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SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF CONSTRUCTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

At present the essence of cultural knowledge lies in its integration with major aspects of our life and belongs to the global skills which are also known as "life skills" and needed to achieve for lifelong success and fulfilment in the fast-changing and diverse world. The paper discusses the findings of international researchers (Kramsch (1992), Triandis (2002), Hall (1959), Schwartz (2012), Kulich (2002, 2015), M. Taylor (2002), M. Gelfand (2018) who explored different aspects of cultural awareness demonstrates the benefits of such knowledge for smooth and painless adaptation to new culture and society, transforms this knowledge into competence and develop flexibility and adaptability. The author consolidates and sums up these aspects and proposes some advice for efficient cooperation in multicultural teams. Among the recommendations how to nudge a culture she singles out the following: to share the best practices of expats; to transform cultural knowledge into competence and develop flexibility and adaptability in cros-cultural communication; to be aware of etic and emic lenses of different cultures; to avoid stereotyping judgements and estimates; to apply knowledge of ethnorelativism towards understanding the foreigners; to understand the logic of tight-loose cultures to cultivate cultural empathy; to accept different cultural norms to lower judgmental attitudes towards them; to observe, ask politely and interpret for understanding other cultures; to learn target language to bridge cultural gaps; to be open and sincere in conversation, avoid taboo and personal questions, ask what is important to others in culturally appropriate ways.

Key words: *subjective culture, etic and emic lenses, stereotype, norms, values, intercultural communication, global skills.*

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ВАЖЛИВІ ЧИННИКИ КОНСТРУКТИВНОЇ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

Міжкультурна комунікація для міжнародної співпраці, навчання й навіть відпочинку дає нам знання, досвід і розширює світогляд. Вона допомагає зрозуміти інші народи й краще пізнати свою культуру. У науковій розвідці проаналізовано здобутки зарубіжних науковців у напрямі міжкультурної комунікації, які досліджували різні аспекти крос-культурної усвідомленості, й переваги цих знань для легкої адаптації до нової культури й суспільства, а також трансформації цих знань у компетентність і розвитку гнучкості та адаптивності. Також нами консолідовано рекомендації й поради експертів із міжкультурної комунікації для опанування різних культур й ефективної співпраці у полікультурних компаніях. Оперуючи отриманими знаннями, будь-який фахівець зможе продемонструвати відкритість до різноманіття культур, зацікавленість ними, коректне спілкування із зарубіжними партнерами, розуміння й повагу до власної культури та мультикультурної різноманітності для вирішення нагальних проблем світової спільноти.

Ключові слова: *суб'єктивна культура, етичні й емічні риси, стереотипи, норми, цінності, міжкультурна комунікація, глобальні навички.*

Modern world dissolves boundaries. Even in COVIOD-19 pandemic circumstances people have found the way to communicate with the help of the Internet. Intercultural communication for business, education or for pleasure gives us knowledge, experience and broaden our minds. It helps us understand other nations and ourselves as well. Moreover, as the previous year persuaded, it is a necessary tool for the essential global issues' solutions and overcoming. Except online courses, conferences or webinars, we also have the opportunities to sign the contract and go to work or study abroad or participate in the international projects as team members. Anyway, each activity includes intercultural communication and collaboration.

But alongside the excitement it brings, there's the added pressure of how you'll respond and adapt to new and weird way of life. A limited culture understanding affects a person's public behaviour, but the knock-on effects can also be significant. It can impact their ability to engage with and access learning which can lower their self-esteem, increase the risk of poor behaviour and dropping out of adaptation, and ultimately hamper our prospects. On the one hand, we try to relate with others and establish friendly relationships. On the other hand, we compare ourselves with others and figure out what we are able to do better. Both attempts make relationships and communication enlightening and challenging at the same time. But across cultures people may feel misunderstanding, confusion, and even cultural incidents.

Consequently, the aim of the article is to explain the aspects of cultural diversity which can influence our perception and adaptation in peculiar surroundings to prevent misunderstandings and embarrassment and help foreigners immerse into new society smoothly and easily and develop their citizenship and intercultural competence skills which are the parts of vital global personal skills of 21st century humans.

Culture follows us everywhere. It comes from our families, countries, regions, religion, education or social cooperation, our work. Many images used to describe culture are presented in the form of iceberg. The reason for such metaphorical comparison is laid in the fact that culture has a visible section above the surface of the water and bigger invisible part underneath the surface.

Intercultural competence is associated with skills needed to interact appropriately and sensitively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

All of us, regardless of where we're originally from, need to be aware of the impact of the cultural peculiarities on the expats, and their features. While there is no quick-fix solution how to adapt smoothly and unstintingly to new reality you are appeared to be, there are several recommendations that can be used by the foreigners for less painful staying in "another world".

Firstly, we believe there should be an increased focus on the language learning. "Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex way. Language expresses cultural reality [4, p.3].

Anthropologist E. T. Hall was the first person to use the term "intercultural communication". He also equated the concepts of "culture" and "communication", asserting that, "Culture is communication and communication is culture" [3].

Secondly, we suggest sharing best practice within expats, and between those who intend to try new experience. Cultural awareness community shares a common purpose – helping people to grow and thrive. We should promote best practice, and learn from one another, whether it's about positive or negative experience we faced with, ensuring the best learning outcomes. Thirdly, we call for improving links between cultures vie digital resources and online communities.

Finally, we call for more support for continued questions and misunderstandings between different nations and cultures for explorers. In all intercultural experiences, it is important to protest the natural tendency of people to be critical of cultural practices and attitudes that are different from their own, particularly in the early stages of adaptation and overcoming cultural shock.

We're undoubtedly at a time of enormous change in the way people live, work, and learn. But fortunately, we have fantastic resources to acquire cultural knowledge and transform knowledge into competence, develop flexibility and adaptability in cross-cultural communication.

Being abroad for any mentioned above reason, we deal with subjective culture first of all. Subjective culture is defined by the cross-cultural psychologist Harry Triandis as the intangible part of culture, which could include ideas, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs [11]. We can study subjective culture using two lenses. "Etic" refers to the general categories that can be found in all cultures, which serve as common grounds for comparison. Common for many countries, for instance, broken mirror symbolizes "bad luck". Likewise, number 13 is considered unlucky for Western and American Cultures, but for many Eastern countries unlucky number is four, and in China, Malaysia, Singapore, etc. they avoid buildings', flats' and even floors' numbers with 4. On the contrary, "emic" means categories that might only stand to reason in a given culture, which makes cultures unique and meaningful to those who belong to it. We can learn a good deal about a culture by examining its emic associations. For example, we know Thai nation as a smiling nation. But not all of us have any idea that there are a lot of meanings in their smiles, and not all the time they express friendship and happiness. They can also convey and recognize sorrow, irony, and irritation in their smiles. There are overall 13 meanings in their smiles which they can distinguish and understand.

Concluding, we can reveal that subjective culture contains elements that reflect cultural differences, either as etic or emic items.

One more aspect of culture acquisition is a stereotype. It links a category of people to some attributes. For example, "British are reserved and stubborn" is a stereotype. Stereotypes have a valid core, but are largely invalid. Are all British stubborn? And at the same time they spend large amount on charity annually. While stereotyping may be temporarily satisfying to someone in the suffering of culture shock, it is destructive and alienating in the long staying.

To avoid stereotyping thinking, one should apply the knowledge of ethnorelativism as a step toward understanding people you meet abroad. Ethnorelativism is the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another, and that a particular behaviour can be understood within a cultural context [7, p.30].

Michele Gelfand, Professor of Psychology at the University of Maryland, claims that one of the most important aspects of culture that we take for granted is our social norms. Norms are ideas about behaviour expected of members of a group. If people didn't abide by socially expected rules, their behaviour would be unbearably unpredictable [2]. In some cultures, called *tight*, people are expected to behave exactly as specified by norms. In other cultures, called *loose*, one can deviate from norms. In tight cultures a person gets punished if he/she does not behave with norms' accordance. In loose cultures he/she is less likely to be punished. Loose cultures are much more open to new ideas, new people, to change. In antient period Ukrainian culture was tight when girls were forced to marry old rich guys, otherwise she was punished by her parents. But nowadays it's loose. These days, we distinguish Japanese, Taliban, Singapore cultures as tight, British, American – in-between, and Ukrainian, Polish, French cultures are rather loose than tight.

Norm's knowledge helps us understand why making cultural distinctions is necessary in figuring out "what something means" in another culture, is to acknowledge that what is called "reality" might have more than one meaning or explanation, often entirely different. And one should keep in mind that what we see is more in the mind as it is in reality.

Roles belong to the subcategory of norms. These are the ideas about the correct behaviour of people in social groups according to the position. For instance, queen, first lady, daughter, brother-in-law are roles. Roles contain prescriptive parts (mother is the head of Jewish family, she makes decisions) and proscriptive parts (elder brother should protect younger sister; the eldest person in Thai family has the last word to make a decision). That means we have to understand the norms and rules that guiding behaviour in order to best adapt to the target culture.

We also distinguish values as a part of cultural identity and issue in cross-cultural comparison. They represent what is generally desirable in a culture. Schwartz (2012), who has studied them extensively in about 50 countries, defined them as beliefs that pertain to desirable states or behaviors, that transcend specific situations, and guide the selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and that are ordered by relative importance. When collecting data he uses a concept, such as "freedom" and asks people to rate its importance as "a guiding principle in my life". His research found that there are 10 sets of values in most of the cultures that he has studied.

They are:

1. Self-direction – defining goals: creativity, independent thought, choosing own goals, curiousity, exploring.
2. Stimulation – defining goals: excitement, novelty, daring life.
3. Hedonism – defining goals: pleasure, enjoyment.
4. Achievement – defining goals: ambitious, success, capability, prosperity.
5. Power – defining goals: authority, wealth, social recognition, control.

6. Security – defining goals: social order, clean, health, sense of belonging, safety, harmony, stability in all spheres.

7. Conformity – defining goals: obedient, self-disciplined, politeness.

8. Tradition – defining goals: respect for tradition, humble, devout, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas which one's culture or religion provides.

9. Benevolence – defining goals: being helpful, loyal, tolerant, forgiving in-group.

10. Universalism – defining goals: broadminded, social justice, appreciation, understanding and protection [10].

Cultural identities help us create a sense of belonging, security, satisfaction, and continuing connectedness. They might exist at various levels, depending on whether we "identify" with our nation, ethnic group, or geographic region of a country.

Whenever we contact with others, we often ask ourselves identity questions.

In our own society, we often have clues about reading others identity. We can verify by their accent where they might be from, from their clothes what their occupation or educational level might be, and from their manners what kind of family background or quality of life they seem to have and were nurtured. From very young we have learnt how to be insightful and "recognize" the status and identity symbols of people that we are familiar with. "The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, e.g., tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions" [4, p.3].

But across cultures, this issue of identity is often confusing and should be deliberate. Different countries have different clues. We may not be sure what a firm handshake means, or direct eye contact, or a torn sock, or many other symbols that are not common to us. Whenever we have lack of knowledge, we need to make up for it with sensitivity without quick infer. Observing, politely asking, and interpreting all become vital skills toward trying to understand someone from another culture [6, p. 32-34].

And sometimes foreigners' observations turn out to be precision and even surprising for natives. Living in a country since we are born, make us accept norms and our identity in an everyday occurrence, but for attentive stranger such commonplace might be paranormal phenomenon of mystical dimensions and implications or at least startle. And their summings-up even come as an embarrassment. Thus, observations were made by the writer and literary translator Michael Naydan in his novel "Seven Signs of the Lion" about Ukrainian culture and people's behaviour that "almost no one says thank you if you do something nice for them (except your friends)" [8, p. 29] and that's ridiculous, but true that "everyone seemed to want to live vicariously through someone else and in small or even large ways was unhappy with their own lives" [8, p. 37].

Self-awareness, attainment and sensitivity to others can help us communicate more thoughtfully in own culture and across cultures. When some people communicate, they usually share particular common ground, but also some individual distinctions. We have to be aware that some cultures represent commonality more while others emphasize on their uniqueness. Every nation consists of thousands of cultures, but many of them have much in common. One more thing should be taken into account that culture is a shared pattern of beliefs, attitudes, norms, role perceptions, and values. Being observant, interested and asking polite questions can help us learn more about what others find essential.

Getting to know others is as difficult as getting to know yourself sometimes. In this case there would be pertinent the English idiom, "Don't judge a book by its cover". Taking into consideration that person's identity is very complex and includes public, personal and psychological levels, each of us needs to develop good communication skills in knowing how to relate at each level. But even then, some aspects might remain hidden to us. Any behaviour observed across cultural barrier has to be interpreted in two ways: the meaning presented by the person who acts, and the meaning given to it by the observer of this action. Only when these two meanings coincide, we do have successful cross-cultural communication. In other words, two constituent ideas have to be kept in mind when talking about culture.

Not every communication counter is equal. Especially across cultures, we often encounter great differences in values, status, economics, attitudes, languages. "Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity" [4, p.3].

These components can threaten to block our communication, or we can try to find polite ways to bridge the gap. Many potential obstacle was dissolved when one side showed interest in or respect toward the other. And even unwilling communication partners can often be won over with kindness, humor or a friendly gesture. So even though we can observe much about a person, much remains hidden from us unless we relate. And we need to recognize that people from different cultures might expect different kinds of interaction.

When we see other people, we may quickly judge them by external factors, but only if we take the time to relate, talk or share deeper experiences we get to know them better. Our personal identity has a decisive effect on our communication. It influences the language and the way of speaking we choose, the expectations we have, the way we conduct the interaction and the outcomes we achieve. Sharing more about ourselves and learning to ask others about what is important to them in culturally appropriate ways enable people relate and work together better.

Self-awareness and other-sensitivity will surely help you be a better communicator, whether it is in your own culture or cross-culturally [5].

Culture affects how we see things. When we cross cultures, our perceptions will be challenged. From own experience we can assure that asking the proper questions will open the boundaries even of high context society. As from Edward Hall classification of cultural differences between societies we know that high content society has dense and strong boundaries and strong long-term relations within a group. All these features were noticed in Thai teachers' society in Hat Yai Technical College, and it was almost impossible to enter the group as an equal colleague, because you were considered to be an outsider. And only sharing more about ourselves, being an observer and asking correct questions with sensitivity, readiness to help and support if asked, helped us become a full-fledged teacher for the period of our contract in that college.

But what we can observe lately with the quarantine amendments in our cross-cultural communication is that our societies are becoming low context with the development of remote online work and accessibility to much information and collaborations. Edvard Hall defined low context society as rule oriented, task-centered with more interpersonal connections of shorter duration where knowledge is more often transferable, public, external and accessible [3].

As a result, with the COVID-19 lockdown we have stopped gathering for a lecture or seminar or conference, but we have received online access to much information and mastered online platforms, our communication became short-term verbal online in the form of webinars, online conferences, online courses and lessons. And most of the world societies has transformed into low context network societies with dissolved boundaries and the Internet dependance.

To nudge a culture, we recommend:

1) share best expats' practice from the country of interest (intercultural experience);

2) transform knowledge into competence and develop flexibility in cross-cultural communication;

3) be aware of emic lenses of the designated culture;

4) avoid stereotyping judgements and estimates;

5) apply knowledge of ethnorelativism towards understanding the foreigners;

6) understand the logic of tight-loose cultures to cultivate cultural empathy and manage our divides more constructively;

7) penetrate why cultures have different norms to lower judgmental attitudes towards them;

8) observe, ask politely and interpret for understanding other cultures;

9) realize that self-awareness, attainment and sensitivity to others are the clue to thoughtful and meaningful cross-cultural communication;

10) comprehend that two or more constituent ideas must be kept in minds when talking about culture, to minimize misunderstandings, confusion and unhampered communication unstintingly;

11) learn target language to bridge the gap because language is a symbol of social identity;

12) remember that our personal identity has a decisive effect on the communication;

13) be open and sincere in the conversation, ask what is important to others in culturally appropriate way, and listen carefully what people say, at the same time, learn the taboo or private questions.

Considering knowledge mentioned above and achieving cultural competence, one can demonstrate curiosity and openness about their own and diverse cultures; communicate respectfully and appropriately with partners from different cultures; understand and appreciate their own and multicultural identities; understand their own and global roles regarding international issues.

As a solution, we propose a short course of cultural peculiarities and intercultural communication for the students of higher educational institutions and developed methodological recommendations "Culture" [1], promoting intercultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. This course will also help students approach different cultures respectfully and appropriately, encouraging openness and curiosity.

Further scientific research we would like to investigate in the field of intercultural conflict resolution.

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