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Improving satisfaction and performance of diverse teams at an international university

- Presentation 30 mins -

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Abstract

Teams are important at Jacobs University Bremen and tend to be highly diverse. Members from student, staff and faculty groups are represented on many university-wide committees to maximize representativeness, the flow of information, creativity and efficiency throughout the institution. Due to the fact that the Jacobs community encompasses over 95 different nations, with a majority of internationals among the student body, the intercultural factor further diversifies the teams by supplementing the age, gender and interest group differences. Within this multicultural community, diverse teams are both a challenge and a great opportunity for generating synergies. To minimize the potential problems in communication, acculturation stress and feelings of exclusion, an Intercultural Need Assessment was conducted to explore problem areas as well as the benefits of diverse teams. Spanning over two years, the Intercultural Need Assessment was conducted on a qualitative level through interviews with representatives of all groups on campus (i.e. undergraduate and graduate students, staff, alumni, faculty and host families) as well as a quantitative level with an online survey for all members of the community. Questions explored satisfaction levels related to academic and social life of students and alumni, as well as satisfaction with work environment and social life for faculty, staff and host families. Results pinpointed several factors related to satisfaction and performance, particularly the level of acculturation stress, differences in classroom culture, perceived intercultural competence and perceived level of inclusion. In a next step, interventions targeted at these factors and tailored to the specific groups, such as intercultural trainings, handbooks, website creation and workshops, have been designed and implemented by an internal diversity task force team. These measures are meant to help increase overall satisfaction of individuals at the university and more specifically to heighten performance of diverse teams and groups on campus by expanding internal cross-cultural support services and applying diversity management strategies.

Learning outcomes for participants

- Participants will learn how the Intercultural Need Assessment was conducted at Jacobs University and how to design such a survey for best results when working within a diverse organization.
- Participants will learn how to connect interventions to the results from the Need Assessment and what benefits have been shown even in the initial stages.
- Participants will be able to see how satisfaction measures are related to better results and lower turn-over rates.
- Participants will be able to recognize the importance and influence that various factors such as acculturation stress and inclusion have on satisfaction.

Profile

After graduating with a Masters of Arts in Intercultural Humanities at Jacobs University Bremen and also holding a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Boston College in the USA, Alexis Rossi joined Jacobs University as the Diversity Manager and Interculturalist for Campus Activities and Intercultural Affairs in 2008. Alexis is currently pursuing her PhD in association with Loughborough University in the UK. With broad experience in designing and implementing intercultural training programs and diversity initiatives for businesses and universities, she is a seasoned intercultural trainer, teacher and cross-cultural researcher. Alexis has lived in the US, Italy and Germany.