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Workshop 4

Why and how we should approach EDI within a non-essentialist paradigm of culture?

Workshop Chair:

Dr Ganesh Nathan, FHNW, Hochschule für Wirtschaft
ganesh.nathan@fhnw.ch

The workshop takes into account Nathan's three basic social facts and their implications for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), demonstrating why we should move away from an essentialist paradigm of culture, towards a non-essentialist paradigm, in order to bring about social justice and sustainability through deliberation. The first basic social fact is that human diversity is inevitable: i.e., we differ in terms of our identities and capabilities. The second is that we live in an ethically plural society: i.e., we differ in our ethical convictions of what is a good or meaningful life for us and third, we are interdependent beings, directly or indirectly, in pursuing our complex of purposes; this includes not only intergenerational but also ecological issues. However, these three basic social facts lead to asymmetrical power relations – power-holders vs. powerless members of society, dominance and dependence, and lack of recognition, non-recognition, or even misrecognition in our identities. These social vulnerabilities can lead to the stereotyping of certain social factions, based on a generalised image constructed through prejudices towards a particular social group, (usually with negative traits), and oppression in terms of discrimination, marginalization, social exclusion, denigration, and even humiliation through social stigmatization. The workshop argues that a national culture based on value orientations of cultural dimensions essentializes culture, and is not conducive to bringing about social justice and sustainability in terms of EDI.

Within management studies, models of culture based on value orientation of cultural dimensions such as Hofstede's model of culture, Trompenaars' model, and the GLOBE study have gained popularity, even though there have been various critiques of such models.

The first category of these critiques focuses on the methodology of data-gathering and statistical representation of the population. It is debated as to whether this representation is inclusive in terms of gender, sexual orientation, religious and ethnic minorities, different generations, etc.

The second category of critique is about the sufficiency and value orientations of cultural dimensions. For example, the number of dimensions of Hofstede's model of culture has been updated; initially, there were 4, subsequently 5, and currently 6. Trompenaars' model consists of 7 dimensions, and the GLOBE study provides 9. How many dimensions will sufficiently represent a national culture is a debatable matter. Moreover, these critiques include inconsistencies and contradictions among the value orientations. In addition, these value orientations mainly consider *descriptive* value orientations; they do not explicitly include *normative* value orientations, such as value orientation for equality in terms of wealth distribution (to alleviate poverty), sexual orientation (for inclusion) etc. National cultures based on descriptive value orientations treat individuals as cultural dopes, ignoring agency and choice for change: for example, to bring about social justice and sustainability. National cultures predominantly based on singular notions of identity, based on the nationality of origin, not only stereotype individuals but also reinforce ethnocentrism. Therefore, they are not conducive for deliberation for social justice and sustainability.

The third category of critique concerns the paradigm of value orientations of cultural dimensions. National cultures based on such cultural dimensions fall into the trap of essentializing culture as static, homogeneous, deterministic and bounded; culture is treated as rooted in human nature. An essentialist paradigm of culture essentially reifies national culture, and ossifies individuals, suppressing their agency for choice and change with a singular notion of identity, based largely on nationality. However, it is to be noted that values – and their meanings – can change over a given period of time. Moreover, people have multiple intersecting collective identities, based on many attributes such as language, religion, gender and sexual orientation, along with their individual identities. Even national identities can (and do) change, due to shifting socio-historic-political dimensions. People have agency for choice and change. It is arguable that any deliberation within essentialist cultural paradigms on EDI will lead to an impasse. Therefore, we should move away from essentializing culture and instead, move towards understanding culture within non-essentialist paradigm.

Non-essentialist paradigms of culture treat culture as dynamic (with some continuity), heterogeneous, internally riven, changeable, and as having blurred boundaries. They are rooted in human conditions, not in human nature. Nathan's non-essentialist model of culture considers culture in terms of intersecting cultural systems, such as language, religion, cuisine, entertainment, etc. These systems can be internally riven (with sub-systems) and can have normatively contestable values. Individuals are at the intersection of these intersecting cultural systems, and interact with formal social, political, legal and economic institutions, as well as informal institutions of family, religion (in the case of secular nations), traditions, and rituals, in pursuing their complex of purposes, and giving and deriving meanings collectively or individually. This model of culture within the non-essentialist paradigm treats individuals with intersecting collective identities, along with individual identities. It does not suppress the agency for change and choice. It recognizes that individuals have different worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*), gradually formed through ideas of 'the good life' (idealism) and the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) that forms their ethical convictions.

Based on the above, the workshop will attempt to show how we could deliberate for social justice and sustainability.

References

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