

## DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL CAREERS

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Employers nowadays are looking for workers with a variety of technical and core skills, including the ability to communicate effectively, and are having a hard time filling jobs that require a combination of strong technical skills, and leadership, organizational and essential skills in communication and computer skills. Training programs therefore are trying to integrate building technical skills with core skills in communication, a transferable skill that could improve person's employability. At the same time, in the globalization process, more organizations have been moving outside national borders and have to face cultural plurality and to challenge cultural barriers in order to create a competitive edge. As Marion Estienne mentions, "without doubt, understanding the consequences of culture on business practices can improve decision making and help a pluri-cultural workforce to work together more effectively. Cross-cultural training can also help close the skills gap between the ideal and the reality of working internationally" [1]. Cross-cultural training, as if this were the "quick fix" which would make the organizations more competitive, has become a kind of a fashion for the executive boards. For Ukrainian business practice, though theoretically acknowledged already, cross-cultural awareness remains to be something either very vague and unimportant compared to main transition problems to be solved or something which is relevant only for international trading companies. By this paper we are trying to draw attention of the higher educational institutions to creating a so-called *nation brand*, developing *national identity* of their students, and to consider the objectives and opportunities of tertiary education in the information society as to forming the global mindset with Ukrainian university students.

Modern professionals need to have a grasp of cultural concepts in order to perform their role satisfactorily. First, a manager has to be able to understand and manage different groups in the workplace characterized by different cultures. Second, managers have to react to, initiate and manage change at a cultural level in their organizations. An extreme example of such a challenge is a transition to a market-driven civilized economy that requires, among others, a radical reconceptualization of the whole organizational behaviour, which, in turn, cannot occur without a commensurate change in corporate culture. Third, more managers have to manage across borders and by definition across national cultures as markets become more global. To manage successfully in the contexts described above, managers need more than the instinctive grasp which they have of their own culture. Managers need models, frameworks and concepts which they can articulate in order to talk to those in other organizations and from other cultures [2]. They also need to be able to analyze the underlying values of their own organization and understand how these are linked to the organizational structures and processes of the company and the corporate behaviour they see around them.

Although being fashionable in the West, cross-cultural training is still far from being widely practiced in the companies. The Western scholars noticed that individuals from the operational level were interested in improving their skills without the recognition from the strategic level that this was crucial to business objectives. For many at more senior levels of the organization, cross-cultural skills are seen as "soft". Skill acquisition is important, but it only has meaning when it is part of the altered process of how we think about business. An attitude and awareness are necessary which convert the "where" the company does business, to "how" [3].

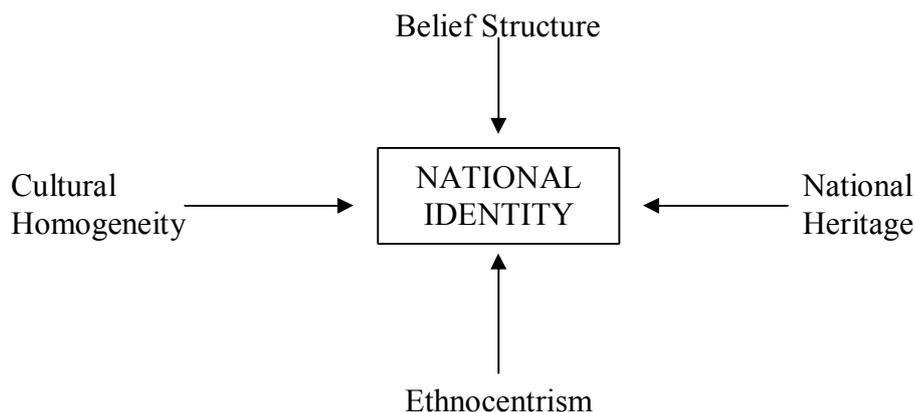
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This approach is especially urgent for Ukraine as for any other country in the making which has to build up not only its economics and business but also to create a new mentality and national cultural awareness that would meet the requirements of new globalized world. Though in this paper we do not aim at handling the issue of national identity theoretically, we still guess that raising the question of developing national brand and cultural awareness it is necessary to introduce the definition of national identity and to see which of its dimensions should be taken into account when planning students' professional training.

According to Herskovits [4] and Huntington [5], national identity becomes the "set of meanings" owned by a given culture which sets it apart from other cultures. They determined the basic components of the national identity framework, shown in Figure 1:

*Figure 1. Dimensions of national identity*



Belief structure should have an impact on the magnitude to which a culture actively identifies with a unique national identity. A belief structure can serve to promote cultural participation, provide a mechanism for conflict resolution, or a means through which psychological tensions and distortions can be reduced or eliminated. Thus, awareness of one's national belief structure enables a psychological bridge to be constructed between individual beliefs and a culture's aggregate social structure. Another closely related component proposed to be part of the overall construct is national heritage. While the belief structure may be similar across various nations, the differing histories, or national heritages, of the individual nations may produce differing national identities. The cultural homogeneity component deals with the cultural uniqueness of a given society's sense of national identity. The final component of national identity is ethnocentrism as the tendency in which individuals, or societies, make cultural evaluations and attributions using their own cultural perspectives as the base line criteria. Ethnocentrism is included in the national identity framework as a means of accounting for the importance placed on maintaining culturally-centred values and behaviours [6].

We need this theoretical overview of what national identity is in order to approach the educational aspect of this issue. The national identity components are too comprehensive and multidimensional to be covered by a single university course. The awareness of these components is to permeate the whole system of tertiary education if we claim that we train the people for international careers.

The multicultural nature of societies and the way cultural differences and identities could be tackled have been moving to the centre of debate in the educational arena, as pointed out by Canen [7]. The expression "intercultural perspective" has been used in the field of education mainly to express a set of ideas concerning knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural plurality and to challenge ethnocentric views in curricular contents and practices, while it should also necessarily imply the deconstruction and challenging of stereotypes and assumptions associated with cultural plurality.

Bringing the above ideas to the globalized world of work, understanding cultural differences and going beyond cultural boundaries may prove to be the cutting edge for the success of organizations at the beginning of the new millennium. Exploring the “cultural uniqueness versus universalism” duality in global business interactions, Elger & Smith [8] assert that the economics and “culture-free” thesis which advocates the precedence of system standards and economic efficiency over cultural diversity is more and more unacceptable. As argued by the above mentioned authors, it has been consistently challenged by cross-national studies which have shown persistent difference between societies with similar political economies. Such a remark should cast light on the relevance of coming to grips with the mediating, cultural interpreting agencies making up culturally diverse societies operating in the world economy, so as to maximize sensitiveness to cultural plurality and ensure competitive edge in an ever-increasing globalized market.

However, the skill of cultural interpreters as one of the most demanded with modern international professionals still remains underestimated if we look at the present-day curriculum of Ukrainian universities. In this context to create a course “Cross-cultural management” for second-year Ukrainian students of international economics and international business activity at Donetsk National Technical University was a challenge stipulated mainly by meta-educational factors.

The most influential of these factors were the students’ stereotypes with which they treat the subjects which seem to have no immediate application for them: ‘I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it’ approach, ‘cross-cultural – it is about foreigners, and we do not have any of them here at the moment’. So unlike the similar courses developed in the Western universities, which, of course, were taken as a basis of our course development, we redefined the mission of this course for Ukrainian IBA students: ‘it’s not about ‘them’, it’s not about comparing them in order to understand them better, it’s about *us*, it’s about comparing them in order to better understand *ourselves*.

The approach which appealed to this mission was that of self-explication understood as an experienced-based learning approach to practical cross-cultural management stated, among others, by P.C.Jensen who argues that “in this way, cross-cultural experience offers a unique possibility to become aware of oneself, to scrutinize and understand one’s own culture”[9].

Future managers’ personal development which includes the development of interpersonal skills and communication competency is known to be the most critical for cross-cultural cooperation and management. Their cross-cultural awareness and understanding have to be regarded as an active life-long process of learning which is due to start at the university. The process of learning viewed as a continuous cycle of experience, observation, conceptualization and experimentation (Kolb’s model) [10], the business student is meant to act creatively, independently and to think critically. Thus, it is the higher school where the learner in the field of business is to receive the tools and acquire practical skills of the continuous personal development which is impossible without cultural self-awareness.

But on this level of learning, when the student is supposed to deal with such cognitive operations like extraction of patterns from intercultural interactions, comparing intercultural experience with expectations and stereotypes, forming and refining models and applying these models to new situations, the learners placed in the traditional class-room setting lack authentic opportunities to gain this experience. The real opportunity and efficient tool to simulate this authentic context for developing the global mindset is the global informational network, the Internet which allows the learners to experience, observe and experiment with cross-cultural encounters having the world at their fingertips.

While developing any course the instructor should first determine the objectives and needs to be achieved. Making the teaching process more student-centred the teacher can no longer ignore the opinion of those who are supposed to become the essential figures of the teaching/learning process. The needs analysis carried out in the pre-project stage showed that besides common psychological needs like need for motivation and feedback, for peer evaluation

and reward, for new skills and creativity, the students express more specific requirements like need for skills for future employment, need for authentic audience and for authenticity in communication, need for real case study and for interacting with real purpose in mind, need for new challenge and for intensive intercultural practice.

Although trying to create a learner-centred course, the instructor should not take a back seat but mentor by means of supporting, challenging and providing vision to have students feel the ambiguities of cross-cultural management, to help them ride the waves of cross-cultural communication [11]. Having analyzed the educational research, businesses' needs and students' expectations we forecast the following educational outcomes of our course. Upon its successful completion a student should be able to:

1. Develop a cross-cultural orientation for working with people who may not share our basic values and assumptions.
2. Comprehend one's national brand (identity) to manage to effectively apply one's national beliefs, values and attitudes when in intercultural setting.
3. Integrate the key management functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling into a systems framework.
4. Develop a conceptual understanding for the scope of business knowledge required in order to perform successfully in the international arena.
5. Identify the core skills and competencies that lead to success in international management.
6. Demonstrate the ability to analyze a cross-cultural situation which results in an effective response.
7. Demonstrate skills in effective cross-cultural communication.

The other concept to consider here are techniques to encourage critical self-analysis. Ukraine's aspiration for imparting a new quality to the form and content of national higher education makes us approach the learning process as a means of forming a free personality for whom acquisition of critical knowledge is a background of intellectual maturity. Traditionally, higher education presupposes students' mastering of the modern social paradigm of communication within a definite field of professional activity. The students are taught the mechanics or "cook book" methods of problem solving. Development of students' critical thinking skills, however, requires a flexible and diverse environment that is able to simulate a variety of social and political forces specifying the professional activity and influencing the personal development. Economic, social and political situations, which are constantly changing in the real world, require highly-organized practical skills of critical thinking.

Having chosen student-centred and experience-based learning and integration of computers and new technologies in the processes of teaching and learning as the principles for our course development, we were well aware that a Ukrainian learner being placed in a challenging educational environment and facing unusual educational tasks will call both for motivation and encouragement and for clever well-planned guidance on the instructor's part. Stice mentions the need to emphasize the degree of immediacy, relevance and reality of a course in order to bring it to life in the minds of students [12] – a process called "guided design" by Wales and Stager [13].

The key components which the course should contain for an instructor to guide and stimulate students were emphasized by J.F. Ramsoomair [14]. The course should be relevant, immediate and real. The *relevance* pertains to the degree of utility perceived for present or future application. *Immediacy* refers to the currency of the course in terms of holding interest, and *reality* alludes to the potency of course material in meeting short and long-term needs.

The objectives of this course are to help future managers develop greater awareness and sensitivity towards the cross-cultural idiosyncrasies and issues involved in today's international business arena and to challenge the opportunities and perceived threats encountered when managing and negotiating in an increasingly complex multicultural environment.

The *immediacy* of the course was supported by improved cross-cultural communication skills: the course is designed to expand the student's understanding of common cross-cultural communication problems and to develop skills that facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication.

The *relevance* of the course supported by enhanced knowledge of specific cultures and related business practices: lectures, use of the Internet, discussions, and team projects will enable the learner to become more knowledgeable about specific cultures, as well as about business and management practices. A theoretical framework will be provided whilst drawing upon students' personal cultural experiences. Different attitudes towards time and space, information flow, decision-making and leadership are just a few of the many dimensions of culture that are discussed. Issues related to national differences encountered in management practice and how these differences are likely to impact the effectiveness of organizations and individuals alike will also be addressed. Besides, improved cross-cultural transition skills contribute to the relevance of the course: another important objective of the course is to form the student's understanding of the issues involved in working and living in a foreign culture and to use this understanding to develop strategies for successfully managing cross-cultural transitions.

The *reality* of the course is supported by increased cultural awareness to be gained by a student after the completion of the course. This course will aim to broaden and deepen the learner's understanding of what culture is and how it affects organizational and business practices. This course is designed to provide a student with some of the basic concepts and skills necessary for understanding and applying various theories and practices of management to international settings. Managerial functions are discussed in a cross-cultural setting. Emphasis is placed on the importance of cross-cultural differences and the challenges of working in a diverse work environment where people may not share the same basic values and assumptions. Throughout the course we maintain an emphasis on applying theories from organizational research to realistic and relevant problems faced by multinational organizations. It is only when a learner has experienced applying these theories to actual problems that he can readily see their strengths and weaknesses, and perhaps more importantly recognize that no single theory is appropriate for all situations.

Every course requires a certain degree of hands-on material, but any discourse about cross-cultural management would seem to demand interactive events and experiences.

The Web is recognized to be a great tool for student-centred cooperative education, for project based learning, for team teaching and training social skills such as cooperative problem solving, conflict resolution, etc., for integration of the curriculum and school-based management [15]. The Internet has become a vast storehouse and disseminator of information in addition to being a major communications instrument. Given the reach, as well as the potential of the Internet, it is surprising that universities, both in this country and in the West, have not been more active users. The trend in institutions of higher learning has long been to provide information as opposed to utilizing and interacting with it [16].

The potential of the Internet in terms of developing cross-cultural awareness is difficult to overestimate. First, students and teachers receive access to the world's largest archives, to thousands educational and research databases. Unfortunately, the studies on cross-cultural issues in Ukraine are rather scarce, to say nothing about the national textbooks in Russian or Ukrainian. The Internet sites and archives proved to be the only source for the course materials. What's more valuable is: there can be no end to the WWW document the students are reading, as they may read a related document written by another author and follow links after link to browse around WWW documents in different parts of the world.

Secondly, the WWW provides opportunities to simulate production and business environment for training purposes, to virtually cross the boundaries to communicate and exchange experience. Besides rapid E-mail exchange, one of the promising aspects is the Internet Relay Chat (IRC), often referred to as the citizens' band radio of the Internet, which is a talk program which allows a two-way real time conversation to be carried out between computers.

The IRC extends this notion to allow multi-user capability [17]. There have been efforts to improve IRC-type software like ICQ, MSN Messenger, the Sametime, to add up video, mobile phone, sms preferences, so that it is less cumbersome than the traditional and allows the people from different parts of the world to communicate real time on-line.

To ensure fast intra-class communication we made a class e-mail directory and encouraged students to practice by sending e-mail messages to each other, to find foreign keypals (e-mail penpals). The ultimate purpose was to use international e-mail exchange in class projects. Besides, the nature of the project encouraged students to send e-mail feedback as they surf the net as most pages have an address to which viewers can send questions and comments. An invaluable source of information and tool to practice cross-cultural skills are specialized discussion lists. Students used various forums to seek out mentors from the area in which they were interested, and soon groups of students had advisors from disparate parts of the world who shared their authentic intercultural experience.

In addition to the range of communication software available, computer technology has also been shown to increase learner motivation: the interactive and multimedia capabilities of the computer make it an attractive teaching/learning tool. Computers can provide immediate feedback to students and students can interact at an individualized pace. Software can be designed to include sound, graphics, video, and animation. Moreover, information is presented in a non-linear sequence through the use of hyperlinks whereby clicking on a textual or graphic link transports you directly to a different page in a different virtual space enabling learners to simulate the reality and making the Internet the major component of the course's immediacy.

This immediacy has been also supported by creating a course web-site (<http://www.geocities.com/nutodorova/>), which was aimed at becoming an interactive teaching/learning tool going beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. On the one hand, this is a way for the teacher to organize the information flow on the subject and guide the students' learning activity under conditions when the students are deprived of the sufficient number of textbooks and published reading materials. The instructor's home page is multifunctional. It should be clear and easy to follow. Related to classroom management, it would have course schedules, posting on course requirements, student/teacher evaluation forms, everything which would normally be distributed in handout form. It may also serve as an example for students to follow in designing their own team project pages.

On the other hand, this is the way for the students to share their ideas and/or the results of their research and class work with the world. There are a variety of different possibilities and formats. For example, we published pieces of student writing on cross-cultural issues, had students take photographs and write captions, and even placed the advertising of the students' team projects that gave recommendations on cross-cultural matters to foreign businessmen intending to do business with Ukraine. Among other factors the instructor had to take into account while integrating a class web page project in the course 'cross-cultural management' were the following:

1. Deciding on the size of working groups and the division of labour. Will students work individually, in small groups, or as a class? Will students learn to use html to do the layout of the pages themselves, or will you be doing the actual coding yourself?
2. Deciding on the themes of the research related to the content of the course and students' professional interests. A class web site was used to present Internet-based research and the results of more traditional class assignments.
3. Deciding on a target audience. Will the pages be for other university students? For people who are interested in Ukrainian or other business cultures?
4. Looking for related pages on the WWW that might be necessary links for the course content.
5. Having students browse the WWW focusing on page layout. Have students think about the following questions: What makes a page interesting and easy to read? What is a good ratio of pictures to text? How long does it take for the graphics to load?

6. Having students look at sites made by other students for ideas about themes and layout.

The group project page is an advertisement of services the team is ready to provide foreign businessmen in cross-cultural cooperation with Ukraine. It entails students in working together to create a project and produce a commercial home page with service description and all the things you would expect to find in a real commercial home page. What is required of each group project are not just visual items, but written text providing descriptions and general things related to their topic, perhaps an exaggeration of what would be expected in a real commercial home page.

Thus, the Internet in its different forms was cropping up across dimensions in the planning of the course, and its potential to enhance learning appeared to be powerful.

As we aimed at integrating the Internet resources into the course we started the classes by dealing with such topics as:

- understanding Gopher, Usenet and the World Wide Web
- harnessing search engines for reference, for example Excite at <<http://www.excite.com/> and Yahoo at <<http://www.yahoo.com/> and helping students learn to pick search terms effectively
- understanding conference lines; using conference lines for planned visits.

Because so much of the relevant material on the Internet is in English, even non-directed activity such as "surfing" the World Wide Web can involve a great deal of reading in English, and it can be a pleasurable, yet effective, way of introducing students to the basic functions of the browser such as the Forward and Back buttons, the Jump function and bookmarks. As we couldn't afford to spend every class period letting students surf, by giving them a good start, we encouraged them to continue outside of class.

Although our students seem to be computer literate, for a novice with limited English and computer skills surfing can often be more frustrating than fun. There are several things, however, that the instructor can do to reduce the level of frustration and help your students' first experiences go smoothly. On the course website we put together a list of "starting links" for students who are new to the Internet so they connect directly to interesting sites without having to search first. The links were made as direct as possible, so that students see relevant information right away without having to choose from a long list of options.

Once students have a basic understanding of the Internet, they can begin to use it to actively learn about things they are interested in and to work on assignments for our class and other classes.

We divided the course content into two modules, each followed by a module exam. The course plan covered the topics shown below:

Weeks 1-9 Module I. The Impact of Culture on Doing Business Internationally

- What is Culture? Cultural orientation. Different layers of culture.
- 'Culture Shock': Symptoms & Consequences. Culture Triangle.
- Defining Cross-Cultural Value Orientations, Attitudes and Stereotypes
- Behaviour. Cultural diversity A Cross-Cultural Look at Values and Job Satisfaction. Job Attitudes and Consistency. Cognitive dissonance theory
- Communication across Cultures.
- Cross-Cultural Misperception, Misinterpretation, Misevaluation
- When national vs. organisational differences collide. Ethnocentrism: Impact & Consequences
- Cultural Synergy and Problem Solving. Strategies for Recognizing Culture

Weeks 10-17 Module II. Management Challenges in a Multi-cultural Environment

- Influence of Cultural Differences on Organizations
- Cultural differences of managerial styles
- Dimensions of work-related attitudes. Variations of Work Behaviors Across Cultures
- Leadership Theories: Cultural Contingency. Leadership Styles

- Multicultural Teams in Organizations. Leveraging diversity through multicultural teams
- Cultural Dimensions of Motivation. Empowerment: Cross-cultural conflicts in hierarchies & decision-making Approaches to managing cross-cultural conflicts
- Communication & Negotiation: Developing cultural empathy. International negotiators. Negotiation Context. Negotiation Process: Cultural synergy
- Cross-cultural Meetings

Week 18 Team projects presentation

The topics were to be supplemented by readings from the texts of the lectures available on the course web-site, as well as supplementary materials from journals and web-publications, experiential exercises, appropriate videotapes and case analysis. Each session would also incorporate an Internet segment, in which students would report of his/her cyberspace activities.

The group country project encompassed an in-depth study of the culture and business practices of a country in which they were interested in order to recommend the businessmen from this country how to overcome possible cultural barriers when doing business with Ukrainians. By means of the Internet facilities the teams managed to find mentors – from Tunisia, Israel, Australia, and the UK. The degree of participation was overwhelming, enthusiastic and gratifying. In raising issues and actively participating, not only were students deepening their knowledge of the topic but, more fundamentally, they were afforded the opportunity to see cross-cultural communication in action. Besides, they learnt to create a web-page presentation of their team project for the results of their work to be seen by the public.

Our first experience in designing the course “cross-cultural management” with the extensive integration of the Internet was met with vigorous support by the students yet it also showed the potential to be further applied in improving the content and form of the course design. The country project should imply establishing and maintaining a relationship with at least one business expert from the country under study. The multiline conferencing in real time via the Internet is indispensable and invaluable in this regard. Students may make appointments with their mentors, telnet to the site (telnet mach1.wlu.ca), and conduct their discussions in the main discussion room, or go to private rooms and secure the channels, so prohibiting general access. The meetings on the talker will simulate, as realistically as possible, actual physical meetings with the experts around the world.

The global perspective of any teaching/learning process is increasingly evident in our shrinking world. The assignments which were traditionally handed out to students are useful from the point of view of having learners delve deeply into root causes of problems and issues. Yet, such assignments are often like a static imprint of reality. In the context of cross-cultural training, there is need for a greater degree of dynamism from the perspective of reality, immediacy and relevance. The thinking process in cross-cultural education can be optimized only by providing students with the opportunity to practice. In this regard, the Internet communication facilities proved to be the effective means of mastering and simulating the reality the significance of which should not be underestimated.

The training methodology described in this paper is just one of the attempts to develop tertiary students’ cultural sensitivity by exposing them to the opportunity to comprehend their national belief structure, national heritage, cultural homogeneity and ethnocentrism as the components of their national identity. The latter is vital to be able to approach and understand other cultures and to be prepared to international assignments. Being culturally sensitive does not mean to know the rules of etiquette, i.e. to be able to interpret the so-called front-stage behaviour. The modern constantly changing international environment calls for professionals to be able to see beyond the ‘culture iceberg’ and to react flexibly and adequately in a number of unpredictable and unconventional situations. Cross-cultural training calls essentially for a move from ethnocentrism to cultural relativity, which can hardly occur without authentic encounters with

another culture. The Internet and the attendant features are powerfully poised to help bring about the paradigmatic shift that is necessary to understand the ins and outs of cultural difference.

## **РОЗВИТОК МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ СПРИЙНЯТЛИВОСТІ ДЛЯ УСПІШНОЇ МІЖНАРОДНОЇ КАР'ЄРИ**

*Н.Ю.Тодорова*

Стаття піднімає питання про необхідність розвитку міжкультурної сприйнятливості студентів вузів, що навчаються за фахом «міжнародний бізнес» й «міжнародні відносини». Визначені особливості, завдання й структура курсу «міжкультурний менеджмент» з інтенсивним використанням мережі Інтернет і веб-технологій для моделювання автентичного контексту навчання з метою формування національної культурної самосвідомості в умовах глобалізації й інформаційного суспільства.

## **РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ ВОСПРИИМЧИВОСТИ ДЛЯ УСПЕШНОЙ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ КАРЬЕРЫ**

*Н.Ю.Тодорова*

Статья поднимает вопрос о необходимости развития межкультурной восприимчивости у студентов вузов специальностей «международный бизнес» и «международные отношения». Определены особенности, задачи и структура курса «межкультурный менеджмент» с интенсивным использованием сети Интернет и веб-технологий для моделирования аутентичного контекста обучения с целью формирования национального культурного самосознания в условиях глобализации и информационного общества.

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