IRINA BUDRINA

MULTICULTURALISM UNITED IN DIVERSITY

A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Irina Budrina not only knows what she writes and talks about, but she is, as they say, walking her talk. Born in Russia, having traveled all over the world, with an MBA in Japan and a Ph.D. in Romania (REI, ASE) she has been living in Romania for the last 12 years.

The present book is, therefore, based on her very rich and significant encounters with people and organizations in various parts of the world and mainly in Romania.

You are reading a book which is a voyage of discovery and learning about our own and other cultures. Leadership, intercultural communication, cultural dimensions, cultural values, and gender issues in business and beyond business are just some

of the discussions you are going to be part of through Irina Budrina's knowledgeable and skillful guidance. This is a book to enjoy and to reflect upon.

Professor Mariana Nicolae, REI (ASE)

Multiculturalism—United in Diversity: A Romanian Perspective

In today's world, exposure to other cultures has become a symbol of increasing globalization processes. Many people leave their home area to go on a voyage of discovery and learning about other cultures, which affects their original cultural identity.

Interactions with multiple cultural settings and globalizing transformations have affected the world over the past twenty years and increased opportunities for communicating almost instantly across previously built barriers.

The needs of the 21st century demand citizens that are culturally sensitive and internationally focused, with an orientation toward the future rather than the past. Cultural Diversity is in it.

The concept of multiculturalism offers a new orientation toward the future.

"Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society" (Caleb Rosado, 1997).

The essence of multiculturalism is the ability to celebrate with the Other in a manner that removes all barriers and brings unity in diversity. Multiculturalism pushes us to look upon the Other not as a potential enemy but as a profitable partner.

Managing diversity is an ongoing process that unleashes the various talents and capabilities which a diverse population brings to an organization, community or society, so as to create a wholesome, inclusive environment, that is safe for differences, enables people to reject rejection, celebrates diversity, and maximizes the full potential of all, in a cultural context where everyone benefits.

Multiculturalism, as the art of managing diversity, is an inclusive process where no one is left out. Diversity, in its essence, then is a safeguard against ethnocentrism (making of one group as the norm for all groups).

No cultures should be verbally and/or physically attacked based solely on the negative meaning given due to biological, cultural, political or socioeconomic differences (such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, political party, class, education, values, religious affiliation or sexual orientation The motivating factor for such attitude is fear, arising out of ignorance of the other culture, which is different from your own.

Multiculturalism should be the only option open to educators, leaders, and administrators in an ever-increasing culturally pluralistic environment. Today's diverse student populations and workforce is simply not going to go away, but increase. This is the direction of the future multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual communities. And effective leaders are recognizing it. The art of managing diversity is thus of great concern to all persons charged with the responsibility of overseeing the work of others.

Multiculturalism, then, may very well be part of an ongoing process which enables people to become world citizens—persons who are able to transfer their own racial/ethnic, gender, cultural and socio-political reality and identify with humankind throughout the world, at all levels of human needs.

The concept of multiculturalism itself

• allows to explore the meaning of culture and how cultures operate, sharing the basic values across cultures, it promotes an "awareness and appreciation" of your own culture and the cultures of others;

• helps to promote mutual understanding and a sense of belonging within and across different communities in which people are located, and an ability to engage with a variety of other communities through meaningful cross-cultural communication at local, national, regional and global levels, and more successfully interact and engage across these levels;

• values the experiences and different cultural backgrounds and creates a learning resource in a positive manner for developing skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed to participate actively as a critically informed member of society: local, national, regional and global ;

• affirms the right of all people to access important learning strategies and resources;

• provides an educational framework that is relevant and responsive to all needs, despite the varied experiences, knowledge and backgrounds.

Requirements

Basic needs are sensitivity and self-consciousness: the understanding of other behaviors and ways of thinking as well as the ability to express one's own point of view in a transparent way with the aim to be understood and respected by staying flexible where this is possible, and being clear where this is necessary.

It is a balance adapted between three parts:

1. knowledge (about other cultures, people, nations, behaviors...),

2. empathy (understanding feelings and needs of other people), and

3. self-confidence (knowing what I want, my strengths and weaknesses, emotional stability).

Cultural differences

Cultural characteristics can be differentiated between several dimensions and aspects (the ability to perceive them and to cope with them is one of the bases of intercultural competence), such as:

• Collectivist and individualist cultures;
• Masculine and feminine cultures;
• Uncertainty avoidance;
• Power distance;

• Monochrone (time-fixed, "one after the other") and polychrone (many things at the same time, "multi-tasking") aspects;

• Structural characteristics: e. g. basic personality, value orientation, experience of time and space, selective perception, nonverbal communication, patterns of behavior.

Improving Intercultural Communication

It is essential that people research the cultures and communication conventions of those whom they propose to meet. This will minimize the risk of making the elementary mistakes. It is also prudent to set a clear agenda so that everyone understands the nature and purpose of the interaction. When language skills are unequal, clarifying one's meaning in four ways will improve communication:

1. avoid using slang and idioms, choosing words that will convey only the most specific denotative meaning;

2. listen carefully and, if in doubt, ask for confirmation of understanding (particularly important if local accents and pronunciation are a problem);

3. recognize that accenting and intonation can cause meaning to vary significantly; and

4. respect the local communication formalities and styles, and watch for any changes in body language.

5. Investigate their culture's perception of your culture by reading literature about your culture through their eyes before entering into communication with them. This will allow you to prepare yourself for projected views of your culture you will be bearing as a visitor in their culture.

If it is not possible to learn the other's language it is expected to show some respect by learning a few words. In all important exchanges, a translator can convey the message.