

SIETAR UK Conference

Relational Intelligence: Empathy and Trust in Intercultural Practice

Conference Guide

09.30 – 10.00

KIN G04

Opening Keynote: Relational Intelligence and Emotional Awareness: Practical Insights from Psychology

With Professor Helen Spencer-Oatey

Helen Spencer-Oatey

Helen Spencer-Oatey is Emeritus Professor of Intercultural Communication at the University of Warwick, and is well known internationally for her work on rapport management, especially in contexts of diversity. Her latest books include *Making Working Relationships Work* (Castledown, 2024) and *Rapport at Work: How to communicate mindfully, navigate culture, and build relationships* (Routledge, forthcoming 2026)

10:00–11:15

KIN G04

Panel: Relational Intelligence: From Theory to Practice

Dr Christa Uehlinger

When the Unknown Kicks In: From Reaction to Relational Intelligence

Explores uncertainty, vulnerability and reactions to unfamiliarity, showing how self-awareness and presence can turn discomfort into better trust and collaboration.

Speaker profile: Dr Christa Uehlinger is an intercultural mentor, author and TEDx speaker and the founding President of SIETAR Switzerland. She helps leaders build trust and navigate complexity through a practical, human to human approach.

Arsenia Corcoba Santamaría

Empathy and Compassion in Intercultural Leadership

Explores how empathy and compassion can support ethical, trust-building leadership during disruption and change in diverse teams.

Speaker profile: Arsenia Corcoba Santamaría is the Managing Director of Tombo Tribe Consulting and The Centre for Ki Leadership with over 20 years' experience of leadership science, martial arts and neurodivergent thinking.

Maria Koromila, MSc

Leaving the Container: Identity, Belonging and the Space Between

KIN 206

Workshop: What Does It Feel Like To Work With You? Building empathy, trust and connection across cultures

Cara Cunliff

What Does It Feel Like To Work With You? Building empathy, trust and connection across cultures

Explores the behaviours that build trust, empathy and connection across cultures, helping participants better understand their impact and strengthen workplace relationships.

Speaker profile: Cara Cunliff is an Emotional Intelligence specialist, keynote speaker and founder of the Business of Emotions. She has worked with a range of organisations to instill trust, connection and high-performing cultures, informed by her experience as a British Army Psychological Operations Officer (R) and as a military and diplomatic spouse.

Choose this session if: You want practical, immediately usable behaviours for building stronger connection across cultures.

Explores being “between worlds” when familiar cultural, professional or social structures no longer provide a secure sense of identity and belonging. Speaker profile: Maria Koromila is a coach and organisational psychologist with a background in business transformation and change management. Her work focuses on the human side of transition. Choose this session if: You want to explore a range of psychological approaches to managing diversity, uncertainty, ambiguity and personal identity in intercultural encounters.	
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11:35–12:50

KIN G04 Workshop: When Culture Isn't the Only Culture: Navigating Legitimacy, Trust and Power Across Difference	KIN 206 Workshop: Writing Across Difference: Storytelling, Trust and Relational Intelligence in Intercultural Practice
Joy Wiggins When Culture Isn't the Only Culture: Navigating Legitimacy, Trust and Power Across Difference Looks beyond “culture” as the default explanation for friction and explores how trust, legitimacy and power interact with language, gender, generation, hierarchy and belonging. Speaker profile: Joy Wiggins is an equity and inclusion consultant, TEDx speaker, author, and founder of Joy Wiggins, PhD Consulting. Choose this session if: You want to examine power, legitimacy and trust rather than treating every problem as a simple cultural difference.	Andy Pring Writing Across Difference: Storytelling, Trust and Relational Intelligence in Intercultural Practice Uses creative writing and storytelling as relational methods for empathy, deep listening, ethical presence and trust across difference. Speaker profile: Andy Pring is the founder of Creative Writing for Social Change. He is also a qualified counter-radicalisation professional. Choose this session if: You learn through creativity and want practical writing prompts for reflection, dialogue and trust-building.

Synopses and speaker profiles are condensed from the submitted proposals and aligned to the current conference programme.

13:45–15:00

KIN G04 Panel: Trust and Empathy in Context	KIN 206 Workshop: Building Bridges of Trust
Vandana Das, ACC The Invisible Cost of Cross-Cultural Misreading: When Leadership Intention and Experience Diverge Drawing on a survey of 47 Indian civil servants, examines how directness, urgency, initiative, feedback and hierarchy can be interpreted differently from the speaker's intention. Speaker profile: Vandana Das, ACC Vandana Das, ACC, is an executive coach, leadership development consultant, and intercultural practitioner with 27+ years of experience across India, Nepal, and the United States. Dr Jane Darvill-Evans How Intercultural Coaching Stimulates Learning: Exploring the Experiences of Coaches and Coachees in Japanese–Western Dyads Explores how difference, productive friction, listening, authenticity and discomfort can stimulate transformative learning in Japanese–Western coaching dyads. Speaker profile: Dr Jane Darvill-Evans is an executive coach and Managing Director of Sakura Leadership Limited. Her research focuses on intercultural coaching, transformative learning and Japanese–Western coaching relationships. Carol McDermott LLB (Hons), MBE When Trust Breaks Down: Advocacy, Empathy and Access to Justice Across Institutional Boundaries Examines trust and communication breakdown as vulnerable people navigate healthcare, housing, complaints and legal-support systems, focusing on advocacy and restoring voice. Speaker profile: Carol McDermott LLB (Hons), MBE, is a legal and advocacy consultant and the founder of Eden Legal Consultancy. And a National Diversity Award winner. Choose this session if: You are interested in exploring coaching, leadership, advocacy and how cultural difference can become a source of development in a range of cross-cultural and organizational contexts.	Bernd Gibson Building Bridges of Trust A hands-on workshop in which participants construct and compare a “Bridge of Trust” using qualities such as acceptance, reciprocity, reliability, openness and shared values. Speaker profile: Bernd Gibson is the author of ‘The Immersive Theatre of Learning’ and a learning experience designer and facilitator. He lives in the north of France and is also adjunct professor at the IESEG School of Management in Lille. Choose this if: You want an active, visual way to examine how different people define and build trust.

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15:15–16:30

KIN G04 Workshop: Mind the Empathy Gap	KIN 206 Workshop: Using the Wisdom of the Nervous System for Increased Connection in Intercultural Interactions
Neil Payne Mind the Empathy Gap Uses challenging intercultural cases to ask what happens when empathy is absent, conditional or resisted, and how curiosity, ethics and professional judgement shape possible responses. Speaker profile: Neil Payne is an intercultural practitioner and director of Commisceo Global Consulting Ltd. He specializes in West Asian cultures and breaking down stereotypes about the Muslim world. Choose this if: You want to grapple with the limits of empathy and practise judgement in ethically difficult intercultural situations.	Dr Cheryl Forster Using the Wisdom of the Nervous System for Increased Connection in Intercultural Interactions Explores how nervous-system states may interact with safety, listening, curiosity and cultural interpretation through self-regulation, co-regulation and relational dynamics. Speaker profile: Dr Cheryl Forster is a licensed psychologist at Portland State University and the owner and intercultural trainer at Bookmark Connections. Her work brings an embodied perspective to intercultural connection, safety and emotion regulation. Choose this if: You are interested in embodied practice, regulation and how felt safety can influence intercultural connection.

16:30 – 16.50

KIN G04 Closing Keynote: What Interculturalists do when nobody's watching: Intercultural in private With Dr Irina Chongarova-Aron
Dr Irina Chongarova-Aron Dr Irina Chongarova-Aron is an Intercultural Relations Consultant, Psychotherapist and Trainer, working with individuals, couples and groups across private and professional settings. She also teaches on the Master's programme in Translation and Intercultural Communication at the University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

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