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Talking Culture: Intercultural Competence in a Corporate Context

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Talking Culture: Intercultural Competence in a Corporate Context

Abstract

Taking its starting point in two, currently predominant views on intercultural business communication and intercultural competence (e.g. Askehave & Norlyk 2006; Blasco 2004; Franklin 2007; Gudykunst & Kim 2002; Hofstede 2001; Holiday et al. 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997), this paper provides insight into the way practitioners in an international software company construct their experiences with culture and intercultural encounters in the workplace. On the basis of the discursive analysis of ten semi-structured interviews, the presentation details how practitioners make sense of their work experiences through the adoption of different approaches, ranging from what may be termed a 'functionalist' approach that constructs culture as a relatively fixed, homogeneous entity which can be 'managed' or 'overcome', to an approach based on situational adaptation and diversity. In doing so, the paper attempts to show that *in practice* members of staff may make sense of intercultural issues by means of various discourses that reflect very different ideas of what culture and intercultural competence is, potentially leading to differences in the handling and experience of intercultural encounters as well as to challenges for the company as a whole in addressing intercultural issues. These findings may prove valuable to the understanding of how to "define and design a sphere of interculturality" (the third place), and the study as whole may illuminate the usefulness of discourse analysis to this end.

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Summary

Taking its starting point in two views on intercultural business communication, this paper provides insight into how practitioners in an international software company construct experiences with culture and intercultural encounters in the workplace. Here, discourse analysis proves valuable for the uncovering of how interculturality ("a third place") may be constructed.

