

Theory and practice of intercultural training

General introduction – The motivation for this project

During my studies of international economy in Innsbruck I studied one year in Zaragoza, Spain. Inspired by this experience I wrote my final thesis about micro-politics during processes of internationalisation, which concluded in a proposal for more intercultural management and intercultural training during these periods. Therefore I chose to finish my studies of educational sciences by conducting a project about intercultural training within the following objectives should be reached:

- Facilitate the work in intercultural groups (especially in international organisations)
- Reduce the problems before, during and after expatriation
- Improve the communication skills between different cultures

These rather business orientated objectives, based on the results of my master thesis, changed and became more general, because of a rather pragmatic approach: if you know and understand yourself, your own culture and the functions of culture and education your abilities to get in contact and communicate with peoples of other cultures will be broadened.

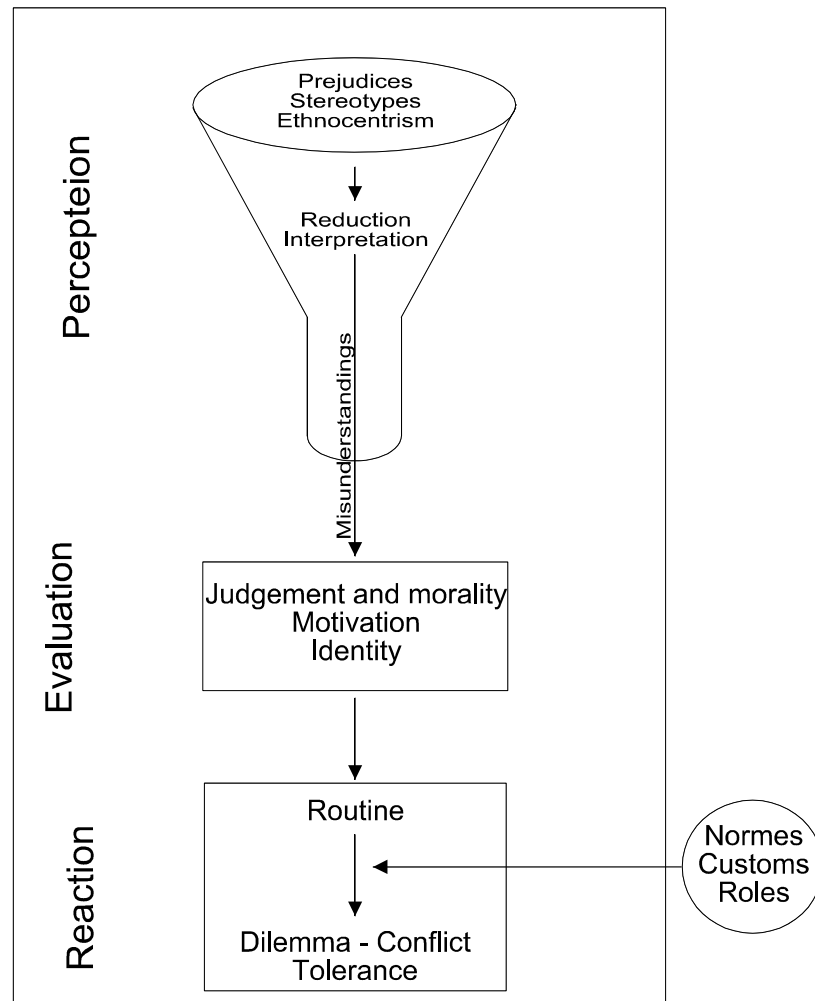
Therefore the goal of this project is to design a training, which attempts to reach these objectives and is based on an understanding of the theories and functions behind culture.

The theory

In the first part I try to work out an overview of definitions of “culture”. After a historical introduction I get into the areas where a specific culture is valid (subcultures, regional cultures, cultural area, cultural zone and trans-national culture) and the overlapping zones between cultures. also try to explain how culture offers a system of orientation, influences people but also helps them to cope with reality (public and private functions of culture) and how these cultural moments are fixed in structures and symbols (specific of each area of validity).

In combination with the type of intercultural contact (tourism, school, immigration, international business, international enterprises, medias, ...), in the second part of

this paper I explain the intercultural interaction model, based on Habermas' theories (objective, social and subjective interactions), because it stresses the importance of a common (cultural) basis for successful communication. Because this common cultural basis can only be the result of and is at the same time part of a series of interactions it is important to get into the details of the processes of interaction: Communication, perception, interpretation, judgement, morale, motivation, identity and reaction, which I combined in the following model:



Communication, which is the input for the following processes, consists basically of spoken and “silent” language (body language, language of objects and of space, paralinguistics, ...). Language training is one of the most common preparation methods for international contacts, but most of the time the relation between language and culture is ignored. I wish to point out that language training can only be effective if it is combined with cultural learning.

The communicated messages are perceived, interpreted and in the course of this process distorted (which leads to misunderstandings). Especially the concepts of

ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudgements are central in this phase of the interaction. Therefore I try to explain the reasons and the functions of these attitudes in order to understand them and work on them (and not to banish them).

In order to influence the actions of a person, the perceived and interpreted messages must be judged by: the moral and the norms, the individual motivation and the identity of the person itself. These three themes are explained in the fifth part of the paper. First of all the evolution of morale (Lawrence Kohlberg) and the different stages of moral in relation with culture, second the backgrounds of motivation and its dependency on culture and finally the identity (Erikson) which needs stability and the possibilities of orientation, otherwise it is possible that a malfunction results in the following stages (solidarity vs. isolation).

In the final part I get into the explications of the possible reactions. Especially routines are interesting because they may not work in different cultural contexts. Also the manners and the norms, the contents of the roles and the roles themselves and relations of power (hierarchy) change, which could lead to a dilemma between adaptation and conflict.

The Training

As a result of these theoretical explications, combined with an introduction into the processes of cultural shocks, I obtained a list of key themes, which are interesting for an intercultural training, which I will design in the second part of my project.

The planning process for this training contains the following steps:

1. Target group and trainer description: Which persons is this training for? What skills and characteristics are required for a trainer?
2. Needs and expectations
3. Global goals
4. Key contents (=key themes)
5. Detailed goals for each content
6. Methods (based on a couple of publications like intercultural sourcebook and a number of method sets which I found in the library of SIETAR)
7. Program of the training

8. Evaluation: How will participants apply what they have learned? Which methods to use for the evaluation?

In the training part I included the empirical study and the interviews I made in Paris and in Berlin.