Identity Construction in the Workplace: *Insights from an International Project*

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Focus

Identity in collaborative workplace projects

Key Features

- Task-focused
- Project members who may not know each other (well) initially
- Limited timeframe and budget
- Stakeholders who want value for money achievements/outputs

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Overview

- Introduction: Conceptualising Identity
- Case study: the eChina-UK Programme
- Constructing Identities: Case study examples
- Reflections on Identities in the Workplace
- [Global People resources for Intercultural Effectiveness]

Introduction: Conceptualising Identity

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Definitions of Identity (1)

"Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)."

Jenkins 2004: 5

Definitions of Identity (2)

"... the verb 'to identify' is a necessary accompaniment of identity. There is something active about identity that cannot be ignored: it isn't 'just there', it's not a 'thing', it must *always* be established."

Jenkins 2004: 4

Definitions of Identity (3)

"We define identity as a performative act, realized when people expose who they are at each moment in specific social interactions (...). We also see it as a negotiated process of exposure and interpretation of social positions, affiliations, roles, status, and other social categories."

Bastos and de Oliveira 2006: 189

Definitions of Identity (4)

Key Elements

- We need to interpret and grow in our understanding of our own and others' identities;
- This entails learning:
  - disclosure and enquiry
  - negotiation, reflection and change

Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

Self-Aspect Model of Identity (SAMI)

Making sense of who we are ...

- People engage in self-interpretation
- Self-interpretation involves a range of self-aspects

Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

What are Self-Aspects? (1)

Cognitive concepts that serve to process & organise information & knowledge about self:

- Personality traits (e.g. Shy)
- Abilities (e.g. Poor dancer)
- Physical features (e.g. Curly hair, slim)
- Behavioural characteristics (e.g. Usually gets up early)
- Ideologies (e.g. Christian, democrat)

Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

What are Self-Aspects? (2)

Cognitive concepts that serve to process & organise information & knowledge about self:

- Social roles (e.g. Project manager)
- Language affiliations (e.g. English, Chinese)
- Group memberships (e.g. Female, British, academic, Christian)

Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

What are Self-Aspects? (3)

- Self-aspects are *both cognitive and social*. Constructed as cognitive representations of self, but emerge from social interaction with others and so are also social.
- Self-aspects are typically interpreted relative to others/the social context, and hence are not absolute features.
- People conceptualise themselves in terms of *multiple self-aspects.*

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Self-Aspects & Evaluative Judgements

Criteria	Judgements
Valence	Negative ←→ Neutral ← → Positive
Centrality	Core ← → Peripheral
Currency	Past ← → Present ← → Future
Actuality	Actual ← → Ideal

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Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

Dual Perspective on Self-Aspects

- *Individual (cf. Personal) Identity*

Self-interpretation based on a complex configuration of self-aspects

- *Collective (cf. Group or Social) Identity*

Self-interpretation focused on a socially shared self-aspect

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Simon's (2004) SAMI Approach

Dual Perspective on Self-Aspects

Same self-aspect can be experienced in different ways in different contexts:

- as individual attribute
- as collective attribute

e.g. overweight

An Interactional Approach

Triple Perspective on Self-Aspects

- Brewer and Gardner (1996)
- Hecht (1993), Hecht et al. (2005)
- Spencer-Oatey (2007)
- Zimmerman (1998)

➢ *Individual Identities*

➢ *Group Identities*

➢ *Interactional Identities* (labelled *Relational Identities* in Spencer-Oatey 2007)

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An Interactional Approach

Interactional Identities (1)

- **Discourse Identities** (Zimmerman 1998)

Integral to the moment-by-moment interaction, & can shift turn by turn. E.g. Current speaker, listener, questioner, answerer, repair initiator etc.

An Interactional Approach

Interactional Identities (2)

- **Role Identities** (cf. Zimmerman's 1998 *Situated identities)*

Associated with the interactional roles we play at work or in a communicative event; e.g. teacher in a class, project manager in a meeting, mother at the family dinner table.

[This builds on Identity Theory (e.g. Stryker) which has focused on role identities. Cf. Social Identity Theory (e.g. Tajfel) which has focused on category-based identities.]

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Case Study:
The eChina-UK Programme

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eChina-UK Programme

- Set of Sino-British collaborative projects on eLearning in education
- Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (£4 million) & supported by Chinese Ministry of Education
- Involved British and Chinese universities working in partnership
- 4 initial projects, 3 follow-up projects, with each project having core team of about 16 to 35

Key Parties in the Programme

Stakeholders:

- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE)

Partnered Universities ("Arranged Marriages"):

- Cambridge University – Tsinghua University
- Nottingham University – Beijing Normal University & Beijing Foreign Studies University
- WUN – Beijing Normal University

Project Members:

- British team members – Chinese team members
- Academic members – Technical members

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Key Aims of the Programme

1. Strengthen collaboration between China and the UK by sharing experience in the use of ICT;
2. Support HE staff in developing their competence in the use of internet-based learning and teaching;
3. Develop & pilot innovative online teacher training courses for teachers at secondary and tertiary levels;
4. Disseminate generic insights on a range of issues, including perspectives on pedagogy and the benefits & challenges of working interculturally;
5. Inform the development of national policy on e-learning in HE in both countries.

i.e. **Collaboration → Learning → Impact**

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Identities and eChina-UK

Recalling our definitions:

"Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)." Jenkins 2004: 5

"We define identity as a performative act ... a negotiated process of exposure and interpretation of social positions, affiliations, roles, status, and other social categories."

Bastos and de Oliveira 2006: 189

Identities and eChina-UK

The Process of Identity Construction in International Projects

3 key elements:

- Learning – about self and others
- Disclosure about self and Enquiry about others
- Negotiation, Reflection and Change

Constructing Identities: Learning about Self & Other

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Identities and eChina-UK

Learning through Collaboration

Learning about our Partners:

- Individual attributes (e.g. German speaking, from Inner Mongolia)
- Pedagogic beliefs and practises

Learning about our Roles:

- Within e-learning team (e.g. Academic – Technical)
- Within Sino-UK collaborative partnership

Learning about Ourselves:

- Competencies in relation to e-learning

Learning about Identities: Roles

Email from UK Programme Manager to HEFCE: (Confusion about own role)

I feel [name of another person]'s role is ambiguous. She is identified as the Chinese Programme Manager (main point of contact), as well as a member of the Programme Management Group. My role (and hers, as counterpart) is referred to variously as 'Programme Co-ordinator', 'Programme Manager', 'Project Manager' and 'Budget Manager', and it's unclear how much 'power' is associated with the role or what the responsibilities are.

Learning about Identities: Roles

Email from UK Programme Manager to HEFCE (contd.)

It seems that [name](perhaps because of her position in MoE) is according herself more power than the management framework in fact does. So for our sanity, as well as task/goal achievement, the responsibilities of our two roles need to be clarified.

(And I myself feel in urgent need that my role be clarified!)

Learning about Identities: Roles

Interview Comment: (Confusion about own role)

Ch20 *I am not sure about my role because of the unclear division of responsibilities in the whole project. Nominally, I was in charge of technical affairs, but I was confused to which extent I was supposed to do. Since this project was related to distance education, I was supposed to restrict my role in the field of educational technology, using multi media to assist the delivery of learning materials. This role, however, have not been stressed by my school administrators all through the project.*

Learning about Identities: Roles

Interview Comment: (Confusion about others' roles)

Ch17 *… we didn't know clearly about their team and how they divided the tasks and responsibilities among themselves. I had no idea what the two colleagues that I usually contacted with were actually doing.*

R *Didn't you visit the UK last time? Haven't you ask them about it?*

Ch17 *It was such chaos last time. There were so many people working together with us that we were confused who was who and who was doing what.*

Constructing Identities: Disclosure & Enquiry

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Constructing Identities: Disclosure and Enquiry

Initial Encounter Meeting Extract: (Too much disclosure & too little enquiry)

Researcher: *Shall we get straight to business? There were 3 main elements to the research proposal and what I'd like us to do today is to get as far as we can with an action plan on those 3 elements.* [Monologue for 12 minutes]

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Constructing Identities: Disclosure and Enquiry

Initial Encounter Meeting Extract: (Too much disclosure & too little enquiry) [contd.]

Programme Manager: *I think we need to step back a bit because we're getting quite detailed. [Chinese name] needs a more overall picture, and maybe something about your background.*

Researcher: *Am I losing you?*

Chinese Visitor/Researcher: *Well to me it's a bit too detailed, can you give me an overall picture?*

Researcher: [Another very long monologue – more than 20 minutes]

Constructing Identities: Disclosure and Enquiry

Initial Encounter Meeting Extract: (Opportunity for mutual sharing)

Chair: *This afternoon is a chance for us really to explore the research issues, tell each other what we're doing, tell each other what we hope to achieve, what we're aspiring to, and it would be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning, if that was of interest to you.*

Constructing Identities: Disclosure and Enquiry

Disclosing Email from Chinese Project Manager

Chinese 02: *Sending mass emails is a good way. But when we send such emails, it will infringe Chinese principles. If I send such an email to a person in a higher position, s/he will feel offended. Nowadays we send various materials by email, but Chinese are special, superiors will feel particularly insulted. …*

Sending emails to superiors is not a good way, because it shows no regard for status differences between people. Some superiors dislike equality, so the best way to communicate with them is to submit a report, either in written or oral form.

Constructing Identities: Negotiation, Reflection and Change

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Negotiating Identities

Language Choice and Power

Chinese 21: *The working language was English. Due to the language problems, when we couldn't express ourselves clearly, it seemed that we were disadvantaged.*

Negotiating Identities

Style of Interaction and Power

Chinese 06: *The UK colleagues are more likely to raise issues directly. Their logic is that issues should be raised first, then they'll try their best to find solutions. … Sometimes the UK project manager sent some suggestions to us. When we got the suggestion, we usually got nervous and wondered 'must we do it immediately?' or 'are they commanding us to do this?' But working together with them for a while I gradually realised that I could voice my opinions too and take time to think. It wasn't a problem.*

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Negotiating & Developing Identities

Interview Comment

Chinese 05: *It has opened up a window for me and I have got to know a group of people.*

Negotiating & Developing Identities

Interview Comment

Chinese 03: *Challenges and benefits co-exist. If you can surmount a challenge you will get benefit from it. …we stayed over one month there and got to know about it gradually. It has a great impact on us. We have developed deep understanding about their culture, the way they get on with others, education in their country, and the implementation of online learning, etc. These are all new to me.*

Reflection on Identities and the Workplace

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Identities and the Workplace

Reflections (1)

- All identity perspectives (individual, interactional and group) are important in the workplace.
- People's role identities are particularly important in workplaces.
- People's group identities are particularly important in cross-sector or international projects.

Identities and the Workplace

Reflections (2)

- To work effectively, we need to grow in understanding of ourselves and our colleagues.
- Project managers need to help manage opportunities for this, e.g. by building in time for sharing and reflection.

Global People Resources

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Global People Resources

http://www.globalpeople.org.uk/

- Landscaping study of research on working across cultures
- Life cycle model of intercultural partnerships
- Competency framework
- Learning process model

The Competency Framework

- Intercultural collaborations are a delicate balancing acts

- Our Competency Framework was developed to help raise awareness of competencies that facilitate intercultural work

The Competency Framework

- Identifies four competency clusters
  - Knowledge and Ideas
  - Communication
  - Relationships
  - Personal Qualities and Dispositions
- Explains each competency and discusses why it is important for intercultural effectiveness
- Illustrates each competency with a case study example from the eChina-UK Programme (some of them supported by audio clips)

Case Study Example: Language Adjustment at the start of a meeting

Adjusting one's use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) is vital for effective communication; however, it is sometimes easier said than done. Consider the following interaction that took place at one of our meetings:

Chair:	*[…] I'm going to ask everybody to speak very clearly and uh without heavy accents if possible*
Everyone:	*Laughter [as the Chair speaks with a Scottish accent]*
Chair:	*and we may take some pauses just to make sure everybody uhm uh is keeping up with the conversation cause we can sometimes each of us speak very quickly when we get excited. Uh this afternoon is a chance for us really to explore the research issues ## tell each other what we're doing ## tell each other what we hope to achieve what we're aspiring to ### and it would be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning ## if that was of interest to you ##### so what I I'd like to do is I think it would be very helpful for one of our colleagues to volunteer to <as we say in Scotland: start the ball rolling cause we really love football>. Uh I think I think it would be fair to ask one of our colleagues to start the ball rolling and (name of British colleague) if you would like to kick off for us.*

This excerpt demonstrates a number of adjustment practices. The Chair clearly shows a high level of awareness of this competency, by asking participants to speak clearly, to avoid accents, to avoid fast speech and to pause regularly in order to ensure that all participants have the chance to follow the conversation. The Chair then goes on to put her insights into practice, speaking slowly and clearly, by pausing regularly (signalled by #) and trying to avoid the use of a heavy Scottish accent. However, only seconds later she speeds up (signalled by < >), falls into a heavy Scottish accent, uses an idiomatic expression ('to start the ball rolling') which leaves all but one of the Chinese participants with blank faces, and then goes on to repeat the idiom and to use complex vocabulary ('kick off'), which is unlikely to be understood and could easily have been replaced by a more simple word, such as 'start' or 'begin'.

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Learning Process Model:
Active learning runs through the process

Learning Process Model

- Highlights the importance of active learning in developing intercultural competence.
- Encourages project leaders to build knowledge-sharing and reflection into the project plan.
- Provides a simple 3-phase model to identify the core learning process.
- Provides examples of how to embed learning into the partnership experience.

Acquisition-Awareness-Embedding

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The Global People Landscaping Study
Intercultural Effectiveness in Global Education Partnerships
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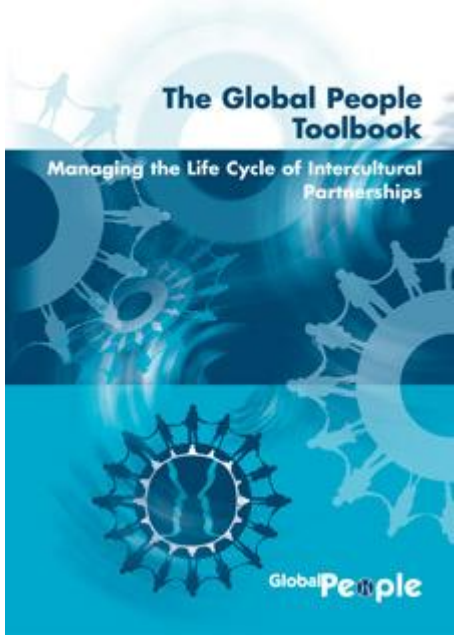
The Global People Toolbook
Managing the Life Cycle of Intercultural Partnerships
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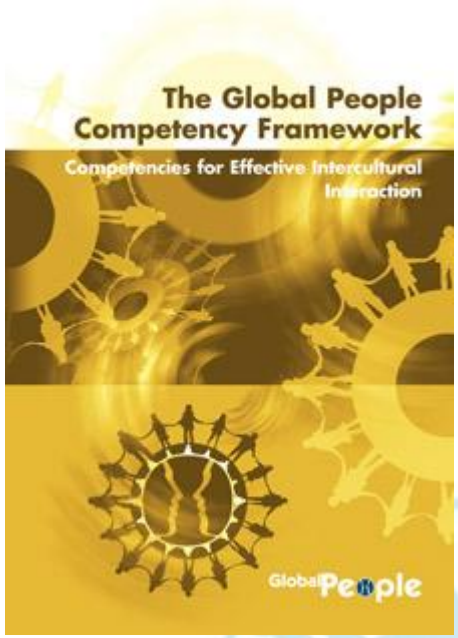
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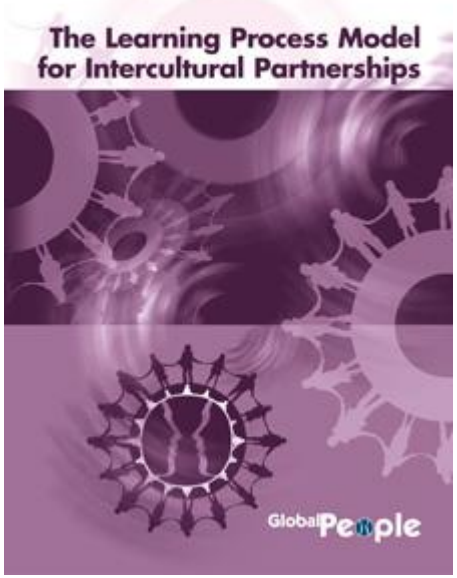
The Learning Process Model for Intercultural Partnerships
GlobalPeople

The Learning Process in Intercultural Collaboration
Evidence from the eChina-UK Programme
GlobalPeople

Sino-British Interaction in Professional Contexts
GlobalPeople

Thank you

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