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The Role of Cultural Diversity in Business Communication Contacts

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Abstract:
This paper examines the involvement of cultural factors in the process of effective intercultural communication in a business environment. In order to do so, I shall discuss the basic issues concerning culture as a pattern of interactional behaviors, investigating intercultural communication practices as a means to reveal such patterns, communication as a process of activating cultural meanings, intercultural communication in the context of multinational management, and its challenges, strategies and significance for negotiation and decision-making processes. Moreover, the results of my research into the interconnection between belonging to a specific cultural background and respecting cultural values of co-workers and managers' attitudes towards cultural diversity at work will be shown.

Introduction

Thanks to globalization, managers are able to travel abroad and seek advantages in foreign markets. Even if they do not have to travel, globalization has caused many societies to become more and more multicultural, which is exemplified in the emergence of global companies that are bicultural or multicultural (F. Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2003), e.g. in New Zealand, China or the USA. The managers' exposure to new culturally-relevant contexts and immersion in intercultural communication requires them to go through the process of acculturation that allows the reduction of cultural barriers and, as a result, enables them to become successful communicators or decision-makers. For effective communication, managers must acquire intercultural communication competence which is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (D.K. Deardorff 2006: 247).

One of the factors for such a success and the sine qua non for developing intercultural communication competence is the rise of creativity among workers who come into intercultural interactions. According to Stahl et al. (2010: 439–447)—and to the conception of Positive Organization Scholarship in general (see e.g. K.S. Cameron et al. 2003; K. Kalinowska-Andrian 2006; M. Rozkwitalska 2012) as well as to management psychology (F.G. Stevens et al. 2008)—intercultural interactions between people who represent different experiences, models of perception and thinking, and their approaches to solving problems, positively expand the array of possibilities of solving problems and may result in increased job satisfaction due to diversity, personal and

professional development, a chance to gain new knowledge and experiences as well as adventure (M.H. Basadur, M. Head 2001; M. Rozkwitalska 2011) which those interactions offer to company workers who work in an international environment (M. Wilczewski 2015: 51). Moreover, the experiential diversity resulting from intercultural interactions is believed to enhance communication (Stahl et al. 2010), improve the functioning of the decision-making process thanks to an understanding of local market conditions (B.D. McFarlin, P.D. Sweeney 2006) and, finally, a personal and professional development through gaining new knowledge and taking up new challenges arising in an international environment.

In this article, both meta-analyses of the previous research into intercultural business communication as well as my own preliminary research will be presented in order to show the significance of cultural diversity in professional contexts. To do so, the concept of "culture" will be clarified first, followed by the concept of "intercultural communication" with an indication of the role of intercultural communication research in exploring the richness of cultural patterns. Next, such features of intercultural communication as uncertainty and unambiguity as well as expectations towards certain social behaviors, whose meeting prevents from cultural misunderstandings or even conflicts, will be discussed. Then I will present the results of a pilot survey I conducted in 2014 in one of global companies in China, to show the connection between working in an intercultural environment and respecting cultural values of co-workers and managers' attitudes towards cultural diversity at work. Finally, certain previous research into positive and negative aspects of cultural diversity (and its influence on the decision-making process) will be analyzed.

1. Culture

The concept of culture is complex and has therefore so far earned over a hundred definitions, which can be categorized according to their following types: descriptive, historical, normative, psychological, structural and genetic (A.L. Kroeber et al. 1952). Table 1 presents the exemplary and widely accepted definitions of culture.

Author	Culture is...
E.B. Tylor (1958 [1871,1873]: 1) C.W. Hill (2005: 696)	"that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society";
R. Benedict (1934: 16, 46)	the ideas and the standards they have in common; a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action;
C. Kluckhohn (1951: 86), C. Geertz (1973: 17), R.G. D'Andrade (1984: 116)	patterns of ways of thinking, feeling, interacting with other members of the same group, which are acquired and communicated by means of symbols and embodied in artifacts;
H.C. Triandis (1994: 22, 408)	"a set of human-made objective and subjective elements that in the past have increased the probability of survival and resulted in satisfaction for the participants in an ecological niche, and thus became shared among those who could communicate with each other because they had a common language and they lived in the same time and place", a semantic structure of meanings, a kind of a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, values, norms, categorisations;

W.G. Zikmund/ M. D'amico (1996: 727)	"the institutions, values, beliefs, and behaviors of a society; everything we learn, as opposed to that with which we were born; that part of the environment, domestic or foreign or both, that is shaped by humankind";
G.H. Hofstede (2001: 9), Z. Swaidan/ L.A. Hayes (2005: 10)	the collective programming of the mind which differentiate individuals from one group from individuals from another group;
A. Holliday et al. (2004: 14, 9)	a kind of shifting reality in which "people make of it what they need to as live their identities in different circumstances" because "cultural attributes can flow between societies";
D. Matsumoto (2006: 219–20)	"product of the interaction between universal biological needs and functions, universal social problems created to address those needs, and the contexts in which people live, […] a shared system of socially transmitted behavior that describes, defines, and guides people's ways of life, communicated from one generation to the next";
R.A. LeVine (2007: 4)	organised rules relating to the ways individuals should communicate within a group and how they should behave in their environments.

Table 1. Understandings of the concept "culture"
(Source: own study)

On the basis of the above definitions, culture is here understood as a set of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, ideas, standards, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired, learnt and shaped by man as a member of society, shared by him/ her with other members of the society, and distinguishing him/ her as a member of one group from the members of another group. It embraces collective programming of the mind, cognitive patterns, ways of thinking, feeling, and styles of interaction that are acquired, described and communicated by means of symbols, and socially transmitted from one generation to another. The survival and reinforcement of all those elements is possible due to common language, the spatial and temporal framework, and the way they are shaped in institutions, human practices and interactions (cf. I. Hacking 1999: 31) is determined by the needs of a particular group with regard to their biology and identity, depending on time and contextual circumstances.

Significant for this paper is determining the position of culture in relation to communication, and the position of that relation to the issue of intercultural communication. As stated above, communication serves as a means to share (via symbols) ways of thinking and behaving within a group, community and society. Owing to the fact that communication is highly dependent on individual features of the members' personalities (which is congruent with the essentialists' view of culture) but not on their personal attributes (which is congruent with the non-essentialists' view of culture), one can talk of different kinds/ styles of communication which result from different characteristics of groups whose acquisition of knowledge, habits, systems of norms, ways of thinking, etc. differs from the acquisition of other groups. It is the very act of communication, i.e. conveying meanings by the sender to the receiver both in an intended and unintended way (G. Kress 1988: 2), that is embedded in a cultural background as it conveys the meanings produced by cultural artifacts and by the use of such cultural artifacts as signs, but that cultural background is also shaped by the process of communication since it consists in conveying meanings which are incorporated to culture.

Communication involves more than speaking. It involves the constructs of the wider part of life of a person, conveying not only what they say but also who they are and what they believe. When people of diverse cultures share information, both orally and through body language, it is often cultural in nature. Their words and actions are loaded with cultural meanings built on foundational beliefs and values they have been taught. Therefore, in order for there to be effective communication that makes sense, each person has to make an intentional effort to truly understand the other (D. Moon 2012: 2).

2. Intercultural communication

The concept of "intercultural communication" happens to be used interchangeably with "cross-cultural communication" (see e.g. H.S. Noor Al-Deen 1997) as people from different cultural backgrounds are involved in both intercultural and cross-cultural communication. However, it ought to be emphasized that cross-cultural studies consist in exploring the attitudes and communication practices between interactants from the same culture as opposed to the attitudes and practices of people from another culture, and hence they exemplify research meant to compare communication in different cultures (I. Piller 2009: 318). Intercultural studies, in turn, consist in exploring the attitudes and communication practices between people from different cultures who come into contact, and because such studies concentrate on interaction in a multicultural milieu, all the findings serve to provide practical solutions for people working in global companies. Yet W.B. Gudykunst (2000: 314) notes that intercultural communication cannot be understood if cross-cultural behavioral differences are not appreciated, so the significance of cross-cultural studies cannot be neglected in the context of business communication (and even with regard to intercultural communication research) since they constitute a starting point for any comparative cultural research.

"Intercultural communication" can be defined as any process of communication in which participants from different cultures are involved. It is "interaction between people of diverse cultural backgrounds with distinct communication patterns, preferences, and styles" (Novinger 2001; Gudykunst 1997) and with "cultural differences in perception and behavior that affect the attribution of meaning (by the partners)" (Ø. Dahl 1999: 9).

Exploring intercultural contacts through research into communication practices provides an opportunity to reveal the richness of cultural patterns and force and perplexities between social groups (cf. D. Carbaugh 1990: 150). Understanding people, their culture and society is not only a prerequisite for comparing relations within one society with relations within another society (A. Holliday et al. 2004: 2), and hence — for intercultural studies, but is also of heuristic value, i.e.

The study of intercultural communication is the study of communication between people with different mind sets and ways of looking at and perceiving the world. Though commonly applied to communication between persons who are each embedded in a different cultural group, intercultural communication also has heuristic utility when applied to the examination of two persons, ostensibly from the same culture, gender, age, ethnic group, and socioeconomic status, whose assumptions about the nature of the world and ways of relating to it are sufficiently divergent to produce misunderstandings commonly found in intercultural analysis. The central thrust of intercultural communication is in the analysis of meaning assignment in interactions between persons whose attitudes, beliefs, and values differ due to a corresponding difference in their cultural or co-cultural backgrounds (Th. Steinfatt, D.M. Christophel 1996 : 319).

The process of symbolic interaction entails communicating by means of symbols distinguished culturally, depending on the kind of communication. Such symbols are manifested in words, actions and gestures specific for a given culture, and they are derived from such frames of references as time concepts, beliefs, values, norms of social behavior and linguistic practices (Ø. Dahl 1999: 159). A successful intercultural interaction enables communicators from different cultures to produce shared meanings, but this is only feasible when they are aware of and support "others' desired self-concepts, including their preferred cultural, ethnic, gender, and personal identities" (S. Ting-Toomey 1999: 21–22). A knowledge of all those elements amounts to intercultural competence, i.e. "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (D.K. Deardorff 2006: 248).

3. Features of intercultural communication

Generally, two essential features of intercultural communication can be distinguished. D. Matsumoto et al. (2005: 16) point out that intercultural interactions as opposed to intra-cultural contacts are characterized by an aspect of uncertainty and ambiguity (the second being the primary characteristic in intercultural adaptation (J.M. Martin, T.K. Nakayama 2000: 278) with respect to the rules of maintaining the contact and signaled meanings (cf. W. Gudykunst, T. Nishida 2001).

This uncertainty, or anxiety—in W. Gudykunst's terms[1], derives from cultural differences both in the aspect of verbal and non-verbal communication and the fact that interactants may not be sure if the same communication rules (e.g. the selection of communication channels) are followed and what communicative styles should be employed. If we assume that in intercultural encounters one communicator is regarded as a "stranger", the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety is usually ascribed to that stranger who happens to feel insecure and does not know how to behave and react to certain initial communication stimuli. And yet thinking differently in divergent cultural contexts (uncertainty), and feeling differently in these contexts due to inappropriate/ unexpected for the communicator in his/ her original culture (anxiety), both apply to strangers and in-group members of the alien culture, strangers are "hyperaware of cultural differences" as they "tend to overestimate the effect of cultural identity on the behavior of people in an alien society while blurring individual distinctions" (E. Griffin 2003: 426).

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[1] In the context of intercultural communication studies, "anxiety" and "uncertainty" are the core concepts in Anxiety/ Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory proposed by one of the pioneers in intercultural communication W.B. Gudykunst, especially in his article "Anxiety/uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory: Current status" (1995). W.B. Gudykunst is said to be legitimizing G. Hofstede's functionalist approach to intercultural communication (I. Jensen 2003), whereby cultures are equaled to national cultures, they do not change significantly over time and within them four universal dimensions are distinguished: power-distance (small vs. large), uncertainty avoidance vs. anxiety, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity.

The second feature refers to the cultural layer of communication practices. Because of different expectations towards certain social behaviors, there is a great chance that not meeting them will end up in cultural misunderstandings or even conflicts. Due to the fact that people's behaviors are interpreted through the cultural perspective of interactants, some behaviors which do not comply with the value system of the communicator, or which just differ from his/ her perspective, may be a source of anger, resentment and conflict—which are aggravated by uncertainty. But "even after uncertainty is reduced, conflict is inevitable because of the differences in the meaning of verbal and nonverbal behaviors across cultures, and the associated emotions and values inherent in the cultural system" (D. Matsumoto et al. 2005: 16).

As a result of the abovementioned features, the effectiveness of communication in an intercultural environment can be regarded as the extent to which uncertainty/ anxiety and ambiguity in intercultural interactions are reduced. And because communication, in simple terms[2], consists in sending messages and ascribing meanings to them (see W. Gudykunst 1995: 15), and it is based on mutual understanding (which—owing to cultural differences—seems to be infeasible), crucial in the process of communication is minimizing misunderstandings, which leads to an accurate understanding of the interactant's intentions and his/ her behaviors.

4. Communicating cultures in a working environment

Increasing globalization and competitiveness in the global marked have caused intercultural communication to be recognized and appreciated in corporate management, especially as far as managing employees from different cultural backgrounds is concerned. The reason for this is that a knowledge of intercultural communication strategies and cultural nuances, which are derived from specific cultural values, norms, behaviors, etc. reflected in e.g. business etiquette, is a prerequisite for avoiding potential conflicts and misunderstandings in a working environment, resulting from different cultural contexts which determine different ways of perceiving each other and responding to each other (D. Matsumoto et al. 2005: 16). Thus, managers should "develop cultural sensitivity, be careful in encoding their messages, thoughtful in decoding and analyzing content and context, selective in choosing channels for transmission of messages" (E. Okoro 2013: 7). Because communication is dependent on culture and vice versa, acquiring intercultural communication competence and maintaining effective communication practices in a company allows the establishment of long-lasting cultural relations and an increase of both managers' and employees' job satisfaction.

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[2] The nature of communication so described seems to be simplified here due to some limitations of the AUM theory. Namely, since effective communication requires a transfer of a message from the sender to the receiver, and the receiver's task is to decipher the sender's intention and to ascribe a meaning to the message, the process of communication requires that messages are sent by the sender. Nevertheless, this is the listeners who create and attribute meanings, not the speakers, and therefore some meanings may be created by the first ones even if the latter have not intended to communicate any message, neither verbally nor non-verbally. As a result, as it is difficult to speak about an intended meaning of an unintended nonverbal message, the AUM theory can only be applied to the cases where the sender's intentions are easily read, and hence in the "linear", "mechanical" view of communication (M. Yoshitake 2002: 183).

The experience of being a part of a multicultural team will begin positively and have a chance of long term success when people agree to serve on such a team, when they expect there will be cultural differences, when they have a positive attitude about working together, are willing to learn and practice skills that build trust and mutual understanding. The possibility of this happening is increased when they have received training about how to identify their own cultural preferences with their corresponding strengths and weaknesses as well as how they affect those of other cultures (D. Moon 2012: 4).

The connection between belonging to a specific cultural background and efficient business communication is also evidenced in a survey conducted by me. In May 2014, I surveyed[3] twenty managers (who work in a multinational environment) from one of the top global manufacturing companies[4] about what they understood under the statement "I have to take into consideration cultural differences in the work environment because:

1. I like working with people from different cultural backgrounds,
2. I feel well when my co-workers respect my cultural values,
3. I respect cultural values of my co-workers,
4. cultural differences make my work more difficult,
5. cultural differences hamper communication,
6. I wish I could have some trainings and instructions in my company about how to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds".

The results are illustrated in the form of pie charts below (Figures 1–6):
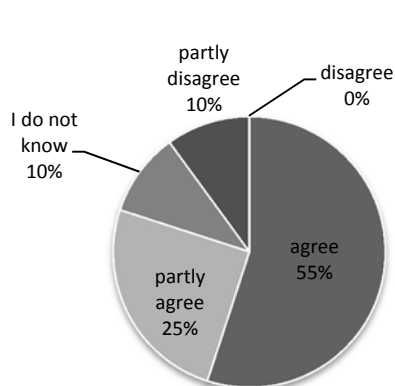

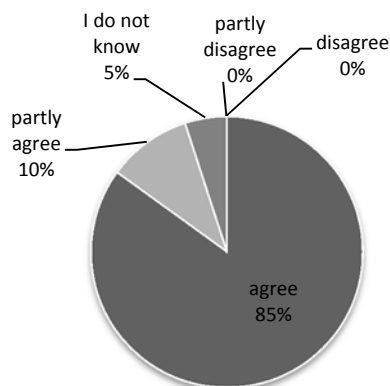Fig.1. I like working with people from different cultural backgrounds

Fig. 2. I feel well when my co-workers respect my cultural values

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[3] Here, I would like to thank Prof. A. Gut from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and Dr. L. Gut for their help in distributing the questionnaires to the managers.

[4] Due to confidentiality reasons, the name of the company has not been given here. The managers surveyed currently work in one of the company's subsidiaries in China. The company has around 70 factories worldwide and employs over 100,000 people.
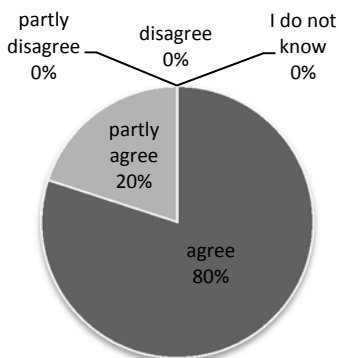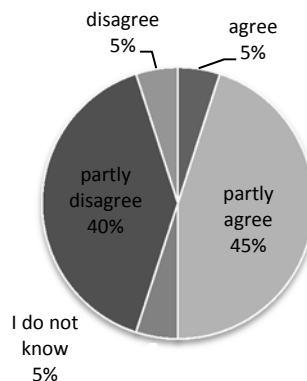
Fig. 3. I respect cultural values of my co-workers

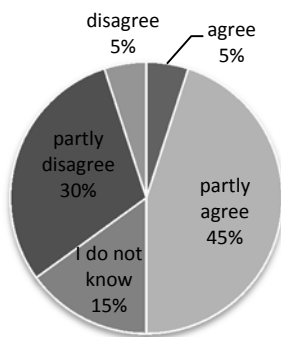*Fig. 4. Cultural differences make my work more difficult*

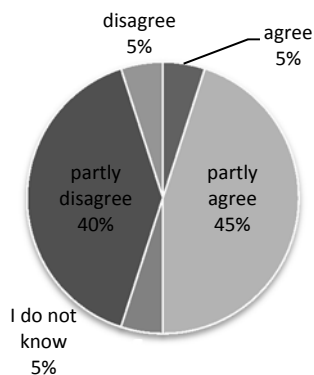*Fig. 5. Cultural differences hamper communication*

Fig. 6. I wish I could have some trainings and instructions in my company about how to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds

The questions asked were aimed at revealing the managers' feelings as for working in a culturally divergent work environment. To do so, the questions were formulated in such a way as to combine the concepts of "different cultural background" and "cultural values" as well as the influence of cultural differences of co-workers on the effectiveness of the respondent's work and communication at work. Accordingly, most (80%) of the managers working in that multinational company either agreed or partly agreed that they liked working with people of different cultural backgrounds (Fig. 1), which indicates that they held a positive attitude towards they co-workers from different cul-

tures. At the same time, most of them regarded respecting cultural values as important for their well-being because 85% of them agreed and 10% partly agreed that they felt well when their values had been respected (Fig. 2) and all of them declared that they had respected the cultural values of their co-workers. Nevertheless, even though they felt well in a multicultural work environment, they realized that their work was made more difficult due to the cultural differences (Fig. 4), which is specifically reflected in the aspect of communication at work.

Interestingly, the survey results illustrated in Figs 4-5 are convergent as 45% of the respondents partly agreed and 5% of them signaled the hampering effect of cultural differences on their work and identical percentage responded that they these differences hinder communication. Thus, it can tentatively be concluded that it is communication with people of other cultural backgrounds that makes the respondents' work more difficult. This conclusion seems valid if Fig. 6 is taken into account—the same percentage expressed a wish that they could be trained on how to communicate with people from other countries. Of much significance here is the fact that business communication problems at this point do not seem to discourage the respondents from working in a multicultural context since they want to develop they communication skills.

To recapitulate, the survey results show the connection between working in an intercultural environment and respecting cultural values of co-workers. The managers seem to appreciate cultural diversity at work even if it may cause communication problems, and—in order to lessen this negative effect—they are open to instructions and trainings from their company on the successful intercultural communication. This is why knowledge of intercultural business etiquette, i.e. rules of behavior for management and communication in the business context, is so important now. Furthermore, this knowledge is even regarded as a prerequisite for a successful manager and for a company to be successful in a competitive international market (C.L. Bovee, J.V. Thill 2010).

5. Cultural diversity and decision-making

In intercultural communication in an international environment, the concept of cultural diversity, which is here understood after P. Schachaf as "heterogeneity of national cultures of team members; an individual's national culture is considered to be that of his or her country of residence" (2008: 131), appears to play both positive and negative roles. The positive one is that the diversity facilitates the decision-making process and hence it contributes to the productivity of employees who work in different team members, such as e.g. virtual teams (see B. Daily et al. 1996; B.F. Daily, R.L. Steiner 1998; P. Schachaf 2008).

The above hypothesis stays in accordance with group systems theory where the concept of "interdependence" is regarded as essential for the proper functioning of a group within which decisions are made:

> Interdependence in group systems theory is the assumption that all members of a group are interdependent with each other and that all groups are interdependent within and between system levels (from the individual members to the greater world of concern). Each member of a group plays an es-

sential part in group dynamics and health, and what happens with one member affects them all. There must be a balance of energy and a relative equality between members of a group for optimal functioning. Group experts are keenly aware of the importance of every member and how silent or nonparticipating members often affect the group as a whole. Dominating members or unequal power dynamics must be addressed or groups will tend to fall into destructive interpersonal patterns and create negative outcomes (J.V. Connors, R.B. Caple 2005: 100).

In the very process of making decisions, J.V. Connors and R.B. Caple (2005: 100) consider the following features of groups significant: structure (power structures controlling or guiding administrative decisions, systemic structures or group structures governing group rules, guidelines, leader directiveness), interactivity (regulating the input and output of external environments), growth cycles and stages, and instability and chaos and complementarity. The last characteristic means that various perspectives of approaching a problem of the relevant team members are complementary, i.e. they are not entirely compatible nor contradictory, so it is worth considering all the opinions as they contribute more perspectives to the process. Naturally, a lack of compatibility may open ground to conflict.

Cultural diversity generates a wider range of perspectives on a problem, a selection of alternatives, more and better and individual thinking, so the team members are not confined in a "groupthink" and, as a result, their performance is extended (P. Shachaf 2008). These findings are, among others, presented in the works by B.F. Daily and R.L. Steiner 1998, B. Daily et al. 1996, W.E. Watson et al. 1993.

In turn, the negative aspect of cultural diversity in a working environment is seen in the process of communication as it hampers communication, which is caused by different worldviews deriving from different cultural systems and being manifested in different ways of perceiving and understanding extra-linguistic reality (e.g. via various communicative styles). As a result, differences in interpreting certain issues may in some instances lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, ambiguity and, as a result—a decrease of communication effectiveness and, in the long run—low levels of integration and cohesion in the culturally diverse teams (W.E. Watson, K. Kumar 1992). And this is the very conflict that makes some scholars investigating communication in multicultural teams believe that

(…) contrary to the often expressed belief about the positive power of diversity, (…) the potential for conflict is greater with diverse teams because achieving cohesion and understanding around the common goal may turn out more difficult, to say nothing of other factors of cultural dissimilarity" (J.B. łompieś 2015: 40).

To avoid this, many companies attempt to reduce cultural barriers among their employees by developing organizational culture, i.e. a concept comprised of socio-cultural system, cultural system and organization's imagery (Y. Allaire, M.E. Firsirotu 1984). The first component embraces formal structures, strategies and management processes which build organization's reality. Cultural system consists of such dimensions as organization's values, ideology, symbols, legends, design, etc. Finally, an organization's imagery presents an organization's "hidden face", i.e. all the interactions between an organization's individuals triggered by individual and team values (M. Brun 2002: 149–150; see also B. Moingeon, B. Ramanantsoa 1997: 386) or what M.A. Diamond (1993: 62) defines as the manner in which people speak to each other, the way they dress at work, and informal protocol people adhere to in everyday work.

Previous research has signaled a relation between Hofstede's dimensions (especially power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, uncertainty avoidance, short-term vs. long-term orientation and masculinity vs. femininity) and modes of decision-making, communication models, management styles and the values which managers are guided by when building business relationships (N.R. Abramson et al. 1993; J. Tang, A. Ward 2003; J. Kobayashi, L. Viswat 2011; J.W. Neuliep 2011: 379; G. Warner-Soderholm 2012). On that basis, we assume that the mode and capability of making decisions are culturally dependent and may influence current business relationships as well as the performance of current enterprises.

For instance, the involvement of workers in the decision-making process is influenced by power distance in such a way that organizations functioning in high power distance, collectivist cultures employ a top-down communication model and are highly aware of the status of management and employees, which excludes the latter ones from making decisions. On the contrary, in individualistic and low power distance cultures, like American culture, the management style is "participatory" which means that employers are expected to be committed in decision making (J.W. Neuliep 2011: 379).

Also collectivism vs. individualism plays a substantial role in the decision-making process. The slow pace of making decision in Asian cultures is reflective of their collectivist nature. For example, J. Tang and A. Ward (2003) note that in Chinese culture decisions are made at the managerial level as managers are considered to be a distinct group from that of employees and consensus between the two groups is not valued to the degree as it is individualistic cultures (see e.g. G. Warner-Søderholm 2012).

The findings of the research by J. Kobayashi and L. Viswat (2011) into business negotiations experiences between American business people with high intercultural awareness and their Japanese counterparts reveal that Japanese, as opposed to Americans—who highly value time and focus on fast decision-making—give responses and reach decisions slowly probably because they want to make sure that there will be no surprises (cf. the research by J. Kim and R.A. Meyers 2012 into cultural differences in Eastern and Western organizations, which shows that this tendency is also typical of managing conflicts, because American preferred styles in conflict management are positively correlated with compromising and avoiding, whilst a South Korean mostly preferred styles are collaborating, compromising and accommodating, which again shows that Easterners are more holistic in doing business than Westerners).

The second reason for that is that they are open to new information (N.R. Abramson et al. 1993), which is linked to Easterner's high level of uncertainty avoidance in making decisions as well as to a long-term orientation and femininity where emphasis is put on building harmonious relationships (cf. H.P. Numprasertchai, F.W. Swierczek 2006). This, however, is a generalization as e.g. H.P. Numprasertchai's and F.W. Swierczek's study (2006) shows significant differences in risk propensity in business negotiations between Japanese—who generally prefer predictable situations—which is indicative of high uncertainty avoidance, and Thais who are more flexible and open to changes.

6. Conclusions

Developing and implementing a coherent communication strategy/ policy is decisive for a successful functioning of any company, organization or institution as it translates into an increase of employees' satisfaction and, hence—into an increase of their productivity and decrease of work absence (P.G. Clampitt, W. Downs 1993). As for intercultural business communication, acquiring intercultural competence by managers allows the establishment of long-lasting relations with their business partners, better realization of the company's goals in an international environment and the maintenance of proper communication practices with their employees (S. Grucza 2014: 41). As a matter of fact, however, although the role of communication seems to be more often recognized as a crucial factor determining the successful business relations, it is still underestimated in many companies, which is reflected in managers' conviction that the key factor for an efficacious functioning of a company is boiled down to employees' work performance. It must be realized that managers devote up to 90% of their time to communication with their employees (J. Alnajjar 2013: 9-10) and this means that the employees' work is also embedded in communicative contexts. These managers often do not notice the significance of a proportional relation between performance and communication, which means that doing those everyday tasks requires collaboration whose efficiency is dependent on effective communication. This is why effective communication should be appreciated and reflected in an attempt to build specific communication strategies, mechanisms of their implementation and development (M. Wilczewski 2014).

Thanks to the previous research according to which—in spite of the progressive globalization process and blurring borders between national markets, which is evidenced by, among other things, the emergence of business communication as a global discipline—we can observe a phenomenon of the reinforcement of cultural differences between nations, regions and ethnic groups (M. Lillis, R. Tian 2010), which—in turn— inevitably leads to communication problems in globalized business (cf. G.P. Ferraro 2002). Research into the influence of culture-relevant factors on managers' communication practices as well as negotiation and decision-making processes in a business context is a step towards recognizing these problems. Comparative research involving Asians, Americans and Western Europeans into the impact of cultural factors on communication styles and practices in a multinational environment and a business one indicates a necessity to revise the tendency of culturologists to classify representatives of particular cultures according to the criterion of cultural dimensions (G. Hofstede 1994; 2001) and anticipating on that basis their communication practices—neglecting such factors as intercultural interaction, external context (political, economic, social, legal, etc.) in which a given company operates, and—most of all—managers' individual cognitive capabilities, e.g. to grasp intensions, to attribute mental states, to express empathy, to grasp irony, to operate a set of mental concept, or to construe the "self" independently or interdependently, and so on. Accordingly, we postulate involving in the research into intercultural business communication a question about the degree to which professional standards, ethics and organizational culture (and constitutive sociocultural system and organizational image) as well as modes of thinking (e.g. symbolic thinking, individual vs. collective thinking), interaction styles, or the so-called cultural

scripts, enhance communication in a business environment or create barriers in inter-cultural contacts.

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