Workshops on Diversity and Global Understanding

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As a consequence of increasing migration in our global society, deficits as regards internal and external communication, intercultural competencies, and diversity management have surfaced in all kinds of working environments. Different attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions were first identified as problematic; over time, workplace diversity has been acquiring a secondary meaning as a "vital strategic resource for competitive advantage" (Lockwood 2005). Working in the context of the UN is a prime example of what it means to experience cultural diversity and multilingualism. The importance of efficient communication tools and "a common language" spoken when people from diverse backgrounds work together goes almost without saying—considering UN counts 40,000 staff members from 185 countries.[1]

On June 1 and 2, 2010, the UN Studies Association (UNSA), TermNet, the Heidelberg University and the University of Vienna welcomed over fifty participants, representing different countries as well as cultural, disciplinary and organizational backgrounds, to engage in the "Workshops on Diversity and Global Understanding" at the UNO City in Vienna. The workshop sessions aimed to highlight the diverse views and approaches concerning cultural diversity, to discuss their effects on complex working environment (including not exclusively focusing on the UN) as well as to make participants feel and discuss these effects. Presentations addressed the role of terminology, organizational culture, leadership and management, global learning, and education, as well as new social media, and were backed by a vast array of examples from practice, interactive role plays, group work, and brainstorming. In the following, we will highlight the main differences and similarities of selected views and approaches. Not surprisingly, as diverse as the topic, so are the results.[2]

Laying the Basis: Transcultural Communication, Multilingualism, and Terminology
In his opening remarks, Gerhard Budin, UNESCO Chair for Multilingual and Transcultural

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1. U.N. Secretary-General's report: *"Composition of the Secretariat,"* UN Document A/64/352, 15 September 2009.
2. For a full report and documentation of each of the workshop sessions, please visit the event web site: http://www.workshops-on-diversity.org.

Communication at the University of Vienna, argued that multilinguism is key in facilitating interaction beyond cultural boundaries and developing a global society. From his view, translation and terminology as well as the use of information and communication technologies all play an important role in fostering global understanding and cultural diversity.

Dr. Gabriele Sauberer, executive secretary of TermNet, illustrated the importance of a common understanding by contrasting workshop participants' rather broad definitions of the term "diversity management" with the official, quite concise norm that reads:

> a strategic management approach aimed at the targeted consideration and deliberate utilization of the diversity of persons and relevant organizational environments or stakeholders in order to create structural and social conditions under which all employees can develop their abilities and reach their full performance to the benefit of all parties involved and for raising the organization's success."[3]

This definition, with its obvious (business) management focus, was indicative of the workshops' overall quest for seeking answers to the following questions: Which factors and measures help leverage (workplace) diversity and global understanding? Which approaches exist, and to what end? In what context have they proved successful? Is there a one-fits-all "diversity" model that could be applied to the complex and highly diverse UN working environment?

Anja Drame of TermNet delivered an in-depth account of a terminologist's view and take on cultural diversity. Appraising terminology as playing the crucial, yet, in her view often underestimated or at least unknown, role in every communication, particularly in diverse environments, she defined "terminology" as a set of designations that represent concepts or units of thinking, in specialized communication. Although mostly expressed through language, she called attention to nonverbal expressions: signs, sign language, symbols, etc. Drame then provided a few sample-use cases of terminology and shared specialized knowledge; global business teams, for example, that are comprised of people from different locations, physical abilities, backgrounds, or governments that address minority populations' rights through national language policies (Ní Ghallchobhair 2008, Drame 2008). She further mentioned specialized organizations that communicate complex and highly technical matters to people who often lack a higher education, have a different level of abstraction, and speak an array of languages with no adequate technical terms for these concepts: the "Information Paradox" according to WHO—those who most urgently need the information, cannot access it. Drame pointed toward the great danger of the communication dilemma and warned how severely understanding could be disturbed.

With regard to international organizations and the UN system, she felt there is a certain degree of awareness for this communicative challenge and referred to the WHO terminology group, the FAO terminology database, and terminologists working for the ICC and the Special Tribunals. Moreover, she reported that each of the UN headquarters has its own staff of translators and terminologists for different official languages. Various multilingual terminology databases, such as UNTERM and Vintars,[4] would allow staff and the public to look up terms and definitions. Besides UNESCO, the leading specialized agency that concerns with all aspects of cultural and

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3. Austrian Standards Institute: ÖNORM S 2501 (2008), page 5, Clause 2: Terms and definitions.
4. VINTARS: *Vienna INternet Terminology And Reference System*; http://cms.unov.org/vintars/VINTARSDefault.aspx. UNTERM: *UN Multilingual Terminology Database*, available at http://unterm.un.org/; accessed 14 June 2010.

linguistic diversity, access to information and education for all and the freedom of expression no matter in which language (UNESCO 2010), she also endorsed the efforts of UNHCR providing language assistance in disaster and crisis communication (UNHCR 2002).

In conclusion, Drame observed a growing awareness of the supportive role that terminology management plays within the UN system but an utter lack of coordination, which she deemed symptomatic of the UN's work. She also deplored the scarce training opportunities. Whatever efforts would exist to harmonize terminology work, she considered them as purely technical and at best half-hearted matters. Terminology work, in her words, is a costly matter but an important fundament for most other duties, leading to her final call for a systematic and system-wide approach: a comprehensive UN terminology policy. This call was reaffirmed by Mekki Elbadri, reviser and Arabic translator at the UN Vienna offices. Not only would expert translators and terminologists at the UN support the worldwide transfer of knowledge and contribute to the human linguistic and cultural heritage. Their work would also promote the enrichment of diversity and a mutual understanding. Translation and terminology studies, training, and software development, as well as team work, managerial and administrative skills are all factors Elbadri considered fundamental to meet the challenges of the diverse linguistic and cultural audience within the UN family.

Practicing Diversity

James V. Arbuckle, a former Canadian Peacekeeper, addressed the challenge to tackle the communication dilemma from a UN practitioners' view. His insights and statements reflected his personal experiences as infantryman in Canada and Germany as well as a faculty member of the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Center. Other than his colleagues from the Austrian Armed Forces, who reported on the integration of female soldiers (René Hudribusch, Ministry of Defense and Sport) and on military terminology (Jürgen Kotzian, AAF), Arbuckle focused on the role and influence of cultures in the context of interagency communications and co-operations in complex emergencies, i.e., multi-agency operations consisting of international, regional, local, governmental, nongovernmental, civilian, and military organizations. Arbuckle considered the "narcissism of small differences," the threat of similarity in means but dissimilarity in goals, as a driving force for conflicts and misunderstandings in interagency cooperation. Stereotyped perceptions and misperceptions of each other accompanied by poor communications and competition for access, resources, and recognition are all factors that in his opinion contribute to this "now-chronic-dysfunction" (Arbuckle 2006: pp. 35). He agreed to the view that "organizations are as different as the nations of the world" (Handy 1993: p. 180). Hence, to achieve more sustainable, mature, and trusting relationships among organizations, Arbuckle called for an understanding of organizations as cultures, consisting of sets of values, norms, and beliefs as well as mechanisms, systems, and structures, all of which are established and internalized by people. He recommended that changing attitudes, eliminating prejudices and misperceptions, and substituting competitive behavior for cooperative manners as well as minor differences for close similarities all help promote a common understanding; culminating in his advice to "diversify yourself." Arbuckle ultimately proposed simultaneous organizational cross-cultural education and train-

ing to prepare all actors for highly complex and diverse peace operations. Although recognizing the importance of each individual's attitude and willingness to adapt to diverse settings, he found the bottom-up process to be rather insufficient and promoted an active role of the management (Arbuckle 2006: p. 160).

Management and leadership are commonly acknowledged to play a key role in creating and empowering any organizational culture (Lockwood 2005). This view was also shared and promoted by Reinhard Mitschke and Alexander Wick, researchers and lecturers at the Institute of Educational Science (IBW), Heidelberg University. Based on the concepts of global education and global learning (Steiner-Khamsi 2004), their interdisciplinary COMSIC project (Collaboration Competencies for Media Supported Intercultural Groups) aims to translate abstract personal values to concrete work settings. More precisely, it addresses the concrete challenge how to not only feel but also act committed to global responsibility goals in everyday leadership and organization. Since managers are the driving force behind an organization's success, constantly influencing their employees even without permanent communicating with them, COMSIC is targeted at the competencies of managers. In this context, learning is not about extending knowledge or practicing new techniques but rather supports the application and integration of existing personal ideas and values in efficiency-oriented working settings. Furthermore, due to new technologies that allow for virtual communication and collaboration independent of time and location, diversity management is not only seen as a challenge for physical but also for virtual working environments (Hoch 2007, pp. 50), requiring managers to assume new roles and tasks (as moderators, coordinators, communicators, controllers, and decision-makers). Taken together, COMSIC seeks to enable managers to lead their (virtual) teams with respect of values embodied in Global Learning, while considering the standards of economic, social, and cultural sustainability in their daily practice (Wick et al. 2009: pp. 14). Mitschke and Wick decided to let workshop participants themselves experience this learning process by organizing group discussions about major concepts of global learning and education: sustainability, operating efficiency, and, intercultural relations. Using online collaboration spaces provided on the workshops' web site, the participants developed ways to approach or possible action to solve mock scenarios. In a next step, they worked on and developed master solutions that were subsequently viewed through different lenses (e.g., from a politician's or manager's viewpoint).

Equally favoring interactive techniques, Kent Kille, chair and associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the College of Wooster, Ohio, made a slightly different case why global education and learning are key in mastering the challenges of diversity. His aim is to foster students' better understanding of concepts and their practical application in real world settings, as well as to transfer critical thinking skills. A strong proponent of the learning-by-doing-approach, Kille seeks to engage his student audience by allowing it to directly and interactively make their own experiences rather than applying exclusively traditional, lecture-oriented approaches; he offered an impressive list of active learning applications, such as case studies, alternative texts (television, music, news articles), IT, structured debates, simulations,

games, and service learning.[5] Next, he presented the Center for Diversity and Global Engagement (CDGE), part of the College of Wooster, which has been created to better coordinate all campus and community initiatives that deal with diversity. Besides fostering understanding and approval for people with diverse backgrounds, it seeks to broaden horizons, to connect academic affairs and student life, as well as domestic and international dimensions of diversity.[6] Kille highlighted the center's determination to educate the students to become informed "global citizens," who communicating and interacting with all people in the globalized world and successfully meeting the challenges arising from diversity issues.[7]

The views of Arbuckle, the COMSIC project, and Kille may appear as a perfect and logical match, since they all argue along the line of fostering global understanding through global learning in order to educate global citizens that have internalized global values. However, there are noticeable differences in terms of the projected goals, underlying concepts, and approaches. Whereas Kille promotes interactive learning processes as a means to educate students to become global citizens, the other two are concerned with how to infuse leadership in concrete work settings (military or business), promote more targeted training and development of competencies, while also paying respect to contextual factors such as organizational culture. The last presentation on the role of new social media in fostering global understanding subsumed procedural and structural factors, while making a case for a third, a "people-centered" approach.

"Promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace and encouraging universal access through the global network to all information in the public domain"; "facilitating the digital dissemination of endogenous cultural products and access by those countries to the educational, cultural and scientific digital resources available worldwide," so reads UNESCO's action plan for the implementation of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2002). Dr. Henrike Paepcke, co-chair of the UN Studies Association (UNSA) and managing director of a small IT business, covered the role of new social media, starting with an overview of the goals, means, and functioning of virtual communication and collaboration tools. Emphasizing the secondary role of technologies and also consciously not addressing the digital divide and public availability challenge (hallmarks of the UNESCO declaration cited above), she listed rather broad principles as prerequisites for improved organizational performance: open-mindedness, transparency, the willingness to share knowledge and experiences with others, as well as to work with peers (beyond all hierarchies and borders). She further argued that virtual working settings not only foster the active engagement of individuals but make them also better see, feel, and experience diversity (of view points, perspectives, opinions, ideas, etc.). Ultimately, such virtual spaces would provide creative freedom and, thus, motivate individuals to work together and jointly create something new. An expert in conceptualizing interactive web portals, Paepcke thus favors an approach that focuses on people and follows

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5. In promoting active learning, Kille refers to Dale (1969), who looked at different levels of participation of students and their degree of abstraction in connection with the learning output. He found the higher the degree of experience, the higher the degree of what people remember, and the higher the learning outcomes. For more information about interactive global education, please visit: http://www3.wooster.edu/ir/Active-TeachingIR/.

6. Center for Diversity and Global Engagement at the College of Wooster: http://www.wooster.edu/Offices-Directories/Center-for-Diversity-and-Global-Engagement, accessed 14 June 2010.

7. Originally framed by Oxfam in 1997, the common notion of global citizenship projects a responsible person with awareness of the wider world and respect for diversity, with an understanding of how the world works in terms of economy, ecology, politics, culture, and technology; and last but not least, highly socially engaged and willing to contribute to a more equitable and sustainable arena, while participating in communities at local and global levels. See Young and Commins (2002).

the wiki principles, the Hawaiian term for "quick" or "hurry." Wiki technology enables all users of a web portal not only to read, but also to easily add and change web site content, simply by editing web pages. With a seemingly endless list of interactive features, wiki-based portals are all-rounders and can be used to facilitate knowledge-sharing, project planning, documentation, (live) reporting, virtual discussions, co-authoring, or joint brainstorming.[8] Adding to workshop participants' direct experience with such collaboration spaces during the Mitschke/Wick session, a couple of portals were introduced to better illustrate how the wiki principles of sharing, peering, openness, and transparency materialize in virtual team work and are key in meeting challenges and mastering problems arising from cultural diversity (Ebersbach et al. 2008, pp. 11).

Conclusion

The workshop sessions managed to clarify key concepts and provided participants with a comprehensive overview of the diverse views and approaches on how to manage cultural diversity in different working settings, engaging them in intense debates and interactive, practical exercises. It quickly became clear there is no one-fits-all diversity model that would apply to all kinds of organizations, particularly not with regard to the complex UN system. Even if the main finding could be summarized as the need for more targeted global education and training, backed by new social media and based on a comprehensive (UN system-wide) terminology, the approaches varied noticeably: from individual to group level, from organizational culture to manager (leadership) competencies, from terminology to technology, all reflecting the presenters' own set of (global) values, aims, and expectations about organizations (either their own, the UN, or organizations in general).

However, a consensus emerged that social interaction plays a crucial role in fostering cultural diversity and global understanding. In this context, open-mindedness, or to change one's own mind and beliefs, was repeatedly identified as one of the greatest challenges. To give an example, people who use wiki-portals for the first time and are expected to contribute to a public web page, often experience a sort of culture shock (Ebersbach et al. 2008, p. 11). The effects of virtual collaboration irritate many people: In contrast to their willingness to contribute to (private) social networks, they are not used to making their know-how or ideas public in more professional contexts. Neither do they find it easy to actively hold a view, let alone allow others to comment on or edit their contributions. More broadly speaking, diversity requires the acceptance of people with other backgrounds and viewpoints, a sound basis of trust among people, and the willingness to adapt to environmental changes. If people are intrinsically willing to contribute to solve diversity-related problems, diversification is possible, according to Arbuckle; more precisely, diversification of people's reactions, of their attitudes, expectations, and of their understanding: "'Go forth and multiply' yourselves" (Arbuckle 2010). This rationality is certainly a defining success factor in the context of diversity management.

Addressing individuals' barriers to accept and deal with diversity while looking closer at the interplay of the approaches proposed in the workshops as to whether they may fit into the UN working environment, these points should be at the core of a future, more in-depth discus-

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8. For a detailed account, including lessons learned of wiki-based expert communities, please see Paepcke and Harfensteller (2009).

sion of how to "ensure the creation, management, valuing and leveraging of a diverse workforce that will lead to organizational effectiveness and sustained competitiveness" (Lockwood 2005). Coming back to the diversity management norm, provided by Sauberer, employees are expected to "act to the benefit of all parties involved," as well as to "reach their full performance." Therefore, any further discussion and analysis of diversity management within the UN should also seek to integrate more of the views of UN staff, as well as UN Studies experts that particularly focus on organizational issues such as culture and leadership, in order to gain a better picture of diversity and global understanding in theory and practice.

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