

Cultural Diversity in Multinational Corporations

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Driven by economic rationale, cultural diversity has become a major asset for multinational corporations (MNCs). Having won the “head-to-head” race against Japan in the early 1990s, America promoted the ideal of open, multicultural economies. As a consequence, the Japanese ideal of a homogeneous society and economy, that dominated in the 1980s, completely lost its attractiveness.

In about 2008, the so called “Diversity Charter” was introduced in several European countries. Public and private organizations committed themselves to promoting diversity, to assert and facilitate the incorporation of a diversity policy into the organization’s general strategy thereby creating equal opportunities for employees regardless of gender, ethnic identity, religion, etc.

In most MNCs, at least in western countries, cultural diversity is considered an invaluable resource. But there is still a hinderance: the “colonialist character” of MNCs does not allow to effectively exploit cultural diversity. Therefore, companies need to strive for structural renewal and become a “globally integrated enterprise” where talents are promoted regardless of region, cultural or religious identity, gender, etc., and where employees, at least the managers, are expected to be global-minded. Quick to follow their new message, MNCs aptly use the rhetoric of cultural diversity and stage-manage the success stories of their global-minded staff. Behind the shiny facades that are suggestive of a cosmopolitan, global-minded, interculturally competent policy and praxis, reality does not quite look as promising. Commenting on some case studies on Japanese-German collaboration in MNCs, I will point out how ethnocentric attitudes and work habits despite all the globalist rhetorics are rather the rule than the exception in the daily routines in MNCs.

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