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Cultural domination or cooperation on the example of Toyota and Bridgestone

Abstract: *The article describes the problem of cross cultural management in Japanese companies operating in Poland. The aim of this paper is to present significant differences in the approach to intercultural management in two large Japanese companies operating in Poland. Author answers the question of why there can be no one best model of cultural interaction, and present the results of empirical studies of this issue carried out at Toyota Motor Industries Poland and Bridgestone Diversified Products Poland. The article is concluded with the sentence that the best model of cultural interaction is the model of cultural interaction consciously chosen taking into account situational factors present in a particular company.*

Key words: *organization culture, cultural interactions, cross cultural management, Japanese management*

1. Introduction

Managing cultural diversity is a current and important issue. In Poland, there are many international companies that employ Poles. These include the Japanese companies. They are even more interesting that they come from a completely different culture area. Poles working in these companies are subject to strong influence of Japanese culture.

Article refers to some of the earlier author's studies - *Selected aspects of the cultural differences between the Poles and the Japanese influence on management subsidiaries of Japanese companies in Poland*. It is the continuation and extension of the previous article. The aim of this paper is to present significant differences in the approach to intercultural management in two large Japanese companies operating in Poland. Author answers the question of why there can be no one best model of cultural interaction, and present the results of empirical studies of this issue carried out at Toyota Motor Industries Poland and Bridgestone Diversified Products Poland. The study was conducted in the period from February to May 2012 using a survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

2. National culture, organizational culture and cultural interactions

Organizational culture is a popular issue among researchers all over the world. Also, many people are involved in defining and describing the dimensions of national cultures. Should mention Hofstede, Laurent, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, but of course this list is much longer. This raises the question whether national culture influences organizational culture, or *vice versa*? To answer this question should be provided some specific definitions of organizational culture.

Table 1. Definitions of the organizational culture

No.	Author	Definition
1.	Bower M.	Organizational culture is the way we do things that surround us.
2.	Geertz C.	Organizational culture is the creation of meanings, of which human beings derive their experience and practices.
3.	Hofstede G.	Organizational culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another.
4.	Jacques E.	Organizational culture is the customary and traditional way of thinking and acting. The new members of the organization must know and accept it if they want to be accepted as members.
5.	Deshapande R., Parasurman R.	Organizational culture is the unwritten, often unconsciously perceived rules, which bridge the gap between what is formally in force, and what is actually happening.
6.	Schein E.	Organizational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned in the course of solving the problems of its external adaptation and internal integration, working well enough that they were considered valuable and therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.
7.	Pietkiewicz E., Kałużny S.	Organizational culture is the right organizational climate and management, incentives, skills, relationships.

Source: [Kraśiński M., 2012, p. 95]

It is worth noting that the quoted definitions of organizational culture in the most appeal to common principles, norms and values espoused by

members of the organization. In this context, it should be considered that the national culture with the characteristics of people who represent it affects the organizational culture of a particular company. Of course it is possible to find some examples where this relationship is reversed. An example is the church, which is also the organization, so it has its corporate culture. Churches in the history of the world have changed the national culture affecting its organizational culture - religion. There were changes in the state such as the pagan became Christian, and the Christian countries - Muslim. However, on the basis of the modern economy we have more to do with the influence of national culture on organizational culture.

Global markets have caused many results, also the creation of a large number of international organizations. A characteristic feature of these organizations is the variety of national cultures represented by their members. In special cases, it comes into contact only two national cultures at the organization. Such a case occurs when a particular company from one country invests in another one.

This paper focuses on the case in which the Japanese make direct investments in Poland. Regardless of the nature of the investment, the industry in which the Japanese company operates and the type of tasks, the Board Polish branch of Japanese companies are Japanese, and the workforce are mostly Poles. So there is a meeting of two cultures - Polish and Japanese.

In the 80's of the twentieth century Nancy Adler proposed an interesting model of cultural interaction, which identified three possible types of behaviour [Adler N.J., 1986].

1. The first is cultural domination. This is a case in which one culture is clearly dominant and affects the behaviour of the representatives of other cultures. Most often the dominant culture is the culture of the parent organization. Especially in the case of the Japanese companies is this situation because, in the opinion of the Japanese, the use of Japanese management methods also requires the use of the Japanese models of behaviour.
2. Cultural coexistence occurs when two different cultures within one organization operate in parallel. The model of cultural coexistence looking for a compromise that allows for the effective functioning, or functioning at all.
3. The third type of cultural interaction is the cultural cooperation. When the cultural cooperation exist in the organization there is a synergy of existing features of both cultures, and as a result a new, unique organizational culture is formed.

It might seem that the model of cultural cooperation is the most beneficial and thus is a win-win strategy. But is it always? First of all, in the cultural cooperation comes to merging two cultures, and the results of merging two different cultural features are not always positive (from the economic point of

view). In addition, the model of intercultural cooperation can be achieved in two ways. The first involves natural cooperation when both cultures “adapt” to each other during the time. The second model is a model of forced cooperation, what means that it is determined by management and the strategy of the company. In this case, it is possible to talk about the apparent cooperation because the national culture is reduced to the series of behaviours, from which are selected those behaviours for which there is consent. In the case of forced cultural cooperation, the members of the organization may have a feeling that after all this activity is artificial. Illusory cross-cultural cooperation basically comes down to cultural domination with elements of coexistence. Forced cooperation “allows” the behaviour of other culture, but only those that are acceptable, so that it is not a true cultural cooperation.

It is impossible to clearly determine the best model of cultural interaction, because the choice depends on many factors. Always, however, is a decision-in-chief executive. It is worth recalling at this point the situational model of leadership style because decisions on the model of cultural interaction will be associated with it.

Table 2. The situational model of leadership style

Situational factors			Recommended leadership style
Range of power	Level of tasks structuration	Relations between the leader and the group	
high	high	good	tasks-oriented
small	high	good	tasks-oriented
high	low	good	tasks-oriented
small	low	good	people-oriented
high	high	bad	people-oriented
small	high	bad	people-oriented
high	low	bad	people-oriented
small	low	bad	tasks-oriented

Source: [Przybyła M., 2003, p. 283]

As previously noted, the decision to choose the model of cultural interaction is within the top management. So that in a model of cultural interaction there is

no factor “range of power”, because its value will always be “high”. For the same reason, the factor “relations between the leader and the group” in the model of cultural interaction takes the form of “relations between management and employees”.

Table 3. The situational model of cultural interaction

Situational factors			Recommended model of cultural interaction
Level of tasks structuration	relations between management and employees	Leadership style	
high	good	tasks-oriented	cultural domination
low	good	tasks-oriented	cultural cooperation
high	bad	people-oriented	cultural domination
low	bad	people-oriented	cultural coexistence

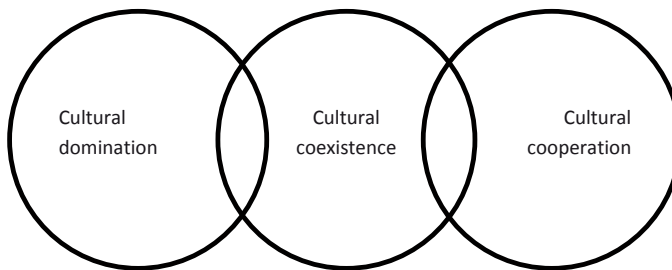
Source: Author’s own study

It is necessary to add a few assumptions to the proposed in Table 3 situational model of cultural interaction. First of all, it is assumed that in the case of cultural dominance, the dominant culture is the culture of the parent organization. The second assumption is to apply the solutions in the field of organization and management that are specific (originate) for cultural characteristics of the parent organization. Additionally, leadership style is consistent with the model suggested in Table 2 and for the purposes of this model, it becomes the situational factor. The fourth assumption is that the employees are people from the country where the investment is located, as opposed to top management. Cultural domination is performed, when the level of tasks structuration is high. The way the tasks are structured comes from the parent organization culture and for this reason, it should be present for efficient operation of the company. In the case when tasks structuration is low, the cultural cooperation model can be used. It should be remembered that the style of leadership should be tasks-oriented. Therefore, the process of developing cultural relations between the parent organization and employees should be completed in the first phase of the business life cycle [see: Przybyła M., 2003, s. 19]. The worst situation from the company’s management point of view is when tasks structuration is low, and relations between management and employees are bad. Then the preferred leadership style is “the people-oriented”, and the cultural coexistence model is postulated on the ground of cultural interaction. From the people-oriented point of view, cultural cooperation would be better, but due to the previous

factors, it could lead to the domination of employees' culture over the culture of the parent organization. Then there could be a problem with the implementation of the strategy and management solutions of the parent organization.

Considerations related to cultural interaction models should finish one more remark. It is hardly to separate specified in Table 3 the three types of cultural interactions models. It is also very difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear borders between them.

Figure 1. The boundaries of cultural interaction models



Source: Author's own study

In practice, most of the companies in which cultural interactions occur at the level of different national cultures, there will be the indirect model of cultural interactions only with most features of one of these basic models. This situation illustrates the schematic shown in Figure 1

3. Cultural interaction model present in Japanese companies participating in the survey

The problem with the choice of a particular model of cultural interaction in Japanese companies operating in Poland, was tested within the wider research related to cultural determinants of Japanese management concept for Japanese companies operating in Poland. In these studies, among others, took part two large and well-known in the world Japanese companies - Toyota Motor Industries Poland and Bridgestone Diversified Products Poland.

Both companies are Polish subsidiaries of Japanese corporations. Both companies are using the Japanese management concepts that are strongly embedded in the Japanese national culture. However, these companies have different models of cultural interaction. At Toyota Motor Industries Poland there is the cultural domination (Japanese culture dominate the Polish culture), while at Bridgestone Diversified Products Poland there is the cultural cooperation.

In-depth interviews with representatives of top management show that the level of tasks structuration at TMIP is high, while at Bridgestone is closer to the low than high. Toyota employees must follow exactly the established procedures, while at Bridgestone the end result is most important, and the way to reach it is left to the decision of workers. Tasks-oriented leadership is present at Bridgestone, and at Toyota leaders are people-oriented. Toyota managers are focused on human relationships, because, thanks to a very high level of standardization of work, tasks are performed automatically in some case. Situational model of cultural interaction factor “relations between management and employees” is defined both on the basis of in-depth interviews, as well as on the basis of surveys among employees. Employees were asked about the frequency of meetings with the top management and the awareness of business development plans for the coming years, because the direct question of relations with superiors could result in dishonest answers. The object of the study was the frequency of meetings with top management and the quality of these meetings. The quality of meeting was measured with the level of knowledge about the company future. The results are shown in Table 4

Table 4. Frequency of meetings with employees

Does your company top management:		
Company name	Bridgestone	Toyota
Often met with all employees	76%	13%
In exceptional circumstances, meet with all employees	24%	87%
Do not meet with all employees	0%	0%

Source: Author’s own study based on the research data

Table 5. Knowledge of the future of the company

Do you know the future plans of the company?		
Company name	Bridgestone	Toyota
Yes	62%	29%
No	38%	71%

Source: Author’s own study based on the research data

The high frequency of meetings with top management has increased awareness of the directions of development in the coming years. In the case of TMIP it is possible to say that the factor “relations between management and employees” is set to “bad”, and in-depth analysis allows to answer the question of why this is so. This is due to the organizational structure, which in TMIP is extended and there are many levels of management. Employees usually communicate with their direct operational supervisors, not the chief management.

Cultural cooperation model is present from the start of the BDPP. This is possible thanks to the high degree of autonomy within the scope of the organization and management solutions, which may not be faithfully reproduced from Japanese headquarters solutions. Human Resources at Bridgestone from the very beginning have an idea to create a family atmosphere. At the same time the HR department looks after the tasks have been carried out properly. One of the effects of these actions is the declaration of 84% of employees that they wish to work in BDPP until retirement¹.

TMIP also identified from the beginning as a model of the interaction of cultural domination of Japanese culture on Polish culture. In this case it is caused by the fact, that Polish branch need to follow very strict procedures imposed by the Japanese headquarters. Simultaneous focus on people management makes mitigate resistance to the policy related to Japanese cultural domination. An important factor in determining the choice of the model of cultural interaction is also the use of many Japanese management concepts that require the performance of attitudes characteristic for the Japanese national culture. The attitude of the people is very difficult to change, so the Toyota forced to maintain in the spirit of the Japanese workers in a formal way.

Great difficulties in changing attitudes illustrate the results of research in these companies. The Bridgestone’s employee average seniority is 4.56 years; the Toyota’s is 6.33 years. Despite this attitude of Polish employees haven’t changed and aren’t close to Japanese attitudes, what is shown in Tables 6 and 7

Table 6. Locus of control

Locus of control		
Company name	Bridgestone	Toyota
Inner control	86%	83%
Outer control	14%	17%

Source: Author’s own study based on the research data

¹ In the TMIP similar declaration made 43% of the workforce.

Table 7. Perceptions of work

With which statement you agree		
Company name	Bridgestone	Toyota
I live to work	14%	13%
I work to live	86%	88%

Source: Author's own study based on the research data

Japanese are the highly outer control nation. Poles are much more inner control [comp.: Trompenaars F., Hampden-Turner Ch., 2012]. The result of the survey presented in Table 6 shows, that despite the long seniority at the Japanese companies, Polish workers haven't changed their attitudes in the level of locus of control.

Another characteristic feature is the Japanese perception of work as a duty resulting from life, while in Poland work is seen as a necessity [comp.: Hofstede, G., 2010]. Both in BDPP and in the workers attitudes coincide with the Hofstede research results.

4. Conclusions

Conducted studies have shown that despite the use of one of the three models of cultural interaction, there is a possibility to observe some behaviour specific to another model.

An example would be to limit the Japanese Total 5S² to 4S in TMIP. The Japanese felt that the Poles cannot be enforced self-discipline, and so they made an exception to the full cultural domination. In BDPP HR department introduced the Japanese motivation system, which assumes that only the best 60% of the crew may receive a bonus in a given month, and not all who have completed their tasks. The decision to introduce a system of remuneration has been forced by the Japanese headquarters and did not agree with the current model of intercultural cooperation in the Bridgestone. The decision was therefore deviation from the model of cooperation for coexistence (reaching the compromise). These examples seem to confirm shown in Figure 1 certain common areas between different models of cultural interaction.

Selection of the cultural interaction model in a particular company is the responsibility of the company's top management. However, the choice should not be made on the basis of a random decision, but on the basis of the company's situation, in particular the level of tasks structuration, relations between

² 5S is the Lean Management tool. The shortcut comes from the acronym of five Japanese words: Seiri (sorting), Seiton (stabilizing), Seiso (Sweeping), Seiketsu (standardizing), Shitsuke (self-discipline).

management and employees and present leadership style. The presented results show that these factors have a key impact on the used model of cultural interaction. It is hardly to determine which model of cultural interaction is the best because it depends on, as indicated, a number of factors. The TMIP and BDPP examples show that two large Japanese companies operating in Poland can be successful despite using two very different models of cultural interaction. The article can therefore be concluded that the best model of cultural interaction is the model of cultural interaction consciously chosen taking into account situational factors present in a particular company.

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