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Talking Culture

Discursive Constructions of 'Culture' in a Corporate Context

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Talking Culture: Discursive Constructions of 'Culture' in a Corporate Context
When Danish businesses move production abroad, 'culture' is often seen as a huge challenge to the successful outcome of cross-border collaboration. Therefore, business leaders often seek information and guidelines of how to cope in the vast amount of literature on culture and intercultural communication. Much of this literature is based on functionalist approaches providing the dos and don'ts of intercultural encounters. This involves inter alia conceptualising 'culture' as a relatively fixed, homogeneous entity of values, attitudes and norms shared by members of a group, often leading readers to adopt dichotomised understandings and discourses about other cultures (see e.g. Hofstede 2001; Jandt 1998; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997). However, experience shows that the world in which intercultural encounters take place is not as simple and easy to categorise as these approaches may suggest, and therefore other approaches are needed to help actors manage and talk about the complexity and dynamism often experienced in intercultural encounters (Askehave & Norlyk 2006; Plum 2007; Zhu 2005). Taking the above as my starting point, I will present a case study of a Danish cross-border company and its employees' discourses on culture and intercultural collaboration, demonstrating that even within one, relatively small, group of people (the company), many different discourses and understandings of culture and intercultural collaboration may exist, making functionalist approaches seem little useful beyond the initial and preparatory stages of cross-border engagement and instead calling for other ways of dealing with diversity, and not difference, in day-to-day collaboration.

References
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