

Track 3: Intercultural Dialogue in a Changing World

The Cohesion Approach of Culture - How to really prepare students for working in a global world

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CONTEXT

Modern business education needs concepts not only to settle intercultural tensions arising in international collaboration, but also to meet the challenges of employing a multicultural workforce, successfully managing international cooperations and integrating diverse corporate cultures around the globe. While the importance of a training of intercultural competence in higher education seems undoubted, the question remains unanswered what intercultural competence really is and thus if and how it can be taught (Rathje 2007).

PROBLEM

In earlier days, anthropologists' answers to the questions of culture were quite simple: culture was mostly understood as the coherent, unifying aspects of countries or ethnic groups, that set them apart from others. Based on this paradigm, the concept of intercultural competence has been conceived as something rather static, comparable to a bridge between two islands. Since individuals have been seen as being primarily part of one culture, it was assumed to need something "third", often called "interculture", to bridge the gap between them. Following these assumptions, intercultural competence education has thus mainly focussed on providing information on the foreign (national) culture and training in identifying and overcoming presumably fixed differences (Bolten 2004). As a consequence, intercultural trainings have often led to a reinforcement of national stereotypes and collective borderlines while at the same time lacking practical interaction concepts.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the paper is to present a revised understanding of intercultural competence and outline how it can be put into action as a basis for innovative teaching approaches to effectively prepare students for working in a global world.

METHODOLOGY

The approach is based on the cohesion model of culture as recently proposed by Hansen (2000, 2009) and Rathje (2009), characterized by:

- a distinction between cultural habits and collective membership
- an open understanding of culture as human group habits on multiple societal levels
- multiple simultaneous group membership ("multicollectivity") as basic characteristic of each individual
- cultural membership defined as familiarity with inherent differences rather than compliance with norms and rules
- additive identity concepts.

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

Based on this revised understanding of culture, the paper will derive a new set of learning objectives for education in intercultural competence, including:

- ability to differentiate between cultural habits and collective memberships
- awareness of the various aspects of the individual's state of multicollectivity
- ability to consciously and resourcefully navigate between differing collective memberships
- development of resources and strategies to control and handle fear, anger and rivalry linked to the experience of foreignness through consequent familiarization with differences.

The paper will put up for debate various teaching approaches how to reach these learning objectives.

Friday 8 October 9:00 – 10:30