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International Education

Towards synergy in multicultural learning environments

EDiLivRE

"To Noemi N. and Miguel A.Velo"

Sommaire

Part II
Solutions that have been found

Introduction

The world is gone global. This is news to nobody; it is just an undeniable reality. And the world is global because technology allows businesses to be global. Businesses have been faster than educational institutions at discovering this fact and at taking full advantage from it, but it is now time for schools in general (and for business schools in particular) to react if they intend to take full advantage of the opportunities available to maximize the use of talent, which in a knowledge-based society is the key success factor.

Simultaneously to the raise of the globalization phenomenon and in parallel to it, recent and less than recent events involving unethical management practices have caused company debacles and some political blocks have suffered true disasters such as the Euro-crisis. Such events have reminded us of the importance of keeping in mind the value of good sustainable practice at all levels of business life.

This book aims at unveiling issues that could prevent maximum exploitation of potential out of

cross-cultural interactions at all levels in the academic world. Dealing with international staff, students, partners and even superiors can at all times become either a source of gratification, creativity and performance (if well managed) or lead directly into disaster (if mismanaged).

The opportunity loss resulting from incapacity to integrate different viewpoints from alternative paradigms into one complex and innovative perspective carries with it not only the loss of competitive edge, but also a significant impact on social care. When not being given the chance to shine at their best, talented people easily lose self-confidence and drive. They shadow themselves into lower positions and simply do not perform at their best. This state of things is shameful and unfair, not to mention uneconomical. In some extreme cases, the frustration resulting from not being allowed to express oneself can lead to disruptive behavior or contestation and in extreme cases, to revolt and marginalization.

Underperforming management of international and global intellectual assets is certainly a major issue not just from the ethical point of view – as it relates very tightly to the notion of justice and equity; but also from the economic point of view, as in a knowledge-based society, in which producing competitive advantage becomes key; getting hold of the brightest brains whomever they are and wherever they come from becomes paramount if one desires to produce more and better.

The first part of the book discusses typical problems that educational institutions usually have to

deal with when it comes to integrating international stakeholders (students, teachers, partners, etc.) in their processes and costs derived from mismanagement in this type of activities.

The second part of this book presents examples of how modern and creative teaching can help in overcoming most obstacles through the analysis of concrete examples of institutions that have managed to find the way to go beyond traditional paradigms and in so doing have produced breakthrough practice that should be emulated.

The examples are taken from real life and the papers presenting the main ideas and concepts have been peer reviewed and presented in academic gatherings. They lead the reader towards the conclusion of this book, which predicts some of the future trends that may arise in a world in which Higher Education Institutions most definitely need to start moving Towards Responsible International Management Education.

Part I

The problems we face

Chapter I
The "them" and "us" syndrome

**Some opportunities and threats to be faced
when teachers come from certain countries
and students come from others…**

Introduction

During the decades preceding the development,
raise, dissemination and common acceptance of the
notion of "Education Industry" in Europe, strong
immigration regulations forced Business Schools to
privilege the hiring of local nationals or persons whose
origin is from wealthy Western economies to fill
available teaching positions. On the other hand, the
student population started to become more diverse years
before, and was mostly constituted by young
cosmopolitans travelling westwards, attracted by the
promising future that a Developed World degree could
ensure for them. These conditions resulted in the day-to-
day encounter of two not necessarily compatible groups.
The first composed by lecturers, who brought along a
set of values representing those of Western developed

economies; the second one constituted by students originating mostly from a patchwork of cultures with different values and assumptions about how the world is and how it functions.

Based on data collected in the early 2000s (period in the evolution of International Education in Europe during which faculty used to be mostly local and students used to be mostly from abroad) at the two campuses of one of the leading Swiss Hospitality Management Institutions (Institut Hôtelier César Ritz in Le Bouveret and University Center César Ritz in Brig), this paper will reveal potential areas of misunderstandings and communication problems that usually arise between students and teachers due to their different cultural backgrounds. The above-mentioned schools have been selected because of their high level of diversity in student population.

The analysis of the material collected helped us identify and analyse major usual patterns in student/lecturer relations, potential sources of conflict and also explore potential avenues for resolution.

Conceptual Analysis

Geert Hofstede (1980) was one of the pioneers together with Edward Hall (1976) in the study of the impact of the cultural dimension in the development of management and business. Hofstede's typologies (frameworks) opposing dichotomies (individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, high vs low power distance, high vs low uncertainty avoidance and short vs long run orientation) offered to researchers the basis for multiple articles and studies. Fons Trompenaars in the 1990s borrowed Hofstede's

approach and produced seven dimensions, some of which overlap with Hofstede's.

In this article we will use both Hofstede and Trompenaars dimensions to: (1) compare the cultures which the students come from using the above-mentioned frameworks for cultural analysis; and (2) predict areas of misunderstanding between teachers and students due to differences in cultural backgrounds.

The cultural dimensions

According to Trompenaars, culture is the way that different societies have chosen to solve their own problems. It comprises the set of formal and informal rules that people in these societies have invented in order to survive as a homogeneous group. These rules are based on the notion of "good and evil" and are transmitted from generation to generation through the socialization process (Parsons, 1963).

Hofstede and Trompenaars have developed dimensions of cultural analysis according to which they were able to position many countries with regards to their mental programming (assumptions of their people about what "normal behaviour" is). As most of the time what is said to be "absolutely normal and desirable" for some cultures is being seen as "intolerable" by others, having a set of frameworks for categorising these perceptions has been extremely useful for researchers to facilitate the understanding of the cultural aspects of human life.

We will start our synthesis of the frameworks that we will use in our study by explaining **individualism**

vs collectivism, which was created by Hofstede and taken up by Trompenaars. This dimension measures the relationship between the individual and the groups to which he or she belongs. In individualistic cultures, people are brought up to be independent, to fight for their own ideas and rights, to develop their own beliefs and not to report to anybody about their choices in life. On the opposite side, collectivistic people see themselves as part of different groups: religious community, family, company, etc. Their ideas and beliefs should be those of the groups to which they belong and their success in life is strongly linked to them as well.

The second dichotomy that will be used for comparison is the one Trompenaars used to describe how different cultures relate to the environment. People from some cultures interpret the world as an object to be analysed, understood and dominated. They are called cultures with **internal locus of control**. Other cultures just take the world as either a source of knowledge or as a source of fear, but which in any case is perceived as stronger than human nature. Those who perceive reality as something that comes from outside their own selves., and that therefore requires more adaptation than domination, are categorised as cultures with **external locus of control**. These terminologies have been borrowed by Trompenaars from the famous psychologist JB Rotter (1971).

Trompenaars included in his analysis a framework related to time. According to him, there are cultures where time is considered to be a sequence of passing events, not necessarily linked to each other. The past and the present are therefore not tightly related; they

are independent. Each action has its place in time. These cultures are defined as **sequential**. On the other hand, there are cultures in which the present, the past and the future are closely interrelated. Many activities can take place at the same time, and what happened before will affect what is happening at the moment, as well as what will happen in the future. Past, present and future are all connected with each other and each determines or is a consequence of the others. These cultures are said to be **synchronic**.

Another of Hofstede's dimensions is **femininity/masculinity**, which has to do mainly with the way in which roles are distributed in society. In feminine cultures, women and men are supposed to assume interchangeable roles, whereas in masculine cultures, what women and men are supposed to do, think, feel, pursue and expect from life is determined and strongly differentiated. This dimension also regards the type of values held by these cultures. For example, in feminine societies, values traditionally attributed to women – such as modesty, caring (for the poor, for the ecological environment, etc.), consumption of fresh products, non-corruption, sexuality as a relationship (and not as an allowance), etc – prevail.

The next framework, presented by Trompenaars, is **universalism/particularism**. This dimension describes how different cultures perceive the correct application of rules and regulations. In universalistic cultures, people respect their rules without exception and deviant behaviours with regards to these norms are punished without exception. The reason behind this strict behaviour is the necessity to reinforce the value of the law under the assumption that, without it,

society would become out of control. In particularist cultures, rules and norms are perceived just a general guideline for behaviour, but they are not supposed to be followed without exceptions. Relationships count more. Rule applicability depends always on the situation, and also in the closeness between the "judge" and the person who has broken the law. A strict attachment to the law would be interpreted in particularist societies as a lack of sensitivity or even of common sense.

The next dimension, also from Trompenaars, has to do with the degree of involvement that people from different cultures show towards others. The dichotomy here takes place between **diffuses and specifics**. People in the former category take time to form attachments. The latter category includes people who immediately get in touch with strangers, but who do not keep them forever as friends. Another difference between specifics and diffuses is related to the domain of the issues shared. Diffuses take time to share experiences and objects with others, but when they do, this sharing includes all aspects of life. Specifics share fast, but only issues that have to do with particular aspects of life. Specifics would share working problems with working colleagues. But outside work, the relationship could be over, or of a very different nature.

Geert Hofstede introduced the concept of **power distance**. This dimension relates to how hierarchically-oriented different cultures are. High power distance cultures are those where money and access to wealth are very unequally distributed. In cultures with low power distance the basic elements

for living are ensured to everyone and those who are rich do not show off their status. This status is most of the time not as exorbitant as that of the richest and most powerful people in high power distance cultures.

The next dichotomy (from Trompenaars) has to do with status. Different cultures accord status in different ways. Some privilege achievements, meaning that respect is going to be given to those who can demonstrate they have done things well in the recent past (and that they are still able to perform), while others will give more importance to virtue (age, gender, class, education, etc.). Cultures where status is given according to virtue are said to be "**ascribed**" cultures. Those where status is granted to those who seem to be able of "doing well", are called "**achieving**" cultures.

Back to Hofstede's dimensions, we have **uncertainty avoidance**. This dimension measures the cultural predisposition to take risks. People from high uncertainty avoidance cultures dislike abnormal or original behaviours, stick to religious rules more tightly, and get attached to one or more of the following factors intended to reduce or control the unknown: technology (which allows us to deal with nature), law (that protects us from human behaviour) or religion (which helps us to accept our destiny and promises us a state of health and safety after death). Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance accept everyday anxiety more naturally.

Finally, we have Trompenaar's framework related to communication. It is called **neturals vs emotionals**. In neutral cultures, people express their feelings openly, seek in their interlocutors a direct

response (they expect others to share their feelings) and do not express disagreement directly. In emotional cultures people consider that feelings should not be expressed openly because this could disturb others with problems that are none of their business. Openly expressing feelings is perceived as an act of immaturity and sometimes even as a weakness (the incapacity of controlling oneself). In these cultures, the interlocutor is expected just to understand the situation, but not to put himself in the shoes of the other person.

Empirical Analysis

Having described the conceptual framework, we positioned the cultural origin of the population of the totality of the students of the two schools participating to the survey (456 students in Le Bouveret and Brig), and we categorised them into the frameworks described in the previous paragraphs. We did the same with the 46 lecturers teaching these students.

Then, we proceeded to the comparison of (a) the cultural positioning of the 456 students, and (b) the cultural positioning of the teachers. Finally, we were able to predict potential problems that teachers unable to adapt to the values of the student population would most probably have to face.

It is important to say that most teachers have been able to adapt to their students' cultures and mental programming very successfully, regardless their own origin. We are by no means stating that teachers coming from the same countries than the students have better relationships with them, but only that the personal values of the teachers that the students appreciate might