

Chapter 5

Cooperation as a Core Component of Intercultural Competence: A Neuroeconomic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Assuming the meaning of intercultural competency is a crucial issue in multicultural societies and within business units as results of globalization, this chapter analyses cooperative attitude as a core component of intercultural competence. First, the chapter explains such terms as intercultural competence, cooperation, and culture, as well as the diffusion of cultures. Cooperation as a social value in strategic human resources management is also considered. Secondly, factors shaping cooperation (divided into two groups: cultural and biological) are discussed from a multidisciplinary perspective. Finally, the neuroeconomic dimension of cooperation is discussed with its subsequent socio-economic implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations regarding human choices resulting from individual ontogenetic processes (including cultural differences, genetic differences, and neural differences) and concludes on cooperative attitudes that are most likely culturally and biologically dependent, and which become a part of intercultural competence desired in a multicultural society and at the work place.

INTRODUCTION

The ability and willingness to act cooperatively is the very foundation of civilisation. Being ‘cooperative’ today is more valuable than ever before. Participants, partners, or simply team members in an effective consensus process should strive to reach the best possible decision for all of its members and the group as a whole rather than competing for personal preferences. The propensity to cooperate helps in building

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a connection between individuals and/or groups of people, although sometimes the reason why a person or group elects to cooperate with others is because they want to have influence—to get back the support others for their own objectives. Working together to accomplish a mutual goal means extending a hand to others in the organization. It is an extremely effective way of influencing others. Building cooperative connections may involve collaboration (figuring out what you will do together), consultation (finding out what ideas other people have) and alliances (drawing on whoever already supports you or has the credibility you need).

Economic discourse traditionally uses a cooperation concept to explain the obvious benefits that are derived from the combination of joint activities of different groups of suppliers (e.g., workers, farmers, etc.) and consumers, embracing production, distribution, or trade. In terms of management, cooperation is defined as “the interaction of two or more persons or organizations directed toward a common goal which is mutually beneficial, or an act or instance of working or acting together for a common purpose or benefit (i.e., joint action)” (House, 2005). Clearly, there are many research studies, especially in reference to so-called ‘high performance work organizations’ (HPWOs), documenting the positive effect of ‘cooperation like’ terms including: collaboration, teamwork, trust, commitment and mutual help offered by employees during day-to-day work (Kozlowski, Gully, Nason & Smith, 1999).

In today’s globalized reality, the role of cooperation in terms of economic and management perspectives is obviously multiplied. Nobody can imagine implementing any modern innovation without the earlier process of multilevel cooperation that involves the engagement of different experts, suppliers, business supporters, and the involvement of different organizations, including research bodies activities, or expectations verbalized by groups of customers. However, within mainstream academic discussions lies the argument as to which is better for effective teamwork: cooperation (working with others) or competition (between coworkers), and if so, what proportion of these two behaviour-traits would be appropriate to achieving effectiveness in the workplace (Rosenbaum et al., 1980).

The debate assumes that both competitive and collaborative ‘behaviours’ are equally important in different work situations: competitive attitude is useful when people are working independently, but collaborative attitude is more rewarding when people are interdependent (Beersma et al., 2003). The value of competition in work performance cannot be undervalued. But, changes required from contemporary organizations individual-based structures, as well as team-based structures (Allred, Snow & Miles, 1996) and as a consequence internal cooperative behaviour cannot be overestimated. This creates a challenging condition for strategic human resource management processes (Becker & Huselid, 2006). The need to be ‘cooperative’ in intercultural societies and multinational corporations in times of high migration flows become a challenge. From a globalization point of view, it is important to maximize economic benefits that skilled migrants can provide, but on the other hand, it is necessary to develop intercultural competence for particular employees to benefit from that.

This chapter addresses the following issues: *Why intercultural competency starts to be so urgently needed worldwide and what are its distinctive features? What will happen with a particular cultures’ uniqueness when inter-cultural paradigm will be continuously broadened and intensively developed?*

The chapter introduces discourse in sociology, ethnology, psychology, and behavioural economy about cooperation within the framework of intercultural competence. Importance is placed on neuroeconomic research dedicated to factors involved in the shaping and dissemination of cooperative attitudes, as well as decision-making processes directed at collaborative, as opposed to selfish, or hostile goals (Blizinsky & Chiao, 2010; Gintis, 2011). The perspective which suggests that cooperation is determined not only cul-

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