

Generic programmes offer limited benefits for international businesses compared to specific cross-cultural courses

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Programmes specifically designed to educate students to succeed in intercultural teams offer significant benefits compared to more generic courses, new research from Trinity Business School has found.

According to the study, undertaken by Dr Eimear Nolan, Assistant Professor of International Business and Director of the Flexible Executive MBA at Trinity Business School, alongside researchers from the Surrey School of Business at the University of Surrey and The Open University, courses with a specific cross-cultural design offer significant benefits and lead to increased intercultural interaction.

Generic programmes, meanwhile, offer limited benefits when compared to those specifically designed to prepare student for a more internationalised business environment.

The study analysed how 263 students learned within two culturally diverse post-graduate management courses – one, a more generalised programme that educated students around Organisational Behaviour, and the other, designed with a focus on enhancing students' cultural interaction and awareness.

The researchers compared results from each course using qualitative findings to measure the impact of the programmes.

They found that, while those studying on a generic programme appreciated the opportunity to engage with other learners within the classroom, the content on offer did not necessarily improve cross-national learning relations.

The results, however, derived from the course designed specifically to bolster intercultural interaction contrast significantly, as students expressed an overwhelming willingness to work with one another, citing a feeling of safety to do so.

Dr Eimear Nolan, Assistant Professor of International Business and Director of the Flexible Executive MBA at Trinity Business School and co-author of the research, says:

“In undertaking the study, students from each course were interviewed about experiences. We found that, in the case of the course with specific cross-cultural design, every single interviewee indicated that, courtesy of the internationalised activities and content, cross-cultural collaboration with facilitated.”

Reflecting on the implications of the study, Nolan adds:

“This research offers clear evidence of the need for educators to consider the importance learning relationships in intercultural and multi-disciplinary environments. As workforces continue to become more

global, the need for professionals that can succeed in such environments will only grow.”

The paper, Encouraging Intercultural Interaction by Cultural Specific Learning Design, was published in The Journal of Studies in International Education, and can be accessed here (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10283153221145083>.)

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