

Review

Constructive intercultural management: Integrating cultural differences successfully (a review)

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This is a very well organised, tightly focused and clearly presented book which will be of value to intercultural trainers, teachers of languages for special purposes and international managers dealing with cultural differences. It divides into three parts – Understanding Constructive Intercultural Management, Experiencing Constructive Intercultural Management and Designing Constructive Intercultural Management – and contains thirteen chapters. Each chapter is clearly laid out with a chapter summary of Learning Objectives at the beginning and a summary at the end, supported by Discussion Questions for use in groups or for individual study and reflection. The approach is broadly theoretical, but a highlight of the book is the examples of the challenges of intercultural management and best practice, presented in boxes throughout the text, and the frequent use of charts and diagrammes for further clarification.

With globalisation, digitalisation, and migration we live increasingly in a world characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity –

a VUCA world, in the acronym coined by Nathan Bennett and James Lemoine. Constructive intercultural management can help resolve some of the issues that arise in international operations. So, what do the authors mean by interculturality? They define it as a reciprocal and dialogical, if possible symmetrical, process of negotiation, communication, and cooperation between actors in which adaptation, learning and development take place. They distinguish between interculturality (the negotiation of new rules of communication and behaviour), multiculturalism, the co-existence of different cultures with limited interaction, and transculturality, the networking of communities carrying different cultural identities. The authors stress the importance of critical incident methodology (incidents where conflicts arise due to differences in values, communication, and behaviour styles) as a basis for personal development and intercultural learning leading to new cultural framing where both parties find ways of adapting to each other.

So, what about national culture? Does it exist? Obviously yes, but in the authors' view in the complexity of multinational and multicultural working environments static national categories are being replaced by workers adjusting their own personal cultural identity to work with others from a different cultural background. Because I am of German or French nationality, it doesn't mean I have to conform to German or French national characteristics. The authors identify three levels of cultural interaction. First is the *micro level*, the culture of the actors, second is the *meso level*, the culture of the organisation in which they work or with which they deal, and third is the *macro level*, which is the culture of the society in which the individuals and the organisations work. That means that in any intercultural situation or negotiation three factors have to be taken into account: the character of the actors, the character of the institution/s they are dealing with and the culture/s. The conclusion is that in any situation culture is only one factor. The culture of the individuals concerned (the actors) and the institution they are involved with are also important. Cultural differences alone will not explain why an issue arises in cross-border or multicultural team management. The authors go on to propose a three-step model to help understand and integrate cultures. The three steps are: cultural specifics (characteristics of the culture), cultural comparison (understanding the similarities and differences between cultures), and interculturality (reciprocal intercultural learning, adaptation, and development).

In Chapter 11 the authors apply the principles of constructive intercultural management to organisational leadership, teams and the intercultural transfer of management practices, in other words how to transfer knowledge, management tools and practices successfully between organisations (e.g. in supply chain management) and between head offices, branches and subsidiaries. They also analyse the three stages by which knowledge and practices transfer takes place. The first stage is contextualisation where concepts and practices are introduced. The issue is that people are not aware of the cultural presuppositions that may underlie new

policies and procedures. The second stage is de-contextualisation. This describes the irritation that arises if the changes proposed seem senseless or don't fit the context. The third and most important stage is recontextualisation whereby negotiation and adaptation take place, and the issues can be resolved. Where this fails to happen the business relationship can break down, resulting in resignations and the loss of capital. A small example of successful recontextualisation in the reviewer's own experience took place when a French company took over a British company. The British workers' contract hours were from 845 to 1745 hours, but the French held their team meeting at 1800 hours. This was contextualisation based on French routine behaviour. The British workers were angry and threatened to go on strike. This was decontextualisation. The French manager apologised for the error and was able to recontextualise the team meeting by bringing it forward to 1600 hours. The constructive intercultural management strategy worked, and everyone was satisfied.

Chapter 9 on Intercultural Communication and Language will be of special interest to LSP teachers and researchers. It deals with the multiple forms of languages in use in organisations, the challenges of the use of English as a lingua franca and how organisations can deal constructively with multilingualism. The authors identify four areas of communication forms affecting cultures. One is verbal communication, especially the difference between direct and indirect styles, non-verbal communication, covering different paralinguistic styles of eye contact, gestures and body movement and, in written communication, pictures, diagrammes and colours, para-verbal communication, involving tone of voice, intonation, volume, rhythm and pauses and, in written communication, the use of punctuation, spelling and paragraphing, and finally, extra-verbal communication covering, space, time, smell and dress codes. Research suggests that the increased use of online media whether it be 'rich media' (video conferencing) or 'lean media' (emails), has facilitated communication within and between organisations across cultures.

Nevertheless, problems can arise. The authors describe how divergent meanings of the word 'concept' in French and German in a multicultural organisation caused problems. Asked to prepare a concept for a project, the Germans produced a full draft report while the French produced a two-page list of thoughts. The Germans thought the French were lazy and uncommitted while the French thought the Germans were trying to take over the project. In fact, the difference was linguistic misunderstanding. *Konzept* in German is a first plan for a solution, while *concepte* in French means an informal collection of ideas prior to discussion. The authors list multiple layers of language in organisations, national and regional language, corporate or organisational language, professional language (e.g. engineering) and team language. As an example of organisational language they give the interesting if offbeat example of Google employees who describe the Goggle campus as the *Googleplex* or *the Plex*, employees as *nooglers* (pronounced *newglers*) and employees who leave Google as *zooglers*. What is important is the language used in organisations, in teams and by individuals should strengthen effectiveness and efficiency of communication and ease the building of contacts and personal relations.

The danger is that language standardisation in a corporation can provoke anxiety in intercultural communication. Stressing the importance of recognising the links between communication, language, and culture in an organisation the authors consider language diversity as an asset that can enrich interaction between individuals and in teams. They describe five strategies for dealing with multilingualism: the introduction of a multi-lingua franca, intercomprehension, simultaneous

and consecutive interpreting, language training, and the support of intercultural and multilingual individuals in the group.

Having explored the meaning of intercultural competence and the development of intercultural training tools, the authors end with a systemic framework for constructive interculturality in organisations. A key figure in successful intercultural liaison is the boundary spanner. This is an employee who combines cultural and linguistic skills with a knowledge of the management process and can act as the 'go to' person in managing the recontextualisation process when an issue arises. Because of their knowledge and experience they are adept at code and frame switching in the situations the organisation encounters.

Boundary spanners may include employees or consultants and can provide greater social capital and intercultural skills as well as a degree of well-being and empathy. According to the business relationship of the institutions working together, the boundary spanners may provide translation skills, enhanced information exchange, social network building skills and problem-solving skills. Research suggests that multicultural teams embodying a wider range of experience and insight than monocultural teams achieve much greater success. So, it is important to recruit intercultural employees and promote them and to use their skills in helping to build and promote the values of an international organisation.

Constructive Intercultural Management deserves careful study both for its theoretical analysis and establishment of an intercultural management cultural framework but also for its case studies and examples of successful and unsuccessful intercultural negotiation and management.

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