Research Paper

The Effect of International Education System on the Developing of Intercultural Qualifications

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Abstract

The increased international mergers, acquisitions and collaborations have posed a challenge to HRM: more and more co-workers stemming from different horizons are co-working in multicultural contexts. Intercultural misunderstandings usually arise from the differences in the methods of work and the styles of communication. HRM experts are motivated to organize trainings, and thus develop the intercultural competence of the co-workers by virtue of the variety in companies. This paper, of theoretical reach, comes to explain the effect of intercultural trainings on the development and learning of intercultural competences. To this end, it was first tried to define the intercultural competences and to explain how the quality of cooperation within the multicultural companies is defined by these competences. Afterwards, the process of intercultural learning was studied. Finally, the development of these competences was discussed.

Keywords: Competence; Intercultural Competence; Intercultural Learning; Intercultural Training

1. Introduction

The opportunities for multicultural teamwork are slowed down as a result of globalization, international mergers and expatriations. Therefore, international organizations not only manage products and services, but also are more and more authorized to govern the employees from various countries, whose harmonious collaborations bring about financial success to companies [1-2]. The successful internationalization of companies is largely contingent upon the effective cooperation among the concerned individuals and their skills [3].

As put by Casrnir (1999), this effective cooperation is defined by dint of a newly created "inter-culture", which is a new conscious or unconscious, dynamic and constructed culture, emanating from the actions taken by the partners in interaction that come from different cultures. There are negotiations and discussions among the actors in this interaction over new rules and modes of behaviour accepted and displayed by all participants. The actors maintain different attitudes within the framework of this inter-culture as compared to the national contexts.

The actors develop a new common space for communication and cooperation, i.e. the "third culture" or the "intermediate world" through the fusion and dynamics of different cultural elements. The ideal fruit of the juxtaposition of various stands and skills is a capital gain similar to the intercultural synergy in project management or within the framework of service reorganization. Boterf (1994) introduced intercultural competence as the key to success in the international context. By putting this concept in the social context as a whole, he argued that intercultural competence could be defined as the capacity that provides an insight as to how to analyze and understand the situations of contact between individuals as well as between the growing groups of various cultures. It also helps understand how these situations can be managed. Companies reach a whole new level of complexity through internationalization, which involves new capacities for individual and organizational learning. Consequently, the acquisition of interpersonal, social and intercultural skills becomes a real stake in the companies. The present research goal was to define such concepts as competence and

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intercultural competences and to explain the contribution of the latter to the quality of cooperation in intercultural workplaces. Afterwards, the process of intercultural learning was analyzed. Finally, the effect of intercultural training on the development of these skills was explored.

2. Competence and intercultural competence

Due to the specificity of the problems that could be solved through HRM, intercultural meetings are held in foreign companies, which increase the importance of HRM. Besides researching the good qualifications of the selected staff, we are required to aim for and set up a real skill management system, which involves the necessary adaptations to the cultural differences in the context of globalization. The notion of competence was widely discussed, revealing the extreme difficulty of offering a unified definition. According to Boterf (2000), competence is the resultant of three factors, viz. the know-how to act, the intention to act, and the ability to act. However, Perrenoud (2008) defines competence as the ability to act effectively in a set of situations that we handle successfully, because we have at our disposal both the necessary knowledge and the capacity to mobilize them at the appropriate time.

By insisting on the personal and contextualized dimensions of competence, Levy-Leboyer (1996) asserts that the skills are the directories of behavior that are mastered by some individuals better than the others, making them effective in a given situation. Delange and Pierre (2007) clarify the confusion between competence and qualification in line with these viewpoints. They argue that qualification equals competence if we assume it is the realization of the acquired experiences. These are two totally different concepts, because qualification is acquired punctually in the time domain, whereas competence becomes updated on a cyclic/iterative basis. The acquisition of cultural skills started in the mid-21st century following the considerable research on the key factors of success in expatriation [9-11]. Authors proposed a corpus of knowledge that is useful beyond expatriation. Several researchers also carried out investigations into the cultural skills [12-14]. However, they may have used different terms in particular such as "intercultural intelligence".

In the social context, the competence refers to a set of analytical and strategic abilities, which widen the range of interpretations and actions of an individual in his interpersonal interactions with the members from the other cultures [15-16].

This accords the individuals the privilege of knowing how to analyze, understand, and manage the situations of contact between persons and between the growing groups from different cultures [5]. Delange and Pierre (2007) suggested that being competent is to be more than tolerant in the context of cultural interactions. Tolerance refers to the acceptance of differences despite an immediate urge for rejection. In this regard, intercultural competence is the acceptance of others without undermining or jeopardizing one's own expectations of gratitude.

Certain personal traits and qualities are listed as "intercultural skills" by some authors. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), for instance, described the following abilities as qualities: the capacity for coping with stress, which involves a good personal relationship with others, the willingness to communicate, and the potential for decoding and understanding the behavior of foreigners. Other authors have stressed emotional stability, extroversion and openness to experience [17-18]. Leiba-O'Sullivan (1999) distinguishes classified skills into two categories, i.e. the cultural and the dynamic skills.

Leiba-O'Sullivan argues that it is feasible to make a distinction between the static elements (mainly the personality traits) and the dynamic elements (i.e. cultural knowledge, confidence, the capacity for stress management and conflict settlement, critical questioning, etc.). Other researchers have enumerated the features similar to the personality traits. For example, the self-sufficient and self-monitoring individuals generally adapt better to intercultural meetings [20].

According to several authors, integrates three types of attitudes are consolidated into this competence [16, 21-22].

• Emotional Attitudes (Cultural sensibility): Intercultural competence is above all associated with social competence. Therefore, personality traits and the propensity to be interested in others are under the umbrella of emotional attitudes. Moreover, this competence has a place in monocultural contexts.

• Cognitive knowledge: It covers a specific body of knowledge relative to the civilization, history, valuable orientations, structure and functions of the economic, social and organizational systems of the partner cultures.

• Behavioral capacities: The consistency of the cognitive and emotional skills is a necessity in intercultural situations. To wit, intercultural competence can be manifested only as the ability to apply this knowledge and adapt to a foreign culture. Hence, this competence originates from the interaction between these three dimensions (Figure 1).
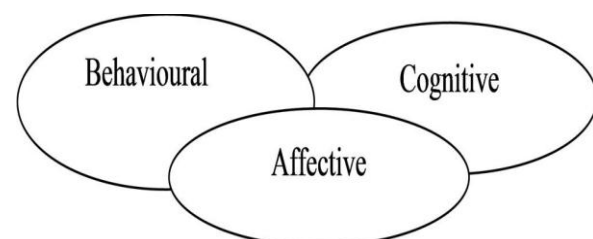

Figure 1. The three dimensions of the intercultural competence [24].

In line with these findings, the works of Thomas (2000) suggest that cross-cultural skills include *three types* of knowledge: the knowledge, the know-how and the knowledge to be. The resources required by these skills are listed hereunder in view of the estimates by Rakotomena Mialy (2005).

• The physiological resources: the ability to manage stressful situations or conflicts, the taste for danger, and the degree of motivation.
• The capacities or the qualities: The dominant personality features such as the flexibility, openness, tolerance, and empathy.
• The know-how: It is the knowledge gained through experiential learning. It includes the linguistic, communicative, behavioural, and relational capacities.
• Cultural knowledge: It refers to the insight into one's own culture as well as the culture of the persons involved in the interactions.

3. Learning the intercultural competence

Intercultural competence can contribute to the short- or long-term integration of the individual with the social system of the company. Integration takes place in the course of individual learning. The process of individual learning varies from one individual to another and is determined by personality and personal international experiences [25].

3.1 Definitions: learning and individual learning

Researchers have been studying the learning and thinking methods for several years. This theme prevails during the life of an individual, and thus it is not limited to a certain phase of the growth curve. With the dawn of new learning situations, it continues garnering importance in major areas.

Girodan (1998) referred to the deliberate nature of learning. Therefore, the learning process is part of the personal dynamics of the individual; the decision to learn is to be made solely by the individual. In the same order of ideas, Besnard and Lietard (2001) added that only a clear awareness of the applications of the lessons learnt can bring meaning to learning. Another school of thought defended by Levy-Leboyer (1996) considers experience to be the main source of learning. As put by Weiss (1995), an experience which is not enough for learning per se triggers learning. A more global view of this concept was voiced by Barmeyer (2004), who suggested that learning does not arise from a single aspect of the human functions, such as cognition or perception. Rather, it requires the integrated involves of all aspects, which are thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behavior.

Carré (2005) was one of the researchers that addressed the diversity of the variables intervening in the act of learning. He believed learning is a set of suitable forms for the act of learning in all situations, whether they are formal, experiential, didactic, self-managed, managed by others, deliberate, or accidental. In this paper, the concept of individual learning is defined based on the theories put forward in the management sciences. These theories define individual learning as the process of creation and acquisition of knowledge by an entity. The first approach to this concept is proposed by behaviourists. They adopt a behaviouristic approach that postulates the objectification of the reality, dreaded by facts and observable data [31-33].

The first psychologist that employed a systematic approach to animal learning was Edward Lee Thorndike. His conception contributed to the framework of stimulus-response (S-R) schema. In this approach, the response of the subject to a situation that serves as a stimulus is determined by the strength of the connection linking the stimulus to the response [32].

A Russian researcher called Pavlov introduced ***respondent conditioning or Pavlovian conditioning***, which refers to the conditioning of an answer triggered by a stimulus that precedes it. Pavlov argues that learning persists provided that the stimulus inciting the demonstration of the desired behaviour (answer) is combined with an intensifier [34].

Skinner proposed the notion of effective conditioning, rejecting the idea of an innate reflex. In fact, the growing applied fields such as programmed learning and behavioural therapy were vastly inspired by this author. He also went on to question the conventional outcomes of the man's actions and his relations with the physical and social environments [35].

Piaget was the founder of the second approach which is the cognitive approach. Discovery learning, through which the students interact with their environments, was formulated by Piaget [36]. He, in brief, suggested that "intelligence is adaptation". Hence, learning serves as a tool that enables the body to adapt (Roulin, 2006).

The third approach was advocated by socio-constructivists. As one of the authors of this movement, Vygotski believed that cognitive development is directly associated with and originates from social development. Therefore, the lessons learnt by the individuals and their ways of thinking are the direct outcomes of the social, cultural and historic environments surrounding them [36].

3.2 The individual learning of the intercultural competences

Several authors argue that learning intercultural competences is substantively an intercultural process of learning [37-39].

In a vision based on the notion of interaction, learning in the intercultural context complements itself through permanent opposition to the other viewpoints [23]. He adds that this learning involves observation, analysis and evaluation in addition to

the active methods of experiment. Therefore, for intercultural learning, the emotional and cognitive aspects should be involved simultaneously, which reminds the concept of individual learning through experience. Kolb (1984) stated that this learning process is a continuous lifelong process that influences and modifies the subsequent reflections and actions.

In his model of learning, he suggests that the learner needs four types of skills to be effective. These skills are associated with the Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (R.O), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE). Figure 2 illustrates this model.

He believes humans owe the acquisition of new knowledge, abilities, and skills to contradictions between these four modes of learning. The first state involves the concrete experience that he defines as "learning by feelings". This experience frames the openness an individual to a different culture, which allows him to improve his specific knowledge of the other culture as well as his relational skills. The second phase, i.e. the reflective observation, is defined as "learning by reflection". As a result of this state, the individual is enabled to foster his personal skills and environmental skills. Abstract conceptualization, as the third mode, is known as "learning by thought". This state allows the individual to establish their operational skills. Active experiment, aka "learning by action", is the last phase, which sets the scene for the acquisition of behavioral skills.
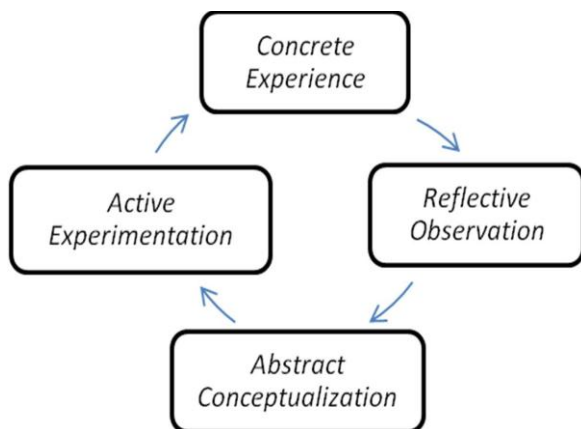

Figure 2. Kolb Experiential Learning Model [40].

As put by Barmeyer (2007), the ternary classification of the intercultural skills (i.e. emotional, cognitive and behavioral) can be pushed closer to the theory of "learning by experience". Three out of four competences can be classified under Kolb's three phases of learning by experience, except for "The Observer", which cannot be directly classified as a competence. It is, however, always present in a latent way as a perception.

As seen in Figure 3, emotional skills, cognitive skills, and behavioural skills correspond to the feeling, thinking, and decision-making dimensions, respectively.
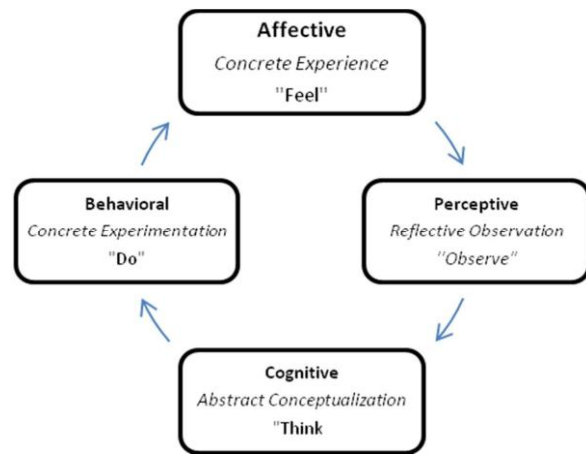

Figure 3. The individual learning of the intercultural skills [54].

4. Impact of the intercultural training on the development of the intercultural skills

Intercultural competence can be fostered during the primary phase of socialization or the specialized learning processes. Although the personal traits are inherent to the person and are rarely modifiable, the knowledge, capacities and attitudes can be developed through framed training. Therefore, by offering intercultural trainings to its employees the company can promote the acquisition and development of these skills [41-42]. The training is intended to improve the performance of the employees in their current positions. In this regard, the following training programs are recommended by Rhinesmith (1993) for the development of different types of competences and the attitudes demanded from the staff of multinational companies.

• Orientation programs, where the participants come from different jobs to develop the types of abilities and the attitudes demanded from the staff of multinational companies.
• Global seminars of location (global scanning seminars) help familiarize the participants with the global trends on the social, economic and political levels.
• Training seminars help the executives find a balance in global integration, global coordination and local responsibilities.

The objective of the intercultural training is in line with these ideas. Intercultural training, in fact, serves to set the scene for the proper management of intercultural situations by raising awareness of the cultural differences and increasing the capacities [22]. It allows the teaching members from a particular culture to interact effectively with the members from another culture and to enable them to quickly adapt to their new position [10]. The results are a decrease in the intercultural misunderstandings, better collaborations, and possibly the development of cultural synergy [44]. Hence, the human resources departments of big

companies organize and offer intercultural trainings to the managers that are going to migrate or shoulder the responsibility for managing the international projects.

Concerning the types of intercultural trainings [45], the intercultural psychologist, enumerates three types of training: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. The authors to the works on the management sciences picked up Brislin's (1979) classification by adding to them the situational variables: the hardness of the culture and the communication [46], the function and the role of the executive [47], the expected duration of the migration [48], and the individual (i.e. the degree of active participation) [47]. Tung (1981) groups the training programs into five categories along a continuum: 1) documentary programs, 2) assimilation programs, 3) linguistic programs, 4) Awareness programs, and 5) field experiences.

Gertsen (1990) proposes a quaternary typology of the methods of training. At first, she distinguishes two kinds of training: 1) conventional training by which the information is communicated uni-directionally such as the training provided in schools and universities; and 2) experimental training, whereby the trainer involves the participants by simulating real-life situations. Next, Gertsen introduces two possible training orientations: 1) the training is aimed at deepening the notion of culture in general and its objective is to sensitize the participants with the concept of culture; 2) the training is aimed at the discovery of a specific culture, and its objective is to help the participants become competent in a particular culture. The positive effects of intercultural training on the adaptation of migrants are mirrored by the studies in intercultural psychology and management sciences show.

The authors dealing with this subject have reported that intercultural training is associated with: 1) the feelings of greater welfare and higher self-confidence; 2) the development of a suitable behaviour in the context of another culture; and 3) the improvements in the relations with the native population of the host country [10, 51-52].

Waxin and Panaccio (2005) have recently acknowledged the positive effect of cultural training on three facets of intercultural adaptation among international executives, viz. adaptation to the job, adaptation to the interaction, and the general form of adaptation.

Several authors have argued that intercultural training seeks to trigger the development of intercultural competences in the individuals. Therefore, it helps minimize the critical incidents and benefit from the various approaches of the staff members [41-42, 53]. In this research, we take back the typology introduced by Brislin (1979), Barmeyer (2007) and Waxin and Barmeyer (2008), which suits best with the managed acquisition of an intercultural competence [54].

4.1 Emotional-oriented training (Culture awareness)

It is a question of generally sensitizing people to the appropriate value systems, foreign cultures, models of perception, different forms of communication, different ways of thinking and behaving, and eventually self-awareness and culture-awareness. According to the value models, the contradiction between the standards of a person's own culture and those of the foreign culture is acceptable [25,41].

In a culture-oriented training, the development of personality features and attitudes such as empathy, open-mindedness, and tolerance is in the foreground. The individual learns to know not only the other cultural logics but also the culture he/she has interiorized by experimenting (by experience). In the foreground, the goal is to raise intercultural awareness (sensitization), which can be achieved by means of numerous educational methods (discussion, interactive simulations and role play). The advantages of this type of training are the methods that mobilize the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions of the participant as well as the unconnected character of the lessons learnt that can be transferred to any given culture.

However, it is difficult to determine how competent the non-specific experiences gained by dint of fictitious cultures and situations are for the intercultural interactions in meetings with members of the other actual cultures [54].

4.2 Cognitive-oriented training
4.2.1 The university model

This model suggests seminars on civilization, which generate basic information on the political, social, economic and managerial systems of a given country. The identification of the customs and practical information on, for example, the modalities of entering the country or social systems are the fruits of these seminars. Since cognitive-oriented training is provided through conferences, text readings, or case studies, these trainings follow the style of traditional university teaching, hence the name of "university model". One of the advantages of this form of training is that it quickly provides a large volume of data and important facts. However, the participants learn only few things about the existing value systems, the modes of behaviour, and the forms of communication in the given culture. This is because this form of training is basically theoretical.

4.2.2 Culture Assimilator

It is based on the technique of the critical incidents. In this method, a case study is presented and analyzed. In this case study, the participants experience some misunderstandings and cultural conflicts, which either make the attainment of the goal difficult or hinder its attainment. Since the advantage of this type of training is its flexible

application, it helps conduct studies without the aid of professor and group discussions. It is possible to considerably improve one's knowledge by taking part in numerous episodes. One weakness of this model is the possibility of monocausal interpretation. Besides, the answers given beforehand may make people think there are "correct" and "incorrect" behaviours.

4.3 Behavioral-oriented training

This mode of training enables the participants to live and feel the target culture by directly contacting persons from that country. The ideal is a bicultural group, because interactive training is based on the principle that the participants learn from each other by interacting with each other. The participants in intercultural interactions realized that due to the divergence of perceptions their behaviors will be possibly interpreted differently unlike the intra-cultural interactions.

The advantage of this training lies in the limitation of the descriptions and the ethnocentric interpretations.

The participants have the opportunity to experience the intercultural effects of communication and cooperation in the course of experience-based learning. However, since this training requires a bicultural group as well as a team of bicultural trainers it is difficult to administer.

5. Conclusion

Intercultural competence can contribute to the short- or long-term integration of an individual with the social system of a company. This integration takes place through the course of individual learning, which is not only individual-specific but also contingent upon on his/her personality and on his/her experience.

Our findings revealed that intercultural competence can be acquired within the framework of a supervised training because the personality traits are hardly modifiable. Hence, the company can promote the acquisition and development of this competence by offering intercultural trainings to its employees.

There are numerous types of intercultural training. We unveiled three major types of intercultural training within our research framework: emotionally oriented training, cognitively oriented training and the behaviorally oriented training.

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