

Laura Sukyte-Eickmeyer

Institute Organisation and Management, International Academy Berlin for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology and Economics (INA); Berlin (Germany)

Application of coaching in intercultural learning processes

ABSTRACT

The highly dynamic nature of the EU labor market increases the complexity and diversity of European social structures. Organizations and commercial enterprises are faced with the growing challenge of successfully shaping multicultural teamwork. Intercultural learning in everyday business life is gaining in importance. Coaching is used to support managers in professionalizing their leadership work. In teams, coaching is used as a pedagogical intervention in team development and team conflict resolution to support intercultural learning processes in a targeted manner. The concepts have been developed from practical application; the scientific foundation is still in its infancy.

Key words: Coaching, intercultural learning process, team development coaching, team conflict coaching

1. Introduction

In recent years, the European economic area has benefited from a highly dynamic labor market. Continuing globalization, digitization, and networking in conjunction with the free movement of workers have favored pluralistic social trends and an increase in complexity and diversity in social structures. Organizations and commercial enterprises have to deal with the increasing multiculturalism and diversity of their employees. Concepts of diversity management try to provide answers to complex daily challenges and to design the handling of diversity in such a way that the best possible output for the organizations and companies can be achieved.

The market, especially in countries dominated by traditional industrial economic structures, such as Germany, is increasingly characterized by demographic change with a growing proportion of older employees. The willingness of the younger generation to opt for traditional occupations in crafts, industry, or agriculture is declining among generation "Y". This additionally increases the demand for workers from other countries. To meet this demand, the focus is increasingly on migration in addition to worker mobility in the European Economic Area. Organizations and companies, as well as the employees and teams working in them, are becoming more multicultural and diverse as a result.

The handling of multicultural teams is hardly taught in any academic training. Managers, mostly with a background in business administration, engineering, or law, have to learn how to lead employees on the one hand, while on the other hand they have to solve the special challenge of successfully organizing multicultural teamwork. This goes hand in hand with intercultural learning in everyday business life. Coaching is now widely used to support managers in professionalizing their leadership work. In teams, coaching is used for team development and team conflict resolution and finally to support intercultural learning processes in a targeted manner. The main focus here is on team coaching - team development coaching as a preventive instrument and team conflict coaching as a reactive instrument, flanked by individual coaching to strengthen cultural identity. The concepts have been developed from practical application; the scientific foundation is only at the beginning.

At the Institute for Organization and Management of the International Academy, Berlin for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology, and Economics (INA) gGmbH, founded at the Freie Universität Berlin (FU Berlin) and the International Academy for Social Sciences, Organization and Management - World Citizen Campus - gGmbH (INA CCW) in Berlin, the trends, findings and processes in the areas of coaching, leadership and change management are scientifically examined at the national and

international level to contribute to the scientific foundation of the expertise of the master's programs offered by ZITA as well as formulating a scientifically based coaching theory. Due to its complexity, the research field requires an interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, the research focus is on the interdisciplinary, integrative approach from a business management practice and social science perspective. The interdisciplinary Master's program "Coaching, Leadership and Change Management", licensed by the International Academy for Social Sciences, Organization and Management - World Citizen Campus - gGmbH (INA CCW) and offered at the ZiTA University of Applied Sciences Berlin, offers an academic and practical examination in connection with the work of the research unit at the INA CCW and the practical, one-year training as Master Coach Business, ECA and TÜV certified according to DIN EN ISO 17024. The Master's degree program with the title "Master of Arts" deals with the theoretical basics of coaching and combines scientifically and empirically founded findings with practical process design in coaching. The one-year, in-service training to become a Master Coach Business (ECA) offers a practical examination of the "practical substrate" of the Master's program. The combination of the academic and practical training offers provides a scientific and practical overall concept for the

professionalization of the coaching profession. Academics, managers, and group leaders will deal with the scientifically based pedagogical leadership and coaching concept to make cooperating and learning in multicultural working groups even more effective and successful.

2. Method

The framework of the article is based on the system theory of Luhmann and Willke and represents theory-based work in conjunction with proven application concept.

3. Theory

3.1 Definition of terms

To deal with coaching in intercultural working groups and learning processes, a conceptual definition of the main terms is necessary first.

Culture is defined as "a universal system of orientation which is, however, very typical for society, organization, and group. <...> It influences the perception, thinking, values and actions of all its members and thus defines their belonging to a certain society, organization, and group" (Thomas, 1993, p. 380).

A **working group / team** is defined as a collective in which group members pursue common goals in terms of learning or production. Research into the behavior and behavioral change of groups has been

intensively explored under the term group dynamics.

Intercultural learning as part of social learning focuses on the acquisition of skills and knowledge in interpersonal interactions in an intercultural context. Intercultural learning "takes place when a person strives to understand the specific orientation system of perception, thinking, values, and actions of people from another culture, to connect this with his orientation system, and to apply this to his thinking and actions in the foreign cultural field of action. Intercultural learning requires, in addition to the understanding of foreign cultural orientation systems, a reflection of the own cultural orientation system" (Thomas, in von Rosenstiel et al. (ed.), 2003, p. 532).

Coaching is a management instrument, a consulting method, "a problem-solving method in which the coach is responsible for the appropriate questions, helpful summaries and adherence to the process, and the coachee finds independent solutions for his situation - for his upcoming questions" (Radatz, 2018, p. 85). The variety of definitions can be found in chapter 5 of this article.

3.2 Learning with the help of the situational approach

In its scientific and practical work with intercultural teams in selected German business enterprises, the Institute for Organization and Management of the International Academy for

Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology, and Economics (INA) gGmbH, founded at the Freie Universität Berlin, is oriented towards the model of the "situational approach". The Situational Approach was developed by Prof. Juergen Zimmer at the FU Berlin, initially for the reform of pedagogical practice in the institutional education of children and adolescents in Germany, and later transferred to the field of adult and organizational education¹. The central focus of the situational approach is on complex situations in relevant life-worlds.

In its classical form, the Situation Approach takes as its starting point the life situations of children and their families, opens them up as learning situations, and formulates the claim that children, adolescents, and adults jointly shape their lives and influence social processes. For the work with intercultural teams in organizations it means that the concrete situation in the company/organization is the focus of attention, the people involved (employees) explore and shape this organizational world together and influence the work processes.

Learning with the help of the situational approach takes place under consideration of five principles:

Life-world orientation: the heterogeneous social, cultural, and individual life situations are the content and reference point of professional work and learning in real life situations.

Education: the factual and methodological competence is acquired in social contexts of meaning; all those involved in the educational process are encouraged to shape their present and future life situations in an enlightened, competent, self-determined and solidary manner with others.

Participation: a basic right and a universal attitude of educators and managers that constantly reflects the unequal relationship between recognized holders of rights and resources and those who have yet to conquer these rights and resources, and makes co-determination a central theme.

Equality and difference: the recognition of the diversity of people based on equal rights for all, consistent and active resistance to all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Unity of content and form: the critical reflection of given plans as well as the opening and further development of organizations and companies as places of productive learning and working

¹ Organizational pedagogy (OP) as a subdiscipline of pedagogy is a relatively new academic subject and refers to both pedagogical and non-educational organizations. The central object of organizational pedagogical research is organizational learning, which can be understood as an individual or collective

learning in organizations, organizations and between organizations (see "Research Memorandum of the Commission for Organizational Education of the German Society for Educational Science (DGfE)", dgfe.de)

(<https://www.inaberlin.org/ina/Institut-für-den-Situationsansatz.html>).

3.3 Specification of intercultural groups and objectives of intercultural learning

If one compares intercultural groups with ordinary groups, all scientifically researched group dynamic manifestations and phenomena occur in both types of groups, with one difference: in intercultural groups the group, leadership, and interaction phenomena are much stronger and more extreme than in homogeneous groups. Also, there are other specific characteristics, additional challenges, and specific intercultural problems that depend on the specific composition of the particular group.

The aim of intercultural learning and intercultural teamwork is to solve communication and interaction problems on the one hand (reactive) and to exploit special opportunities for action and resources on the other hand (preventive). In the learning process, one deals reflexively with one's own culture as well as foreign cultural issues and develops the common intercultural topic from this.

The focus of learning in intercultural teams in organizations is to reflect, become aware of, and strengthen self-confidence and self-assurance in complex "situations" that the team has to cope with. Complex situations can be

everyday challenges, conflicts as well as imminent future changes, tasks, and goals.

3.4 Use of coaching as a pedagogical intervention

To outline the use of coaching in intercultural learning processes in organizations and business enterprises, the term, the goals, the reasons for its application and the basic forms are specified.

The term coaching is defined in many ways. As a collective term, coaching is used in connection with consulting methods, instruments, and competencies. There is talk of individual coaching, team coaching, project coaching, of coaching as a management tool, of coaching as an instrument of personnel and management development and coaching competence of managers.

Coaching is described - in contrast to classical management consulting - as a special form of consulting, as person-centered consulting and support, in which no direct solution proposals are provided by the coach, but the development of own solutions is accompanied. The role of the coach is to act as a neutral, critical discussion partner and, depending on the goal, to apply methods from the entire spectrum of personnel and management development. "Coaching differs from classical management consulting in that it is primarily independent professional concepts that are developed and implemented there (in

management consulting), while coaching follows an exercise (enabling) approach or, as in sport, has the task of enabling the high performers (of the company) to achieve independent high or peak performance" (Böning in von Rosenstiel (ed.), 2003: p. 284).

In comparison to the top-class sport, where coaching has its origins as "performance coaching", the focus is primarily on "different" performance rather than on "more" performance (Koditek, 2008: p. 12). However, the goal behind the goal is again likely to be the "more" in performance and is expressed in the attainment or restoration of performance or the strengthening of (existing, hidden) performance resources and the expansion of possibilities for action.

Coaching accompanies and supports individuals and teams in change and development processes both on a personal and organizational level. This establishes the two basic forms of coaching: individual coaching and group coaching.

Individual coaching is a person-centered one-on-one interview in which the coachee is guided by the coach into a "search loop" to broaden his or her perspective and possibilities for action. Hidden resources should be identified, named, and made usable; the competence of the coachee should be (re)established or increased. "In doing so, coaching fulfills the function of a 'transmission belt' in which it promotes self-reflection,

awareness and the assumption of responsibility" (Koditek, 2008: p. 12).

Group coaching in the forms of team coaching (team conflict and team development coaching), coaching of project teams (process support for difficult projects in the context of project management) and coaching of organizational and/or corporate units are understood as process support and "process support for difficult projects and complicated change management tasks, in which interpersonal communication, acceptance of those involved, resistance and effective implementation play an essential role" (Böning in von Rosenstiel (eds.), 2003: p. 285).

Coaching events can be divided into two categories: reactive and preventive events. The reactive occasions are aimed at overcoming situations that have already occurred, e.g. difficult interpersonal constellations, conflicts, intercultural misunderstandings, and personal performances and life crises. Preventive occasions are aimed at the changes that are about to take place, such as new tasks, roles, functions, processes, or, in general, accompanied and controlled team or personality development. In an intercultural context, the focus is primarily on bringing together and efficiently developing multinational work teams.

Three things are common to all the definitions given. First, that coaching is one of a series of conversations. Secondly, that these

conversations are always about (re)discovering existing (possibly hidden) resources and strengthening potential. And thirdly, that the coach does not prescribe solutions, but that the coachee develops his solutions. Thus, coaching is a learning process that has established itself as a pedagogical intervention in management practice, a special form of consulting, a problem-solving method, a process and a setting, an individual and a group discussion or conversations, an instrument of personnel, executive and organizational development and individual management, method and leadership competence at the same time.

A coach is someone who accompanies a coachee using scientifically based methods and tools so that the coachee himself recognizes his resources, promotes his potential, and develops solutions. A comprehensive analysis of all internationally used coaching definitions can be found in the dissertation by Rauen, 2017, p. 15ff.

4. Results: Team coaching in intercultural working groups

Team coaching in organizations and commercial enterprises pursues two goals:

- **Achievement of objectives:** achievement of company objectives, project objectives, team objectives, etc.; strengthening of efficiency and effectiveness

- **Good cooperation:** strengthening the cooperation and cohesion of the group

There are two types of team coaching: team conflict coaching and team development coaching. Team development coaching has a preventive effect against all kinds of conflicts and can therefore also be called preventive team conflict coaching.

In intercultural working groups, team coaching supports the group members in coordinating their culture-specific behavioral modalities in such a way that the best possible synergy effects and group productivity are created to cope with work and achieve common goals.

Two success factors play a role here: firstly: stable self-esteem of all group members and secondly: a clear formulation of a goal that is equally highly valued and accepted by all group members. Acknowledging the successes achieved together is a strong supporting and stabilizing factor.

4.1 Team development coaching

Team development coaching is about the preventive creation of the cultural potential and resources slumbering in the group to achieve goals. Individual coaching can be used in team development processes to stabilize the self-esteem of each individual.

Based on the scientific findings of intercultural working groups (Thomas, in von Rosenstiel et al., 2003: p. 536ff), the following

guideline for coaching in intercultural working groups results:

Reflection on one's own cultural identity: to what extent do one's self and the foreign correspond with each other?

Cultural compatibility: to what extent can elements of oneself and the foreign coexist?

Cultural incompatibility: which elements may be incompatible and are they a decisive obstacle to achieving common goals?

Cultural accommodation: what of oneself can be changed in the direction of the foreign, to what extent does it make sense to adapt to the foreign?

Cultural assimilation: to what extent the foreign can be changed in the direction of the own?

Cultural synergy: "the bringing together of culturally different elements such as patterns of orientation, values, norms, behavior, etc. in such a way that a new structure is created that exceeds the summation of the elements" (Stumpf, 1999, in Thomas, in von Rosenstiel et al., 2003: p. 537). Reflecting on one's own, recognizing what is foreign, appreciating what is different, and the ability to handle one's own and the foreign equally as goal-oriented

solution potential form the basis for intercultural synergy in working groups.

4.2 Team conflict coaching

Team conflict coaching is about reactive dealing with (intercultural) conflicts that have already arisen.

Wherever people work together, conflicts are unavoidable. Conflicts are signs of a deepened confrontation with the other (the foreign), in which one perceives the other (foreign) behavior, compares it with one's cultural orientation pattern, and, due to the lack of understanding, evaluates it negatively (devaluates it). A conflict is characterized by the subjective evaluation and perception of the parties involved. The perception is shaped by subjective interpretations and individual forms of reaction and is co-determined by living conditions, family forms of interaction, the personality variables of the perceivers as well as culturally determined artifacts. Conflicts are neither desirable nor necessary, but simply unavoidable. Intercultural conflicts have an even higher intensity and more pronounced character than interpersonal conflicts of the same cultural group.

Once a conflict has occurred, it is crucial how it is dealt with. Since it is hardly part of any training to learn how to solve intercultural conflicts in the workplace, in such situations learned conflict behavior is used: avoidance, denial, outbursts, appeasement, superficial

solutions, and intercultural stereotyping. In the long run, they lead to an enormous complication of cooperation up to the dissolution of working groups with the associated increase in economic effort, loss of efficiency, and loss of competitiveness. All the more important is the thorough handling of a conflict. This minimizes frictional losses and increases synergy effects through qualitatively new cooperation.

In the first step, the coach of multicultural teams needs to convey that the misunderstanding (the problem) is valued and that the situation in which it arises is given space. In the futile attempts to find solutions in the past, there is usually a lot of work and energy involved. In a second step, it is necessary to reconstruct the systemic and cultural context of the situation to reactivate the solution competencies of the system itself. The willingness to deal with one's own culture and with the foreign culture as equivalent orientation systems is a basic prerequisite for this.

In team coaching, the following basic attitudes and rules of play are advantageous for a successful process:

- Clarification that people talk to each other instead of about each other
- Always and without reservation believe the parties involved

- Making clear that conflicts are opportunities with enormous potential for truly good cooperation
- Showing gratitude and appreciating team members who dare to address conflicts, because this is the first step to be able to solve them
- Last but not least: the rule of classical group pedagogy: "disorders have priority".

The team coach must meet the following requirements to successfully manage the team learning process:

- Acceptance by all participants: A suitable team coach enjoys the trust of all participants or can earn it. His competence is not disputed.
- No self-interest in a particular solution: neutrality or impartiality. He or she is committed to the interests and concerns of all parties involved. Impartiality even beyond the coaching.
- The team coach is responsible for the process: the participants in the team coaching for the content and the solution.
- The team coach does not evaluate and judge: He takes all points of view, interests, and feelings seriously and balances power imbalances.
- Confidentiality and special responsibility: The coach ensures that nobody is harmed.

5. Diskussion: Further scientific foundation: interdisciplinary master's degree and research at the INA and CCW

The findings outlined above were gained during the 17 years of work of the Institute for Organization and Management of INA, founded at the Freie Universität Berlin and INA-CCW, and tested in the course of the practical, one-year training as a Master Coach Business, ECA and TÜV certified according to DIN EN ISO 17024, with a total of around 600 participants from around 250 organizations and commercial enterprises in the German-speaking world (<https://www.iom-coaching.de>). The academic debate is to be continued and deepened within the framework of the interdisciplinary Master's program "Coaching, Leadership and Change Management", licensed by the International Academy for Social Sciences, Organization and Management - World Citizen Campus - gGmbH (INA CCW) and offered at the ZiTA

University of Applied Sciences Berlin (<https://zita-berlin.de/kooperationen/interdisziplinaer-angelegter-masterstudiengang/>), in connection with the work of the research unit at the INA CCW. In the context of the author's upcoming doctoral thesis, which is intended to be written at the University of Vilnius/Lithuania, further scientific findings on learning according to the situational approach and coaching in educational organizations will be presented.

Conclusions

Coaching is used to support managers in professionalizing their leadership work. In teams, coaching is used as a pedagogical intervention in team development and team conflict resolution to support intercultural learning processes in a targeted manner. The concepts have been developed from practical application; the scientific foundation is still in its infancy.

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