided versus hindered by our own voice, social identities, experiences, orientations and locations. ***Who we are as knowers, inquirers and engagers of others matters, regardless of which methodology we choose to use.*** As noted earlier, many sources of potential invalidity cannot be eliminated by simply using methodologically sophisticated research methods. (The sources of invalidity by research methods table in *Evaluating Social Science Research* spotlights this reality.) My evolving integral researcher-self model can help us mindfully tend to these considerations in order to move beyond flattened, disembodied social research approaches towards more full-bodied ones that foster ethical praxis and inclusive excellence.

MAKING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION WORK FOR THE GREATER GOOD

*Help Individuals, Groups and Organizations to
Bring Forward their *BEST SELF* in Full Voice to do
Best Learning, Best Engaging and Best Work!*

∞ NOTES ∞

* **INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE:** The Association of American Colleges Universities, with support from the Ford Foundation, spearheaded a research agenda that spotlights the integral interconnections among diversity and educational quality initiatives. It places these intersections at the center of campus planning and practice. The *Making Excellence Inclusive* project is designed to help colleges and universities fully integrate these efforts and embed them into the core of academic mission and institutional functioning: *“Through this initiative, AAC&U re-envision diversity and inclusion as a multilayered process through which we achieve excellence in learning; research and teaching; student development; institutional functioning; local and global community engagement; workforce development; and more.”*

* **INTERPERSONAL VALIDITY:** Karen Kirkhart, the 1994 President of the American Evaluation Association, introduced this term in her Presidential Address at the annual conference which was later published as “Seeking Multicultural Validity: A Postcard from the Road,” *Evaluation Practice* 16:1, 1995, pp. 1-12.

* **DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION:** Michael Q. Patton’s entry in the *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* edited by Sandra Mathison.

* Bennett, Milton, “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity,” in Michael Paige, ed., *Cross-Cultural Orientation*, University Press of America.



A Harvard Business review article entitled “The High Cost of Accurate Knowledge” (2003) compared different approaches to using data with variations in performance and concluded:

...it's not the accuracy and abundance of information that matters most to top executive effectiveness, it's how that information is interpreted. After all, they concluded, the role of senior managers isn't just to make decisions; it's to set direction and motivate others in the face of ambiguities and conflicting demands. Top executives must interpret information and communicate those interpretations--they must manage meaning as much as they must manage information. (Quoted in Michael Patton, “Developmental Evaluation”)

In *Getting To Maybe: How The World Is Changed*, Patton makes the case for the importance of Developmental Evaluation:

“... not all forms of evaluation are helpful. Indeed, many forms of evaluation are the enemy of social innovation. ... Social innovators are likely to be ahead of the evidence and in front of the science.”

Calibrating and Cultivating An Integral Researcher-Self As Responsive Instrument

Agent/Actor Vantage Point/Stance	Interior Environment	Exterior Environment
Individual Standing in one's own vantage point/ perspective (self-empathy)	<p>Inside/In Self-to-Self/Inward</p> <p>* Self-Awareness *</p> <p>* What is my vision of who I <i>be/am</i> becoming calling for from me—unilateral self awareness? * How am I showing up in my own intrapersonal world of self? * WHO AM I?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">* Subjective* I</p>	<p>Inside/Out Self-to-Self/Outward</p> <p>* Research Task Management *</p> <p>* What is the situational context--the research agenda--calling for from me? * How am I showing up in that world of work and other tasks? * WHAT MATTERS?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ITG * Behavioral *</p>
Collective Standing in the perspectives/vantage points of multiple relevant collectives and reference groups	<p style="text-align: right;">WE</p> <p>Outside/In Self-to-Others</p> <p>* Social Awareness *</p> <p>* What is the sociocultural/relational context calling for from me—multilateral self-awareness? * How am I perceiving others as perceiving/receiving me showing up in a world of many We's and They's? * What cues and clues telegraph the message "one of us" versus "not one of us"—however, US-ness is defined? * WHO BELONGS?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">* InterSubjective/Cultural*</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ITGS</p> <p>Outside/Out Self-to-Systems</p> <p>* Relationship/Process Management *</p> <p>* How is the researcher interfacing and engaging with the collective intentions and diverse sociocultural orientations organized and manifesting in the world in ways that impact their implementation of the research agenda? * For and with whose rhythms and ways of being, doing and engaging is the system congruent—a mirror vs a window experience? * WHO MATTERS—AUTHORIZES/DECIDES—AND HOW?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">* Social Systems*</p>

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF INVALIDITY RELATED TO HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS
 ~ “WHO”-CENTERED SOCIAL RELATIONS ~

ON-STAGE EFFECTS

EXTRANEOUS VARIABLES	ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS
Social desirability	Subject may be saying what he/she “should” believe
Evaluation apprehension	Subject may be trying to impress someone judging “mental health,” IQ, etc.
Faking bad [Faking good]	Subject may be trying to sabotage research
Demand characteristics	Subject may be doing what he/she thinks researcher wants

MORE PERSISTENT CHANGES CAUSED BY RESEARCH

EXTRANEOUS VARIABLES	ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS
Placebo effect	Subject may be changing because he/she expected to
Researcher expectancy (self-fulfilling prophecy)	Researcher may subtly communicate an expectancy that subject acts to fulfill
Personal relationship effect	Subjects may perform differently because of nature of relationship with researcher
Reflexivity problems	Responses may be due to researcher’s personal characteristics or behavior with subjects

DATA ACCESS AND REPRESENTATION ISSUES

EXTRANEOUS VARIABLES	ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS
Incomplete access	Researcher may have selective access to only a subset of the potentially relevant data, so key unobserved factors may explain the research issue/question.
Researcher selectivity	Events are due to causes that the researcher’s theory considers unimportant or to causes someone in the researcher’s social position cannot discern.
Researcher distortion or bias	Researcher’s evaluation of data may be colored by preconceptions/predispositions

SOURCE: Stern and Kalof, *Evaluating Social Science Research*
 Adaptation of excerpts from Tables 3.1 and 3.2