Chapter 13
Developing Cultural Competence:
Challenges and Best Practices in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of short-term study abroad and faculty-led immersion offer scholars and educators a new opportunity to study the impact of cross-cultural experiential learning practices on fostering cross-cultural competency among business students. Rising foreign direct investment, international trade, the growing significance of emerging markets, and other socio-political elements of globalization are reshaping 21st century business practices. Pedagogies of business education, including sales and marketing education, must adapt to these changes and provide an emphasis on cross-cultural understanding and its impact on business decision making, along with fostering skills for cultural sensitivity. This article will review two relevant theoretical frameworks, transformative learning theory, and experiential learning theory, which describe the processes by which students develop intercultural competence, particularly with respect to faculty-led, short-term study immersion programs. It will outline a series of best practices for designing, measuring, and implementing such programs in higher education and conclude with brief recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

International trade, the growing significance of emerging markets, rising foreign direct investment, and other socio-political elements of globalization are reshaping 21st century business practices. Pedagogies of business education, including sales and marketing education, must adapt to provide an emphasis on cross-cultural understanding and its impact on business decision making, along with fostering skills for cultural sensitivity. Beyond providing students with in-depth business knowledge, business educa-

tion must now also develop managerial competency, the ability to cope with uncertainty and conflict, a willingness to embrace and integrate diverse perspectives, as well as competence in developing and maintaining good interpersonal relations, all in the context of a multi-culture environment.

A marketing sales strategy defines who the company sells to, what the customer product and service offering is, and the approach to sales (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer 2008). In order to gain traction in the global marketplace, it is important to establish sound sales practices based on an understanding of the social and cultural environment of the market. With respect to international marketing, embracing the cultural diversity of the country may or may not bring success, but not doing so will surely increase the chances of stagnation or failure (Bhatt, 2014). Carter, Dixon, and Moncrief (2008) found an increasing number of MNCs recognize that international sales research is becoming "more and more complex to conduct primarily because of country of regional differences in culture, values, and attitudes." DeCarlo, Rody, and DeCarlo (1999) similarly argue that the application of one culture's sales management practices to another market with even slight differences in cultural environments may lead to inefficient and ineffective performance for organizations in those countries (see also Hunt 1981; Kanungo & Jaeger 1990). There are numerous examples of strategy failures and successes resulting from the inability to recognize cross-cultural challenges and tackle them appropriately. Educators in international business programs must take note of these examples and reconceive of how we introduce "best practices" in cross-cultural international sales and marketing into our curriculum.

The necessity of cross-cultural and intercultural competency in the workplace is also now reflected in the language of accreditation, including for business program accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). As early as 2009, AACSB articulated in its "Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards" that complex demands on management and accounting education, including in the field of sales and marketing, "mirror the demands on organization and managers." Of the four challenges specifically discussed, two relate directly to intercultural competency: (1) differences in organizational and cultural values and (2) cultural diversity among employees and customers (AACSB 2009, 4). The AACSB expects that as part of an accredited business program these challenges should be addressed in undergraduate and graduate business curricula.

The growing popularity of short-term study abroad and faculty-led immersion offer scholars and educators a new opportunity to study the impact of cross-cultural experiential learning practices on fostering cross-cultural competency among business students. Cross-cultural experiential learning occurs when students are provided opportunities to work and learn with people from different cultures. Studies have shown that while experiences abroad have an obvious impact on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills, they do not necessarily or automatically help to develop deeper levels of intercultural competence (Root & Ngampornchai, 2012). Immersion into a culture alone, without framing or guidance, will likely not increase cultural competence.

More recent research has indicated that the role of the faculty-leader and framed experiential learning opportunities are just as important in creating meaningful cross-cultural learning for students (Cilke & Ostojski 2020). Experiential learning activities can include, but are not limited to, globally-focused projects with students from another country or culture, study abroad, faculty-led trips to a foreign country, service learning activities with people from a different culture, online intercultural courses (COIL) and more. These experiential learning activities can build a range of cross-cultural skills, such as cultural self-awareness, cultural worldview and knowledge, effective communications, and other skills. Given the increasing numbers of students who participate in faculty-led short-term abroad programs, research

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