THE COHESION APPROACH OF CULTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRAINING OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

The paper argues that established training methods of intercultural competence often prove to be ineffective if not counterproductive because they build on an outdated paradigm of culture and intercultural communication. Based on a revised understanding of culture and intercultural competence the paper outlines how to develop innovative teaching approaches that effectively prepare students and managers for working in a global world.

Keywords

culture, cohesion, coherence, intercultural competence, intercultural training

Biography of Author

Stefanie Rathje completed her PhD at the University of Arts (Berlin) and received an MBA from the University of Chicago. After a career in management consulting she joined University of Jena as assistant professor for intercultural communication. Since 2008, she is a full professor for leadership and communication at HTW Berlin.

1. The Challenges of Developing Intercultural Competence

1.1. Situation

Modern business education needs concepts how to prepare students and managers to effectively work in heterogeneous teams, manage co-operation between international companies and integrate diverse corporate cultures around the globe. In the past, the paradigm of intercultural competence has emerged to describe the skills necessary to successfully communicate and act in intercultural settings.

The American social psychologist Gardner was probably one of the first to address what we now commonly refer to as intercultural competence when he posed the question: "[…] to what degree is it actually possible, for an expert from one culture to communicate with, to get through to, persons of another culture?" (Gardner, 1962:241).

Research efforts on intercultural competence have mushroomed ever since promoting the development of concepts how to actually train this magical ability. The old theory of culture shock (Oberg, 1960) and subsequent phase models of intercultural adjustment (cf. Taft, 1977) have provided the basic frameworks for instruction. Dimensional models to describe cultural differences, like the works of Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1984), have delivered the contents to be taught. Specific training techniques like the culture assimilator (Fiedler/Mitchell/Triandis, 1971) have been developed to efficiently introduce participants to foreign cultures.

Overall, the invention of intercultural training has been a triumphant global success. Spectacular failures of intercultural co-operation and disturbing experiences of expatriates have fuelled the perceived need for intercultural education. A world-wide training industry represented by globally operating professional associations (e.g. SIETAR) has emerged, the profession of intercultural trainer has established itself as a specific occupational profile (Dahlen, 1997).

1.2. Problem

While the importance of intercultural training in student and management education seems undoubted, the question what intercultural competence really is and thus if and how it can be taught remains heavily debated (Rathje, 2007).

During the last decade, existing training methods of intercultural competence have been severely criticised: The usage of cultural dimension models has been accused of improper simplification and stereotyping (Bolten, 2001:130; Hansen, 2000:285). Traditional training approaches have been blamed to disseminate cultural essentialism, dictate cemented cultural identities and mask or belittle unequal power structures (Auernheimer, 2007:120f). The broadness and diversity of the critique has cast doubt on the overall effectiveness of intercultural training leading to a debate on quality assurance of intercultural trainings in the intercultural community (Kinast, 1998, Kammhuber, 2001:85f; Stellamanns, 2005; Rebensburg, 2007).

In contrast to ongoing quality discussions, this article offers a different explanation for the continuing criticism of intercultural training, hypothesising that classical training methods of intercultural competence often prove to be ineffective, if not counterproductive, because they build on an outdated paradigm of culture and intercultural communication.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The objective of the paper is to present a revised understanding of culture as well as intercultural competence and outline how it can be put into action as a basis for innovative teaching approaches to effectively prepare students or managers for working in a global world.

In order to clarify the differences between the traditional and the revised understanding of culture and its respective implications for the concept of intercultural competence, the two approaches will first be contrasted along the fields of a matrix model of culture, as outlined in Rathje 2009, serving as a common reference for comparison.

This model attempts to map the complex nature of cultural phenomena by separating two different meta-dimensions of describing culture.

The first dimension addresses the common problem of mixing cultural and collective aspects when attempting to characterise cultural phenomena. Culture is often the first to blame, when things get rough between human groups, although the reasons for conflict are rarely to be found in different cultural habits like eating behaviour or dressing styles but rather in rivalry and power struggles. The model therefore broadens the cultural perspective to include a collective perspective. Collectivity in this sense refers to the „formal and structural" aspects of human groups (Hansen, 2009, translation by author). The collective perspective of culture thus deals with questions of group affiliation and belonging, e.g. who has and who gives access to groups

according to which criteria. The „cultural" can then be self-consciously reduced to its content, to the „customs" (or „habits" as in Tylor, 1871:1) of human collectives.

The analytical separation of a cultural perspective dealing with cultural customs and a collective perspective referring to aspects of belonging proves analytically helpful because both do not develop in concert: On the one hand, cultural customs can influence collective affiliations, but they do not necessarily have to (Rathje 2009: 41). On the other hand, shared cultural practices are not a prerequisite for the development of group identity and the resulting phenomena of exclusion and devaluation of outsiders (Tajfel, 1982).

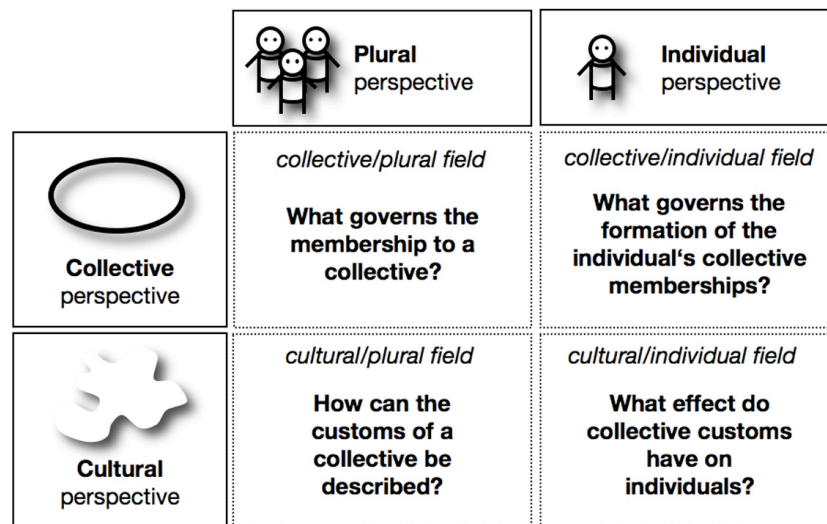|	Plural perspective	Individual perspective
Collective perspective	*collective/plural field* **What governs the membership to a collective?**	*collective/individual field* **What governs the formation of the individual's collective memberships?**
Cultural perspective	*cultural/plural field* **How can the customs of a collective be described?**	*cultural/individual field* **What effect do collective customs have on individuals?**

Figure 1: Matrix Model of Culture (adapted visualisation from Rathje, 2009)

The second dimension deals with the problem of mixing group and individual phenomena when talking about culture. In contrast to personal idiosyncrasies, cultural peculiarities are a plural phenomenon. Culture begins when people interact in groups, it ends with the characteristics of the individual. When talking about culture, this leads to the dilemma that on a group level the concreteness of cultural phenomena cannot be denied, while each individual member of a culture, however, is equipped with the freedom to process those cultural offers in a completely unique way. To adequately illustrate this dialectic of individual and group, the matrix model differentiates between a plural and an individual perspective on culture.

Culture as a complex holistic phenomenon can then be analysed through the use of a four-field matrix (see figure 1). Questions regarding the customs of certain collectives are addressed in the cultural/plural field. The collective/plural field can be used to investigate the rules of membership and participation in collectives. The cultural/individual field is dedicated to the interdependencies between individuals and culture, while the collective/individual field describes the individual's membership in different collectives.

Employing this tool allows for a much more accurate mapping of cultural phenomena and thus permits a more precise comparison of the traditional and revised approach to culture than a one-dimensional perspective.

To subsequently compare the traditional and revised understanding of intercultural competence the article refers to the tripartite classification of mental activities into cognition, affection, and conation as originated in the German psychology of the eighteenth century and extended into the twentieth century through the writings of William McDougall (Hilgard, 1980). Although the three dimensions do not prove to be fully mutually exclusive, this model - frequently used in describing pedagogical training concepts - represents a helpful means to differentiate between the more cognitive, more emotional and more behavioural aspects related to intercultural competence.

3. Coherence

In earlier days, anthropologists' answers to the question of culture were quite simple: culture was mostly understood as the coherent, unifying aspects of countries, nations or ethnic groups, that set them apart from others. Esteemed scholars highlighted its essentialistic existence as something distinct from the individual (White, 1959), its consistency (Benedict, 1934:44), and its internal coherence (Kluckhohn, 1949:35). Even well-known, more recent research still speaks of culture as a consistent „collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 1984:21) or a „universal and quite typical orientation system for a society, organisation or group" (Thomas, 2003:52, translation by author).

In the following paragraphs, this traditional, coherence-oriented understanding of culture will be described in more detail using the four fields of the matrix model. Implications for the concept of intercultural competence will be outlined.

3.1. The Traditional Coherence Approach of Culture

Starting with the cultural/collective dimension, the traditional understanding of culture is characterised by a perceived congruence between these two levels and therefore does not differentiate between customs and membership. It assumes that, on the one hand, customs or traditions end where the collective ends, while, on the other hand, there is little or no overlap between collectives and therefore smaller collectives arise within larger ones.

Because of this assumed congruence, collectives and, by extension, cultures, are characterised by very clear and non-porous boundaries to other collectives/cultures. This will hereafter be referred to as *border coherence*. In the context of cultural customs, there is an expectation of homogeneity and assumed acceptance that will be referred to as *internal coherence*. According to these premises, it is not only absolutely clear who is e.g. French and who is not, who is a Berliner and who is not, who is a police officer and who is not, but it is also clear what values or behaviour each group will display.

Analysing the plural/individual dimension, it can be observed that the traditional understanding of culture is primarily focussed on the group perspective and rarely concerned with the role of the individual. Accordingly, its characterisations of the individual's perspective turn out to be quite simple.

At the level of the collective, the traditional perspective prefers a diagnosis of *primary collectivity* which can be imagined as the individual's main collective allegiance – normally understood as the membership in a national collective. This assumption is so deeply rooted in daily experience that it is rarely questioned. Management guidebooks offering intercultural advice, for example, typically describe the "Czechs" or the "Chinese" without considering other group memberships such as academics, blue-

collar workers, philosophers, engineers, thirty-somethings, or retirees. Even theoretical approaches like multiculturalism (Taylor, 1991:52) are founded upon the same primary collective assumptions assigning an individual to one single collective (Bienfait, 2006:38).
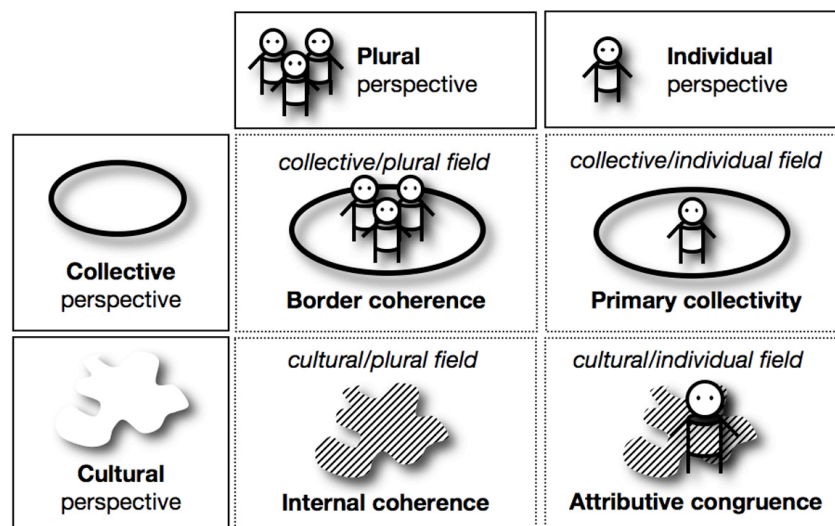

Figure 2: The Coherence Approach to Culture

At the cultural level, the traditional understanding presumes an observable *attributive congruence* in the individual. This is the assumption that since the characteristics within a collective are themselves coherent and furthermore, since an individual belongs primarily to one collective, it must follow that the characteristics of an individual are compatible with his or her primary collective. Therefore, knowing that someone has e.g. grown up in the tradition of the "Christian/European West", certain assumptions could be made regarding his or her opinions on parliamentary democracy or on the Ten Commandments.

3.2. Implications for the Traditional Concept of Intercultural Competence

In the following segment, the implications of the coherence approach for the traditional intercultural paradigm and the concept of intercultural competence will be outlined. It will be argued that the assumed characteristics of *border coherence, internal coherence, primary collectivity and attributive congruence* have a direct impact on the perceived challenges, the learning objectives and the training approaches connected to the traditional way of understanding intercultural competence.

Taking a closer look at the common understanding of intercultural communication, we discover that the traditional intercultural paradigm derives logically from the coherence oriented cultural paradigm as outlined above.

If our understanding of culture is dominated by the notions of *border* and *internal coherence* of each collective as well as *primary collectivity* and *attributive congruence* of the individual, then intercultural encounters must be characterised by the cross-over of different cultural territories including their embedded individuals that, having been well-separated before, start to overlap, thus producing an unstable, vulnerable intersection where codes, symbols, values or types of behaviour intercollide.

This „collision" metaphor of intercultural communication, often depicted as two intersecting circles with „something in the middle", is influenced by classic models of human communication postulating overlapping or shared pools of meaning as a prerequisite for understanding (Burkart, 2003:35). It has shaped the scientific as well as the practical discourse of intercultural communication during the last two decades, as exemplified in a well-known definition by Bolten:

> „ [...] intercultural interaction can be described as a game of foreign cultural environments that permanently produces something „in-between", an „interculture", that can be characterised by completely different [...] conventions and behavioural routines than the communicative interaction within the original cultures." (Bolten, 2007:140, translation by author)

The „collision" metaphor of intercultural communication has lead to the notion of intercultural interaction as „extreme" situation, characterised by a specific difficulty compared to „normal" social interaction. Although multiculturalists have tried to sell this experience as enriching, the image of „cultures colliding" (Lewis, 2006) has influenced the common perception of intercultural encounters as rather stressful: It's no fun to clash!
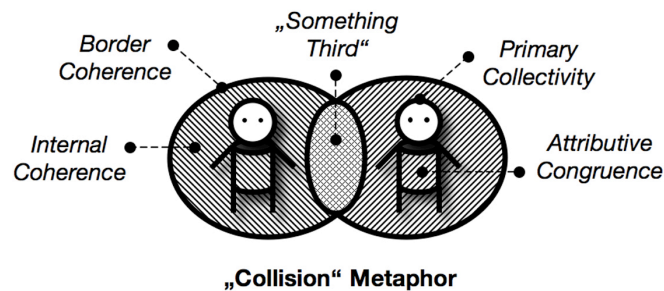

„Collision" Metaphor

Figure 3: The Coherence Paradigm of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural competence has thus emerged as a means to successfully deal with the clash. It can be shown that existing educational concepts for a development of intercultural competence have derived their learning objectives and training approaches from the perceived challenges following the „collision" paradigm:

If an intercultural encounter is compared to two formerly separate cultural islands suddenly getting in contact with each other, the biggest challenge for the involved individuals on the cognitive level is the mutual ignorance of their respective systems of codes, rules, values, behaviour etc. Intercultural training has therefore developed the cognitive learning objective to teach participants the systematic differences between the two „islands". Assuming the internal coherence of culture, it should be possible to understand the whole pattern if either given the right key or decoding the right piece. This has lead to the development of highly sophisticated compression techniques trying to convey the gist of a culture with minimum effort. Well-known training types of this kind build e.g. on the dimensional model of culture (Hofstede, 1984) that aims at capturing national cultures with the help of five bipolar scales or on the culture assimilator technique that presents critical incidents as *pars pro toto* in the form of commented multiple choice questions (Thomas, 1996).

On the affective level, the collision metaphor of two territories clashing evokes negative associations of destruction and the emotional stress of losing something valuable. The affective challenge of intercultural interactions is hence the threat of one's own identity as described in classic models of culture shock. Training of intercultural competence on

the affective level has therefore focussed on teaching how to cope effectively with perceived threats and adjust to the exceptional situation. Common training approaches in this area are often based on psychological models of intercultural adjustment like e.g. the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) by Hammer/Bennett (1998) assuming a set of ascending stages in coping with the foreign. They frequently employ role playing techniques (e.g. BAFA BAFA) that create mock situations of extreme alienation to accustom participants to feelings of disorientation and loss of control.

On the conative level, the major challenge arising from the collision metaphor is the presumably limited consensus between the parties involved. When assuming internal coherence of cultures as well as attributive congruence of its members, it can be furthermore hypothesised that the attitudes, viewpoints, issues or objectives of the interculturally involved parties are likely to differ, thus posing problems for the efficiency and effectiveness of the interaction. The respective learning objective derived from this assumption has been to shape a temporary „middle-ground", often metaphorically called „the third" (Wierlacher, 2003), „third space" (Bhabha/Rutherford, 1990), „third chair" (Badavia, 2002) or plainly „interculture". Trainings addressing this conative learning objective have thus focussed on developing culture-sensitive negotiation skills using simulation techniques that train participants in employing their interaction competencies in intercultural settings (e.g. InterAct by Bolten, 2002).

The intercultural collision paradigm with its challenges of mutual ignorance, threat of identity and limited consensus certainly has its value in that it describes accurately the common intercultural experience of confusion, defence and fear. A closer examination of its consequences reveals, however, that it tends to aggravate the problems without providing a path to solve them.

The cognitive training objective of understanding a different culture suggests that there actually is a coherent system that can be fully deciphered by simplification. As a consequence, stereotypes, particularly national stereotypes, are intensified. The initial relief of reduced complexity soon backfires as a shock when training participants later realise that they in fact do not understand.

The affective learning goal of coping with an exceptionally stressful situation enforces the notion of extraordinariness in intercultural encounters. This can superficially serve as a relief mechanism as well because emotional conflicts are purely attributed to the cultural. On a deeper level it cements the state of emergency and prevents the involved from ever establishing normality.

Finally, the conative objective to create a temporary „third" space necessarily implies the notion that there is also something „first" and something „second". This metaphor can initially simplify communication between groups because it reduces complex interaction to a two-way street. In the long run, however, it reinforces collective borders increasing well-known in-group/out-group mechanisms like rivalry and discrimination.

Overall, it becomes obvious that intercultural training based on the notion of cultural coherence is short-term oriented. Serving as a tool to reduce complexity and provide relief for feelings of confusion, fear or personal failure it seems to make things better. Its effects, however, are not sustainable. Intercultural training building on the intercultural collision paradigm works, on the contrary, as a self-fulfilling prophecy for cultural clash.

4. Cohesion

Although the traditional concept of cultural coherence with its characteristics of *border* and *internal coherence* as well as *primary collectivity* and *attributive congruence* of the individuals still dominates our everyday understanding of culture, it is becoming more and more apparent that it contradicts ongoing social developments.

The following paragraphs explore a more contemporary understanding of culture using the four fields of the matrix. Based on these findings, the traditional intercultural paradigm will be revised and conclusions for the development of intercultural competence will be drawn.

4.1. The Cohesion Approach of Culture

While the traditional understanding of culture was characterised by a perceived congruence between cultures and collectives, there is already substantial evidence found, e.g. in the fields of Cultural and Post-colonial Studies, for the mutual influence and interpenetration of human customs irrespective of collective boundaries. The ever-increasing "transnational flow of information" (Bamyeh, 1993) necessitates the creation and re-creation of new cultural practices independent of national or other collective borders (Featherstone, 1990; Noller, 1999:90). Likewise, these practices are not exclusively attached to certain collectives, but instead permanently branch out, evolve, fray, and create hybrid forms. Cultural phenomena deterritorialize in trans-societal lifestyles or corporate cultures with individuals participating in shared conversations with shared symbols across nations (Holt/Quelch/Taylor, 2004:70). In this light, culture must be seen as capable of practically everything except for stopping at collective borders. The concepts of interculturality and transculturality (Welsch, 1995), which themselves were created in order to illustrate this processual nature of culture, are hence tautological terms since cultural processes always occur "between" or "through" others.

This finding leads to a revision of the *internal coherence* diagnosis in the cultural/plural field of the matrix. Societies differentiate into a greater number of smaller collectives with their own, sometimes conflicting habits, rituals and codes superimposed upon and interpenetrating each other (Winter, 2003). The idea of coherent cultures is gradually being replaced by a new paradigm of "heterotopia" (Willke, 2003) with its notion of culture characterised by inherent differences (Bhabha/Rutherford, 1990). Approaches that describe the development and perpetuation of culture - e.g. the concept of "cultural memory" (Assmann, 1992) - have demonstrated that members of a culture have access to a heterogeneous pool of cultural resources. Depending on current needs they recall pieces of the past respectively. The content of a culture at any given moment can therefore never be categorised as coherent. It must, on the contrary, be characterised by fundamental *differentiation*.

The claim of *differentiation* as a characteristic of cultural customs is closely related to contemporary developments in the field of individual collective membership. While the traditional concept of culture understood this relationship between individuals and their collectives to be one marked by *primary collectivity*, the accelerating increase in the number of available collectives and their mutual influence demands a fundamental revision of this perspective. Today, it is increasingly difficult to predict to how many or precisely which collectives an individual has access. Hansen terms the rather simple observation that an individual belongs to many collectives at the same time "multicollectivity" (2000:196). The model of *multicollectivity* leads away from monolithic

and essentialist views of individual identity that appears to be constantly endangered by variety and contradiction. Instead, *multicollectivity* offers an additive understanding of collective membership and cultural practices: Individuals are able to add collective memberships and cultural customs without having to sacrifice existing ones.

Adhering to the claims of cultural *differentiation* and *multicollectivity*, attachments to the traditional assumptions regarding individual *attributive congruence* must also be abandoned. The notion that individuals are simultaneously part of numerous collectives that produce divergent cultural practices results in a radically individual processing of cultural offers due to reciprocal interaction with their unique biological and biographical foundations. Knowing the collective memberships of an individual only allows for the conclusion which cultural practices or rational concepts that individual is *familiar* with. What that individual makes of this peculiar constellation of influences, however, remains an open question.

The traditional concept of culture postulated the existence of *border coherence*, that is the assumption that collective membership (but not cultural membership) is unambiguously regulated. Unfortunately, no modifications to this approach can be made. The diagnosis of cultural *differentiation*, *multicollectivity*, and *radical individuality* does not allow borders between collectives become blurrier, more porous or even non-existent. Groups attach quite varied requirements to the membership and acceptance of the individuals within them. The result, however, the granting of recognition, participation, and respect is always unambiguous: one is either part of the collective or one is not. Although the coherence paradigm is an obsolete tool in the understanding of culture it retains its usefulness in a collective context. Cultures overlap, intertwine, and influence one another, but the borders drawn by collectives are firm. In order to be part of a culture, it is thus sufficient to be familiar with that culture's customs. In order to achieve membership in a collective, palpable criteria must be fulfilled.
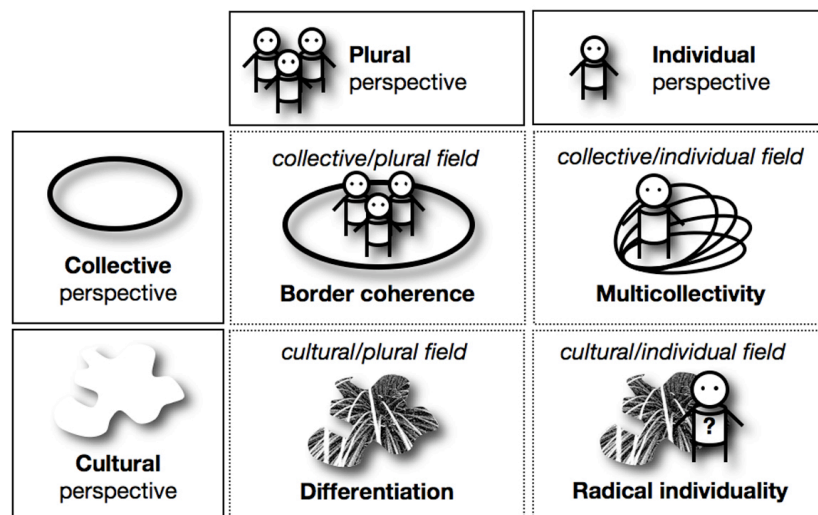

Figure 4: The Cohesion Approach to Culture

While the traditional concept of culture looks to *coherence* as a source of stability, a revised understanding of culture, which assumes *differentiation* among cultural customs and individual *multicollectivity*, must develop new desiderata to ensure the integrity of complex social collective like societies or companies.

The intuitive plausibility of the traditional perspective ("The more alike we are, the less likely there will be conflicts."), a familiar assumption easily gained from personal experiences in small groups like bowling clubs or work teams, certainly makes the exploration of new orientations for complex collectives be they businesses or nations very difficult indeed.

Nevertheless, closer consideration reveals that potential solutions are to be found precisely in the concepts of *multicollectivity* and *differentiation* themselves. Individual *multicollectivity*, through its very variety, provides a network-like stability of greater group connections (Hansen, 2000:196). Organisational science has furthermore been able to prove that familiarity with cultural differences rather than compliance with norms and rules forms a stable basis for organisational effectiveness (cf. Rathje, 2004). These findings indicate that it is not the internal coherence of customs that is vital for the continuity of collectives. On the contrary, the familiarity with the differences creates a framework of normality that alone is sufficient for identification: "We recognise [...] [the divergent] points of view, and when we hear them, we know that we are at home" (Hansen, 2000:232, translation by author).

In contrast to the traditional coherence paradigm this new orientation can be termed *cohesion paradigm* in that it aims at establishing cohesive links between individuals without assuming coherence as a prerequisite (Rathje, 2009:48f).

4.2. Implications for a Revised Concept of Intercultural Competence

The following paragraphs describe the implications of the cohesion approach for a revised intercultural paradigm and draw conclusions regarding a more effective development of intercultural competence. It will be argued that the identified concepts of *differentiation*, *multicollectivity* and *radical individuality* call for a fresh look at the challenges, learning objectives and training approaches necessary to develop intercultural competence.
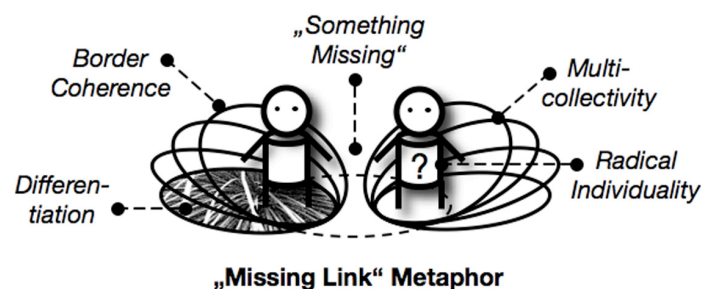

Figure 5: The Cohesion Paradigm of Intercultural Communication

In light of the cohesion concept of culture the intercultural collision paradigm cannot be sustained. Assuming *differentiation*, *multicollectivity* and *radical individuality*, intercultural interaction must be characterised by the encounter of individuals belonging to and being influenced by numerous collectives and their respective cultures, be they national, professional, social, religious, leisure-related or other at the same time. What makes a situation intercultural is hence not a collision of two worlds, because due to their *multicollectivity* individuals process and navigate through numerous worlds everyday. What makes a situation intercultural is rather the perceived missing link between the involved. An interaction can thus be labelled intercultural if the involved attribute their experience of foreignness to a lack of belonging to a shared collective.

Compared to the collision paradigm, this missing-link metaphor turns out to be much less threatening. Instead of provoking a win-lose-situation, the cohesion-based concept of interculturality implies that something missing can be added, thus paving the way for continued communication.

The biggest cognitive challenge for the involved is hence not the complete mutual ignorance of a differing cultural system, but rather a partial unfamiliarity with the collective memberships of the other party. The more adequate learning objective following from that is to establish familiarity with the collective memberships relevant for interaction rather than engaging in the hopeless effort to chase the Chimaera of a coherent cultural system.

The concept of *multicollectivity* with its notion of additive identities moreover suggests that the affective challenge of intercultural interaction can never be a threat of one's identity as a whole. It rather has to be understood as a lack of sense of belonging to the other party involved. As has been argued above, a missing sense of belonging easily leads to in-group/out-group mechanisms of rivalry and discrimination. Instead of learning how to cope with a threatening situation, the skill to either stretch the borders of one's own collective memberships or to add a new collective to be shared with all involved should be developed as a primary learning objective.

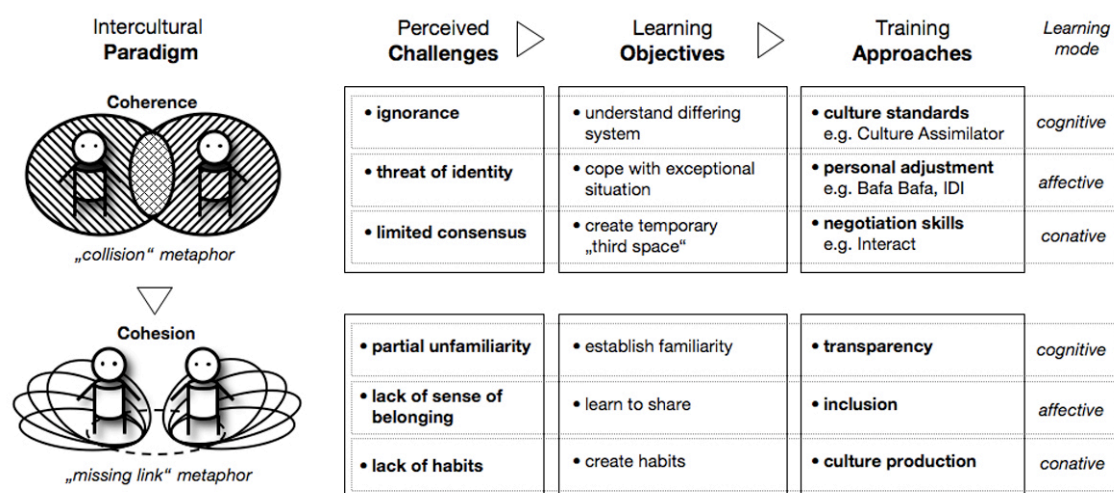| Intercultural **Paradigm**	Perceived **Challenges**	Learning **Objectives**	Training **Approaches**	Learning mode
Coherence "collision" metaphor	• ignorance	• understand differing system	• culture standards e.g. Culture Assimilator	cognitive
	• threat of identity	• cope with exceptional situation	• personal adjustment e.g. Bafa Bafa, IDI	affective
	• limited consensus	• create temporary "third space"	• negotiation skills e.g. Interact	conative
Cohesion "missing link" metaphor	• partial unfamiliarity	• establish familiarity	• transparency	cognitive
	• lack of sense of belonging	• learn to share	• inclusion	affective
	• lack of habits	• create habits	• culture production	conative

Figure 5: Comparison of the Coherence and Cohesion Paradigm of Intercultural Competence

On the conative level, the coherence paradigm had stressed the limited consensus in intercultural encounters as a major challenge to be addressed in trainings. In contrast, the idea of *differentiation* as a fundamental aspect of cultures underlines the presence of disagreement and conflict in any kind of social interaction. What is, however, specific about the intercultural situation is that, due to the missing collective link, the involved feel that they cannot rely on common habits that usually help them in dealing with and solving conflict. The adequate learning objective is hence not to work on a fragile and temporary "third" but to fill the new common collective with solid common habits. Instead of learning how to establish "interculture", the objective is rather to learn how to produce culture.

Compared to the traditional collision paradigm, the new cohesion approach offers a perspective that is much more oriented towards the continuity and sustainability of

human interaction. Intercultural competence, in this light, is the ability to build the missing link between the parties involved by cognitively establishing familiarity and normality, affectively adding and extending collective memberships, and conatively producing cultural habits with the aim to increase cohesion.

5. Implications for Global Education Training Concepts

The arguments above suggest a need for revised training concepts in the area of intercultural education. In the final paragraphs, implications for the further development of intercultural trainings will be outlined along the three dimensions of cognition, affection and conation. The ideas will mainly focus on the content of a general training for students or managers and exclude the discussion of training techniques since those heavily depend on the specific training conditions.

5.1. Cognitive learning approach: Transparency

On the cognitive level, an intercultural training should address the learning objective of establishing familiarity between individuals who experience foreignness due to a perceived missing collective link. Based on the finding that known differences can create as much cohesion as conformities, the training should focus on getting participants accustomed to differences and similarities within the training group, including the following aspects or elements:

- Treatment of each training group as intercultural, independent of their potential ethnic or national homogeneity, to enable participants to practically experience interculturality on different levels by identifying differences in seemingly homogeneous groups and exploring similarities in seemingly heterogeneous groups.

- Mapping and contrasting of the set of collectives that participants belong to (types of collectives include country of origin, but also e.g profession of parents, field of own study, favourite kinds of music, sports or films, or behavioural collectives like planner or spontaneous person, detail-oriented or big picture person) to gain transparency about relevant collective affiliations and potential cultural differentiation

- Exploration of differing influences of the collective affiliation on the individuals in order to understand the difference between collective membership and culture, to highlight the radical individuality of each participant and to reduce overbearing collective attributions (e.g. national attribution)

- Mapping and strengthening of the network of shared collectives among participants (e.g. common professional fields, hobbies or family situation)

As a training result of working on collective transparency, participants should have gained awareness of the individuals' state of multicollectivity and increased their ability to differentiate between cultural habits and collective memberships on all levels. They should be able to transfer this competence to other intercultural settings.

5.2. Inclusion

On the affective level, intercultural trainings should address the learning objective of establishing a sense of belonging between the involved by acknowledging all participants as members of the group - a process that is often referred to as inclusion. Being strongly influenced by the individual's basic emotional resilience and self-

discipline, the capacity to include appears to be hard to teach during a training. It seems however promising to shift the learning focus from aspects of coping to the formation of collectives, including the following aspects:

- Guidance of the group through typical group formation processes (e.g. by managing difficult situations or establishing a common out-group) to foster the experience of dynamics of exclusion and inclusion

- Conceptual familiarisation with team or community building techniques to allow for their purposeful application in intercultural settings

As a training result of learning about inclusion, participants should have understood in-group/out-group dynamics as generic collective phenomena. They should have recognised their own emotions of fear and defence as natural but temporary reactions to changes in collective membership structures independent of cultural differences.

5.3. Culture Production

On the conative level, intercultural trainings should address the learning objective of creating habits. According to the cohesion approach, this can be seen as producing culture within a collective. Intercultural training therefore has to familiarise participants with the techniques of symbolic management, including the following aspects:

- Conceptual familiarisation with the principles of creating symbolic situations or manifestations and preserving them in the collective memory of the group

- Practical identification and creation of specific collective manifestations (e.g. rituals, like the way of starting a meeting or a running gag, group logos, written documents or guiding values) to experience how representations charged with meaning start to become cultural symbols and evoke cohesive effects among the involved

As a training result of learning about symbolic management, participants should be able to proactively and purposefully support the development of new habits within groups.

6. Summary

Although all proposals made above remain introductory and subject to further validation by developing and testing actual training sessions, they represent a promising way of finally implementing contemporary concepts of culture in practical training and establishing a more adequate perspective on intercultural competence.

Despite all advancements in culture theory over the last decade, the image of the intercultural competent individual is still that of a culture clash manager living on the edge of „something third". It is time to change that positioning. Instead of stirring up cultural catastrophes, students and managers should be trained to become *normality makers* and *culture producers* and develop a sober view of intercultural competence: In the end it's just the skill that allows for collective communication to be continued.

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