

Iwona Kubica
Cracow University of Economics

Determinants of the process of acculturation in culturally diverse organizations

Abstract: *In the globalized world, one of significant components of the organizational success has become management of human resources originating from various cultures and using various languages. To meet this challenge, organizations must take account of the issues of diversity in their mission, declared values or applied personnel practices. They should also develop procedures of counteracting discrimination as well as build the organizational culture which promotes positive attitude towards differences. Thus, international companies need employees who easily adapt to new cultures, are able to work effectively in multicultural teams and communicate in many languages.*

The object of considerations covered by this article is the organizational support for the process of acculturation of employees in culturally diverse organizations. The identification of barriers in intercultural interactions and the indication of the impact of national cultures on corporate culture have given the possibility to indicate methods and techniques of improving acculturation and professional skills of employees, employed or delegated to work in wards of culturally diverse organizations.

Key words: *acculturation, cultural shock, intercultural training, cultural diversity, discrimination, expatriation*

Introduction

Development of the world economy, market liberalization as well as technological progress have resulted in internationalization of companies, the foreign assets of which are a growing part of their total assets. [Schroeder J., 2010, p. 11]. Similarly, as a result of demographic changes and related transformations on the labor market the share of employees from foreign markets in this companies grows along with the complexity of internal and external conditions under which personnel decisions are made, focused on effective acquisition and use of human capital [Pocztowski A., 2008, p. 90]. In view of the above, it is not surprising that organizations that want to develop and achieve market successes must have competent personnel, able to operate

in the global context, taking into consideration expectations of local markets [Pocztowski A., 2008, p. 94, Schroeder J., 2010, p. 9]. In order to meet new challenges, contemporary managers (as well as other employees) - apart from traditional skills resulting from performed functions - must have a set of intercultural competences, involving, among others, great cultural sensitivity, adaptability (ability to acculturate), intercultural cooperation, innovation and entrepreneurship, communication skills under conditions of cultural and language diversity or, finally, be characterized by a great mobility and openness to changes [see Pocztowski A., 2008, p. 95, Kuc B. R. and Moczyłowska J. M., 2009, p. 348, Schroeder J., 2010, p. 98 and Janowska Z., 2009, p. 71].

Thus, it is worth observing the way organizations may support the process of acculturation of employees originating from different cultural circles and hired in headquarters and wards of international companies.

Impact of business internationalization on the employment structure

Assuming the degree of internationalization as the basic criterion, we can distinguish four model types of companies and thereby - their different approaches to selection and development of personnel ¹ [more in: Pocztowski A. (ed.) 2002, Przytuła S., 2011, Schroeder J., 2010]:

- 1. Ethnocentric (monocentric) companies** - the headquarters assign the most important positions in the company to PCN employees who are prepared earlier for taking up key positions worldwide. This approach is applied in the early phase of internationalization, when it is necessary to coordinate global initiatives, implement commands of the headquarters or transfer knowledge and solutions. The danger of application of this approach relates to a slower adaptation to a new work environment and lower (or lack of) effectiveness in relations with local employees or customers
- 2. Polycentric companies** - the headquarters assign the most important positions in a branch to HCN employees who are prepared for taking up key positions only in their country. This approach forces preparation of a concept of management at the place of location of a foreign organizational unit. As a result, HCN adapts rapidly to local culture. A drawback of such a solution may be too strong connection with local culture and, thereby, tardiness in implementing commands and strategy of the headquarters in favor of prioritization of local initiatives

¹ On the basis of subject literature, we can distinguish three categories of countries and the corresponding three groups of employees, i.e. PCN (parent-country nationals) - the country of origin of a given organization and the group of employees working there, HCN (host-country nationals) - the host country where the agency, branch or another organizational form of an international company is located, hiring local employees, and TCN (third-country nationals) - third country, where the company or its branch conducts business activities and from where it acquires financial, material and human resources [see Pocztowski A. (ed.), 1999, p. 11].

3. Geocentric companies - the priority is integration of particular organizational units by division of competences between the headquarters of a given company and its branches, preserving general standards binding throughout the whole international organization. Thus, key positions are assigned to best employees, regardless of their country of origin (PCN, HCN or TCN). The key issue is effectiveness in local activities and fulfillment of the strategy of the headquarters. This solution is more and more often applied in respect of low level management².

As we can see, preferences with regard to organizational behaviors and practices are significantly affected by factors associated with the country of origin of organization/employees. Some researchers claim that even the most global companies are not deprived of a kind of „nationality”, which affects various aspects of operation of the company (e.g. Ruigrok W. and Van Tulder R., 1995; Harzing A. W. and Sorge A.M., 2003, pp. 187–214), including creation of a new supranational organizational culture³. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of information -communication systems, used to transfer ideas, goals, values and information on undertaken activities between the headquarters and a foreign branch in order to limit the impact of intercultural barriers on the organizational effectiveness [Kuc R. B. and Moczydłowska J. M., 2009, p. 348]. Searching for the common cultural plane is thus a result of growth in awareness of the role of culture in the organization as well as deepening cultural diversity of the world [Kuc B. R. and Moczydłowska J. M., 2009, pp. 347-348]. As a result, a need emerges, for examining factors

² Taking account of the extended characteristics, including, as 4th type, regiocentric companies, it is worth noting that in their case efforts are made, taking account of both strategy of integration and differentiation of activities. It is conducted by division of the area of organizational activities into homogeneous parts for which unified strategies of actions are prepared. As a result, the most important positions are assigned to best employees from a region, in which the organization/branch operates. Often, it is a stage preceding achievement of a geocentric form, therefore, it is assumed that regiocentric manager is egocentric on the regional scale. In this case, there is a risk of federalization at the level of the region, which may result in difficulties in introducing global strategy of the company [see Poczowski A (ed.) 2002, Przytuła S., 2011, Schroeder J., 2010].

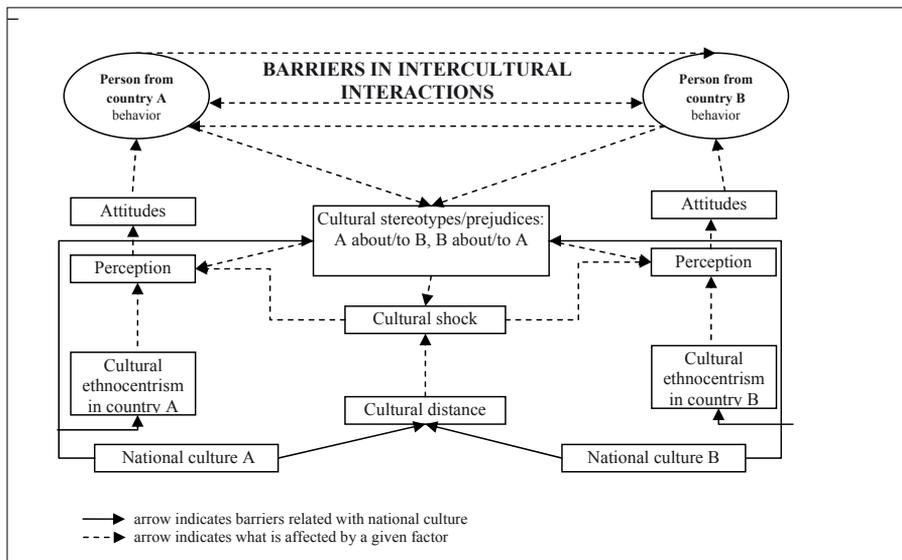
³ In the subject literature there is no universal definition of „organizational culture”. According to E. Schein, it is „a set of basic assumptions, values and norms as well as artefacts, shared by most members of a given organization” [quot.: Czarska M., 2003, p. 13]. Whereas, according to G. Hofstede, „culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one social group from another” [Hofstede G. and Hofstede G. J., 2007, p. 43]. A common element of all concepts concerning organizational culture is - in the opinion of B.R. Kuc and J. M. Moczydłowska - „a holistic understanding of culture as a phenomena covering organizational history, associated with objects of anthropological research”. At the same time, it is a social creature and bears the characteristics of national culture of the people constituting a given organization (employees originating from different countries) [Kuc B. R. And Moczydłowska J. M., 2009, p. 349].

or circumstances weakening or enhancing the impact of culture of a country of origin of employees on their work effectiveness in a culturally diverse environment.

Cultural barriers in international organizations

As it has already been mentioned, during planning of employment in their headquarters or branches, international companies must decide on hiring local employees (including immigrants) or delegating expatriates to work⁴. They must also conduct an analysis of intercultural interactions in the organization and beyond it as well as identify possible barriers in interactions of culturally diverse personnel, which are presented in the figure below [Rozkwitalska M., 2011, p. 57].

Figure 1. Sources of barriers in intercultural interactions related to national culture



Source: Rozkwitalska M., 2011, p. 71.

As it may be easily noted, interpersonal interactions are determined by culture (both national and organizational culture) and, simultaneously, are its element. This situation affects the sense of cultural distance⁵ between interaction

⁴ The term of „expatriate” in the presented article refers to all employees hired by an international company outside the borders of the country of their origin for a definite time in order to execute tasks in business entities controlled by it.

⁵ Cultural distance is an indicator of cultural differences of one country in respect of another, calculated on the basis of results obtained by countries when researching cultural

participants, increasing along with differences between cultural characteristics of both parties [Rozkwitalska M., 2011, p. 61]. In national cultures cultural stereotypes are also rooted, being sets of generalized assessments, opinions or judgments concerning representatives of a given national culture. Negative stereotypes may be a source of prejudices, hostility or even signs of aggression and discrimination, which may conduct also to strengthening cultural ethnocentrism, namely convincing members of a given culture of its superiority over other [*op. cit.*, pp. 68-67]. However, we cannot forget that ethnocentrism is not a realized process, but an automated one, which is not subject to a conscious reflection. It is a type of „cognitive filter, embedded in values and practices of own culture, through the prism of which cultural practices of people treated as culturally strange or different are perceived, interpreted and assessed” [Boski P., 2010, p. 494]. Thus, in interaction with representatives of other cultures differences in appearance, behavior, culinary practices, methods of work, service relations or roles of sexes are noticeable. These expressive differences, often surprising, incomprehensible and ambiguous, are subject to interpretation from the point of view of discrepancies with practices and values of own culture [*op. cit.*, p. 494]. All this may result in cultural shock⁶, called also acculturation stress [see Witkowski S.A. and Łuzniak M., 2007, p. 104 and Boski P., 2010, p. 523]. This phenomenon manifests itself in the individual’s feeling of increased tension and deteriorated mood as a result of realized behavioral inadequacy and cognitive uncertainty [Haslberger A., 2008, p. 138]. Stress resulting from cultural differences implies the need for learning and assimilating new models of behaviors, as only in this way the individual may overcome crisis and achieve balance (Black J. S. and Gregersen H. B., 1991, pp. 225–246).

Currently, the phenomenon of differentiation of society⁷ is considered to stimulate creativity and changes, and diversified human resources are

dimensions. The authors of the indicator on the basis of the model of national cultures by G. Hofstede are B. Kogut and H. Singh, however, similar measures can be built on the basis of other models of national cultures [Rozkwitalska M., 2011, pp. 62-63].

⁶ In the subject literature we can encounter various terminology for particular phases of cultural shock. G. Hofstede calls them euphoria-cultural shock-adaptation - state of balance [see Hofstede G. and Hofstede G. J., 2007, pp. 337-339]. On the other hand, De Cieri et al. suggest the following phases: period of waiting and concerns - honey moon-party is over-regeneration [see De Cieri H., etc., 1991, pp. 379-380]. In the concept by Lysgaard the following have been distinguished: euphoria-cultural shock-acculturation-stable adaptation [Boski P., 2010, p. 525].

⁷ Over the years, the perception of diversity evolved from its perceiving as difference in sex, nationality, skin color or culture [Kossek E.E. and Lobel S. A., 2000, p. 365] to „the way people vary among themselves, which affects their professional experience in effectiveness, motivation and communication, forcing the need for preparing an organizational strategy, considering diversity of the changing environment (customers, suppliers or community)” [Harvey C. P. and Allard M. J., 2012, xiv].

considered a source of competitive advantage by way of cost reduction (fluctuation, absence and legal effects of discrimination), wide access to talents and stimulating economic growth [Waszczak S., 2009, p. 79]. A positive approach to diversity⁸, its integration with organizational strategy and culture as well as effective management may bring many benefits to the company. One of the forms of appreciation of diversity and counteracting its negative effects (among others, facilitating the process of acculturation and introduction in the scope of responsibilities) covers programs and training for people employed or delegated to work in culturally diverse units.

Training and development of employees in culturally various organizations

The main way of socialization and acculturation of employees to the organizational norms and values covers adaptive, training and development programs [Kossek E. E. and Lobel S.A., 2000, p. 179]. International organizations use for that purpose an entire range of methods and techniques that can be divided into [Schroeder J., 2010, p. 106]:

- comprising official, usually regularly conducted training programs (traditional training on international management, diversity training, language training and intercultural training)
- immediate actions, resulting from needs at the given time (in the case of expatriation, these will be information trainings⁹ and initial visit in the host country, in the case of newly hired employees - adaptive procedure¹⁰)
- related to performed work and at the workplace (among others, participation in global multicultural teams, position rotation within various units of the company in Poland and abroad)
- alternative training forms (among others, introduction to the workplace by the predecessor, briefing, coaching and mentoring, networking, encouraging participation in corporate integration events as well as assimilation activities (e.g. multicultural festivals, etc.)).

⁸ In the opinion of S. Moore, organizations may be more or less positive and supporting attitude to diversity, i.e. may be blind to diversity (insularity), hostile towards diversity (ethnocentric), integrating diversity (synergism) or naive towards diversity [Waszczak S., 2009, p. 82].

⁹ Training dedicated to the expatriate and his or her family (or accompanying people), including information related to geography, politics, economy, infrastructure and communication and general living and work conditions in the host country.

¹⁰ The process of adaptation consists of two dimensions - social adaptation (shaping behaviors of a new employee in the company, related to an active adaptation to a new social environment, i.e. the superior, co-workers or customers) as well as professional adaptation (acceptance of a new role and mastering of the scope of tasks executed at the given workplace, including the process of adaptation to the workplace and to physical work environment) [Kubica I., 2010, p. 42].

Employees delegated to work abroad are customarily covered by the greatest number of development and training activities (both before departure, in its course and after coming back to the mother country). However, we cannot forget that similar activities should also cover people accompanying expatriates as well as local employees, whose skills and experience in intercultural cooperation will determine, to a large extent, subsequent business performance [Schroeder J., 2010, p. 104]. When organizing training for HCN and TCN employees, it is required to avoid attempts of direct transferring domestic training programs. It is necessary to adjust them to local cultural conditions and often requires a combined teaching approach and use of services of trainers of different nationalities, representing different styles of education [see Schroeder J., 2010, pp. 123-127, Mead R. and Andrews T. G., 2011, pp. 44-446]. It may happen that in some cultural circles (e.g. the Germans, the Swedes) training participants expect a clear determination of teaching goals, an exact training program and an indication of „adequate” solutions to problems. On the other hand, representatives of other nations (e.g. the Englishmen) will prefer a non-systematized approach, with many solutions to problems and without strict frames of the timetable [Schroeder J., 2010, pp. 123, 126]. The scope of training may result also from cultural conditions and the degree of business internationalization.

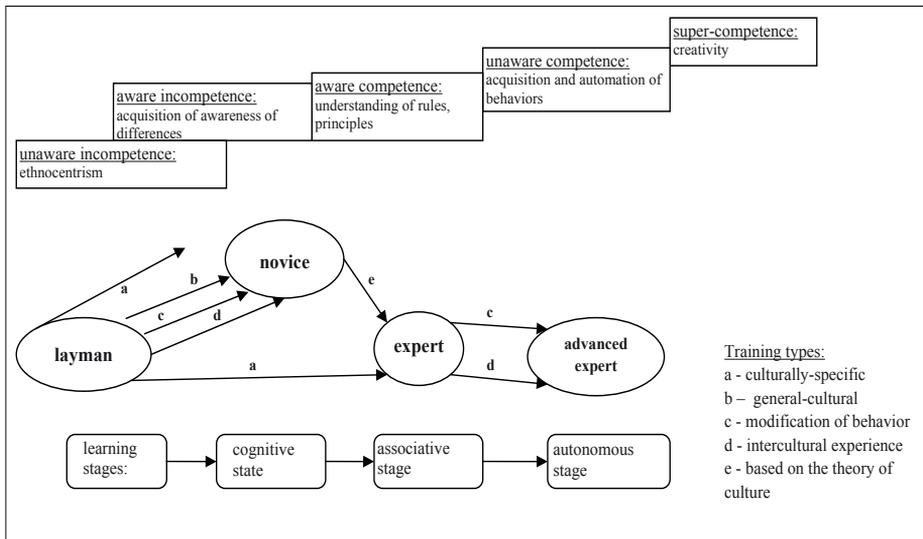
In the subject literature, we may encounter an opinion that one of the most effective tools in the process of acculturation is intercultural training, putting a particular emphasis on the issues of interactions (communication, establishing contacts with inhabitants, learning differences of cultural norms, ways of thinking or behavior). However, it is important that tools used for this purpose correspond to particular stages of the process of adaptation to a new life and work environment, as presented in Figure 2 [Schroeder 2010, p. 120].

As we can see on the outlined model, Bhawuk - like Selmer, Torbiörn and de Leon (1998)¹¹, has distinguished four phases of the process of intercultural adaptation, depending on relations between subjectively understood knowledge of the principles of behavior/life in a new culture (unawareness-awareness) and actual skills (competence-incompetence) [Schroeder J., 2010, pp. 120-121 and Boski P., 2010, p. 582]. The stage of *a layman* is characterized by unawareness of intercultural differences and a low level of descriptive skills (incompetence). Moving to the stage of *a novice* is emotionally difficult and involves the need to overcome the previously discussed acculturation stress. This is the time of realizing reality of intercultural differences and own deficiencies in this field. It requires also the most intensive training activities, involving, among

¹¹ The authors of this concept have distinguished 4 groups of training phases, i.e. pre-departure, in the ethnocentric phase, in the phase of cultural shock and adaptation [more in: Schroeder J., 2010, pp. 120-121].

others, *culturally specific training* (communicating messages/skills relevant for a given culture), *general cultural training* (general reflection on intercultural differences), *training on behavior modification* (acquisition of new behaviors by way of modeling and role playing) and *intercultural experiencing* (the so-called immersion, i.e. arranged dose of presence in a culturally different environment). Mastering of the principles of a new culture involves acquisition of conscious competence (*cognitive training, based on the theory of culture*) and is typical of the stage of *an expert*. However, it is not reflected in smooth initiation of relevant behaviors. No sooner than at the stage of unaware competence (the phase of *an advanced expert*), functioning in the other culture gets automated, differing little from the one adequate to the mother culture. The presented model can be supplemented with the level of creative super-competence, manifesting itself in making conscious and original transformations, introducing new language, behavioral elements, etc. However, the level of super-competence characterizes a little group of cultural creators [Boski P., 2010, pp. 582-584].

Figure 2. Stages of the process of cultural learning and training types



Source: Bhawuk 1998 [quot.:] Boski P., 2010, p. 582.

When talking about cultural training, we cannot also forget that - though these trainings are the most common type of trainings, also other diversity training should be used. In the opinion of P. De Rosa, organizations that care about integration of their employees should organize also training covering the following subject matter [De Rosa P., 2012, pp. 348-354]:

- *Legal Compliance* - legal training and training on the scope of civil rights, the primary goal of which is to pay attention to anti-discriminatory regulations and practices with regard to recruiting, hiring, promoting and rewarding persons of different sex, age, skin color or origin; the applied training methods include presentations, lectures, case studies and - in rare cases- experimental methods
- *Managing diversity & Inclusion* - training informing on the organizational policy in relation to diverse personnel, putting emphasis on presentation of the way business context, stereotypes and prejudices can affect employment, team effectiveness, promotions or organizational profitability; the most popular training methods are role playing, discussion or case studies
- *Prejudice Reduction* - training concerning overcoming stereotypes and prejudices with the use of methods as: case studies (stories of selected persons), personnel interactions (e.g. holding hands) and discussions
- *Valuing Differences* - trainings developing cultural pluralism, the main value of which is the recognition of individual uniqueness while also acknowledging different group identities; training methods are, first of all, discussion, case studies and lectures
- *Anti-racism/Anti-oppression* - trainings that have initiated other activities in the scope of diversity management; they are intended to integrate people of other nationality with the culture dominant in the country/organization without critiquing and transforming the essence of that dominant culture; these trainings combine the micro scale (of the individual) and the macro scale (of the organization), using such training methods as tests (auto-diagnosis), discussions and case studies.

A peculiar embodiment of culture is language that makes it possible for the members of a given community to reflect what is a true value for them. For this reason, supporting the process of acculturation, organizations offer to its employees foreign languages courses¹² and also training on intercultural communication [see Laroche L. and Rutherford D., 2007, pp. 99-162]. In the latter case, it proves purposeful to consider such thematic scope as [Winkler R., 2008, p. 205]:

- dimensions of interacting cultures (particularly distance towards authority and individualism -collectivism)
- approach to time
- common communication and/or negotiation paradigms
- courtesy norms and strategies

¹² In the case of international corporations, it may be learning of „the official language” (usually English) that is binding throughout the organization, while in the case of expatriation - local language, facilitating professional work and accessibility to social structures outside the workplace of the expatriate [Schroeder J., 2010, p. 107].

- elements of non-verbal communication (among others, acceptable forms of touch, eye contact, gestures, distance between interlocutors)

Summary

Due to cultural diversity, creation of multicultural teams is a practice of international companies. Work of such teams is extremely difficult, as it results from different perception of the world and various behavior of its particular members. The awareness of existence and understanding of these differences as well as adaptability to culturally different conditions are the key to use the potential dozing in these teams. Creativity induced by cultural differences allows better defining problems, provides more creative and alternative solutions [Schroeder 2010, pp. 34-35] as well as allows reaching new customer groups, being, for example, representatives of ethnically diverse groups [Janowska Z., 2009, p. 72]. On the other hand, underestimated cultural distance or its improper evaluation (based on national stereotypes or selective information) pose a hazard for success of acculturation, and, in the case of a foreign mission - can lead even to its premature termination¹³.

The analysis of benefits and hazards associated with diversity clearly indicates that the future will belong to the companies that appreciate diversity and will be able to carry out effectively the process of mutual understanding and integration of employees originating from different culture, increasing, therefore, their competitive potential on global markets.

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¹³ As shown by foreign surveys, a percentage of employees returning earlier ranges from 25 to 40% in developed countries and up to 70% in developing countries. It has been assumed that more rigorous trainings reduce failure probability [see Kubica I., 2011, p. 212 and Miś A., 2002, p. 146].

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