Working Definition of Interculturality

The Lauder Business School's (LBS) Research Department defines culture as an acquired meaning system, which guides human behavior, and which is being reproduced and transformed by it. Although its bearers are individuals and organizations, culture should be conceived of as a collective phenomenon of shared meanings within a community of mutual comprehension, and hence, one can speak of cultures as a plural. Because cultures are never homogenous, static or ahistorical, LBS applies a notion of culture(s), which stresses their dynamic, heterogeneous, procedural and relational character. For, every human-being has a multiple belonging to various cultures (e.g. national origin, religious affiliation, socialization, corporate and organizational cultures).

Culture often serves as an all-encompassing category, under which any human and societal behavior can be subsumed, or as a soft, non-rational and hard-to-measure factor of influence. Being conscious of the difficulties of defining culture, LBS conceives of cultural factors ex-negativo as those that are not determined either socio-economically, politically or physically. Diversity includes cultural (e.g. language, religious affiliation, traditions), socio-economic (e.g. social origin, residence, education, professional experience, income, family status), political (e.g. national origin, world view), and physical factors (e.g. age, mental and physical abilities), and is critically increased by gender which intersects with each of the aforementioned determinants.

Interculturality is understood as the encounter between hegemonic and non-dominant cultures as well as frictions, overlapping, interdependencies, potentials for conflict and mutual interference caused by this. Here, both cultural commonalities and differences are taken into account. Interculturality is likewise present in spheres which have apparently been universalized as a result of technical standardization and globally shared challenges. Furthermore, it places emphasis more on the interaction between people, groups, businesses and organizations, and the corresponding norms of communication, negotiation and conflict management, rather than just on a knowledge of other cultures. On the one hand, this notion of Interculturality is clearly distinct from multiculturalism and its political and legal claims of separate cultures which exist side-by-side. On the other hand, it should be distinguished from the concept of transculturality with its emphasis on transcultural fusions and hybrid forms. The notion of interculturality at hand underscores the conflictual encounter of divergent culture-based ideas and patterns of behavior. In a similar vein, opportunities of shaping these contacts and confrontations deserve greater attention.

Due to their transformative outlook and invisibility, it is impossible to analyze culture(s) in their entirety. Only occurrences of culture(s) such as symbols, paths of interactions, role behavior, institutional practices and artifacts can become subjects of research. As part of its research focus on Diversity Challenges within International Management, LBS deals with the impact of cultural factors on management processes and the emergence of novel organizational and corporate cultures as a consequence of conflict-based learning. The applied orientation of the LBS Research Department requires the development of management solutions relevant to intercultural business setting, and, therefore, by the same token, the LBS Research Department pays less attention to nationally or religiously defined cultures and their co-existence and respective socialization and enculturation processes.

In terms of methodology, LBS aims at operationalizing cultural factors by taking into consideration their relationship to other impact factors, and at the replicability of pertinent research designs. The LBS Research Fellows perceive this as self-evident in reflecting their own cultural locus in conceptualizing and conducting research projects.