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SUSTAINABILITY PEDAGOGIES FOR THE BUSINESS LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT

Heightened urgency about the question of the earth's survival has generated increased attention to how to teach sustainability across the curriculum. The business language course, positioned at the nexus of business and the humanities, is the ideal environment for bringing to bear perspectives from multiple disciplines on questions around sustainability. This article examines the notion of "sustainability pedagogies" framed within three key aspects of sustainability education noted in the scholarship: interdisciplinarity, transformative learning, and experiential learning. In each of these areas, we provide an example of how the sustainability pedagogies can be implemented in business language courses.

KEYWORDS: Business language cases, experiential learning, green business, German, interdisciplinary approaches, service-learning, sustainability education, transformative learning

INTRODUCTION

To teach or not to teach sustainability? Few educators continue to ponder this question, as scholars have argued convincingly that it is crucial to bring the topic of earth's survival into the educational context. Corcoran (2010) identifies sustainability as the "narrative of our time" noting that "[a]round the world, we see the earnest and critical work of students, scholars and administrators embedding sustainability across the higher education curriculum" (p. xiii). Indeed, by the mid 1990s environmentalism had gained enormous attention and "hundreds of courses and programs [had] been established in schools of engineering, law, natural sciences, liberal arts, and social sciences" (Shrivastava, 1994, p. 236). Today, universities and colleges across the US and internationally have developed sustainability studies majors and minors. Such programs begin to fulfill the vision of higher education institutions seeing themselves "as the most vital links and agents in promoting and advocating sustainability and in making education for sustainability and sustainability education part of their cultures" (McFarlane & Ogazon, 2011, p. 104).

In the field of foreign languages and cultures, there is a noted increased interest in sustainability. In 2013, the German pedagogy journal *Unterrichtspraxis* put out a special issue focused on “Sustainability and the Environment: ‘Green’ Approaches to Teaching German Language and Culture.” Cross-language journals such as *Foreign Language Annals* and *Global Business Languages* have published sustainability-related articles. There is likewise evidence that topics related to sustainability are very much on students’ radar. A recent survey of primarily business students showed that three-quarters of respondents “would enroll in green business courses if offered” (Silverblatt, Bates, & Kleban, 2012, p. 24). In their survey of past and potential business German students at Texas Tech University, Borst and Schenck (2007) reported that students who had not yet taken the business language course suggested “green development” and “environmental problems” as focal topics for such a class (p. 9).

Given all of this attention and interest, we may conclude that the appropriate question is no longer *whether* to teach sustainability, but rather *how best to approach teaching it*. In this article, we explore sustainability education and the notion of “sustainability pedagogies” and discuss their particular applicability within the field of business language teaching. We begin by defining sustainability as well as sustainability education and describing the framework of our presentation of specific sustainability pedagogies for the business language context.

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION: KEY ASPECTS AND POTENTIAL PEDAGOGIES

“Sustainability” is a term increasingly uttered by the media, local and national governments, in business ads, and even in informal conversation, yet few give much thought to its true complexity. While it is true that particularly in today’s interconnected world, “[e]nvironmental processes and problems thwart national boundaries and demand international solutions” (Matthews, 2011, p. 264), scholars examining *sustainability* and sustainable development point to a much broader spectrum of topics subsumed under the concept beyond environmental concerns. Jones, Selby, and Sterling (2010) propose a definition of sustainability as “a condition or set of conditions whereby human and natural systems can continue indefinitely in a state of mutual well-being, security and survival” (p. 19). Their definition stresses that our survival is contingent upon not only ecological but also social and economic factors and, arguably, action (Sterling, 2001).

Considering the global nature of sustainability, it comes as no surprise that it was an international organization, the United Nations, that called for increased attention to this issue in the realm of education. The UN declared 2005 to 2014 the “Decade for Education for Sustainable Development” with the aim of encouraging all countries to address sustainability at all levels of the educational system, e.g., by “including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption” (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Association, n.d., p. 1). The UN call for revisioning, rethinking, and refocusing education for sustainable development inspired curricular and methodological innovation, and scholarship. In this scholarship, three key aspects of sustainability education come to the fore, namely, *interdisciplinarity*, *experiential learning*, and *transformative learning*. In the next sections, we examine these aspects in detail, noting how sustainability scholars characterize them in their work, and we highlight the connection to the teaching of business languages and cultures. For the discussion of specific sustainability pedagogies, we draw especially on the work of Cotton & Winter (2010), who claim there is “a wide range of suggestions for appropriate approaches to teaching about sustainability and also for specific teaching methods” (p. 45) yet manage to narrow these down to a shorter list (see Appendix 1) based on results of a survey of higher education teachers from various disciplines (Cotton, Warren, Maiboroda, & Bailey, 2007). Though certainly not definitive in number or scope, these methods provide a good starting point for exploring several specific examples for business language teaching.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Because of the increasing complexity of the world and in our society, the typical fragmentary approach of addressing problems through the lens of a single discipline no longer seems appropriate. Individual disciplines, functioning separately and, in some sense, isolated, even if having strength through their focus and rigor, can be limited by single sets of knowledge, skills, and approaches to problems, resulting in possible deficits in both breadth and synthesis. Studying sustainability squarely from the perspective of isolated disciplines reduces the potential for understanding the full impact of the numerous interrelated aspects of sustainability.

Even a cursory glance at new sustainability education programs reveals the high level of collaboration it invites. Sustainability major and minor

requirements typically include courses from at least three fields, though precisely which disciplines are included in such programs varies from school to school. University of Houston's program provides a good example: The homepage of the Energy and Sustainability Minor states that coursework will offer perspectives from "economics and business, engineering and technology, architecture and design, and public policy and education" (see <http://www.uh.edu/uenergy/educational-programs/undergraduate/energy-sustainability-minor/>). This reflects Van Lopik's description of the "undisciplined nature" of sustainability as an area of study that "encompasses elements of many disciplines" (2013, p. 79).

The notion of interdisciplinarity lies at the very heart of business language studies, which connects the field of business to the humanities (Saint Paul, 2006), an existing "divide" that makes "less and less sense in a world that is more inclined to erase old divisions while constantly and instantly remaking itself" (Vega-Carney, 2005, p. vi). Further, McCain, Ray, and Ellsworth (1996) point out that there are fundamental common goals between business and foreign language education, focusing on cultural knowledge and communication. Thus there is an opportunity for developing a rich, interdisciplinary learning environment in the business language classroom by including exposure to multiple disciplinary content and forms of expression from business, economics, and statistics, among other fields.

SUSTAINABILITY PEDAGOGY: "STIMULUS ACTIVITIES"

The explicit integration of interdisciplinary materials into the discourse on sustainability in business language classes can be accomplished by using "stimulus activities," an approach with potential for prompting discussion as well as reflection (Cotton & Winter, 2010). For the traditional (nonbusiness) language classroom, the examination of poems, songs, and other short texts are common stimulus activities, whereas in the context of the business language classroom, the stimuli might take the shape of marketing materials (see e.g., Six, 2006). The infusion of advertisements into business language courses is a stimulus activity that can be framed as a vehicle that "exposes students to different styles of expression and offers a window into another culture" (Martin, 2012, p. 161).

In order to maximize the potential for new realizations and critical interfaces around sustainability, business language teachers can focus on charts and graphs used widely in the disciplines of economics, business, and other social sciences, which display content and use forms of delivery often less familiar to students anchored in literary and language studies. Similar to

advertisements as stimuli for teaching business language and culture, charts and graphs force students to grapple with outputs from different disciplines. At the same time, tapping into graphic visualizations of statistics shares similarities with using traditional literary texts as stimuli. Instead of analyzing words and phrases exclusively, students interpret numbers and ratios along with accompanying explanatory commentary.

The seemingly straightforward, fact-driven objectivity that charts and graphs conjure up is deceptive. In fact, one has to tread carefully when interpreting them and be mindful of any potential underlying agenda. Cotton and Winter (2010) point to the importance of developing the requisite knowledge and skills of sustainability literacy, which includes “open-mindedness and critical awareness of bias” (p. 44). They suggest questions to support students’ critical-thinking skills, such as “Where did this information and view come from?” “Who provided it?” and “How are they funded?” (Cotton & Winter, 2010, p. 44). Such questions can be used to penetrate a facade of objectivity frequently present in these quantitative visualizations.

EXAMPLE TASK: GAINING PERSPECTIVES

ON SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CHARTS AND GRAPHS

There are numerous ways of integrating charts and graphs in sustainability teaching for the business language classroom. The first step for building a series of tasks around these stimuli is the selection of information and visuals. One compelling and easily accessible source of information on sustainability matters is National Geographic’s “Consumer Greendex” (National Geographic, 2012b) which tracks individuals’ environmental impact and consumer behavior on a country-by-country level in regards to sustainable consumption, as exemplified in waste management, energy use, transportation use, and food sourcing. This international index offers indications on improvement/decline in select countries’ sustainable practices over time. Though in English, the free charts can be used as a jumping off point, followed by additional stimuli in the target language.¹

The starting point of this example task is a chart that visually depicts how Germans opt to engage in green consumption (see figure 1). It presents statistics on percentages of citizens who take environmental concerns into

¹ Teachers can find or purchase other similar charts online through organizations such as Globus (of the Deutsche Presseagentur) for German (see dpa Picture-Alliance GmbH at http://www.picture-alliance.com/index_en.htm) or opt to create their own (see Gonglewski & Helm, 2012).

account when purchasing products for daily consumption. Considerations range from buying locally grown products to boycotting firms that harm the environment. They also include personal behaviors around energy consumption. These facets of sustainability or “green” living are thought-provoking and relatable to the students, which makes for an interesting discussion.



Figure 1. German citizens' green action. DPA/LANDOV.

The overarching goals of using these graphs is to enhance students' critical thinking skills through exposure to content and forms anchored in a different discipline and to promote a multifaceted perspective on sustainability. To hone students' critical thinking in both describing and analyzing the statistical data, we recommend having students approach every chart or graph with a line of questions similar to those Cotton and Winter (2010) propose. They fall under the five categories 1. Title / topic; 2. Source / year; 3. Overview / summary; 4. Details / examples; 5. Your view / opinion. Within each category, students can progress from basic to deeper questions, e.g., for category 1, from *What general topic is presented here?* to *How well does the chart title represent the topic?* For category 2, students must research the source of the statistics to help them understand any possible bias. After crafting a summary of the chart's information, students describe it in more detail and offer examples to support these statements. For the final step, students relate the content of the chart to their own experiences and views. At this point students are already contemplating differences in green behavior and preferences between

Germany and their own US-American context: “How often do I buy organic food products?” “What about my friends?” “My parents?” thus making the information personally meaningful. Their access to economic and market-related data also enables them to substantively support their arguments and add a different, and possibly more objective, perspective to their cross-cultural knowledge (and biases) about sustainability.

A follow-up task brings in comparative statistics that highlight the differences in green consumption between Americans and Germans. From the Greendex, a comparison between Germans and Americans provides a window into these countries’ consumption patterns as pertaining to locally grown food specifically. It is interesting to note that 55% of Germans frequently consume locally grown food (National Geographic, 2012c, p. 3), whereas only 7% of Americans do (National Geographic, 2012a, p. 1). This type of data discrepancy allows students to compare and contrast as well as infer the underlying causes of the difference here. Ideally students go through the same progression of answering question as showcased above. For this specific chart, it is important to focus students’ attention on the cross-cultural comparison.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In striving for change in how people deal with the environment and with each other in order to sustain life on earth, we look to learner-centered, constructivist approaches that encourage learners to take an active role in their own learning. Characterizing education for sustainable development, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that it “requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action” (n.d., p. 1). Such methods include problem-based learning, prevalent in the natural sciences (where experiments can be set up in a lab to test effects of sustainable action or non-action), but are also possible in non-sciences through other hands-on experiences.

Experiential learning is, in fact, fundamental to business language studies, where students look for learning opportunities “approximating industry experience” (Barber & Rousseau, 2013, p. 180). Business languages are closely associated with a pragmatic mindset, application of skills, not only in terms of language proficiency, communicating effectively with other speakers of the language, but also in terms of cultural competence, functioning successfully within another culture, as tangibly demonstrated through measurable accomplishments like marketing a product, closing a sale, or landing the job.

The idea of including a practical experience component is not unusual for business language students, and this stands in contrast to many other upper level language courses.

SUSTAINABILITY PEDAGOGY: “CASE STUDIES”

Not all courses can integrate internships or onsite company visits, as these can take considerable time and connections to set up and carry out. It is, however, possible to provide students with an intensive hands-on learning experiences even within the confines of a classroom, where we can place students in situations that mimic on-the-job training or even daily problem-solving. Indeed, this is done regularly in business classes via “case studies,” a method that Cotton and Winter (2010) call a “popular choice for teaching about sustainability” by instructors who participated in their survey on teaching sustainable development (p. 47). They describe it as an approach that offers learners “a holistic view of an issue” while enabling them to work together to investigate problems and find solutions (Cotton & Winter, 2010, p. 47).

At the core of business case methodology lies the imperative to educate managers to become practical problem-solvers (Forman & Rymer, 1999). To truly understand the complexities of sustainable development students have to break boundaries, explore multiple disciplines, and ultimately form new knowledge, precisely what today’s globalized world demands of its corporate leadership (Gonglewski & Helm, 2010). A business case typically replicates an authentic business scenario that draws on issues anchored in different business disciplines such as marketing, strategy, management, accounting, and finance. When deployed productively in the classroom, cases force students to reconcile the perspectives of these business functions to propose a compelling solution to the case protagonist’s dilemma.

The business case method is well known to business language professionals who have been exploring the use and effectiveness of cases for business language teaching for many years (see, for example, Federico, 1996; Grosse, 2012; Piotrowski, 1982; Takami, 2008; Ulrich, 2000; Valdivieso, 1992). Gonglewski and Helm (2010) reported on the benefits to using cases according to students and faculty who have used them in business language courses, such as the opportunity for real-life decision-making and problem-solving, again emphasizing their participatory, experiential aspect.²

² For more on using cases for business language teaching, see the *e-Handbook on Teaching with Business Cases* <http://business.gwu.edu/about-us/research/ciber/business-languages/cases/handbook>

EXAMPLE TASK: LEARNING THROUGH A GREEN BUSINESS CASE

While case studies are available for purchase and use in classes through case providers like Harvard Business Publishing, relatively few are easily available in foreign languages, and fewer still in the so-called critical languages. Of those foreign language cases available, not many are appropriate for business language courses for a variety of reasons, such as text length. Moreover, finding prepared cases appropriate for foreign language learners that also address sustainability-related themes can be enormously challenging. In the news, however, it is possible to find reports on companies dealing with sustainability matters, and these can be transformed into case studies for use in business language courses.

A prime example of a sustainability case prepared for use in a business language course focuses on the well-known corporation IKEA's switch from wooden to cardboard pallets for the transport and storage of their self-assembled furniture (see Appendix 2). Using primarily information gleaned from online sources such as company websites and news articles, the authors composed a brief case that presents the following problem: The CEO of a furniture company is enamored with IKEA's apparently green decision to make the packing/transport materials switch and he is eager to follow their lead. The company's director of logistics, in contrast, has good reason to be skeptical about such a move, both in terms of the environmental facets and potential cost to their comparatively small firm. At the next meeting of the management team, both sides of the issue are to be presented and debated, concluding with the joint formulation of a decision recommendation to the management team.

Significant experiential learning takes place in the case task, following the reading of the case. Divided into two teams, students represent either side of the issue and prepare the arguments for or against the proposed change through careful research and hands-on investigation of relevant questions. The first team serves as assistants to the company CEO and is tasked with finding concrete evidence that the decision would be a boon to the company. Team 2 supports the logistics director by preparing contra arguments. Students must examine the question from a variety of angles, e.g., ecological, financial, marketing. Their work should also include such active and further experiential approaches as visits to local furniture company warehouses. The actual meeting that takes place in the next class session capitalizes on an additional experiential learning approach: role-plays and simulations. Students do more than simply present their arguments and evidence, they engage in formal

debate, working to convince each other. Teachers can assign two students the roles of company CEO and logistics director to both organize the teams and run the meeting. This gives these students experience as team leaders while lending an authentic feel to the meeting. As the last step in the experiential process, students can vote, independent of their team, on the final recommendation of whether the company should switch to the cardboard pallets.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

The concept of *transformative* or *transformational* learning can refer to a wide variety of experiences, yet the common denominator is the shift in perspective caused by a learning experience. The change in perspective may then lead us to want to change our community or the world we live in. In the context of sustainability education, where changes in perspective—as well as tangible change in our communities and the world—are crucial to our very survival, transformative learning plays a vital role. Learners are encouraged to explore not only content knowledge but also “to bring self, including emotion and action, into the learning process,” which can be accomplished through reflection and “reflective dialogue” (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 4), and the teachers’ role is to facilitate critical reflection and dialogue.

Transformative learning often takes place in business language courses through experiences students have using their skills in real-world settings such as service-learning projects (Pak, 2010), including virtual ones (ter Horst & Pearce, 2010), or corporate visits (Bourlatskaya, Shields, & Diaz, 2007). Vigier and Bryant (2009) advocate supporting students’ transformative learning in the business language learning context during their international experience with study or work abroad. They point out that students are often not aware of the transformation or growth they are experiencing (since these sometimes significant changes take place gradually), unless or until they are asked to reflect upon it.

SUSTAINABILITY PEDAGOGY: “REFLEXIVE ACCOUNTS”

Since both accessing and fostering transformative learning in sustainability education can take place through reflection, teaching methods that encourage students “to reflect on personal roles, attitudes and responsibilities in relation to a range of sustainability issues” constitute an appropriate sustainability pedagogy (Cotton & Winter, 2010, p. 47). With the recent increase in attention to service-learning, in which self-reflection plays an integral role, there has been more deliberate integration of this method into business language courses and experiences (Kurasawa & Nagatomi, 2006; McCain, Ray, &

Ellsworth, 1996). Pak (2010) describes business Spanish service-learning projects that give students benefits other language courses do not, such as real-world experience and direct connection to their community. A crucial component of the programs are student reflection tasks to help students make the connection between their actions and their perceptions. Similarly, Vigier and Bryant (2009) developed the “astonishment report” in which students observe and reflect on their new environment and community abroad. Encouraging students to reflect on the changes helps them “cope better with the challenges of crossing into new territory” and make the most of their time in the other culture (Vigier & Bryant, 2009, p. 49). While projects that incorporate reflections for significant and usually longer-term experiences abroad have been shown to be valuable, it is also possible to bring reflection into shorter term assignments in the business language classroom, such as the task described below.

EXAMPLE TASK: PRODUCING A VIDEO RESPONSE ON GREEN ACTION

An effective task to help learners access and practice self-reflection in the context of a business language course is one that requires students to explore their own perspective, and this is done most effectively by having them not only think about the topic at hand but also produce or create something in the process. In the task proposed here, students go beyond merely responding to questions such as *What does the environment mean to you?* which would likely fail to excite students’ interest in the topic. Far more compelling is instead a method that conjoins their reflective and creative skills, into what might be called “action-reflection,” e.g., through the production of a response video. We describe here such a task originally developed for a business German unit focused on eco-fashion.³

While the ultimate goal of the task is for students to reflect consciously and actively on their own daily impact on the environment, a good starting point is to provide stimulating information on human environmental impact. This can be done in the form of graphically represented input (see previous section on using charts or graphs) or textual input, such as an article that presents information on attitudes in the target culture(s). This must be followed up with hands-on presentation of eco-conscious behavior, which

³ The entire green business unit is online at <http://business.gwu.edu/about-us/research/ciber/business-languages/curriculum/business-german-module-2/>. Unit activities, methods, and materials are also described in detail in Gonglewski & Helm, 2013.

can be done both effectively and efficiently through a short video. The video should portray how ordinary citizens of the target culture(s) behave in an eco-conscious manner in their daily lives. With funding from an internal grant through our university's Center for International Business Education and Research, the authors produced such a video, entitled *Was machst du für die Umwelt?* (What are you doing for the environment?). The video has two parts: The first part features short interview clips with Germans briefly describing their effort to live sustainably through daily actions such as picking up trash and turning out lights. After several minutes, the video switches to numbered scenes that show, without narration, sustainable living choices in action, such as commuter-biking.⁴

Working with the video in class, the teacher can pause scenes regularly in order to check comprehension, highlight vocabulary items, and have students describe why each action is good for the environment. Particularly for the video's second part, in which there is no narration accompanying the images, students can identify each eco-action, describe it using appropriate vocabulary, and explain the resulting environmental benefits. Digging deeper, teachers can encourage attention to and discussion about any cultural aspects of what students observe. At this point, students are well prepared for the action-reflection component, which they will complete in the form of a "video response," defined simply as "a video created as a reply to another user's video" as contrasted with "video comments," which are exclusively text-based (Karch, 2013).

In creating their video responses, students must reflect on the identical question (*What are you doing for the environment?*) and include footage of themselves performing the eco-conscious activity they describe. To emphasize the reflective aspect, students can be asked to address the reasoning behind this behavior, why it is particularly relevant and important to them in their own current situation. By posting their completed video to the same YouTube page, other students in the class—along with anyone else who visits the original video's page—can view all responses, prompting further reflection,

⁴ The video is available to the public at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hwt4YOCEvRw>. Creating a similar video for another language could be done without traveling abroad, e.g., through short interviews with colleagues, family members, friends, or others who speak the target language and live in the local community.

critique, and interaction.⁵ First reflecting on their behavior and then placing it in the public eye may inspire them to change their behavior, e.g., through taking on more active responsibility in the future.

CONCLUSION

Among the sustainable pedagogies identified from their survey, Cotton and Winter (2010) note the method “modeling good practice” (p. 50). As instructors teaching sustainability, we should strive to do what Hales (2008) calls “practicing what we teach” (p. 24), even at the very level of our courses at our own universities. These are, after all, “micro-societies” that “should seek to become true sustainable communities” (McFarlane & Ogazon, 2011, p. 104). That students care about the issue has become clear: There is evidence to suggest that a growing number of students are even basing their decision of where to apply and attend college on “campus sustainability performance” (see Dautremont-Smith, 2009). In higher education we have the tools and knowledge to work toward a sustainable society, so it is a question of “whether we have the will and courage to do that which we know is necessary” (Hales, 2008, p. 24).

Path-breakers in the area of modeling good practice at the micro level of university communities already exist. At American University in Washington, DC, the Center for Teaching, Research & Learning developed a successful “Green Teaching Certificate” program, by which teachers earn points based on their regular, environmentally sound practices enumerated under larger categories such as “Reducing Paper Use” and “Saving Energy and Reducing Emissions” (see “Green Teaching,” <http://www.american.edu/ctrl/green.cfm>). While some of the certification criteria may seem obvious, e.g., “Turn off the lights if the room has enough daylight for your needs, and/or when you leave the room,” others are less so: “If possible, take the stairs to your office or your classroom rather than taking the elevator” (see “Green Teaching: Certification Criteria,” <http://www.american.edu/ctrl/greencriteria.cfm>).

Putting such simple sustainable idea(1)s into direct action provides our students with models for sustainable living and learning. Doing so in our business language courses — by consciously and conscientiously integrating

⁵ For instructions on how to post a video response, see How to Post a Video Response on YouTube, <http://www.wikihow.com/Post-a-Video-Response-on-YouTube>. It is also possible to keep videos private, depending on instructor preference or school guidelines. Alternatively, reflections can be posted to a private “VoiceThread” page, see <http://voicethread.com/>.

sustainability themes, and by embracing sustainability pedagogies to promote interdisciplinary, experiential, and transformative learning practices—further underscores for students the interconnectedness, indeed the interdependence of our planet’s people and cultures.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

TEACHING METHODS ADVOCATED FOR SUSTAINABILITY

(from Cotton & Winter, 2010, pp. 46–50)

Role-plays and simulations
 Group discussions
 Stimulus activities
 Debates
 Critical incidents
 Case studies
 Reflexive accounts
 Personal development planning
 Critical reading and writing
 Problem-based learning
 Fieldwork
 Modeling good practice

APPENDIX 2:

GREEN BUSINESS CASE

IKEA’s Papierpaletten: Ein Weg, dem man folgen sollte?

Sandra genoss wie jeden Morgen ihre Tasse Kaffee am sonnigen Fenster ihrer modernen Wohnung in Bremen. Sie liebte diese ruhigen morgendlichen Momente, in denen sie auf das glitzernde Wasser des betriebsamen Hafens unter ihr sah.

Aber genau wie an anderen Morgen seit einiger Zeit konnte sie sich nicht ganz entspannen. Ihr Kopf brummte bereits mit Gedanken an die Arbeit. Es war wenig überraschend, dass sie über ihren undurchschaubaren schwedischen Vorgesetzten Hans nachdachte.

An der Oberfläche wirkte Hans immer so schüchtern und vage. Er gab ihr selten klare Anweisungen, obwohl er genau wusste, was er wollte. Es war so

ungeheuer frustrierend! Gerade vor ein paar Tagen hatte er sie wieder wegen einer seiner “genialen” Ideen angesprochen. Wie üblich war er von seiner Begeisterung für alles Schwedische beeinflusst.

Ab und zu gab es irgendeine neue schwedische unweltfreundliche Geschäftspraxis, die er untersuchen wollte, wie seine jüngste Idee zu IKEA und diesen Papierpaletten. Die Vorstellung, dass ihre kleine Firma, Möbelhaus Bremen, in der Lage sein könnte, die Vorgehensweise von großen multinationalen Konzernen zu übernehmen, war einfach absurd!

Plötzlich fiel ihr Blick auf das magische Wort IKEA auf ihrem iPad, als sie die Überschriften auf der Bloomberg-Website sah. Aha, ein weiterer Artikel über den kürzlichen Entschluss, auf Holzpaletten zu verzichten und sie durch Papp- bzw Papierpaletten zu ersetzen!

Auf den ersten Blick schien alles wunderbar: Der Artikel erklärte, dass die Firma 10% der Transportkosten sparen würde, da die neuen Papierpaletten 90% leichter waren als die normalen Holzpaletten.

Doch ihre kleinere Firma spielte in einer ganz anderen Liga. Darüber hinaus hinderte die einseitige Sichtweise ihres Chefs ihn daran, an mögliche Nachteile für die Firma zu denken. Als Leiterin der Logistikabteilung musste sie klare Gegenargumente für das morgige Treffen mit dem Rest der Leitung finden. Sie zweifelte nicht daran, dass Hans dem Vorstand nur Vorteile von Papierpaletten nennen würde.

Sandra wusste, dass jeder Aspekt gut fundiert und klar formuliert sein musste, damit die Firma die Entscheidung bestmöglichst informiert treffen könnte.

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