

International and Intercultural Learning Issues in HRD: How Differences in Learning Affect HRD

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As HRD scholars and professionals have become involved in international activities, there have been growing concerns as to whether the instructional programs they provide to help people in other countries are as effective as they should be. The focus of the session is issues in international and intercultural learning, based on models from culture and learning. In addition, how these differences might affect HRD research and practices will be discussed.

Keywords: International and Intercultural, Learning, HRD Practices

Session Description

This innovative session is sponsored by International Committee. The focus of this session is learning in international and intercultural settings. A panel discussion is used. The panelists who have different national and cultural backgrounds and research interests will provide various perspectives on learning in international and intercultural settings. The panel discussion is carried out based on two theoretical frameworks, culture and learning. Culture will be discussed, based on three models, and learning will be focused on two models.

Opening the Session

The session will begin with the chair who will explain the purpose and layout of the session. He will also introduce the panelists and their backgrounds. The basic format of the session is that after the first introduction is over, the chair will ask the panelists to provide brief remarks, based on the first discussion topic. Then, all participants will be encouraged to take part in the discussion. This process will be used for each discussion topic.

Discussing Topics

National and cultural differences in learning. The three cultural models, Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Kluchhohn & Strodbeck will be used as the discussion frames. At the same time, a national social system is included to indicate the critical issue, relating to culture. The panelists are asked to provide their perspectives based on the cultural model they are familiar with and their experiences. The panelists will provide seven different perspectives; Europe, India, Japan, Lebanon, Singapore, South America, and the U.S. Then, all participants will be encouraged to take part in this discussion.

Learning style and action learning. Two discussion frames, learning style by Kolb's experiential learning model and action learning, will be used. The panelists will be asked to provide remarks based on how the models might fit their situations, based on their national and cultural backgrounds and their experiences being in the U.S. or other countries. Then, all participants will be encouraged to take part in this discussion.

Effectiveness in international and intercultural instruction settings. Based on the discussions, all participants will gain a good understanding of learning in international and intercultural settings. The next issue will be how we as HRD scholars and professionals can be effective in international/ intercultural settings. Cross-cultural training settings and other international/intercultural learning settings will be used as discussion frames. The chair will encourage all participants to offer their ideas and experiences.

Closing the Session

The chair will summarize the session and he will thank the panelists and audience for their collaboration in the session.

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Goals

1. To gain knowledge of critical international and intercultural issues in learning and instruction.
2. To apply those critical issues in learning and instruction in our professional tasks to become effective in these areas.

Purpose

The purpose of this innovative session is as follows:

1. To provide discussions on international and intercultural issues in HRD, specifically relating to learning and instruction across different cultures.
2. To share knowledge and experiences among the panelists and the audience to enhance their understanding of international & intercultural learning.

Theoretical Framework

When a panel discussion is held, the panelists bring their perspectives of a certain topic. However, each panelist has own perspectives and opinions about the topic, which tends to result in a lack of cohesiveness in the discussion while there is certainly a lot of information in the discussion. One reason for this might be the fact that throwing out different information into a discussion may not be effective.

This innovative session uses new approaches. In order for discussions to be innovative and focused, the panel discussion will be based on two theoretical frameworks, “culture” and “learning.” This session integrates the two theoretical frameworks, learning and culture. In addition, each theoretical framework specifies models as discussion frames.

Another approach is to integrate and compare culture and the social system of a nation. Throughout the session topics are provided to describe which cultural and national characteristics might influence learning. As such, it is hoped that we will be able to differentiate factors in culture and the social system of a nation. This is because culture is often used interchangeably with nation. Understanding factors that might be in culture and the social system of a nation will help provide a rich context in international and intercultural settings.

Cultural Framework

As mentioned previously, culture and nation have been used interchangeably in various studies. However, differentiating the two terms is critical when it comes to providing a rich context and operationalization of culture. “Culture” relates to mental and psychological aspects that deeply influence values and norms of a country and/ or a region. Culture will be discussed with different models, such as Hofstede (1984), Trompenaars (1994), and Kluchhohn and Strodbeck (1961). Needless to say Hofstede’s cultural model with four dimensions includes: (1) individualism and collectivism, (2) masculinity and femininity, (3) power distance, and (4) uncertainty avoidance. Trompenaars’s model contains seven dimensions: (1) Universalism vs. Particularize, (2) Individualism vs. Collectivism, (3) Neutral vs. Emotional, (4) Specific vs. Diffuse, (5) Achievement vs. Ascription, (6) Attitudes towards time, and (7) Attitudes towards the environment. The cultural model by Kluchhohn and Strodbeck includes five value orientations: (1) Relational orientation (Trompenaars, 1994), (2) Time orientation, (3) Activity orientation, (4) Man-nature orientation, and (5) Human-nature orientation (Kluchhohn & Strodbeck, 1961).

Each of these models has been used in various studies, including business settings. As a result, it will provide not only theoretical information, but also real world practical information, which will facilitate in-depth discussions.

Learning Framework

The discussion frame on learning uses learning style and action learning. Learning is an essential part of HRD studies. Learning can be discussed from numerous perspectives, such as theories, instruction, education, style, and different levels (e.g., organization, group/unit, and individuals). As such, learning in an international and intercultural context contains multilayer issues. In our discussion, learning specifies two critical aspects, action learning and learning style.

Action learning model. Action learning is used in academic and business settings (Dufresne, 2004; Hudspith & Ingram, 2002). In particular, action learning has been successful among adult learners in many countries, including Asian and European (Dierk & Saslow, 2005; Finlay & Marples, 1998; Harker & Brennan, 2003; Marquardt, 2004). In this regard, action learning within an international and intercultural context will provide dynamic views, which in turn increase our understanding of international and intercultural issues.

Action learning was developed by Revans in 1940’s as the best way to educate managers. The essence is learning by doing within a situation at learners sites (Edmonstone, 2002; Smith & O’Neil, 2003). Revans recognized that people adopted different learning styles (Schlesinger, 1996).

Learning style model. Another new approach is the use of learning style. The learning style literature

indicates that individual learning style is often influenced by the educational system and culture where people live. In addition, learning style has some relationships with learning strategies and motivation as well as the meaning of learning, which are also deeply influenced by characteristics of national social systems and cultures (Alegee & Bowers, 1993; Church & Katigbak, 1992; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Jaju, Kwak, & Zinkhan, 2002; Niehoff, Yen, Turnley, & Sheu, 2001; Niles, 1995; Nishida, Hammer, & Wisman, 1998; Sims & Sims, 1995).

Learning style by Kolb is defined as the process that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). According to Kolb (2000), the model consists of two dialectical modes of grasping experience: concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and two dialectical modes of transforming experience: reflective observation and active experimentation. The model suggests that learners utilize their abilities, relating to the four modes of learning, in the learning process. That is, immediate concrete experience (CE) is used as the basis for observation and reflection (RO), which become transformed into abstract concepts (AC), from which active experimentation (AE) is derived. Based on these four learning orientations, four basic learning styles have been formed: Accommodation: (CE & AE), Assimilation (RO&AC), Convergence (CE&RO) & Divergence (AC&AE).

The specification of cultural and learning models will ensure the effectiveness and meaningfulness of the session. Throughout the session, how we as HRD scholars and professionals can be effective when we are involved in learning with international and intercultural settings will be merged.

Panelists and Chair

The chair of this session is Michael Marquardt who has been working overseas to provide his expertise in action learning. His teaching experience in international settings will add to the session, in terms of the depth and width discussion. The panelists are volunteered from the International Committees. They have different national and cultural backgrounds and HRD expertise, which ensure various perspectives in learning.

Description of Format, Style, and Agendas

The models in the two theoretical frameworks and discussion topics will contribute to create an intellectually and simulating session, which will help us gain a deep understanding of the learning issue within an international and intercultural context. Moreover, the panelists, who are members of the international committee with different national and cultural backgrounds, have had a good understanding of such differences. Therefore, they will add critical inputs to the discussions. In addition, the audience, who are from foreign countries with different cultural backgrounds, will also make a great contribution to this innovative session. The challenge in the discussion will be how well we can prepare to discuss broad issues in culture and learning.

Format

The basic format of the session is a panel discussion with seven panelists who represent their countries and regions. These include Japan, Singapore, Lebanon, India, Peru, U.S. and Italy. During the session, the panelists will provide their perspectives according to discussion topics. After each topic is discussed, all participants will be encouraged to take part in the discussion to share knowledge and experiences.

Style

Throughout the session, not only panelists but also all participants will be involved in the discussion and they are encouraged to bring their cultural heritages and learning models. Due to the complexity and multiplicity of the topics, the session will be flexible and adaptive.

Agendas

1. National and cultural differences in learning
2. How do four learning styles by Kolb apply to our situations?
3. Why has action learning been effective with learners from different countries?
4. How can we as HRD scholars and professionals be effective in international/ intercultural settings?

Benefits of the Innovative Session

The participants will be exposed to international and intercultural issues in HRD through discussions, so that they will be able to gain knowledge of this area. Consequently, those participants who are interested in international HRD area, will be able to identify international and intercultural issues relating to their own area of research interests, specifically, the main topic of cultural influences on learning.

The discussions will be based on specific cultural models and learning models that will help us maintain focus in our dialogues. This effort will help us gain knowledge in these areas in culture and learning. In addition, the models in culture and learning will be integrated into the discussions, which will contribute to create additional knowledge.

Throughout active participation and involvement in discussion, the panelists and audience will increase

sharing their international and intercultural experiences and thoughts.

International Committee has been promoting internationality among the members. This session is a part of the International Committee activities to serve the members for their professional development as well as increase knowledge in international side of HRD.

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