

# MEASURING AND DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY

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## Abstract

The paper will focus on the intercultural competence of university faculty at an international teaching organisation, outline the tools that can be used to assess competence development, and propose training schemes to enhance competence. Given the need for universal policies in learning outcomes, delivery, and assessment to comply with the quality management requirements that most universities have in place, in which areas can behavioural adaptation be reasonably be implemented? The presenters, all teaching at the International Business School (IBS) in Hungary, base their views on a one-year project that they started August 2012. They used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) for an initial assessment of faculty members' intercultural competence, and then developed a structured programme that primarily addresses faculty skills and attitudes. The online and face-to-face training interventions were completed with a post administration of IDI, followed by a thorough evaluation of the training, and will be made compulsory for all new faculty members in the future.

## Keywords

intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, faculty development, Intercultural Developmental Inventory

## Összefoglalás

A tanulmány egy nemzetközi hallgatósággal rendelkező főiskola oktatóinak interkulturális kompetenciájával foglalkozik; bemutatja a kompetencia fejlesztéséhez alkalmazható eszközöket, és javaslatot fogalmaz meg egy ugyanilyen célú továbbképzési programra. Tekintettel arra, hogy az érvényben lévő minőségbiztosítási szabályzatok miatt a legtöbb egyetemnek egységes politikát kell követnie a tanulmányi kimeneteket, az oktatás formáját és a számonkérés módjait illeti, felmerül a kérdés: mely területeken várható a hallgatókhoz való alkalmazkodás. A szerzők a Nemzetközi Üzleti Főiskolán (IBS) 2012. augusztusa óta zajló projektjüket ismertetik: az Interkulturális Fejlettségi Tesztel (IDI) megmérték az oktatók interkulturális kompetenciáját, majd egy olyan több elemből álló programot dolgoztak ki, amely az oktatók készségeit és attitűdjeit célozza meg. Az online és személyes képzések után kerül sor az IDI újbóli kitöltésére, ami majd lehetővé teszi a tréning részletes értékelését. A tervek szerint a képzés kötelező lesz minden, az IBS-be újonnan belépő oktató számára.

## Kulcsszavak

interkulturális kompetencia, interkulturális érzékenység, kompetenciafejlesztés, Interkulturális Fejlettségi Teszt

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## **Introduction**

In the context of growing competition and internationalisation on the higher education market, institutions seek new ways to increase the quality and effectiveness of their teaching. The ability to attract, develop and retain international students, as a core competency of the higher education institutions, has gradually become a major strategic strength for universities competing for a market share in the last decade. The ability to provide a tolerant and inclusive learning environment for all students is thus of strategic importance. Within this context, developing the intercultural competence of faculty, which includes awareness, attitude, skills and knowledge, has gained increasing significance, as it supports the endeavour to increase the effectiveness of teaching, creates a good working and learning environment in the classroom with diverse students, and thus improves both faculty and student satisfaction. Therefore universities need to find effective methods to further develop the inclusiveness of their learning environments, thus better serve the needs of international students and the future of the educational institution.

The present research has adopted a single case-study approach. It aims to summarise and evaluate a one-year organisational development project of a Hungarian private university, the International Business School of Budapest (IBS). IBS is a higher education institution where about 50% of the students are international, and come from approximately 80 European, African and Asian countries. The teaching faculty, however, are mostly Hungarian. IBS works in strategic partnership with OxfordBrookesUniversity from the UK, and from 2013 September onwards with the University of Buckingham as well, awarding BSc and MSc degrees.

This paper will focus on the intercultural competence of faculty, outline the tools that can be used to assess competence development, and propose training schemes and other organisational practices and interventions to enhance intercultural competence. Based on the findings of the research question, IBS would like to answer the following question: given the need for universal policies in learning outcomes, delivery, and assessment to comply with the quality management requirements in place, in which areas and how can behavioural adaptation by faculty be reasonably implemented? We assume that individual and organisational developmental activities have to be combined in order to achieve meaningful improvement of faculty's intercultural competence level and adaptation of teaching practices conducive to diverse classrooms.

## **Literature Review**

When one ventures into any form of intercultural competence assessment the first question arising is what we should or could measure. Bennett (2004) distinguishes between three levels of measurement: a) cultural level, b) intercultural level and c) level of intercultural experience. The first corresponds to the "knowledge" component that many models include. Such tools describe and compare cultures along value dimensions established by Hall, Hofstede or Trompenaars and other authors. In practice, some tests would use the measurement of cultural value orientations to draw conclusions as to the individuals' intercultural competence. However, the two do not necessarily correlate: one can be competent without knowledge, and knowledge does not guarantee competence either.

Further on, as Bennett (2004) says, attention is shifted to interaction between cultures on the second level. Measurements based on the models and research findings of cross-cultural psychology are based on the assumption that certain psychological variables (personality traits, affective conditions, behaviours) correlate with certain outcomes, and the two are in a causal relationship. He quotes Brislin's personal communication that, for example, we have no evidence to assume that the Myers-Briggs personality indicators are universally valid, or that the resulting 'type' could indeed lead to conclusions about cultural

adaptation, even though the test is often used for this purpose. Just like with other psychometric tests the question is how intercultural competence is defined and what indicators are established for measurement. The correlation seems probable in many cases, but none provides an academically rigorous solution.

Given the obvious shortcomings of the previous two levels, Bennett (2004) proposes measurement on the level of intercultural experience because he believes that traditional psychology seeks linear causal relationships, so may be unable to explain more complex group phenomena.

One of the most comprehensive reviews of the models and theories of intercultural competence is given by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009). In their work, they do not distinguish between intercultural awareness, competence and sensitivity but classify the models from a more comprehensive perspective, although they acknowledge that some influential models carry the features of more than one type. They have established five types of models, notably compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational and causal process.

As our research is based on a developmental model of intercultural competence, we would only cover this below. Other important kinds of models do not consider the time dimension even if, logically, time has an important role to play in what actually happens in a relationship or interaction. The developmental models are based on the assumption that intercultural competence or sensitivity is a process with distinct stages, and as such it is irreversible.

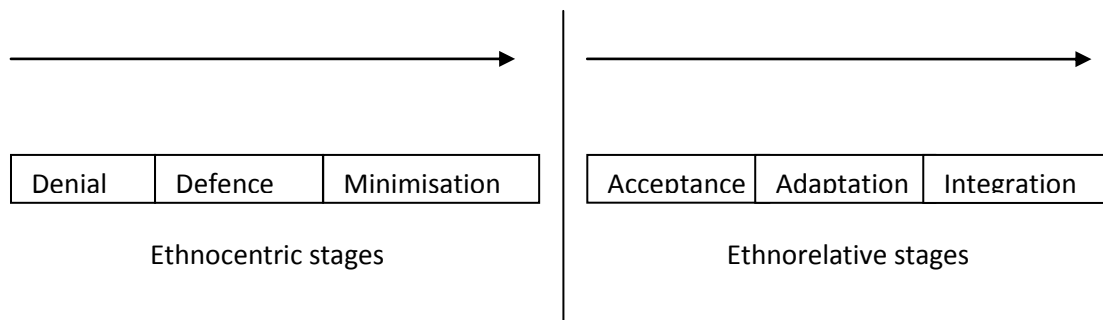
Bennett's particular interest in the intercultural experience led him to develop his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, particularly drawing from the cognitive constructivist theory of psychologist George Kelly.

In agreement with Chen (1997) Bennett (1993, 2004) believes that competence requires intercultural sensitivity. Sensitivity indicates the complex perception of cultural differences, the ability of an individual to construct alternative cultural experiences, while competence implies that a culturally sensitive individual shows appropriate and effective behaviours in other cultural environments. People who have been socialized in a single culture (who are monocultural) are unable to experience differences in their perceptions and those of people from other cultures. If someone develops sensitivity by living in a particular culture, they will be able to mobilize that in another one, so they will become competent more easily in the new context.

Bennett's original Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity maps out the process that an individual acquires the skills for creating alternative experience. Originally six stages were established: three ethnocentric (denial, defence and minimisation) and three ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation and integration) (Hammer *et al.*, 2003, p.424).

Figure 1

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity



Denial is the stage in which the person is likely to recognize more observable cultural differences (e.g., food) but, may not notice deeper cultural differences (e.g., conflict resolution styles), and may avoid or withdraw from cultural differences. Defence is a judgmental orientation that views cultural differences in terms of “us” and “them”. It means an uncritical view toward one’s own cultural values and practices and an overly critical view toward other cultural values and practices. Minimisation highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.

As the first ethnorelative stage, acceptance means understanding and appreciation of patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one’s own and other cultures. People in the adaptation stage are able to shift cultural perspective and change behaviour in culturally appropriate and authentic ways. Finally, for people in the integration stage, the process of shifting cultural perspective becomes a normal part of self, and so identity itself becomes a more fluid notion. One begins to see one’s self as “moving around in cultures”.

Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) claim that a serious shortcoming of the developmental type of models that they do not detail what personality traits and competences promote (or hinder) the development of intercultural sensitivity. Research has attempted to identify such features (e.g. age, gender, international experience) but no conclusive evidence has been found (e.g. Hammer *et al.* 2003)

The available literature raises several concerns in relation to all intercultural competence models, of which we would mention one here. Several authors (e.g. Deardorff 2006, Spitzberg and Changnon 2009, Holmes and O’Neill 2012) point out the ethnocentric (western) bias inherent in the theories. It is only further non-western and non-US studies that can tell the extent to which the currently available definitions and models apply to eastern (or East-European for that matter) cultures. A new study by Holmes and O’Neill (2012), which examined New Zealand university students, found significant differences between Chinese and English-speaking students with regards to interaction management.

In view of the variety of definitions available it is no surprise that there are innumerable tests to assess intercultural competence. Paige (2004, p. 86) defines an intercultural instrument ‘as any measurement device that identifies, describes, assesses, categorizes or evaluates the cultural characteristics of individuals, groups, and organizations’. Thus, measurement tools include a variety of psychological and cross-cultural psychological tests that had not originally been developed for this purpose, e.g. the Myers-Briggs type indicator. Fantini (2006) lists 70 tools but his inventory does not include many more, particularly in-house tests that different organisations use for their own purposes only. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority were developed in the United States or

English-speaking countries, and very few of them have been tested in other cultural environments (Fritz n.d., Simons and Krols 2010, INCA Project).

Just like the controversy around the definition of intercultural competence its measurement is also subject to criticism from plenty of authors, and we ourselves have experienced these in our project even though we made specific steps to pre-empt them.

Research testing the construct and external validity, or the reliability of intercultural competence instruments is scarce. In many cases, one cannot ascertain the theoretical basis, the method of test development, or the process of piloting, and in the absence of such key information neither the users nor the testees can safely interpret the results. In this respect, IDI is among the exceptions: all details are published (Bennett 1986, 1993b, 2009, Hammer 2011).

Many authors have raised doubts with regards to indirect self-administered questionnaires, which most often used in intercultural competence measurement (Altshuler *et al.*, 2003, Arasaratnam and Doerfel 2005, Hammer *et al.* 2003, Williams 2005). The problem is not necessarily that the respondents wish to present their characteristics or attitudes in an agreeable manner, but that they cannot truly predict what behaviour they would show in a particular intercultural encounter. This is of special importance if a measurement is made before some intervention (study abroad, training, etc.) because that result or score will be used as a reference point in the interpretation of post-intervention results.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was developed in 1998, and then reviewed in 2003. In view of continuing research and analysis further modifications were introduced in Version 3, which has been available in several languages since 2010 (Hammer 2011).

Based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, IDI estimates which stage of intercultural development the respondent is in. On the basis of validity studies (Hammer *et al.* 2003, Hammer 2011) Bennett's original model was modified in later IDI versions. Reversal, a variation of defence was introduced in which the individual considers the other culture superior, but it is a kind of defence as it maintains the us vs. them polarisation. It represents an overly critical orientation toward one's own cultural values and practices and an uncritical view toward other cultural values and practices. In more recent literature Hammer (2011) already uses 'polarisation' as a combined term for defence and reversal.

On the other end of the scale, integration was replaced with 'cultural marginality' (Bennett 1993a) in Version 2. Marginality means that the individual puts their identity on the margins of two or more cultures without being any one in the centre. There are two forms of marginality: 'encapsulated' when the individual feels the movement away from their own culture as alienation, and 'constructive' when the movement between cultures is a necessary and positive part of their life. In Version 3 Hammer (2011) uses the term 'cultural disengagement', a sense of disconnection or detachment from the culture of primary socialization, since the validity studies refuted the earlier assumptions about marginality. Cultural disengagement is treated separately, rather than a stage in the development process.

IDI analytic structure then generates an individual or group graphic profile of the respondent's overall position on the intercultural development continuum; more specifically, a Perceived Orientation (PO) score, which reflects where the individual places themselves along the intercultural development continuum, and a Developmental Orientation (DO), which shows the individual's 'primary orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities along the continuum *as assessed by the IDI*' (original italics, IDI, 2012). The Orientation Gap (OG) is the difference along the continuum between the Perceived and Developmental Orientation, where a gap of seven points or higher indicates a meaningful difference. The

profile also provides a 0 to 5 score of Cultural Disengagement which indicates how connected or disconnected the respondent feels toward their own cultural community as specified above.

One disadvantage of IDI that Bennett (2009) raises is that while IDI is particularly suitable to measure the intercultural sensitivity of groups, so it is essentially nomothetic, it does not precisely measure individual variance within the group: it over-assesses the normative stage (minimization) and under-assesses the stages to the left and right. That is why he proposes that IDI should be complemented with other qualitative type of data collection. Hammer (2011) rejects as this ‘unfounded claim’, quoting that the three validation samples (a total of 10,000 subjects) prove the normal distribution of the IDI developmental orientation score, so IDI is suitable both for individual and group level analysis. IBS chose group level analysis, mostly upon the advice of Dr. Bennett, who wrote ‘In my experience, the IDI should only be used as an aggregate measurement of the group at this point, without any individual scores provide to anybody’ (Bennett 2012).

### **Research Methodology**

In April 2012 a one year project was launched aiming at measuring and developing the intercultural competence of the IBS faculty. The project team<sup>4</sup> was successful in convincing IBS management to allocate funds for the administration of the Intercultural Development Inventory, carry out related training activities, and produce relevant written documents. A five-phase project plan was setup. The comprehensive literature review is available in Polyák *et al.* (forthcoming), while a detailed project description will be published in the proceedings of the SIETAR Europa Congress.

### **Findings**

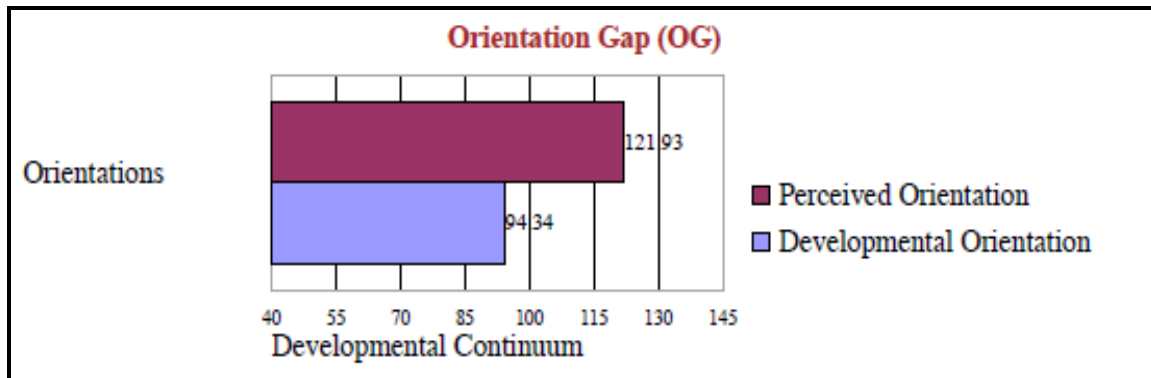
The outcome of the IBS Intercultural Developmental Continuum (IDI) Group Report was rather interesting, if not quite a surprise to us all. <sup>5</sup>The overall result given by the 34 participants who had completed the online test showed that IBS rated their own capability in understanding and appropriately adapting to cultural differences within the Acceptance Phase (the group’s Perceived Orientation Score reached 121.93), whereas the IDI’s Developmental Orientation Score (94.34) indicated that the groups’ primary orientation toward cultural differences was within the Minimization Phase, thus having a large Orientation Gap, which indicated that the IBS group had clearly overestimated its level of intercultural competence. (See Figure 2) According to the IDI Group Profile Report, a gap score of 7 points or higher can be considered a meaningful difference. The 27.59 Orientation Gap Score in the case of IBS indicates that the group substantially overestimates its level of intercultural competence.

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<sup>4</sup> The team included Dr Gábor András until he took up a teaching position abroad in February 2013.

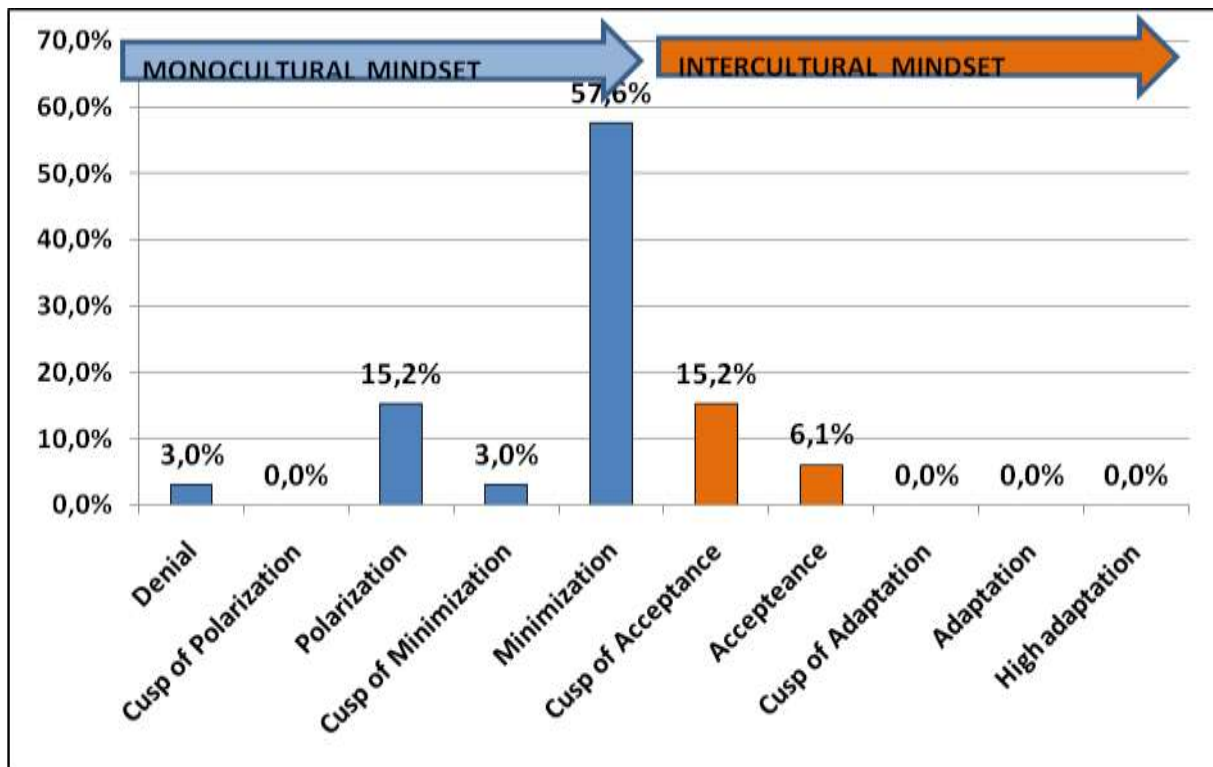
<sup>5</sup> In a staff meeting on 1 June 2012, we presented the following hypothesis: ‘IBS faculty as a group is ethnocentric, on the Minimization scale. They hold the idea that despite differences in language and customs, people share universal goals and values. They fail to perceive the students’ differing cultural realities and engage them in culturally appropriate ways.’

*Figure 2*  
Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI) results of International Business School, Budapest  
in 2012



A more detailed view of the Developmental Orientation Score of IBS highlights that the intercultural competence level of faculty members is rather homogenous as the vast majority of participants (57.6%) were placed in the same category of intercultural competence development, namely Minimization, which is the third level of the ethnocentric/monocultural mindset. (See Figure 1) Only one-fifth of the staff found to be at lower levels of intercultural development, most of those being at the second stage of Polarisation. Within Polarisation two types of orientations are possible: Reversal and Defence. According to the Group Profile Report, both types are present, but the majority of the people belonged to the Defence orientation, meaning that they were uncritical towards their own cultural values and practices and overly critical towards other cultures while those who were categorised at the Reversal level, they were overly critical with their own culture and uncritical towards other cultures. Overall, nearly 80% of IBS faculty belongs to the three first developmental phases of the Intercultural Developmental Continuum, representing a monocultural mindset, though most of them are situated at its highest level, Minimisation. On the other hand, a minority of faculty members have already developed a global mindset and were placed at the Acceptance level of the Intercultural Development Continuum.

*Figure 3*  
Distribution of the Developmental Orientation Scores of IBS faculty members



## Discussion

A major characteristic of the Minimisation developmental orientation is that it de-emphasises differences based on culture in a quest to ensure equal treatment for all students whatever their nationality should be. In this sense, the organisation is able to provide an inclusive environment for the multitude of nationalities, but may experience ‘blind spots’ insofar as discovering the cultural aspect in certain educational problems and solving organisational issues in ways that take cultural differences into consideration. The positive side of having Minimisation as the dominant intercultural competence at IBS is that the probability of international students experiencing unfair treatment during their studies is low. This result is congruent with the previous Student Diversity Survey conducted at IBS (Tardos, 2011) that has revealed that only a minority of students reported incidents of unfair treatment during their studies. Nevertheless, an important learning point to integrate and point out at future teacher training courses is that intercultural competence implies much more than being tolerant, ensuring equal treatment and non-discrimination during the learning and teaching process.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to evaluate the results of the IDI Report in terms of how IBS performs in comparison to other higher education institutions, as benchmark data for similar educational institutions are not available. Feedback offered at the Group Report Session indicated that Minimisation was the most frequent developmental stage for organisations involved in international affairs. Knowing the IDI results, the major challenge for IBS could be phrased as how an organisation can support the shift from Minimisation (de-emphasising cultural differences within the teaching and learning process in the name of universal values, equal treatment and adherence to quality insurance standards) to Acceptance; and what might be the benefit of investing time, energy and financial resources.

While the overall commitment to the research project was high among colleagues throughout the year, the research team has been challenged several times: first, at the Group



Report Session, when IDI results had been announced, and secondly at the end of the first training. Reflecting on the outcome of the first training session, the research team realised that the nature of the reactions could very probably be connected to the IDI Developmental Orientation results. Though the majority of participants expressed their wish to continue the discussions; many enjoyed the atmosphere of having constructive thoughts and challenging debates to be discussed with fellow colleagues. However, there were some comments pointing out the weakness of the training, expressing it not being much of a use in general for the quality of the teaching process; missing out on clearly addressing what the research team's ultimate goal would be, and some even went as far as doubting whether the project was a necessary issue to deal with at IBS.

After this experience the research team realized that the research project would need to be addressing the issue of enhancing IBS teachers' intercultural sensitivity and its requirements in a more specific and transparent way, demonstrating how it is linked to the teaching process, and with that thought we started to consider the way forward. Though some colleagues 'dropped out' from the process by the second training, the idea to demonstrate how international students of different background perceived and coped with our rather Anglo-Saxon teaching methods in different ways was highly illuminating for the majority of participants. Using the videotaped interviews with present IBS students and understanding how they perceived the dominant teaching methods like group work, providing feedback, interactive teaching style, etc. was an effective training tool to demonstrate the inter-linkages between intercultural competence and teaching quality and effectiveness. To substantiate how different cultural patterns might be dealt with in the classroom a *Guide to Teaching International Students* is available on the intranet since May 2013. In addition a Culture Calendar has been also compiled. Top management has also stressed how this project was central to the goals of the institution.

To evaluate the overall organisational development process, Kandola and Fullerton's (1998) Strategy Web Model shall be used. The authors assume that for diversity initiatives to be effective in organisations eight key organisational processes have to be followed. First of all, diversity needs to be part of the *organisational vision*. In case of IBS, diversity and being international is one of the strategic organisational values. The project team has in addition formulated a *Mission and Vision Statement* with regard to teaching diverse students. The Mission Statement, which was approved by the senior management for inclusion in relevant strategic documents, reads as follows:

*'IBS students think, behave and perceive in different ways which partly due to their cultural identities, and these are all equally acceptable and valid. We need to apply teaching methodologies that take this variety of behaviours and thinking patterns, including our own, into account in order to ensure that the learning outcomes, both on programme and module levels, are achievable by all students through a reasonable measure of individual effort.'*

The second key element of the model is the *commitment of top management*. At IBS, top management has decided to invest considerable financial resources for the project, and has symbolically stressed the importance of the project at several occasions. Thirdly, *Auditing and assessment of needs* is recommended. This step has been implemented with the above discussed Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI) tool. The fourth element in the Strategic Web model is the *clarity of objectives*. The ultimate objective of the project was to assess and develop the intercultural competence of the faculty. An additional goal of the project was to design a training process that could be integrated into the standard teachers' training curriculum. Based on the two training sessions held in the framework of the project, this will be possible to complete. *Clear accountability* is the fifth item in the model. In this respect, forming a project team instead of nominating a single individual was a good solution as it was an opportunity to discuss all steps during the process and this led to higher learning and

synergies within the team and better reach-out to wider sections of the organisation. On behalf of the faculty, participation was voluntary, but asking for a written Consent for Participation increased the responsibility level of participants. The sixth process element in the Strategic Web Model is effective communication. Through-out the project we made an effort to combine written (e-mail) and face-to face oral communication with participants to inform them effectively. In addition we had two direct Skype interviews between the IDI staff and IBS participants. We plan to establish a separate page on the IBS Tutors' Page regarding student diversity and intercultural communication. The Intercultural Mission and Vision Statement, the Culture Guide and Calendar, as well as, all previous research and training materials will be uploaded in a well-structured way to be assessable for all faculty members. The seventh key item in the used model is the *co-ordination of activities*, the actual steps and practices of the project. In case of IBS, this meant the sampling of participants, administration of the IDI questionnaire, preparation and implementation of the various group sessions and training opportunities. Finally, the strategic cycle ends with the *evaluation* of the initiatives. For IBS, the ultimate tool for evaluating the project was planned to be the second IDI measurement of faculty's intercultural competence. However, to date, the second assessment of faculty's intercultural competence has not taken place. The project team has decided after the first training to modify the original plans in order to leave more time for individual development and the implementation of other aspects of the project, as the second training, the Culture Guide and Calendar. Furthermore, IBS plans to conduct an international survey among business schools to be able to better benchmark and evaluate the organisational development practices implemented at IBS and elsewhere.

To sum up, the IBS Intercultural Communication project has been effective in focusing jointly on the individual and organisational aspects of intercultural competence development. The missing chain at this phase of the project is Evaluation. The project team needs to design several evaluation schemes for the whole project including measuring the changes in intercultural competence level on the organisational and individual level, satisfaction of project participants, and benchmark data coming from the international survey. In addition, a communication strategy will need to be designed on how to maintain the issue of intercultural competence on the agenda, besides setting up new Teachers Training Modules and uploading related material on our Intranet.

## **Conclusions**

Intercultural competence has become increasingly important in making teaching in higher education effective in the 21st century. Competence or sensitivity can be measured with plenty of instruments available, but such a project requires thorough preparation. One important result of the assessment of intercultural competence is that the issue becomes a focal issue within the organisation. The competence can be enhanced by implementing complex and long-term programmes based on the assessment result, but the direct causal relationship is difficult to prove. The programme improves teachers' performance directly and indirectly, and contributes to their professional and personal development.

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