**`Harnessing Respect for Developing an Effective Organisational Culture`**

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**ABSTRACT**

A growth in multinational organisations in the 21st Century has brought with it a need for further cross-cultural interactions with businesses and foreign investors, from all sectors of industry and from different societies across the globe. This coupled with the movements of people from all over the world, has led to an increase in the number of employees of cultural difference in the workplace. Evidence suggests that it is not cultural differences per se, but the lack of unification and understanding of them that leads to discrimination; Hence, the nurturing of a culture that is deemed institutionally racist. Such practices can render the organisation in breach of government legislation on equal rights and fairness towards the treatment of all employees irrespective of culture or for instance, race, disability, age, marital status or gender. As such, this state of affairs would create an untenable situation for the organisation thus making it difficult for it to maintain its credibility and in turn, its sustainability in an economic world climate that is fraught with financial challenges. Businesses in the millennium also have to contend with the on-going threat of competitors. These occurrences render an imminent need to forge harmonious working relationships between those of difference in the workplace. But what are the implications for Human Resource Management policy makers locally, nationally, and globally?

This paper aims to explore the above question by assuming a macro and micro environmental viewpoint, while referring to the findings of research conducted since 2005 that is based on an exploration of the relationship between respect and culture. The aim is to identify the meaning and understanding of respect born of the diverse learning experiences of final-year undergraduate students enrolled on a business consultancy module, as employees and captains of industry of the future. These students were enrolled on a consultancy module at Middlesex University Business School, an international institution that attracts students that represent every country in the world.

The research methodology adopted for this study, makes use of audio-visual recordings of the interactive behaviour and dialogic exchanges between students in focus groups. Data was also extricated from the students assessed individual learning review essays at the end of their study on the business consultancy module. Evidence was also drawn from transcriptions of the audio-visual recordings, and from a diary of formative research notes documented throughout the study. The focus groups comprised of between four to six volunteer students of mixed gender, ethnicity, ages, and cultures, working together throughout the research that was across two phases of the study, which began in 2007 and concluded in 2009.

The findings from this study were born of a thematic analysis and triangulation of the data-set, elicited from the research methods used to capture rich information. This revealed that respect is a common and significant shared value for those of cultural difference that meant the same, similar, and dissimilar things to the same or different students, depending on their cultures. The research findings also identified that there are four key factors that policy makers would need to consider so that wealth creating societies can maintain their sustainability in a global environment. That is; Respect is a common value for all; Culture is applicable to everyone; Globalisation is an increasingly common trend; and that, culturally driven *Perceptions*, *Attitudes*, and *Feelings* as emotions, are prerequisites for understanding the meaningof respect in today’s society.

**INTRODUCTION**

An increase in globalisation in the 21st century is a growing fact, not a fiction or a fallacy. Furthermore, the impact of globalisation in the workplace is an increasingly evident phenomenon that has resulted in more culturally diverse working environments. This is bound to have implications for HRM policy makers and practitioners who for instance, need to ensure that their organisation is able to comply with race relations legislation, such as the UK’s amended Race Relations Act 2000, that primarily aims to address institutional racism.

According to Rae and Rowley (2001) “Globalization’s impacts on HRM may come via the opening up and penetration of economies to external forces and influences”; hence a change in individual outlooks, actions and attitudes. This was an observation made by Woodward, Zlatko, Skrbis and Bean (2008), who state that “one of the widely accepted consequences of globalisation is the development of individual outlooks, behaviours and feelings that transcend local and national boundaries”. This changing dynamics due to the consequences of globalisation has resulted in an increase in heterogeneous communities locally, nationally and internationally, as reflected in UK Government figures (ONS 2002) that note that those from a minority ethnic backgrounds totalled 4.5 million or 7.6 percent of the population.

As reported by Roger Blitz (2003) the UK Affairs Editor at the Financial Times, “The data from the Greater London Authority shows the non-white population of London at more than 2m for the first time, having stood at slightly over 1.3m in 1991. Added to that are 220,000 Irish and nearly 595,000 "other white" groups, such as Cypriots, Americans and Europeans born on the Continent.” This has resulted in a change in the appearance of British communities and how they are viewed.

According to Woodward, Zlatko, Skrbis and Bean (2008), “the development of individual outlooks” due to globalisation, “has encouraged a re-assessment of important assumptions about the nature of community, personal attachment and belonging in the face of unprecedented opportunities for culture, identities and politics to shape, and be shaped by, global events and processes”.

A global society brings with it those of cultural difference. These differences can harness the same, or dissimilar, beliefs about respect and disrespect. Therefore it should come as no surprise to learn, that “the subject of respect and its opposite, disrespect”, is reputed to be “omnipresent today” (*Quaquebeke, Henrich & Eckloff,* 2007). This sentiment suggests that respect as a value, is crucial in today’s culturally diverse macro world, and as such, the topic of respect is likely to be a theme of ongoing debate.

Organisations would be wise to encourage greater awareness and understanding of the meaning of respect from the cultural perspective of today’s diverse workforce, to forge harmonious team-working relationships and learning in the workplace. Prestwich and Lalljee (2009) have argued that **“**although the term *respect* is widely used in society, its determinants and consequences on group-related factors are unclear”.

A lack of clarity regarding the impact of respect on groups might be due to the lack of awareness of the true meaning of respect from multiple cultural perspectives. Furthermore, another argument would be that which relate to the types of relationships formed in work – teams, that can dictate the approach to team tasks. “The argument presented seeks to explore the organic relationship between group dynamics and the nature of the task to be undertaken in order to maximise effective learning through group work” and to enhance organisational learning (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines & Galton 2001). This said this paper is based on research conducted over two phases (2007-2008 and 2008-2009) in order to explore the notion and meaning of respect from the perspective of culturally diverse individuals working together in teams, and the impact on organisational culture.

The researcher’s intention is to use the findings from the study to develop a framework in higher education that includes culturally sensitive approaches to teaching and learning. The aim is to cultivate an environment that nurtures respect for learners working together in teams with those of cultural difference, as a means for nurturing a community of equality, fairness, and social justice for all. This would be irrespective of ethnicity or culture. The learning that comes from the research can then be disseminated to the wider community of work with a view to inform practice.

This paper begins with an introduction to the organisational context of the study which provides insight to the module and students as the research subjects. A review of a body of literature follows, that investigates respect in context with organisational culture, by drawing on the works of several theorists in this area; Such as the work of Williams, Dobson and Walters (1993), Cohen (2001), Burke (2001), **Simon & Stürmer (2003),** Sennett (2004), Langdon, (2007), Woodward, Zlatko, Skrbis and Bean (2008), and French (2010).

The theories referred to in this paper, are used as a method for seeking out and for promoting awareness and greater understanding of the meaning of respect from diverse cultural perspectives, while reviewing the impact that this might have in the workplace. An overview of the methodology adopted for the study then follows, prior to presenting the research findings drawn from the first phase of a two year study conducted in 2007-2008; Discussions regarding the impact of globalisation in the workplace and the implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) policy makers, ensues. This is followed by concluding remarks that reviews the key discussion points highlighted in this paper, as a means for acknowledging the significance of respect and its impact in a millennium global learning and working environment.

**THE ORGANISATION AS A CASE STUDY**

The evidence elicited for this paper is drawn from audio-visual recorded observations of team activities displayed in the interactive behaviour of final-year undergraduate students at Middlesex University Business School. This module was identified as being an ideal case-study for the research, due to the students’ status as final-year business undergraduates, with ambitions to become leaders, practitioners, and policy makers. The Business School is situated in the north-west area of London based in the borough of Barnet which “is diverse in terms of ethnicity and faith, and experiences a high population turnover, with people leaving and new people arriving all the time, including new immigrants” (Barnet Council Business Intelligence Team, 2008).

Middlesex University is an internationally renowned higher education institution that attracts culturally diverse students from all over the world. As reported, “Middlesex is one of the most multinational universities in the country, with a fifth of its students coming from outside the UK and well over 100 different countries represented” (Guardian on-line Article History, 2009). The university believes in widening access to its programmes, and adopting an inclusive approach to participation, for members of groups who would usually be underrepresented in higher education.

As previously acknowledged, macro environmental changes due to globalisation, has resulted in more ethnically and culturally diverse international, and local communities. The student community at Middlesex University reflect these wider changes so it too has become more heterogeneous. As a result, the students bring with them, a dichotomy of cultural learning experiences hence the need for a more inclusive approach for facilitating learning through diversity, as adopted by the researcher as an educational practitioner, in the classroom. The intention was to foster respect among culturally diverse learners.

The students who volunteered to participate in the study, were enrolled on a final-year undergraduate business consultancy module at Middlesex University Business School, called `Consulting to Organisations`. The module has attracted an increasing number of culturally diverse overseas and UK born students and is now regarded as one of the most popular and successful modules at the Business School. The module now runs over two academic semesters that is, September, and January with cohorts of approximately 300 students.

The consultancy module requires the students to work in teams of between four and six individuals to conduct a `live` consultancy exercise with `real-life` organisations that results in them working with various small, medium, and large, public, voluntary, and privately owned enterprises; These have included airlines, banks, retail stores, and nurseries. The aim of the exercise is for the students in teams, to draw on the knowledge, skills and expertise as taught, to identify suitable intervention strategies for addressing organisational problems or to aid business clients’ quest for further development.

At the onset of the business consultancy module, the researcher asked the students to form teams (of four to six people) using the criteria of mixed gender, ethnicities and culture; mixed HRM and business programme disciplines; and spatial proximity. The team compositions are representative of work teams throughout industry today. The students were also advised to avoid working with those they were familiar with, such as friends or relatives.

Once the business consulting teams were formed, the students were introduced to the researcher’s study and were invited to volunteer to participate in two collaborative research focus groups until the end of the module that was taught over 24 weeks of the academic year. When the research was first introduced (at the onset of the first phase in September 2007) more than 70% of the students volunteered to participate confirming the topic of respect, attracted their interest.

***A History of complaints of disrespect and a lack of respect***

The idea for the research evolved from the history of complaints from students who said they were, or had been disrespected by those of cultural difference in their consultancy team. These ongoing complaints as noted by the researcher, as displayed in the classroom over several years dating back to 2003 to 2005, led to hostilities and conflict. This had a negative impact on the teams’ working relationships, quality of work produced and their morale. The teams also found it difficult to meet assigned deadlines due to an unwillingness to communicate and cooperate with individual team colleagues. The module tutors including the researcher, were bombarded with these complaints and were often expected to resolve them or move the complainants to other teams, which was disruptive and distressing.

**Simon & Stürmer (2003) explored respect in context with group behaviour. They “**examined how disrespectful vs. Respectfultreatment, and negative vs. positive performance evaluation,both received from the same fellow group members, affects collectiveidentification and willingness to engage in group-serving behaviour” which reflects the developments that occurred on the business consultancy module at the time due to the escalating conflict. Therefore, those teams (as organisations) and the individuals within them who were affected by the conflict (more than 80%), found it difficult to learn and develop as well as they could have done if the conflict had not arisen. It was evident from the increasing numbers of overseas and UK born culturally diverse students enrolling on the business module, that the need to identify a suitable solution for addressing team conflict was required. But how could this be achieved? The answer to this question was reflected in the nature of the students’ complaints, that is, of disrespect or a lack of respect. Additionally the complaints were from those whose culture differed to the persons they were complaining about. These complaints triggered counter-complaints of disrespect from the accused. This scenario was the catalyst that encouraged the researcher to explore whether respect was a core and significant value for students of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds; And if so, whether it could be used to nurture harmonious team working for cultivating an organisational culture of respect.

***Earlier findings from students’ list of cultural values***

The conflict and hostilities that arose on the business consultancy module, prompted the researcher to introduce a values exercise (back in 2003) to identify whether respect was a key value for the students. The findings from this exercise suggested that it was.

Each member of a consulting team was initially asked to devise a list in priority order, of three values that they regarded as being of ultimate importance. They were given the freedom to choose values as they saw fit, without constraint or boundaries. They were then asked to share and discuss their individual values list with their team colleagues, before agreeing and devising a list of team values based on the number of times that a value appeared on each person’s individual list. They then used this team values list as an aide memoire for developing a team contract for carrying out the consultancy exercise.

The outcome of the values exercise revealed that for more than four hundred participants’, respect was rated as being one of the most significant individual and team values. This was closely followed by security, and trust; then independence, and honesty, which were listed in second and third place respectfully. This finding suggested that respect was a key value irrespective of the students’ ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, one other important factor, as acknowledged by Haydon (2006), is “respect for persons has to take a person’s cultural context into account”. Therefore, where there is a lack of understanding and awareness of someone’s culture, then there is likely to be a lack of understanding of their meaning of respect. This could have far reaching implications for HRM policy makers’ and as such renders a need to understand what respect means from culturally diverse perspectives. In an attempt to achieve this aim the researcher decided to introduce a cultural diversity introductory model designed to the students. This was done in the first two weeks after the students had formed their consultancy teams. (Wilson, Flynn, and Frame, P. 2008) This model is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Cultural Diversity Team Introduction Exercise

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cultural Diversity Team Introduction Exercise | |
| **1** | ***Each team member introduces themselves to the class confirming their name and cultural origin.*** |
| **Then** | |
| **2** | ***Identify two positive and then one negative cultural stereotype associated with your race, culture, or ethnicity that you are comfortable to share with the rest of the class.*** |
| **Finally** | |
| **3** | ***Confirm the reality by stating the `facts` which you believe to be a more accurate representation of your cultural, race or/ethnicity.*** |

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As shown in Figure 1 above, each consultancy team was invited to participate in a class presentation, where individuals in the team were asked to use the above diversity team introductory exercise, to introduce themselves, their ethnicity and their culture. They were then asked to identify two positive, and then one negative stereotype associated with their cultural backgrounds as they saw fit.

The researcher noted how enthusiastic the students were to participate in the `Cultural Diversity Introductory` exercise. As one student later reported*, “at last I was given the freedom to describe myself and my culture in a way that made me feel comfortable and respected”*. Thus suggesting that culture was not only synonymous with respect, but with acknowledgement and acceptance of an individual’s cultural identity. According to Barreto and Ellemers (2002), “the crucial factor facilitating acceptance is not group distinctiveness but respect for one’s choice of identity”.

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSIONS**

***Defining respect***

The notion that respect is possibly a common value for all irrespective of cultural backgrounds is the dominant manner adopted by the researcher in this paper for conceptualising this idea, as reflected in recent literature on this topic. A review of literature suggests there are a myriad of definitions for respect which Cohen (2001) believes to be “a sentiment of one individual toward another", while Palmer – Jones & Hoertdoerfer,(2009) said, “certain words seem to come up whenever we talk about respect” such as, attention, consideration, courtesy, and care”. Haydon (2006) asserts that “respect itself is in part a cultural phenomenon”.

Nevertheless, Middleton (2004) raised a point for scrutiny when he said “it is not clear exactly what a notion of respect amounts to in practical terms” which is probably because there are so many definitions for the word, thus suggesting little is known about its meaning or impact, which gives credence to the significance of the study. This notion is supported by the work of Bergum and Dossetor (2005) who acknowledge that “disparate perceptions of the concept `respect` may have an impact on learning in the classroom particularly as it requires being interactive and reciprocal”, as replicated in culturally diverse work environments. This said, although globalisation renders cultural employee dynamics that are similar to student cultural dynamics; the main difference would be the impact that current employees have on industry today, which business students do not immediately have. However, unlike employees, these students have access to new business knowledge and practices, therefore it is likely these students in the classroom, as future policy makers and captains of industry, who would be `best` fit to drive organisational change that embraces a more global work environment.

***Globalisation in context with Respect***

Globalisation in the 21st century has resulted in an ever increasing culturally diverse learning and working environments, therefore disparate perceptions of respect are likely to be a common occurrence; Thus likely implications for the world of work, in that learners in the classroom, are the policy makers and practitioners of the future. It is therefore crucial for them to understand not only their respect, but the respect of those of cultural difference if harmonious team working relationships are to be encouraged for sustaining industries.

To grasp the significance of respect in today’s global society, it is important to comprehend what globalisation is, as it results in contact with those of ethnic and cultural difference, and exposure to behaviour, beliefs and culturally centred values such as respect. Use of the term globalisation does not however, suggest an understanding of the strategic world, and organisational implications that come with it, hence the need to explore the meaning of the term.

Carr and Chen (2001) said, “globalisation means different things to different people. In its broadest sense, the term encompasses all types of economic and cultural transfers between nations”. Robertson (2000), believes “globalisation as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.” This consciousness is fundamental to respect in that it makes us aware of its existence, but not necessarily what it means for those of cultural difference. Globalisation therefore affords us close-up opportunities to explore and live other people’s experience of respect that promotes greater awareness of the term. In a testimony given before the US Committee on Health, Education, Labour, and Pensions, (May 26 2005); Jared Bernstein warned “when the global economy calls, you’d better pick up the phone!”

Brown (1993) believes respect is “at the basis of our attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural orientation toward people” as viewed through our cultural lens. While in this position we cultivate perceptions of those of difference that is likely to impact on how we interact and behave with these others. Furthermore, there might be an inclination to take for granted that everyone’s respect is the same. If, however, our respect is perceived by others as their disrespect, then problems can occur.

Social thinker Richard Stennett (2004) noted that a “lack of respect, though less aggressive than an outright insult, can take an equally wounding form. No insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended; he or she is not seen – as a full human being whose presence matters.” Notwithstanding, to be respectful it is important to know what respect to give to improve relationships. To do this warrants a need to understand the kind of respect required.

Langdon, (2007) acknowledges that “respect is often thought to be the driving force in the improved situation, but unfortunately, it is not specifically manipulated or assessed, so its’ direct effects are not known”. Furthermore, the need to develop a bond among student teams working together in the classroom would be a step towards developing a bond among future teams of diverse people working together in the workplace. This sentiment is supported by Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines & Galton (2001) who believe that, “the potential for learning through group work needs to be developed, and that the potential for learning through productive purposeful group work is not fully utilised”.

***The meaning of organisational culture - a micro and macro perspective***

As Williams, Dobson and Walters (1993) asserts, “to begin we must clarify the nature of the beast” in other words, “what is organisational culture?” (ibid) Most people acknowledge its existence, but fewer are able to describe precisely what it is. Like the word respect, there are numerous “definitions of culture abound”, which suggests that there is no clear meaning of the word culture, this is something that the study aimed to address (ibid). This said, Armstrong (1998), defines “organisational or corporate culture” as being “the pattern of shared beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, norms and values in an organisation”. As such, this is a micro environmental positional viewpoint of culture per se, which, as Armstrong acknowledges, “may not have been articulated but in the absence of direct instructions, shape the way people act and interact and strongly influence the ways in which things get done”. Similarly, Schein (1984), believes organisational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented”, albeit intentionally or intentionally; or “discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration”. This suggests a possible cause born of macro environmental forces triggered by for example, political, or social changes. However, these resultant patterns of basic assumptions, if as according to Schein (1984) they “have worked well enough to be considered valid” then they are worthy “to be taught to new members” thus sustaining the culture.

Burke Guild (2001) said, “we also know that an individual learner's culture, family background, and socioeconomic level affect his or her learning” and despite research evidence suggesting that not “all learners are the same, educators continue to treat all learners alike while paying lip service to the principle of diversity” (ibid).

“Cross-cultural management as a subject has taken its bearings from the existing research canon with a resultant orientation towards the twin themes of the effect of culture on organisational actors and a need for cross-cultural sensitivity in interpersonal encounters” (French, 2010).

French (2010), also believes that “a meaningful critique of the underlying assumptions of existing cross-cultural theory also ties in with an analysis of changing insights, which have informed some new work in cross-cultural management in the first decade of the twenty-first century,” thus suggesting greater awareness of culture yields benefits.

Li and Fischer (2006) who conducted studies “both within and across cultures”; discussed another facet of cross-cultural learning when they asserted that “the last decade has witnessed a growing interest in self-conscious emotions, enriched from many researchers studying people from diverse cultural backgrounds”. On a similar note, Tangney (2002) emphasized that “positive self-conscious emotions may be viewed as part of the emerging field of positive psychology”. This supports the relevance and timing of the study that explores the manifestation of respect from the perspective of culturally diverse business learners in the classroom as future leaders and policy makers.

Barreto and Ellemers (2002) in their paper discussed the discrepancy between an individuals choice of identity and how others tend to categorise them, acknowledge that “the crucial factor facilitating acceptance is not group distinctiveness but respect for one’s choice of identity”.

Li and Fischer (2006) state that “other than this common feeling of respect, westerners show a somewhat different kind of respect for people they admire, appreciate, revere, and/or hold in awe. This feeling of respect can be seen when fans meet a rock star” for instance. “This kind of respect is not rights-based but personally generated and expressed”.

Haydon (2006) argued that while” understanding a person’s cultural background is necessary to respecting the person there are two further connections between respect and culture. First, respect itself is in part a cultural phenomenon. Secondly, there is a case for saying that persons should respect not only other persons but cultures as such”. Haydon (ibid) notes, “it is argued that this case is flawed in its presupposition that distinct cultures can be identified. What is needed, rather, is respect for human cultural contexts in all their diversity”.

Armstrong (2007) intimated that in order to create a suitable organisational culture, it is important to recognise that there are four developmental stages. The first acknowledges that culture is formed by the organisations’ leaders.” The second developmental stage “is based on critical incidences” learnt from experience. “Thirdly the purpose is to maintain effective employee working relationships; and the final stage recognises that an organizations culture, is influenced by its environment” (ibid) If the environment has become more diverse, then the employees influence on the organization would be paramount. .

**METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study adopts an observational approach, to assess four teams of focus group student volunteers, of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There were two focus groups for each of the two research phases that began in 2007- 2008, and concluded in 2008-2009. The students were final-year business undergraduates of mixed genders. They were invited to share their stories of their experiences of respect and disrespect, as they saw fit, which they decided should be weekly or fortnightly for half an hour, or an hour. These meetings were audio-visual recorded. Each focus group comprised of between four and seven students. The intention was to examine the role of respect in milieu with organisational culture.

It is widely acknowledged that “focus groups are a form of group interview that capitaliseson communication between research participants in order to generatedata” (**Kitzinger, 1995).** ConverselyEvmorfopoulou, (2000) expands on Kitzinger’s definition of focus groups by stating that “focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them”

Kitzinger, (1995) believes that “although group interviews are often used simply as a quickand convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously,focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of themethod”**.** In essence **“**this means that instead of the researcher asking eachperson to respond to a question in turn, people are encouragedto talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotesand commenting on each others' experiences and points of view” (ibid).

Ritchie & Lewis (2003) said “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. This enabled the researcher to explore communication dynamics that were not manipulated; from multiple perspectives, thus promoting a more in-depth understanding.

Kitzinger, (1995) recognised that “everyday forms of communicationmay tell us as much, if not more, about what people know orexperience”. These insights were gained from listening, observing, and noting the students in the study, in the classroom, from reading their written narratives, and while discussing respect with them in the focus groups. “In this sense focus groups reach the parts thatother methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understandingthat often remain untapped by more conventional data collectiontechniques”.

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

***Approach to Analysis***

Thematic analysis was the method used to examine the research data to identify findings in the form of themes and patterns that were present. This explanation resonate with that of Braun and Clarke, (2006), who believe that, “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” which they added, “minimally organizes and describes your data set in rich detail.”

The researcher’s approach was to ensure that all the data was collated; That is, the audio-visual recorded tapes, the transcriptions of what was observed from these tapes, and the diary of formative notes documenting the researcher’s recall of further observations made of the students in their focus group sessions.

The diarised notes were written-up at the end of each session, while what was observed was still fresh in the researcher’s mind. This was used as an aide memoire for reflecting on and scrutinising the research information, which included data elicited from the students’ individual learning essays which described their module experiences. For this assessed piece of work, the students’ were required to make use of Culik and Robertson (2008) ASK framework, to evaluate their Attitude at the beginning, during, and at the end of the module; the Skills learnt or developed; And; the Knowledge gained. It was later acknowledged that emotions were an important aspect of the students’ learning journey, confirmed earlier to be an emerging field of positive psychology. This paradigm was added to the framework, courtesy of Frame (2009), and is now referred to as the ASKE reflective learning framework.

The researcher adopted an analogical mindset prior to, and during the thematic analysis of the data. That is, the data was viewed in the same manner as small pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle, therefore it was imperative to ensure that all data had been collected, before sorting and analysing it to identify and examine the research patterns via the use of a colour coding system. This approach encouraged a triangulation of the data by cross referencing one set of information with another to ensure the interpretations and conclusions drawn, were valid and reliable.

It was acknowledged that the answers to the research questions were imbedded in the data-set. These included questions such as, `what can I see? , `what does it mean?`, `could it mean something else`?. Care was required to disentangle all the data, to ensure that these questions could be answered adequately. Anderson (2009) describes analysis as, “a process of thought that enables you to understand the nature of what is being investigated, the relationship between different variables in the situation, and the likely outcomes of particular actions or interventions”. She too recognised that, “analysis, therefore, involves finding answers to your research questions using the data that you have gathered” (ibid).

***Phase 1 Research Findings (2007-2008)***

The findings in this section, focuses on data educed from the first phase of the study. These were drawn from the researcher’s observations of the focus group volunteers’ conversations with her, and with each other, in addition to the interactive behaviour displayed noted in written text, while “living-in” the experience of each focus group session. The data from the second phase (2008-2009), is still being analysed. This said, from what has been interpreted thus far, correlates, with the findings identified from the first research phase. Once the final analysis of data is complete, then it will be determined whether this presupposition can be confirmed as fact.

Figure 2 depicted below, provides a breakdown of the ethnicity and cultural origins of the fourteen students who volunteered to form the two focus groups for the first research phase. These findings show that the cultural ethnicity of these final-year students were quite diverse. One student was white British, another was black Afro-Caribbean, three were Asian, five were of black African origin, another was European of Indian Asian origin, and three were Mongolian Chinese. Nine of the students depicted in this figure, were international students, referred to for the purpose of the study, as first generation on the basis that they were born outside of the UK.

Three of the students shown, were born in the UK unlike their parents who were born abroad. These students were therefore categorised as second generation for this reason. One student was a second generation European student, born in Spain to migrant Indian parents. Another student was first generation white British, whose parents and grandparents were of the same ethnicity and origin. There were six female students, and eight were male. Both genders were represented in the two focus groups. The ethnicity and cultural mix of volunteers, reflect Middlesex University’s diverse student community.

**Figure 1:**

Key: F1 denotes the first focus group and (F2) relates to the second focus group

Breakdown of focus group students’ background

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| First Focus Group | | | | | |
| **Ethnic origin** | | **Generation status** | **Gender** | | **Age** |
| (F1) 1 | Black East African of Ugandan & South African parentage | First generation overseas international student | Male | | 23 yrs |
| (F1) 2 | Black West African of Nigerian parentage | Second generation UK student | Male | | 22 yrs |
| (F1) 3 | Black East African of Eritrean parentage | First generation overseas international student | Male | | 23 yrs |
| (F1) 4 | Asian of Sri Lankan parentage | First generation overseas international student | Female | | 23 yrs |
| (F1) 5 | Black Afro-Caribbean of Barbadian parentage | First generation overseas international student | Female | | 43 yrs |
| (F1) 6 | Mongolian Asian of Chinese parentage | First generation overseas international student | Male | | 23 yrs |
| (F1) 7 | Spanish of Asian Indian parentage | Second generation overseas international European | Male | | 23 yrs |
| Second Focus Group | | | | | |
| (F2) 1 | White British of English parentage | First generation UK student | | Female | 23 yrs |
| (F2) 2 | Black North African of Moroccan parentage | First generation overseas international student | | Male | 23 yrs |
| (F2) 3 | Asian of Egyptian parentage | Second generation UK student | | Male | 22 yrs |
| (F2) 4 | Mongolian Asian of Chinese parentage | First generation overseas international student | | Female | 22 yrs |
| (F2) 5 | Black East African of Zimbabwean parentage | First generation overseas international student | | Female | 24 yrs |
| (F2) 6 | Mongolian Asian of Chinese parentage | First generation overseas international student | | Male | 23 yrs |
| (F2) 7 | Asian of Pakistani parentage | Second generation UK student | | Female | 23 yrs |

The students were spontaneous in deciding what aspect of respect they wanted to discuss in their focus group sessions, as they saw fit, which was directly after their weekly module workshop classes. They shared stories of respect and disrespect as they emerged. These were drawn from personal life experiences, cultural upbringing, perceptions, expectations, and their attitude in comparison to others.

There were eight audio-visual recorded focus group sessions in the first research phase, which began in early October 2007, concluding in May 2008. The work recorded was played back to the participants at the end of this first phase, as they requested, to facilitate their learning, and to capture additional rich data based on their responses to seeing themselves on screen for the first time.

The video recordings were used as a discourse for discussing and for understanding the students’ respect, and how it is revealed in the classroom, and how this might manifest in the workplace. As a research method, Kitzinger (1995) regards focus groups as being “particularly useful for exploring people's knowledgeand experiences and can be used to examine not only what peoplethink but how they think and why they think that way”.

It was evident from watching the audio-visual recordings that both the students’ and the researcher as author, at times practiced living contradictions. That is, their description of how they behave respectfully differed in contrast to their practice. McNiff and Whitehead (2006), recognise that “living contradiction” occurs “when one’s values are denied in practice”. In other words, “we hold values about what is important in life, which act as our guiding principles, and we try to live accordingly” yet we need to acknowledge that “sometimes we do, and sometimes we don’t”. This might not be intentional.

The audio-visual recordings enabled the students, and the researcher-a professional educational practitioner, to recognise and reflect on their practice of living contradictions as they emerged on screen. The students later admitted they had not, and probably would not have noticed this beforehand. Their comments and reactions suggested that this was a concern.

The researcher was surprised by what she did, that contradicted with what she said, as lived on screen. That is, “I will not take the lead in this process” but that was precisely what happened occasionally. The audio-visual recording of the focus group sessions, was a significant action research process that acknowledges that the participants as human beings and as the “the living `I` should be placed at the centre of educational enquiries” (McNiff, 2002).

The audio-visual focus group process afforded the students and researcher the opportunity to share their stories of respect and disrespect, to gather rich data, that when analysed revealed three evident themes. These were; Attitude, Perception, Feelings and Emotions that provided insight to the students meaning and understanding of respect from diverse cultures. Although there were numerous stories told that reflected these three themes, for the confines of this paper, two stories for each are document below:

In one of the numerous discussions regarding ***perception*** of those of difference,a male overseas international student from Uganda, commented on his surprise when hearing one of the Chinese students admit that he had never been trained in martial arts. He said;

*“I always thought the reason why you never hear Chinese people getting attacked in the streets, is because everyone thinks they’re all good at Kung Fu, so you gotta give them respect for that.”* Several of the non Chinese students responded to this comment. Their remarks included comments like, “yes come to think of it, that’s true, I never hear of Chinese people getting attacked either”.

The researcher observed the way in which the non Chinese students, glanced tentatively at their Chinese counterparts, in what was perceived to be an attempt to assess their reaction, possibly for fear of causing offence. However, the Chinese students laughed in response to the comments, which made the others feel they could do the same.

A male international Pakistani student told his story of misperception when he said;

*“As a Pakistani young man, people automatically make comments about 911, Osama Bin Laden, and terrorists, when I’m nothing like this.”*

He added that he feltoffended and irritated by these comments, as observed from his body language. That is, raised shoulders, forearms spread, and displaying palms of his hands, in a quizzing manner.

A female international Chinese student, shared her story that identified that ***attitude*** was another research theme. This studentsaid;

*“I like to be polite so listen to others all the time, but sometime they show me no respect when they don’t want to listen to me!”* This student raised her voice each time she mentioned the word respect, and would sit erect at the same time. Thus giving the impression that respect was important to her.

On the same theme of attitude, a male Moroccan student said;

*“sometime when I’m out on the street walking, I notice how some people cross the road when they see me coming, or hold on to their handbags as though I’m gonna mug them or something. They take one look at me and get the wrong impression.”* This student told his story in an animated way. He leant forward with outstretched hands, giving wide-eyed looks while recalling these experiences.

The third theme identified from the study, was **Feelings** as emotions: Reference is made to the story told by the male Ugandan participant, who said when he saw himself on screen in the audio-visual recorded sessions for the first time, he just could not believe the way he was behaving;

“*I was talking over others and was very loud which was embarrassing. I did not realise I behaved that way.. Now I can see why people might think I’m being disrespectful but that’s not what I’m thinking at the time.”*

The researcher recalled the Ugandan student’s reactions when listening to himself speak and interacting with the other members in his focus group. What was noted at the time was the way he pulled his jumper over his head to hide his face inembarrassment, while sliding down in his chair and glancing over at his colleagues, shaking his head in disbelief at his behaviour, while giggling nervously. He later said *“seeing myself in the video changed my behaviour for the better. I am also more curious to learn about other peoples’ culture.”* He said he now accepts, as reported by friends and family, that he has a tendency to talk more than he listens and admitted that seeing his behaviour with his *“own eyes”,* was the only thing that could make him see differently.

The white British female student in the group, story also reflected the theme of feelings and emotions. She said;

*“I felt anxious when I first started this module and discovered that I had to work in a team with people from so many different backgrounds. I now realise how much we have in common, and that they are different to what I thought they were, so I am much more at ease with them”*. This response suggests that this student’s perception might have been influenced by negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, the change in her emotional state was evident, as she hardly spoke at the beginning, preferring to watch and listen, avoiding eye contact, as though nervous and ill at ease. She later became more curious, communicative and attentive which boosted her confidence, which she said was due to her becoming more culturally aware. In a book on respect, edited by Sung and Kim, (2009), they claim “attention is a dimension of respect itself”. Interestingly, when she first introduced herself, this student announced, *”I do not have a culture”,* a commentwhich reflected the thoughtsof two former business students, and a colleague of the researcher, who too were white British*.* This suggested that they believed culture was something that belonged to those of black and minority ethnic origins, which if carried forward, could have implications in the workplace.

This said it was evident from listening to the students’ sharing their stories of respect and disrespect and observing their interactive behaviour; that these stories called to mind, feelings of passion and enthusiasm. This further suggests an emotive aspect to respect. For example, the researcher observed the students at the end of one of the focus group sessions, when they stood up to leave the room, but instead continued sharing their stories of respect and disrespect. They seemed oblivious of the researcher’s presence at the time, and that of her colleague.

The students stood in close proximity while raising their voices in an enthusiastic manner. Some were expressing their opinions to those of cultural difference, on the stories that were being shared. For example, the ethnic students talked about the negative ways in which they were often perceived in different scenarios, so felt they were being “looked down on”. The advice given in response encouraged them to view their situations from another cultural perspective, giving the impression that a lack of awareness might be another dimension to cultural learning in respect.

The focus group research process, allowed the students to reveal their thoughts about others that might otherwise have remained hidden and as such buttress skewered assumptions about those of difference. On a similar note, Bessette, (2004) said that “in best case scenarios, the research or development process itself generates a situation of empowerment in which participants transform their view of reality and are able to take effective action for a change of attitude”, which is an essential learning process. Brockbank & McGill (2007) believe that “learning as a social process is crucial because transformational or critical learning requires conditions that enable the learner to reflect upon her learning not only by herself, but with others.”

**CONCLUSION - IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY MAKERS**

The findings of the study, suggestthat **there are** **four key factors that HRM Policy Makers would need to consider,** when creating suitable procedures and policies; viewed as a necessary means for nurturing `best fit` organisational cultures and for effectively managing workplace diversity.

As document in the HRM International Digest (2006), “diversity management has many aspects. It values employees, provides education on issues around diversity and equity, ensures equal opportunities for professional development and promotion for all staff and offers challenge and responsibility” in an increasingly changing, globally competitive economic climate . Yah, Debrah, and Smith (2002), acknowledged this fact by saying “with the shift towards a more integrated and interdependent world economy, the emergence of a global marketplace where firms compete fiercely is apparent”.

The first of the four factors is a need to accept that respect is a common value for all regardless of cultural background. The second is acknowledgement thatculture is applicable to everyone. As Armstrong (1998) put it, “culture is a key component in the achievement of an organisation’s mission and strategies, the improvement of organisational effectiveness and the management of change”; and that “the significance of culture arises because it is rooted in deeply held beliefs” (ibid). A lack of awareness of peoples’ beliefs regarding respect would make it difficult for HRM policy makers to identify and adequately meet employees’ needs in a way that they would expect. However, understanding respect would depend on an ability to understand other peoples’ cultures. Schein (1984) believes, cultural learning is acquired over a period of time.

The thirdfactor is that globalisation is an increasingly common 21st century trend; therefore the likelihood that indigenous cultural groups will intermingle with those of cultural difference is a probability. French, (2010) acknowledged that “it is commonly held that the processes contained within the term `globalisation` have both increased interactions between members of cultural groups and at the same time led to some degree of homogenisation between cultures”. French (ibid) also warned that “it is crucial to appreciate that globalisation is not merely the latest incarnation of internationalisation”.

The fourth factor identified, is the need for HRM policy makers to understand that culturally driven *Perceptions*, *Attitudes*, and *Feelings*as emotions, are prerequisites for understanding the meaning of respectin today’s global society. According to Bernstein (2005) “the benefits of globalization include the growth-enhancing ability of countries to tap their comparative advantages”. For example, some societies encourage their womenfolk to pursue careers in what could be deemed masculine industries, such as engineering, thus reaping benefits both for the individual and the organisation. “In Jamaica and other Caribbean Islands, there are many prestigious, well-paid jobs for women in ‘digiports’ which focus for example on data entry for US airlines companies. Women often represent 100% of the workforce in these zones” (Carr & Chen 2001).

The lesson to be learnt is that a lack of awareness of employees meaning of respect can threaten an organisation’s very survival. Furthermore, “under the laws of `survival of the fittest`, the “continual death of firms is fine for society. Painful though it may be for the employees and owners, it is simply a turnover of the economic soil, redistributing the resources of production to new companies and new cultures” (Senge, 2006). It is for this reason that understanding the significance of respect should be regarded as a need, and not a want.

To conclude, another matter worthy of consideration is that respect is a right for all and not just for a few. According to Stennett, (2004) “when a society treats the mass of people in this way - singling out only a few for recognition; creates a scarcity of respect, as though there were not enough of this precious substance to go around. Like many famines, this scarcity is man-made; unlike food, respect costs nothing. Why then, should it be in short supply?”

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