INTERCULTURAL TEAMWORK

A media project of the 5th semester

Introduction

In a globalized world, intercultural teamwork is a valuable skill that is not only professionally, but also personally enriching. Teams with different cultural backgrounds benefit from diverse perspectives, but also face particular challenges. This guide helps to identify typical problems and implement concrete solutions.

Common problems and suggested solutions

1. Communication styles

Problem:
Communication styles vary greatly from culture to culture. While some countries prefer a direct, open style, other cultures value indirect and diplomatic formulations. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, hurt feelings or uncertainty.

Solutions:

- **Flexibility in style:** direct communicators can learn to be more polite and diplomatic in their phrasing, while indirect speakers should work on becoming clearer and more concise.
- **Ask questions:** If something is unclear, asking specific questions will help to avoid misunderstandings.
- **Listen attentively:** In addition to words, non-verbal signals such as tone of voice or body language should also be observed in order to fully understand the message.

2. Time orientation

Problem:
Some cultures place a high value on punctuality and strict schedules (monochronic), while others have a more flexible understanding of time (polychronic). These differences can cause frustration and conflict within the team.

Solutions:

- **Make compromises:** Both sides should be willing to question their expectations and accommodate each other.
- **Plan for time buffers:** Additional time slots create room for unforeseen delays.
- **Clear agreements:** Define joint schedules and deadlines to avoid misunderstandings.

3. Hierarchy

Problem:
Cultural differences in the perception of hierarchies can lead to confusion about leadership roles or responsibilities. In flat hierarchies, individual initiative is often expected, whereas in tall (or vertical) hierarchies, instructions from above dominate.

Solutions:

- **Encourage initiative:** Regardless of culture, team members should be encouraged to take responsibility and be proactive.
- **Show resepct:** If a culture prefers more formal behavior, this should be taken into account.
- **Adaptability:** Observe how the team is organized and adapt your own style accordingly.

4. Conflict resolution

Problem:

The way conflicts are approached differs greatly between cultures. Some prefer open discussions, while others prefer to solve problems discreetly and privately. Misunderstandings can escalate as a result.

Solutions:

- **Reflect on your own behaviour:** Become aware of how you handle conflicts yourself and adapt your style to the situation.
- **Maintain objectivity:** Address conflicts without emotion or accusations to allow for a solution-oriented discussion.
- **Have private conversations:** If necessary, resolve conflicts in small groups to avoid unnecessary tension.

5. Cultural attitudes towards teamwork

Problem:

While some cultures focus on individual performance, other cultures place more emphasis on group consensus. These contrasting approaches can lead to frustration and misunderstandings.

Solutions:

- **Promote team spirit:** Shift the focus to common goals and emphasize the benefits of working together.
- **Find a balance:** Contribute your own ideas without jeopardizing team harmony.
- **Strengthen inclusion:** Actively encourage reticent team members to express their opinions.

> **Ask, ask, ask!**
>
> And if this still leads to problems, don't be afraid to actively ask questions about the cultural attitude → but: **remain polite** and **respectful**

6. Feedback

Problem:

Feedback is perceived differently in different cultures. In more direct cultures, feedback is given openly and bluntly, while in other cultures indirect and diplomatic criticism is preferred.

Solutions:

- **Adapt feedback:** The way feedback is given should be adapted to the cultural expectations of the other person.
- **Show opneness:** View feedback as an opportunity for improvement and do not take it personally.

- **Actively ask for feedback:** To avoid misunderstandings, ask specifically for feedback.

7. Cultural group building

Problem:
People tend to group together with people from similar cultures, which can make integration and exchange within the team more difficult.

Solutions:

- **Approach others openly:** Proactively seek out contact with team members from other cultures.
- **Find common interests:** Use hobbies or topics to bridge cultural differences.
- **Encourage cultural exchanges:** Share your own knowledge and learn from the experiences of others.

What can individuals, groups and teachers do?

What STUDENTS can do:

- **Use teamwork as professional training:** Think of intercultural projects as preparation for the workplace, not just a means to get a good grade.
- **Show respect for cultural differences:** Reflect on your own values and behavior patterns and be willing to adapt to new circumstances.
- **Stay curious:** Explore other approaches and perspectives openly and without prejudice. This will give you valuable insights.
- **Accept challenges:** Get out of your comfort zone and see unfamiliar situations as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- **Flexibility in communication:** Learn to switch between direct and indirect communication styles depending on the situation in order to interact more effectively.

What TEAMS can do:

- **Establish cultural norms:** Work together to develop rules for feedback, conflict management and behaviors that take all members into account. Develop a "team culture".
- **Emphasize common goals:** Focus on what unites the team while showing respect for cultural differences.
- **Build trust:** Encourage openness and honesty within the team to create an environment where everyone feels safe.
- **Regular reflection:** Schedule meetings to discuss collaboration and progress on the project.

What TEACHERS can do:

- **Build teams strategically:** Promote diversity by intentionally mixing teams heterogeneously to maximize cultural exchange.

- **Ensure psychological safety:** Create an atmosphere in which students feel heard and valued, for example through active listening and appreciative communication.
- **Adress cultural differences:** Actively address potential areas of conflict and offer solutions to prevent tensions.
- **Trust through openess:** Show a willingness to address uncertainties or challenges openly in order to serve as a role model for the team.
- **Set clear goals:** Communicate the expectations and goals of the project clearly and understandably so that everyone is on the same page.
- **Recognize dysfunction early:** Monitor team dynamics and intervene early if problems arise.

"**Teamwork** makes the **dream work**."

John C. Maxwell

The role of team culture

A strong team culture is the key to success. It creates a foundation of respect, openness and collaboration that overcomes intercultural barriers and enables productive teamwork.

Ready to put into practice?

Use this guide as a tool for your intercultural projects. The content can be flexibly adapted to meet the requirements of your teams and institutions. For further support, please contact the International Office.

TO THE VIDEOS

INTERNATIONALES TEAMWORK VERBINDET MENSCHEN AUS UNTERSCHIEDLICHEN KULTUREN MIT VIELFÄLTIGEN PERSPEKTIVEN UND TALENTEN. DIESE VIELFALT IST EINE GROßE STÄRKE, ABER SIE ERFORDERT AUCH BEWUSSTSEIN UND OFFENHEIT.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

🌐 **Reel1_Introduction.mp4**

WIE KÖNNEN WIR UNS DIESER VORURTEILE BEWUSST WERDEN UND SIE AKTIV ABBAUEN, UM EIN OFFENES UND RESPEKTVOLLES ARBEITSUMFELD ZU SCHAFFEN?

AWARENESS FOR PREJUDICES

🌐 **Reel2_Awareness of Bias.mp4**

INTERNATIONALE TEAMS ZEICHNEN SICH DURCH IHRE VIELFALT AN TALENTEN UND FÄHIGKEITEN AUS. DOCH WIE SCHAFFEN WIR ES, DIE INDIVIDUELLEN STÄRKEN ALLER TEAMMITGLIEDER OPTIMAL ZU FÖRDERN UND DABEI GLEICHBEHANDLUNG SICHERZUSTELLEN?
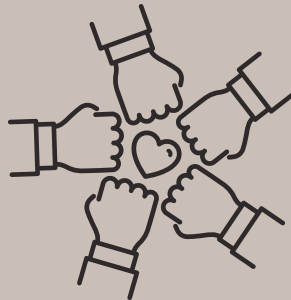
FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS

🌐 **Reel3_Individual Strengths and Equality.mp4**

IN INTERNATIONALEN TEAMS BESTEHT OFT DIE GEFAHR, DASS SICH EXKLUSIVE GRUPPEN BILDEN, DIE DEN ZUSAMMENHALT GEFÄHRDEN. DOCH WIE KÖNNEN WIR BEWUSST GEGEN DIESE DYNAMIK ARBEITEN UND ECHTE INKLUSION FÖRDERN?

EXCLUSIVITY AND GROUP FORMATION

🌐 **Reel4_Exclusivity and Group Formation .mp4**

FEEDBACK IST EIN ZENTRALER BESTANDTEIL ERFOLGREICHER ZUSAMMENARBEIT, INSBESONDERE IN INTERNATIONALEN TEAMS, WO KULTURELLE UNTERSCHIEDE EINE HERAUSFORDERUNG DARSTELLEN KÖNNEN.

FEEDBACK

🌐 **Reel5_Feedback.mp4**