EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MULTICULTURAL TEAMS IN INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the issue of resolving conflicts within multicultural teams in industrial enterprises. The authors build upon the concept of multiculturalism which seeks for possible ways to enable different cultures to coexist and the means of communication between them. In the introduction, the authors explain the importance of increased attention and interest in the area of multiculturalism. Industrial enterprises nowadays are increasingly aware of this issue as they become more open to different cultures and they are confronted with intensive international migration and previously isolated societies become more pluralistic. As a result of these processes, individuals are more frequently in contact with members of different cultures.

Key words

multiculturalism, interculturality, conflict resolution, culture

Introduction

"If we seek to understand people, we have to try to put ourselves, as far as we can, in that particular historical and cultural background. It is not easy for a person of one country to enter into the background of another country. So there is great irritation, because one fact that seems obvious to us is not immediately accepted by the other society or does not seem obvious at all. One has to recognize that countries and people differ in their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. If we wish to convince them, we have to use their language of the mind." (Nancy J. Adler)

The submitted paper discusses the current issues of multicultural/intercultural management, through the discussion of culture and its implications on management and resolve conflicts within multicultural team in industrial enterprises. The topic of interculturality has become more important and relevant than it was in the past, this is especially so since 2004 when Slovakia joined the European Union. Industrial enterprises

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nowadays are increasingly aware of this issue as they become more open to different cultures and they are confronted with intensive international migration and previously isolated societies become more pluralistic. As a result of these processes, individuals are more frequently in contact with members of different cultures and there is assumption that this creates a number of various conflicts. The conflicts have always been around us and always will be in our life. Its primary task is assisting the management in the small and medium-sized enterprises.

This paper builds upon the theory of knowledge processing and its role as a theoretical basis for knowledge development in the area of multiculturalism. Furthermore, it teaches us to be tolerant towards others, their habits, culture and history. "Strangers" can be a source of experience for us and they can enrich our personal lives. Discussion of the issues surrounding multiculturalism and also the identification of sustainable key performance parameters within multicultural work environments can contribute to more effective conflict resolution in the workplace and promote awareness towards the tolerant coexistence and social cohesion. The paper is a part of the submitted VEGA project No. 1/0787/12 „The identification of sustainable performance key parameters in industrial enterprises within multicultural environment (8).

Understanding of cultural

Culture as a concept has many definitions and there is no single agreed definition of culture. It is commonly defined as a set of habits, relationships, feelings, art and other features that characterise a society or social group. These features regulate the behaviour and communication of culture. Culture is created of shared history, experiences, traditions and social customs. It is how we behave as individuals and in groups. Sometimes the culture is considered to consist only of those parts that are visible. However, they lose their meaning without knowing the other parts of culture. They are not easily accessible. Authors consider that culture consists of two equally important parts - directly visible and invisible parts. Culture can be compared to the iceberg. A small part of it is above the water surface, but much larger part is hidden underneath water surface. Authors claim, it is very important to know especially this part of culture. International managers need research into culture because they need to be able to predict what behaviour is typical in routine situations and how members of the culture group will behave in such situations. They should know both parts of culture. Generally, it could be said, that it is recommended for managers and others people to be attentive to both parts of iceberg, as what is perceived on the surface has its roots in bottom part (5).
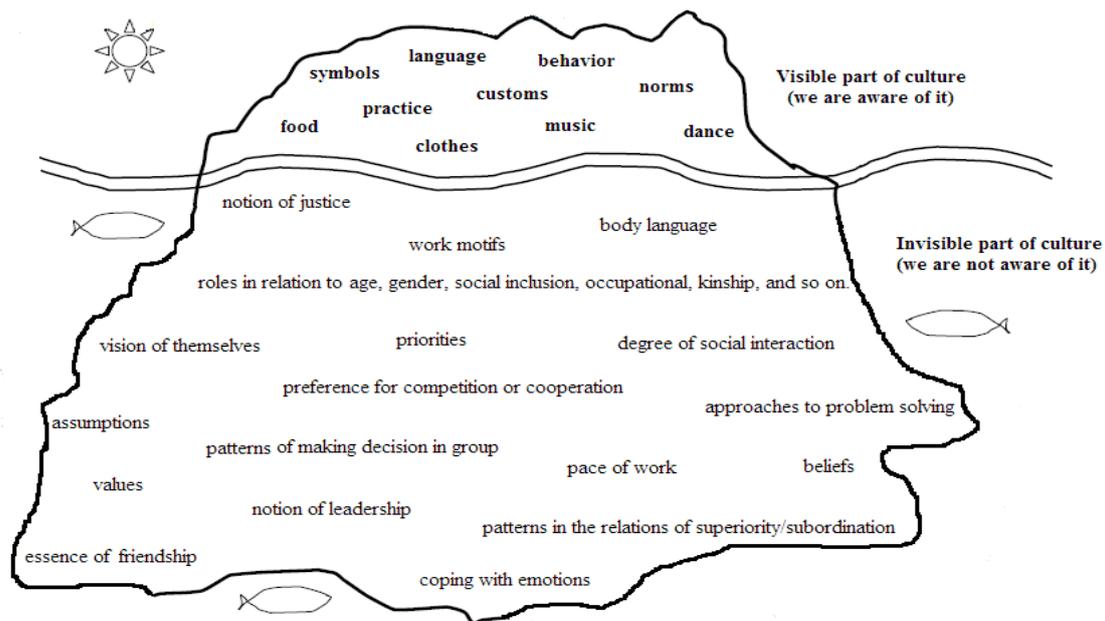
Fig. 1 *The cultural iceberg [4]*

The arrival of many foreign investors raises the important requirement - to build a corporate culture respectful of the natural Slovak working environment, but also embrace differences, brought by foreign investors. **Corporate culture** can be defined as a set of attitudes and behaviour towards its employees and stakeholders. It is mostly reflected if another competitor enters the market and in case of a merger. Mergers of companies, each coming from different cultural backgrounds can sometimes be troublesome, not only for employees, but often also with regards to the companies financial position. In this context, it is highly appropriate to apply the principles of intercultural education. The globalisation of business has broadened interest in the intercultural and multicultural dimensions of management. It is necessary to understand the meaning of these terms and differences between them. Globalisation is a process whereby worldwide interconnections in virtually every sphere of activity are growing. Some of these interconnections lead to integration/unity worldwide; others do not (4).

The main difference between intercultural and multicultural management is defined below. According to authors, this paper is necessary in order to define and know this concept and differences for understanding this issue:

- Intercultural management is the most dynamic term of these focusing on the interaction between cultures on an interpersonal level, for example researching how the member of one culture is adjusting and acting in another culture.
- Multicultural management research focuses on several (usually more than two) cultures living side by side and deals with basic psychological processes.

Resolving conflicts within multicultural teams in industrial enterprises

More and more often, we enter into relationships with other people from diverse culture backgrounds and environments. This can cause the emergence of various conflicts of ignorance of other people and cultures. When people think of the word conflict, they often think of wars or violence. However, conflict exists at all levels of society in all sorts of situations. It is easy to forget that we experience conflict every day of our lives. Conflict

happens when two or more people or groups have, or think they have, incompatible goals. However, in most cases we resolve the conflict. From a personal level to international level, good communication is usually used to overcome differences and to reach an agreement before violence breaks out. At a personal level, we often do not realise we are overcoming our differences. It is important to remember that conflict can be creative. While a conflict starts because of an issue of disagreement, there are usually background influences that fuel the conflict. The most important influence is power. Others include culture, identity and rights.

If we want to prevent such conflicts is useful to know the concept of intercultural competence. **Intercultural competency** is an ability to understand cultural differences, and to utilise this understanding to work effectively and successfully with members of other cultures (2).

Resolving conflicts at work

Every society, organization, group, and family creates a culture of conflict, a complex set of words, ideas, values, behaviours, attitudes, customs, and rules that powerfully influence how its members think about a respond to conflict. Cultures of conflict are shaped in and by our experiences. Every workplace and organization, school and neighbourhood, family and relationship generates spoken and unspoken rules about what we should and should not say and do when we are in conflict. Each of these entities produces a separate and distinct culture that exerts enormous pressure on us to respond to conflict in traditionally expected ways. We often hear managers argue that conflict resolution and effective communication take too much of their time or that it costs too much to conduct a retreat at which employees work on improving their communication skills and resolving their disputes. But consider how much time and money this organization wasted by not addressing its unresolved conflicts and how little time it took to set things right (7).

Outdoor methods and Tuson's model as effective tools for conflict resolution

There are a lot of possibilities how we can resolve conflicts, but the best way is to prevent conflicts before they happen. The training focused on skills development in this area can help to reduce interpersonal misunderstandings, bring new ways of conflict resolution and harmony in the workplace and thereby also increase productivity. The authors focus on the "outdoor method" as an actual phenomenon, which is used in teaching the topic of tolerance towards cultural diversity. The ability to understand and accept the cultural differences is increasingly important in common working environment. It helps to create the interconnection between how the differences are emotionally perceived and how they are rationally processed. In practice, we can find many courses offered in the field of multiculturalism and businesses that decided to invest in raising awareness of their employees through various learning programs have understood the importance of creating friendly working conditions within multicultural teams that consequently leads to motivation and performance increase. The training aimed to develop intercultural tolerance skills can reduce interpersonal misunderstandings, as well as bring new ways of conflict resolutions on the workplace.

Outdoor methods

Working life, very similar to a personal life, has its brighter and darker sides. After a certain time the working team can just like a couple slip easily into the stereotype and routine, or the exhaustion of unsolved conflicts and persistent problems can occur. Outdoor methods

are recently the most used among training methods with focus on gaining intercultural knowledge. Through creating the trustful atmosphere at outdoor activities, the working team starts to open towards the needs of all individuals who are then able and willing to point out the conflict reasons and they are ready to try to find the best ways out. The outdoor training programs are based on a theory of "experimental learning" or so called "adventure learning", which means acquisition of knowledge through you own practical experience. The firsthand experience is the best remembered one and better used in everyday life (7).

Essential features of outdoor training are:
- dynamic training programmes based on first hand experience,
- model situations and real situations solving,
- active participating within small groups,
- inspirational natural surroundings.

Advantages (strengths) of outdoor programmes:
- The creative approaches are developed to eliminate automated activities and routine.
- Developing of fulfilled relationships rather than just formal structures.
- Active behaviour rather than passive soaking of information.
- Include the analysis and feedback.

Tuson's model

Every action promotes reaction and different reactions than expected can after some time reflect in uncertainty or reducing of reassurance. Resolving conflict often depends on the skill of a leader. The Tuson's model gives low priority to efficiency (doing things right) but high priority to effectiveness (doing the right things). The authors of this paper characterize Tuson's model according to three zones (1):

"Comfort zone" – it is the zone in which an individual feels safe, and is familiar with the environment, people and the ways of working. But it is also an environment where he does not learn anything new, since he acts based on his previous experience and knowledge and primarily he does not feel the need to change anything.

"Learning zone" – or so called **"stretch zone"** – is represented by the space where an individual hits his current limits of abilities and skills and finds out they can be developed beyond those borders. In most cases the impulse for changing the way of acting or stepping out from worn out track comes from internal or external environment.

"Panic zone" – usually means crossing the current limits of an individual and from the perspective of gaining knowledge and skills there is no way further, because of the risk of regression, resulting from bad experience and fear.
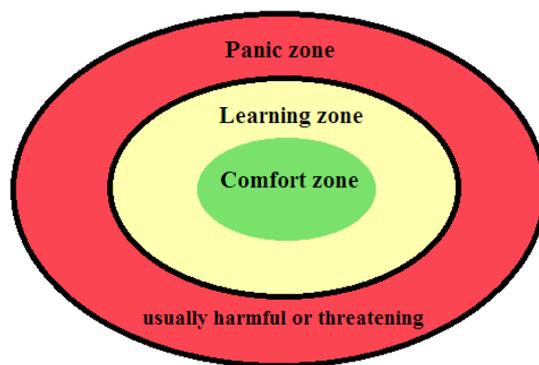
Fig. 2 *Tuson's model [2]*

When conducting intercultural trainings we try to get the participants from the "comfort zone" to the "learning zone" precisely by involving them into aforementioned outdoor activities. Firstly they might feel uncertain about it, like being in the unknown environment. However with gradual learning and acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, their "comfort zone" expands. From the intercultural perspective the "comfort zone" represents you own culture, whereas the "learning zone" is represented by the space for interaction with other cultures and finally the "panic zone" is a source of misunderstandings and social conflicts. The aim of outdoor learning is to simulate specific situations that can help to extend the "comfort zone" range by being active in their "learning zone".

Kolb´s learning cycle

Authors of this paper identify and share Kolb's opinion that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. They propose to apply six main characteristics of experiential learning to use on the multicultural education. Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. In this respect, Kolb's model differs from others since it offers both a way to understand individual learning styles, and also an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to all learners. "Experiential" means relating to or resulting from experience while "experimental" means relating to or based on experiment. Kolb uses the term "experiential" as his theory is based more on reflection of experiences. While others use "experimental" when referencing experimental-inquiry a technique that requires learners to test hypothesis about content knowledge. Kolb theorized that the four combinations of perceiving and processing determine one of four learning styles of how people prefer to learn (3).

According authors, it is necessary to explain the importance of increased attention and interest in the area of multicultural learning. The Kolb's theory of understanding we can also apply and use for multicultural learning. It is source learning of development people which work together in workplace and they are from diverse cultures. All mentioned attributes are helpful in building of stable and effective multicultural teams. Steps of multicultural learning process are below (Figure 3). This figure provides a learning cycle that involves four processes that must be present for learning to occur. Depending upon the situation or environment, the learners may enter the learning cycle at any point.
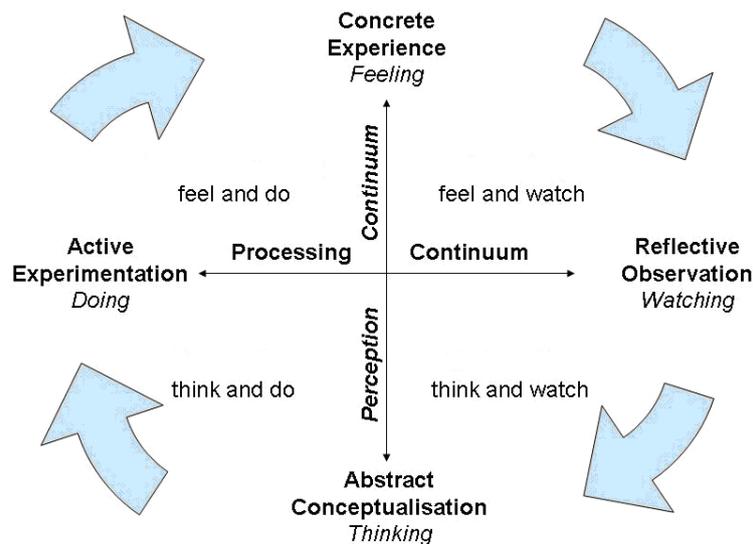
Fig. 3 *Kolb´s learning styles [3]*

Steps in the learning process (4):

- Feeling: Learning from specific experiences. Sensitive to other's feelings.
- Watching: Observing before making a judgment by viewing the environment from different perspectives. Looks for the meaning of things.
- Thinking: Logical analysis of ideas on intellectual understanding of a situation.
- Doing: Ability to get things done by influencing people. Includes risk-taking.

Research findings

"Think globally, act locally" has become a slogan for our society. This way of thinking and acting was transferred to almost all areas of life (economical, political and educational) and it is applied in the context of schools, societies and enterprises as well. The ability to understand and accept cultural diversity is becoming essential in the ordinary working environment. Enterprises supporting the knowledge improvement of their own employees have understood that a friendly working environment leads to increased motivation, consequently reflected in their performance. The authors focus on the "outdoor method" as an actual phenomenon, which is used in teaching the topic of tolerance towards cultural diversity. They describe the individual stages of this method and introduce a modified version of Tuson´s model as an effective tool for conflict resolution in the workplace. The tools introduced in this paper, place particular emphasis on actions to prevent conflicts in the workplace. The authors base the study on the assumption that extensively developed intercultural relationships lead to mutual understanding between people and consequently to less interpersonal conflicts. Kolbe cycle usually focuses on multicultural education in schools. The authors suggested this cycle to be applied for multicultural teams in industrial enterprises.

Authors of this paper state some examples according Kolb´s cycle:
Learning to coach:

- Concrete experience - Having a coach guide you in coaching someone else.
- Active experimentation - Using your people skills with what you have learned to achieve your own coaching style.
- Reflective observation - Observing how other people coach.
- Abstract conceptualization - Reading articles to find out the pros of different methods.

Learning algebra:
- Abstract conceptualization - Listening to explanations on what it is.
- Concrete experience - Going step-by-step through an equation.
- Active experimentation - Practicing.
- Reflective observation - Recording your thoughts about algebraic equations in a learning log.

Conclusion

As the whole world becomes connected and globalised we can see the interactions of different cultures in every part of our lives, not only in professionally, but in personal relationships as well. People have various backgrounds represented in their cultural identity, they have different expectations, ways of thinking and acting, which sometimes can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, therefore it is of great importance to place an emphasis on understanding and accepting those coming from other cultures. This is the main reasons why is necessary to know and apply multicultural education in industrial enterprises. This paper built upon the theory of knowledge processing and its role as a theoretical basis for knowledge development in the area of multicultural education. The authors explained the importance of increased attention and interest in the area of multicultural education.

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