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Cultural determinants of relations with entities from the international market environment

Introduction

A range of factors which should be taken into account when designing the activities aimed at creating long-term customer relationships is growing, along with an increase in the arena covered by a company's activities: from the local one to the international one. As a result, companies operating in the international environment need to take into account so-called cultural determinants in their customer relationship management.

National versus organisational cultures

The term of culture was first defined by E.B. Tylor, who says this is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits learned by man as a member of society'[Bartosik Purgat M., 2006, p.14].

According to A. Kłoskowska, culture is "a relatively integrated whole, comprising people's behaviours following the patterns common for a social community, which have been shaped and learned during interactions and which contain the products of such behaviours" [Kłoskowska A., 1980, p.40].

G. Hofstede defines culture as 'the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another' [Hofstede G., 2000, p.40]. There are three levels of human mind programming:

- human nature, which is universal and inherited,
- culture, which is group specific and learned,
- personality, which is specific for an individual, partly inherited and partly learned.

When conducting research into the impact of culture onto the process of creating relations with entities from the environment, there are a few basic layers:

1. the level of affiliation with a specific national culture,
2. the level of affiliation with the culture connected with a specific ethnic (regional), linguistic or religious group, within a specific and separate national group,
3. the level of the culture resulting from the affiliation with a specific social and occupational group or/and generation,
4. the level of organisational culture connected with one's role and position in a workplace [Karcz K., p.46-46; Hofstede G., p.46].

It seems that the process of establishing relations with entities from the environment is mostly affected by the level of affiliation with a specific national culture and the level of organisational culture connected with an individual's role and position in their workplace. What matters here is the mutual influence of the organisational culture and the national culture. At the level of national cultures, the differences occur, first of all, in the area of values and, to a small extent only, in the area of practices. At the level of organisational cultures, however, we can see the biggest differences in the area of practices.

One of the definitions states that the national culture is a collection of personal cultures (values, norms, preferences, language, personalities, attitudes) of all the members (individuals) of the society [Bartosik – Purgat M., 2006, p.14].

A very broad definition of the national culture is presented by Ph. R. Cateora and P.N. Ghauri. They believe that the national culture includes every part of a human life: material, intellectual and spiritual. They divide it into six parts, i.e.: material culture (technology, economy), social institutions (social organisations, political structures), education (literacy), a system of beliefs (religions, superstitions), aesthetics (art, folklore, music, drama, dance) and language [Cateora Ph. & R., Ghauri P.N., 2000, pp. 109-116].

The literature identified four features of the national culture, namely:

- the national culture is handed down from generation to generation,
- it acquires supra-individual and anonymous features,
- culture is regarded as a human attribute,
- culture is regarded as a complex whole,
- culture is regarded as 'dynamically stable' [Bartosik Purgat M., 2006, pp. 21-26].

The organisational culture, in turn, may be defined as 'a learned product of a group experience, based on values, norms, and cultural patterns resulting from these' [Sułkowski Ł., 2002, p.58].

According to G. Hofstede, the organisational culture is 'the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one organisation from those of another' [Hofstede G., 2000, p. 375]. It may also

be assumed that it is a system of processes, which are typical for a company and connect values, social and cultural norms, favoured by the management and workers, with their attitudes and the ways in which these attitudes affect organisational behaviours [Despahnde R., Webster F.E., 1989, pp.13-15]. Consequently, the organisational culture is a means of conveying values and norms, shared by the members of an organisation, which are the components of their national cultures. The national culture starts to be learned by an individual from childhood, unlike the corporate culture, which starts to be learned when the individual joins a company [Chatman J.A., Jehn K.A., 1994, pp.522-553].

Cultures, both the national culture and the organisational culture, affect each other, which may lead to their partial or complete convergence. Although a lot of convergence can be seen in so-called 'hard' elements of management the unification process of the organisational culture does not tend to run at the same pace and with the same intensity. To simplify, we can say that managers all over the world do more or less the same things (cultural convergence), but in a different way (cultural divergence) [Kostera M., 1996, p. 521]. Therefore, it may be assumed that managers all over the world communicate and establish relationships but this process differs depending on the national and organisational culture they belong to.

Influence of culture on relationship marketing

The influence of culture on relationship marketing may be analysed in the following dimensions [Karcz K., 2005]:

- 1) culturally determined relationships between a company and its present and potential customers – individual consumers (in particular, the process of multicultural communication),
- 2) culturally determined relationships among companies operating in a market:
 - a company and its present and potential institutional customers (business-to-business),
 - companies operating within a given sector (competitors, middlemen, suppliers etc.);
- 3) culturally determined relationships between a company and its stakeholders,
- 4) culturally determined relationships within multinational corporations, having subsidiaries in numerous countries and employing workers from various nationalities and cultures.

The impact of the cultural environment on the establishment and maintenance of relationships with key stakeholders may be analysed from two managerial perspectives. Firstly, cultural factors should be taken into account on the strategic field, in particular in a company's marketing strategy, and secondly – on the field

of tactics and tools for operating on an international market, especially with regard to a so-called marketing mix.

When formulating their marketing strategies, companies should pay attention to the cultural specificity of the given market and, as a result, carry out marketing activities in compliance with the effective social and cultural norms. Owing to that, the company may be perceived as one which is connected with the local market and takes into consideration its specificity. When standardising their marketing activities, even companies whose operations are based on a global marketing concept tend to pay more and more attention to cultural differences in their international environment. Many of them, using the experience they gain, also try to take into consideration the 'think global – act local' principle [Karcz K., 2005].

Before creating their programmes, aimed at expanding and strengthening customer relationships on international markets, companies should first identify the cultural affiliation of their potential buyers from a given country, get familiar with their characteristics and various aspects of their culture, before they start planning the methods and tools targeted at reinforcing the mutual relationships [Pabian A., 2007].

Cultural dimensions and the types of relations with entities from the environment

The literature shows many types of national and organisational cultures. G. Hofstede identifies the following dimensions of national cultures: power distance (small versus large), individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, strong versus weak uncertainty avoidance. According to this author, the dimensions of organisational cultures include: orientation towards procedures – orientation towards outcomes, taking care of workers – taking care of production, affiliation – professionalism, an open system – a closed system, lenient control – strict control, rule by law – rule by pragmatism [Hofstede G., pp. 47-57]. F. Trompennars and Ch. Hampden Turner, in turn, specify the following dimensions of national cultures: universalism – particularism, individualism – collectivism, emotional cultures and reserved cultures, fractional cultures and comprehensive cultures, cultures in which an achieved or an ascribed status matters, cultures with different attitudes to time and environment [Trompennars F., Hampden Turner Ch., 2002, pp. 22-24].

The GLOBE concept comprises 9 dimensions: quality of workmanship, forward-looking orientation, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, family collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, humanistic orientation [House R.J., Hanges P.J., Javidan M., Dorfman P., Gupta P.W. (ed), 2004]. S. Schwarz enumerates personal (individual) values, such as power, achievements, hedonism, search for sensations, subjectivity,

universalism, goodness, conformism, tradition and security, and cultural values, such as background (social order, respect for tradition, obedience), hierarchy (power, modesty), mastery (ambition, confidence), effective autonomy (pleasure, exciting life), intellectual autonomy (broad horizons, curiosity), egalitarianism (justice, equality), harmony (unity with the nature, global peace) [Schwarz S.H.,2007, pp. 711-728]. R. Gesteland divides cultures into: pro-transactional and pro-partnership ones, low and high context, ceremonial and non-ceremonial, monochromic and polychromic, expressive and reserved [Gesteland R., 2000, pp.60-75].

Further analysis focuses on the descriptions of the dimensions presented by the national cultures and the organisational cultures, according to G. Hofstede, T. Trompenaars, Ch. Hampden Turner and R. Gesteland (cf. Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1 The impact of national cultures on the process of relationship building on international markets (typology by R. Gesteland, T. Trompenaars, Ch. Hampden Turner and R. Gesteland)

TYPOLOGY BY G. HOFSTEDE	
CULTURE	FEATURES
- Large power distance	- Superiors and subordinates, by principle, believe that they are not equal. In organisations, there is a strong trend towards maximum centralisation of power, subordinates' role is limited to following superiors' orders. Superiors enjoy special privileges, and contacts between superiors and subordinates can be established only when initiated by superiors.
- Small power distance	- Superiors and subordinates believe that they are equal partners. Organisations are relatively decentralised, workers have easy access to their superiors, they expect all decisions which affect their work to be discussed with them.

<p>- Collectivism</p> <p>- Individualism</p>	<p>- Relationships between a superior and a worker are perceived in ethical categories. They resemble, to a large extent, family relationships, they are based on mutual commitments which ensure security in exchange for unquestionable loyalty, the interest of a group is more important than the interest of an individual, the group i.e. „we” is the main source of identification for its members and the guarantee of security in difficulties of one’s life. In exchange for that, members are required to show loyalty to their group, and any disloyalty poses almost a risk for an individual’s existence, people belong to strong groups, from the moment of their birth, and the source of identification is affiliation with a network of social connections</p> <p>- Relationships between an employer and employees are perceived as a business transaction, „I”, being a given person’s identity, clearly differs from „I” of the other people in the environment, people are classified on the grounds of their personal characteristics, bonds between individuals are loose and everybody pays most attention to themselves and their closest family, an individual is a source of identification</p>
<p>- Masculinity</p> <p>- Femininity</p>	<p>- Managers believe that conflicts can be resolved by confrontation, ‘live-to-work’ attitude to work, a manager is a person who makes decisions easily and quickly, is assertive and aggressive, makes decisions independently, based more on facts than conclusions drawn from discussions with subordinates</p> <p>- Managers aim to resolve conflicts by compromise and negotiations, ‘work-to-live’ attitude towards work, a manager is inconspicuous, follows his/her intuition and aims to reach agreement</p>
<p>- Strong uncertainty avoidance</p> <p>- Weak uncertainty avoidance</p>	<p>- There are many formal and informal laws, by which behaviours of employees and employers can be controlled</p> <p>- Laws and regulations are created only if and where absolutely indispensable</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term orientation - Short-term orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perseverance (industriousness), thrift, hierarchy, marriage as a pragmatic relationship within a bigger family - Respect for free time, consumerism, egalitarianism, marriage as a free relationship between two people
<p>TYPOLGY BY F. TROMPENAARS AND CH.HAMPDEN TURNER</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Universalism - Particularism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is only one truth or reality; more emphasis is put on regulations than mutual relations between partners, people's behaviours are regulated by universal rules. People relate as equals. All individuals who are subject to the same rule should be treated in the same way, there is a tendency to prepare official agreements, a trustworthy person is somebody who respects a word they have given or a concluded contract. A contract is a method for life. An agreement is no just a text concerning rules but it codifies mutual commitments made by parties, proves that parties accept the terms and conditions and provides for a law of recourse, if parties fail to meet their promises. - There are a number of points of view for the same reality, representatives of particularistic cultures place more emphasis on mutual relations than regulations between partners. Everything is considered with reference to a specific situation. A person is not treated as an anonymous citizen but as a friend, husband or any other unique person, both in a positive and negative sense. Focus is more on interpersonal relations than on rules, official agreements tend to be modified. A trustworthy person is somebody who respects changing circumstance, there are a number of perspectives (sides) of a reality, different for every contractual party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individualism - Collectivism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - „Primary focus on oneself”, a worker is expected to follow his/her own interest first. In a workplace a worker should be treated as an individual with specific, personal features, workers achieve objectives on their own and bear personal responsibility - „Primary focus on objectives and tasks”, an employer never treats their employees as individuals but as members of a particular group. A worker is expected to submit to the superior interest, even if it does not overlap with his/her own interest. Employees achieve objectives as a group, which implies collective responsibility

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affective cultures - Neutral cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers clearly express their feelings, people representing neutral cultures are perceived as hiding their feelings, managers communicate in verbal and non-verbal ways. Openness and effusiveness reduce tension, emotions are revealed easily, effusively and violently. Lively, expressive behaviours are admired, touching, gestures and expressive facial expressions are accepted - Managers believe that feelings should be controlled so that they do not distort the perceptions of the reality and do not result in a loss of self-control, reserved people tend to treat anger, delight and excessive emotionality as non-professional; Managers do not reveal their feelings and thoughts, only in exceptional cases they may show stress by their facial expressions or postures. Cold and reserved behaviour is admired; physical contact, gestures or expressive facial expressions are often regarded as taboos
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specificity - Diffusiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers tend to keep their private lives aside, a boss distinguishes professional relations with their subordinate and isolates these from other issues - Workers combine their private and professional lives; when making decisions about their interests, they do not only consider purely economic aspects but also a private sphere of their partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goal-oriented cultures - Ascriptive cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers are evaluated according to the performance of their functions, mutual relations are strictly functional - A status is ascribed to the ones who are naturally respected by others – elderly people, highly-qualified people, specialists in certain fields,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal direction - External direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conscience and beliefs are internal, managers follow their own beliefs, conscience and ethics - External patterns and factors affect a manager; when making decisions, managers follow signals from the environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sequential - Synchronic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers' actions are quick, within the shortest possible time sequence, - Managers take coordinated and synchronised actions

TYPOLOGY BY R. GESTELAND	
<p>– Pro-transactional attitude – focus on task performance</p>	<p>– Managers are open to do business with newly met people, they quickly get down to business during meetings; they communicate in a concrete, open and honest way, in order to understand one another better, a lot of arrangements are made by phone, fax, email, not face-to-face. Clearing up doubts is based on contracts, not personal relations, lawyers play an important part in concluding and performing contracts</p>
<p>– Pro-partnership attitude – focus on interpersonal relations</p>	<p>– Managers do not tend to do business with newly met people, they establish first business contacts in an indirect way; they avoid conflicts and confrontation, communicate in a restrictive, highly contextualised way (not to offend anybody) and prefer frequent face-to-face contacts. Clearing up doubts is based on mutual relations more than provisions of a contract.</p>
<p>– Ceremonial and hierarchical attitude</p>	<p>– Managers attach importance to a social and professional status and hierarchy, they show respect to people with high social status.</p>
<p>– Non-ceremonial and egalitarian attitude</p>	<p>– Managers attach less importance to a social and professional status, they are quickly on a first-name basis with newly met people, they do not use surnames and titles; managers avoid ceremony in interpersonal relations. More egalitarian organisations, with lower differences in status and power, are preferred.</p>
<p>– Polychromic cultures</p>	<p>– Managers attach more importance to people and good relations than punctuality and schedules, they are flexible about deadlines and schedules</p>
<p>– Monochromic cultures</p>	<p>– Managers attach more importance to punctuality and keeping deadlines</p>

- Reserved cultures	- Managers speak quietly, they hardly ever interrupt one another, there is a bigger physical distance between interlocutors, gestures and facial expressions are limited
- Expressive cultures	- Managers speak loudly, they often interrupt one another, there is a smaller physical distance between partners, people tend to touch one another, expressive facial expressions and enthusiastic gestures appear

Source: The author's own work based on: Hofstede, [2000, pp. 61-210], Gesteland, [2000, pp. 25-30], Trompenaars & Hampden – Turner [2002, pp. 22-25].

Table 2 The impact of organisational cultures on establishment of relationships on international markets (classification by G. Hofstede)

TYPOLOGY BY G. HOFSTEDE – DIMENSIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES	
CULTURE	FEATURES
- Orientation towards procedures	- Workers believe that their typical features are avoidance of risk and limited involvement in work,
- Orientation towards outcomes	- Workers perceive themselves as people who easily adapt to new situations and are dedicated to their work,
- Care about workers	- Workers' personal problems are taken into consideration, an organisation feels responsible for ensuring decent living conditions for its workers, all important decisions are made by a group
- Care about production	- Proper execution of work is in focus, an organisation is interested in workers' performance only and does not care about their family or personal happiness
- Affiliation	- An organisation's norms refer to professional life and private life alike
- Professionalism	- Private life is separated from personal life
- Open system	- Workers demonstrate a friendly attitude to new recruits and outsiders
- Closed system	- Workers are closed and reserved, even when dealing with their co-workers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lenient control - Strict control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers feel that no one in a company manages costs, dates of meetings, the company or work are frequent topics of jokes - Workers feel that close attention is paid to costs, all meetings are held punctually, jokes about work or the company are told only occasionally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rule by law - Rule by pragmatism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entities ruled by law believe that their role is to give evidence about the inviolability of rules, the main emphasis is placed on correctness of perceived organisational procedures, even at the expense of performance - Pragmatic entities are market-oriented, their priority is to meet customers' needs, performance is in focus, instead of keeping correct procedures

Source: The author's own work, based on Hofstede [2000, pp. 278-289].

In general, companies which plan to implement relationship marketing on an international market should remember that cultural differences which occur between nations may facilitate but also hinder, or even prevent, building of stable business relations on such a market. These differences may also adversely affect the atmosphere of cooperation, which is the background of and the basis for every partnership. This is particularly important in case when business partners represent completely different cultures. Geographical proximity (e.g. two neighbouring nations) does not have to mean affiliation with the same culture. Therefore, it is so important to take into account cultural differences when establishing long-term partnership bonds on distant but also close, or even neighbouring, foreign markets. That is why, before initiating or implementing any programs aimed at building stable relations on international markets, some in-depth research into and an analysis of cultural differences between the countries where the partners come from, should be conducted.

Every aspect listed above affects the establishment and maintenance of relations with partners on international markets. What seems most important is the fact whether representatives of a given country represent a pro-partnership culture or a pro-transactional culture and, consequently, how inclined they are to establish stable, friendly relations with business partners or to focus not a transaction as such and the conclusion of a contract.

Business partners representing universalistic or particularistic cultures will differ in their attitude to the importance of a contract and room for negotiations. Managers will also differ in their perception of their business partners. They may be treated as close and special people, with whom they will be connected not only because of professional issues but also because of personal issues, and

for whom they will be able to make an exception to the arrangements previously made in a contract. Managers may also not make exceptions when dealing with their partners and treat a contract as a final thing. The representatives of specific cultures, who they will keep their private life aside, and the representatives of diffused cultures, who combine private lives and professional lives, will behave in a similar way.

The representatives of collective cultures or individual cultures will differ in the composition of their teams when negotiating transactions; this will be done by a bigger group with a leader or by individual representatives with decision-making power.

The relations with various groups of stakeholders on international markets are also affected by the aspect of: small/ large power distance. In countries where this distance is large, business contracts will remain the responsibility of people on high positions, who are authorised to represent their company outside, while in countries where this distance is small, also lower-rank employees will be responsible for business contacts.

The division into masculine and feminine cultures, in turn, will affect the way conflicts are solved. Managers representing masculine cultures will tend to solve conflicts by confrontation, managers representing feminine cultures will tend to solve conflicts by compromise.

In societies dominated by a culture in which uncertainty is strongly avoided, mutual relations between partners will be highly formalised, while in cultures where uncertainty is not avoided so strongly, mutual relations are friendly and non-formalised.

Communication, which is connected with relations, and first of all, non-verbal communication, is affected by belonging to affective or neutral cultures. Representatives of affective cultures communicate openly, using a lot of non-verbal signals, while non-verbal communication of neutral cultures is very poor. This aspect is similar to the aspect of reserved versus expressive cultures.

Mutual relations between partners on international markets will be influenced by their belonging to performance-oriented cultures, where mutual relations are strictly functional, or to ascriptive cultures, where a status is ascribed to generally respected people, e.g. because of their age or education. Similarly, mutual relations will be affected by belonging to ceremonial or non-ceremonial cultures.

The division into monochronic and polychronic cultures, as well as sequential and synchronic cultures, determines the attitude to time. This may affect timely performance of a transaction and the sequence and priority of tasks to be performed.

The relations with entities on the European markets will also be affected by the various organisational cultures they belong to.

Managers who deal with representatives of organisations which focus on keeping procedures may be aware that their partners will avoid risk and will be involved in work to a limited extent. Representatives of cultures focusing on performance, however will focus on their objectives and functions.

Representatives of organisations focusing on workers will combine private life and professional life, representatives of organisations focusing on production will focus on a task to be performed, and their professional life will be separated from their private life.

In organisations dominated by affiliation, norms of the organisation apply both to personal life and professional life, and in organisations dominated by professionalism, private life will be separated from professional life.

Organisations ruled by law place the main emphasis on correct perception of organisational procedures, and pragmatic organisations are mainly market- and customer-oriented.

In companies with lenient control, workers feel that not much attention is paid to management, and in companies with strict control, there is a general belief that management and staff work organisation are of primary importance.

Conclusions

One should remember that it is very difficult to obtain information about cultural differences, and in some cases, such information may not even exist (e.g. with reference to small or very remote countries). A lack of secondary data often means a need to conduct our own direct research into the specificity of activities and behaviours of our business partners in a given area. Furthermore, managerial staff and personnel involved in establishment of stable relations on international markets should be trained in cultural differences so that they can meet the relationship marketing goals more effectively and quickly.

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Abstract

The article presents the impact of culture on the relations with entities from the international market environment. There were presented the definition of culture and the differences between national and organisational culture. However, the main aim of the article was to present the different approaches to the national and organisational culture's dimensions (Hofstede, Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, Schwarz versus GLOBE) and the influence of cultural differences on implementing the relationship marketing on international markets.