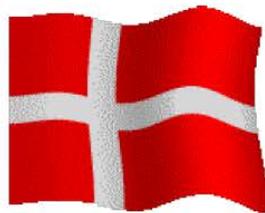




Intercultural relations between engineering student in Denmark, China and Brazil



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"What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions.

Life is plurality, death is uniformity.

By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death.

The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us.

Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life"

(Octavio Paz, Mexican poet, writer, and diplomat, 1914-1998)

Abstract:

This Management Challenge is made in order to highlight the possibilities for the faculty of engineering at an unnamed University in Denmark to successfully expanding its exchange program to China and Brazil. The report is mainly dealing with the professional field of Cultural relations. It is examining the consequences of expanding the present student exchange program at the Faculty of Engineering.

For several years, a European exchange program under the wings of the European Union's Erasmus program has been an important part of the faculty. Due to limitation in the Erasmus program, and a wish to expand the exchange activities to the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), this Management Challenge is examining the consequences in exchange programs with respectively Brazil and China.

The potential issues related to the expansion of the exchange program has been examined both theoretically by a literature review, with focus on especially structural and cultural issues, but also in order to reveal the potential motives for the local universities to establish exchange relations.

The practical part of the examination has been a focus-group interview with a number of the existing European exchange student, in order to reveal their motives for studying at the Faculty of Engineering, and to get an overview over the cultural issues they have experienced during their exchange visit. The most interesting information from this part of the survey, was that the pedagogical profile for the Faculty of Engineering, which is one of the main ideas of the faculty, was totally unknown for the exchange students.

After the focus-group interviews was done, potential exchange students from two Chinese universities and one Brazilian university was provided with a modified Triangle Test (Garrison, 2006), to reveal their cultural habitus.

The review of current thinking showed that there are no serious structural issues related to expansion of the exchange program to China, but there are very severe cultural differences especially related to power distance and individualism, which could conflict with the main principles in the DSMI program. The Triangle test of the two Chinese universities showed a totally different pattern with an outcome much closer to the Danish culture. This means that the reliability of the survey can be questioned, and the result of the survey needs to be verified before a corporation based on the result of the Triangle test can be established.

The literature review of Brazil revealed on the other hand some structural issues, based on misalignment between the educational levels in Europe and Brazil. The most serious problem in this case is that a bachelor degree in Brazil is at a level above a bachelor level in Europe and closer to the Master level.

On the other hand the cultural differences between Denmark and Brazil are smaller than the differences between Denmark and China, but they are still substantial and needs to be taking into consideration, in order to develop a successful exchange program.

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1. Introduction:

This book is based on the management challenge conducted by the author in 2011 as the Master Challenge in the Henley Executive MBA program. The book has been changed in order to make it more generally useable and not that specific to one university.

1.1 Scope

This Management Challenge will investigate the cultural differences between the three countries Denmark, China and Brazil, with regard to higher educational institutions within engineering science. Specifically, the Management Challenge will determine if these intercultural differences will impact a successful expansion of the existing Master's Programs to exchange students from China and Brazil.

1.2 Background for the Management Challenge

When the author graduated from Odense University College of Engineering (OUCE) 25 years ago, around 98% of the cohort was native Danish. The last 2% were Icelandic citizens, who due to a special agreement between Denmark and its former colony were able to complete their education in Denmark.

Many things have changed over the last quarter of a century, the university colleges have become part of the universities, and the number of foreign students has increased dramatically. Today around one third of the students are exchange students from the European Union's Erasmus Program (Commission, 2010). In addition, there are an increasing number of students with a background as second-generation immigrants. Additionally, the Faculty of Engineering has developed a strategy to expand the exchange program, to countries outside Europe. This means that it would be fair to call the Faculty a multi-ethnic institution, however, the business culture and the pedagogical approach are still as arch Danish, as it was 25 years ago.

This Management Challenge will look into these issues, by examining the intercultural literature, conducting surveys among the present European exchange student population and most specifically future exchange students from outside EU. The more academic and administrative issues in this expansion will also be broached.