

Joanna Mróz
Wroclaw University of Economics

Intercultural education from the organizational point of view

Abstract: *The paper concerns the problems of applying intercultural education into enterprises. After the presentation of the definition and essence of the examined issue, the aims and rules of intercultural education have been focused on. Finally, the methods, tools and problems of international education in enterprises have been pointed out and examined as for the consequence for organizational success.*

Key words: *intercultural education, intercultural management*

1. Introduction

Free flow of people between countries and the process of businesses becoming international results in a new phenomenon. Both social and professional life is more and more often taking place in cross-cultural environment. On the domestic and international level, there are many initiatives and programs aiming at making citizens more conscious of other cultures' problems as well as helping them in peaceful coexistence. While operating, contemporary enterprises should take the cross-cultural aspects into consideration in order to fulfill their goals successfully. The challenges of modern management imply welcoming other cultures and an efficient management of people in intercultural environments. Despite the increasing awareness of the issues in question, however, proper international education is frequently neglected in organizations.

The purpose of the article is therefore to describe the role and meaning of intercultural education. Moreover, it will present and consider the ways of carrying it out in enterprises.

2. Definitions and aims of intercultural education

Intercultural education means teaching about other cultures, their conditions and social processes. Its purpose is to arouse curiosity and willingness to get to know other people, search for similarities and understanding the differences. In this sense, intercultural education implies teaching to be open and able

to communicate. Also, this type of education is conducive to thinking over somebody's own culture and deepening the knowledge about it [Edukacja międzykulturowa 2012].

Intercultural education should be an interdisciplinary process which benefits from such scientific fields as ethnology, history, psychology, sociology, linguistics and the knowledge of culture [Lewowicki, Nikitorowicz, Pilch, Tomiuk 2002, p. 31]. It ought to teach mutual understanding, acceptance and empathy which contribute to harmonious and constructive relations between people originating from various cultures. Moreover, it should enable the participants to take a look at other cultures as a source of knowledge and wealth [Orłowska 2009] while, simultaneously, making use of their own culture.

Intercultural education consists in 'constant questioning prejudices and truths until welcoming the unknown and the incomprehensible. In the process of interaction and mutual cognition, every person is given an opportunity to fulfill himself in personal, social and global dimensions' [Cascao Guedes 2002, p. 34].

The basic objective of intercultural education is to create the need to explore the frontiers of various cultures and to excite cognitive and emotional curiosity such as exchanging values, astonishment, discovering, dialogue, negotiations and tolerance. It enables welcoming the world which, in turn, facilitates communication among people of various nationalities, races, religions and traditions [Nikitorowicz 2001, p. 126].

Goals of international education can be defined in reference to several dimensions: awareness, skills and attitude. As far as awareness is concerned, it is essential to define self-identity as well as rules and values which result from it. Moreover, it is vital to be conscious of independence and separateness which requires being well acquainted with native traditions and customs. It is also significant to acknowledge the equality of all cultures and to create ties within a family, group and a local community which can then spread up to international and global level. As for skills, P. Grzybowski draws attention to such aspects as recognizing and understanding cultural differences along with acceptance and pride of the native culture. Cultural education in this dimension comprises also perceiving people from different cultures not as enemies but the ones that can develop and enrich us through mutual contacts. Other issues concern 'surpassing' beyond the native culture, searching for understanding and dialogue with others. Moreover, it is important to notice and level off stereotypes, prejudices as well as other forms of discrimination. Furthermore, it is vital to work out means and tools allowing to diminish the problems connected with operating on the border of various cultures.

The attitude dimension focuses on the need to teach openness, empathy and sensitiveness to other cultures. It also involves fighting with all kinds

of discrimination, xenophobia, nationalism and ethnocentrism. It pays considerable attention to tolerance and recognition of the existence of other cultures. They, on the one hand, make people different but, at the same time, contribute to their mutual enrichment [Grzybowski 2009, pp. 80-81].

In accordance with the recommendations of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, intercultural education ought to consist of four basic pillars [UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education 2012, p.19]:

- learning to know - concerns gaining knowledge indispensable to understand both the native culture and the other, foreign rules and values ;
- learning to do – it means learning which enables operating in an intercultural environment;
- learning to live together – the learner should be able to cooperate with people coming from different cultures. Not only should he understand and accept them but also be capable of cooperating with them;
- learning to be – consists in self-development, the feeling of cultural identity and learning intercultural competence.

3. Intercultural education in an enterprise¹

The consequences of successful or poor intercultural education in an enterprise are noticeable not only on an individual level but also in the departments and, as a result, throughout the organization as a whole. It is thus crucial for the largest possible groups of workers to participate in the educational process. Although the techniques and methods used in international education should be tailored depending on, among others, a company's condition, duties required on a given position and the level of intercultural competence of an individual, there exist several universal rules to follow.

First of all, it is significant to create the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect which will enable openness and facilitate exchanging opinions. Moreover, the starting (and the reference) point is the native culture. It is therefore most significant to get to know one's own culture as well as to define and experience one's identity. Another significant factor is to realize the fact that objective reality does not exist. What and in what way people perceive around is a creation of their minds and rules imposed by the native culture. That is why those coming from other cultures should be approached with openness and sensibility which allows taking a look at given issues from their point of view. Apart from this, intercultural education requires accepting uncertainty and ambiguity along with openness to change and otherness. The problem in question is also connected with the need of considerable involvement. The

¹ For the sake of the article, terms like organization, enterprise and firm are used interchangeably, although the author is aware that they are not entirely identical.

process evokes huge emotions which are frequently quite extreme and difficult. Therefore, conflict is an inseparable element of intercultural education while the ability to cope with it constitutes one of the most important aspects of the education [Schachinger, Taylor 2002, s. 35-37].

Activities within the framework of intercultural education ought to comprise, among others, [Nikitorowicz, Sobiecki 1999, p.110] [Orłowska 2009]:

- recognition and awareness of one's own cultural identity,
- gaining knowledge about cultural similarities and differences,
- developing and acquiring both communication skills and interpersonal relations as well as the ability to analyze their essence and processes which seems indispensable to operate successfully in an intercultural environment,
- understanding issues connected with injustice, denying rights and the inequality of chances,
- capability of generating new and creative solutions within the scope of social relations.

Thus intercultural education in an enterprise should include not only knowledge and understanding but, first of all, shaping practical skills and attitudes. This will help to realize both cognitive, affective and behavioral goals [Strzałka 2005, p. 319].

In intercultural education the role of empathy and cultural sensibility are very much highlighted. These can be acquired through effective listening and non-evaluating approach to another person. Learning cultural empathy is particularly difficult for people showing signs of narcissism (which is often the case as far as some managers are concerned). Narcissus type of personality means that they, often unconsciously, treat others as beings whose function is to fulfill a narcissus' needs or as mirrors made up for him to admire his reflection. In his efforts to prove his greatness and being superior, a narcissus hardly ever takes other people's needs and values into account. It is therefore much more difficult for such a person to have a look at given issues from a different angle than his own and accept other rules or behavior [Schneider 1999, p. 165].

Moreover, it is vital to get rid of ethnocentrism, both individual and institutional, [Johnson 2006 pp.532-533]. Ethnocentrism is a way of thinking which consists in evaluating other cultures from the point of view of the native one. This results in considering any differences in rules and values as negative, and one's own culture as superior [Etnocentrismus...2012].

In intercultural education it is most important to assess at which stage of learning a given person is. Bhawuk distinguishes four basic stages in the learning [Bhawuk 1998] [Boski 2009, p.582]:

- unconscious incompetence-ethnocentrism,
- conscious incompetence- acquiring the awareness of the differences,
- conscious competence- understanding the rules,
- unconscious competence- acquiring and automatism in behavior,
- supercompetence-creativity.

The above model refers to the levels of competence distinguished by Benett. At the level of unconscious competence a person assumes the role of the so-called layman and is not aware of the differences in particular cultures. Later on, mostly owing to a 'clash' with some other culture, he realizes the existing differences, problems and misunderstandings yet does not understand their causes and essence. The level of conscious competence is acquired by an expert who is aware of the existing rules and values. He still cannot, however, behave and react automatically and naturally in a way proper and characteristic for a given culture. It is only at the higher level of unconscious competence that the so-called advanced expert is capable of both adapting his behavior and reactions to the rules of another culture and read the incoming signals properly. P. Boski supplements Bhawuk's model with the supercompetence level (characteristic of culture creators) which implies the creation of new elements of culture (artifacts, rules) [Boski 2009, pp. 582-584]

Assigning an employee abroad is a special challenge of cultural education. In this case, the process consists of several stages. It starts with acquainting the assigned with basic information about life in a given country. This comprises [McFarlin, Sweeney 2011, p.415]:

- problems connected with everyday life such as life standard, shopping, housekeeping,
- possibility of employing the spouse or another close person, conditions of children education,
- issues concerning running a business in a new location (political, economic and legal conditions, business code of conduct, socializing),
- problems connected with safety, health and insurance,
- policy and history of the foreign subsidiary, habits and routines of employees.

In the subsequent stages, the assigned should become conscious of problems resulting from cultural shock which he can experience while abroad. Informing about the reasons, symptoms and ways of coping with the phenomenon are very important elements of intercultural education.

Moreover, it is vital to get to know cultural differences which explain why people in a given country think and behave in the way they do. The next stage in cultural education is retaining the knowledge about foreigners' behavior, creating mental matrix (framework) which will help to make one's own

behavior suitable in a foreign country as well as understand the consequences of potential failure. Later on, the knowledge can be applied in practice which will bring about self-confidence in contacts with employees, customers and suppliers coming from a different culture [Mc Farlin, Sweeney 2011, p.415].

In case of intercultural education concerning people going abroad, it is significant not to forget issues connected with coming back to the home country. Such a person may experience the so-called repeated cultural shock.

4. Methods, techniques and tools employed by intercultural education in an enterprise

While considering issues connected with intercultural education in an enterprise it is crucial to remember about the concept of situated approach which stresses the need of applying suitable methods and techniques according to particular conditions. Trainings in international organizations which have subsidiaries in different countries ought to be tailored to peculiar conditions in a given region. It is quite common that joint techniques of intercultural education are worked out for people coming from various cultures. This can hardly be successful since every nation has its own preferences concerning the style of working and learning. Methods of intercultural education, therefore, cannot be standardized and try to prepare all those leaving native countries to work abroad or in a multicultural environment in the same way.

Furthermore, it is important to define what purpose a given intercultural training will serve that is what its goal and audience are. In case of preparing a person to conduct negotiations with a foreign business partner negotiation techniques should be of main interest. People from the Marketing Department, however, who create advertising campaigns and launch products or services onto a market ought to be taught in a different way. Namely, the main emphasis has to be laid on the meaning of symbols, colors, the sound of words and their associations. Training an expat is a special challenge as he must be well acquainted with the phenomenon of cultural shock. Still other problems must be underlined while teaching a manager who leads a multicultural team. In this case, he has to learn sensitiveness towards the otherness of each team member.

Also, the method of teaching depends on the culture of a given nation. For instance, in countries characterized by (according to Hofstede) high uncertainty avoidance the preferred methods are those structured along with detailed and carefully followed agenda. This approach is opposed to the one applied in countries with a low level of uncertainty avoidance where trainings are more flexible in many respects.

Within intercultural education trainings of various kind can be conducted. Bhawuk [Bhawuk 1998] distinguishes five basic types of trainings [Boski 2009, pp. 582-584] :

- specified cultural training,
- general cultural training,
- behavior altering training,
- intercultural experience,
- cognitive training.

General cultural training supplies the trainees with the knowledge about the general mechanisms which influence culture, its dimensions and types as well as factors affecting it. The specified cultural training is connected with discussing one particular culture. Behavior altering consists in practicing a new code of conduct demanded in a given culture and assuming different roles. Intercultural experience involves simulating a stay in a foreign cultural environment while cognitive training is based on the theory of culture. [Boski 2009, pp. 583-584].

The choice of tools and techniques in international education depends on how advanced a person is as well as the goals which are to be achieved. Area studies are didactic and informative. They equip the learners with basic information concerning social and political conditions, history, geography and religion. This type of training is conducted by means of lectures, supported by films, reading material and handouts. The next group of techniques is focused on cultural experience and has in view practicing the best ways of reacting in ambiguous and difficult situations which can be encountered in a foreign country. The trainer introduces the learners to various situations and then asks how they would react. After that, he interprets the answers from the point of view of the foreign culture. He uses manifold case studies, culture assimilators and role playing. Moreover, intercultural training comprises mastering linguistic skills where special attention is paid to explaining the so-called cultural codes that exist in every language. Cultural issues are spotted through the analysis of literary texts, films and scenes. Techniques connected with creating cultural sensitiveness aim at evoking empathy, the ability to listen and the non-evaluating approach to another person. Here, personal, communicative trainings along with group work and foreign travels are used. Techniques employed within the so-called field experience should make the learners well acquainted with customs, beliefs, gestures, rules and values. This is achieved by means of experience gained abroad, field trips, meetings with those who have returned from a foreign country or with foreigners living in the motherland of a given employee and the assessment centers [Ronen 1989, p.438] [Deresky 2000, p.359] [McFarlin, Sweeney 2011, p.415].

While teaching intercultural problems, it is worth using ludic techniques (those with elements of entertainment and amusement) which play cognitive, affective and social roles. The above techniques lessen negative emotions

connected with tension and hence facilitate openness and better learning the conveyed knowledge. Among ludic techniques the following are most useful: role-play, simulations, psychodramas, sport games, quizzes and others [Jodłowiec, p.269].

Modern ICT appliances may be of much use, too. Although they cannot replace personal contact, the internet platforms, forums, on-line games and tests ought to accompany the process of intercultural education.

It is also vital to create situations that enable learning. Some companies have a tradition of inviting people from different countries to be trained in the company's location. Such meetings teach not only specialist(technical) skills but they are also an opportunity for people originating from various cultures to meet face to face. [Schneider, Barsoux 1999, p.230].

It has to be underlined, however, that even an organization which has the already worked out and proven schemes should constantly search for new methods of intercultural education. They have to be adapted to the shifting rules and values in particular countries as well as to the modes of perception of subsequent generations entering the labor market.

Intercultural education can be carried out by outer, companies which specialize in this type of activity. In bigger firms there are separate training divisions dealing with elaborating globally compulsory programs. They can be very useful if well suited to specific conditions in other departments or subsidiaries.

One of the elements of intercultural education is the efficient coping with intercultural conflicts. Any efforts to solve a conflict should start with defining the field which the problem concerns. Usually, misunderstandings which are the source of conflicts are connected with the sphere of facts, needs or values [Kella 2002, s.92]. It is possible that a conflict comprises all three spheres, though. It is relatively the easiest to cope with misunderstandings concerning facts as they arise due to an inappropriate interpretation of the conveyed contents. Much attention ought to be paid to explain the differences in both verbal and non-verbal communication. These include: communicative rules, customs and scripts, manners, taboos, formal and informal rituals as well as the assumed communicative roles [Winkler 2008, p.636]. As far as the sphere of needs is concerned, the most commonly neglected is the need of safety. Intercultural contacts are often accompanied by fear resulting from 'the strange' and 'the unknown' which causes misunderstanding of certain behavior or approach. The participants of the conflict should realize what psychological reactions are evoked by fear and contact with the unknown. They ought to understand that escape and isolation are not the only methods to overcome the difficult situation. In the sphere of values, solving a conflict requires not only understanding the

differences in rules and values but also getting rid of prejudices, ethnocentrism and xenophobia.

While introducing intercultural education in an enterprise, it is significant to be aware of pitfalls and dangers such as [[Ladmiral, Lipianski 1989] [Cascao Guedes 2002, p.33] :

- creating generalizations and extensive limiting the reality,
- considering problems and conflicts focusing too much on cultural aspects taking no account of other issues, for instance psychological, sociological etc.,
- solving problems referring mostly to the rational knowledge about others.

5. Conclusion

'Attractiveness of intercultural education consists in the fact that it restores the faith in man, his inner strength and sensitiveness to others' needs. It is based on a deep, humanistic idea of coexistence, assuming the possibility of mutual development as a result of the ongoing internal processes, dialogue, agreement, negotiations and cooperation'[Grzybowski 2009, p. 90]. It seems that currently educating employees of an organization about cultural problems and teaching them to be open and understand other cultures is an indispensable condition for the efficient functioning of enterprises. Whether such an approach will be successful in a long run remains yet to be seen.

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