CHALLENGES OF MANAGER'S CULTURAL DIFFERENCES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract *Certainly people of different cultures have different opinions regarding what is ethical or not and that is why controversies and tensions may occur. In order to avoid the misunderstandings or conflicts, the managers must have good knowledge about the different cultural values and adjust to them. Obviously, a manager who works in another country has the objective to understand its culture. The individuals keep an eye on the others' behavior and use the acquired information to draw conclusions on certain event. The attributes may be created once three types of information have been obtained by the observer: consensus information, solid information distinctive information.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The boom of the international business led to an increase of the relations among the managers with different social and cultural experience. Many authors highlight that the managers' values, beliefs, norms and conducts are directly influenced by their national culture. These different perceptions are of utmost importance, being appreciated as "good or bad" or "the way they should be".

For example, the custom to offer gifts is largely spread in countries from Asia and Latin America (these countries are famous for certain values, such as: the importance of traditions and longtime relations). The above mentioned custom was borrowed by the organizations as a way of showing "the good manners'. However in the Anglo-American cultures, especially in countries like U.S.A., Great Britain, Australia, where the traditions are less important and the focus is on the short time relations, to offer gifts might be interpreted as bribe within a company.

2. CONTENT

The national culture dimensions are related to the following aspects: the national culture profile, the national culture importance in the managers' decisions making and the impact of the national culture on the ethics.

2.1. The national culture profile

As for our relations, can we say that we always resort to the same rules and behavior with all the persons? Aren't we selective and preferential, making a difference between the persons we know and the foreigners?

↳ **Universal versus particular**

The Anglo-American cultures, deeply rooted in the protestant religion, have the

tendency to support "the universality". In this type of society, the rules are evenly applied to all the members of society regardless who they might be. The biased regime is considered unethical.

As opposed to this culture, in Asia and Latin America, they aim at "particularity". In these countries there are obvious differences among the members of a group and the ones outside. The individuals are used to socializing since early childhood to cultivate loyalty within a group. The personal relations relying on family and friends have an impact on the business decisions. The definition of the truth and reality depends on situational circum-stances; they do not accept the idea of universal truths and principles.

✎ **Specific culture versus diffuse culture (our emotional involvement)**

As far as the specific culture is concerned, the relations with the subordinates are completely different from other relations. In this type of culture "business does not interfere with pleasure". Within the company the relations are cordial yet superficial ones and there are not many cases when people get to know each other personally (they don't know anything about other persons' family, life etc.).

The diffuse culture shows that all the relations intermingle and the business relations are on long-term and develop personally as well. These aspect is important also for the manager compelled to reply to the stockholders (for his benefit he should develop a friendship with them). Within the organization there are affective relations and the decisions regarding the employees are differently made depending on the situations.

✎ People of different cultures may have the following types of relation:

a) **a harmonious relation** – This is a compromise between the two types presented below and it is not very important;

b) **a dominant relation** – people think they govern and prevail nature through science and technology;

People feel they have control over their life and they consider that life success is due to their endeavor and strong will. They don't believe in fate or fortune, they rely on their own

forces. This type of relation works in USA, Canada, Australia and Great Britain where man's superiority to nature is maintained.

c) **a relation of subordination** – people face the power of nature.

The Asian countries believe that any people's result is pre-established by God and they have no power to change their fate. God makes everything happen in their life. In many Islamic countries the word "Inshallah" (the God's will) is frequently used in conversations. In this culture it is considered that every event is caused by fate and luck, as external forces. The individual cannot make things happen only the destiny has this power. Hence, people do not strive very much as "everyone has a fate".

2.2. The importance of national cultures in the managers' making decisions

In order to explain the importance of the national cultures we should take into account the assigning theory. Every event is related to another one. The scientists found a connection between this theory and the employees'/ managers' conduct. Many researches showed that connecting the effect to its cause it is easier to draw up the typology of managers' failures. Other authors emphasized that the assigning theory can be applied both in the manager-employee relation and any other relation of subordination.

The assigning process consists of the following stages (Davis, J., 1994) and the individual has the responsibilities below:

✎ to face a range of stimuli which are going to be decoded (such as; the behavior or the language). These stimuli represent labels for the previous events;

✎ to find some assignments representing the explanation for the reasons which determine the noticed stimuli;

✎ to assess the assignments related to new information and observations;

✎ to change or adapt the assignments;

✎ to memorize the assignments in order to use them as a "filter" for the next events which will be interpreted as reported to them.

Another author (Kelley, H., 1980) who created a more detailed model of the attributes and in this case, the individuals keep an eye on

the others' behavior and use the acquired information to draw conclusions on certain event. The attributes may be created once three types of information have been obtained by the observer:

1) **Consensus information** compares a person's conduct with the others' in a similar situation. In case all the persons have the same conduct that action is of big consensus and if a certain conduct is unusual for the other persons it means that the consensus is small (if a student comes late to the lectures and he is the only one who does that then the consensus is small).

2) **Solid information** is obtained after having watched the same person's behavior in two similar situation in different periods of time. We spot a high consistency if the person acts the same way in similar situations and a low consistency if he behaves differently. In case the student mentioned in the previous paragraph has not been late before the consistency is low.

3) **Distinctive information** are the ones which compare a person's behavior in different situations. For instance, if the late coming student usually does that when it is about his job or special social events the differentiation is small. If he is punctual at his job and the social events, being late only at the faculty, it means that the differentiation is big.

2.3. The impact of national culture on the ethics

The national cultural differences may represent the reason for the managers' different perceptions regarding the ethical or unethical aspects. These differences are caused by various assignments created for the respective behavior. Therefore a manager may ask a person if he/she was the only one responsible for a specific action or if it was caused by external factors. If that person's behavior has external causes he was not self-controlled and his conduct may be therefore considered unethical. Hence there is a difference between a person who is late at his job after the lunch break and an individual who comes late to the job in the morning because of the crowded traffic.

2.4. The importance of the language used in the international marketing

It is interesting that English has been associated with the current globalization process although it is not the native language of the most people in the world. By far, Chinese is the language spoken by the most people in the world, meaning 15% of the world population. However, Chinese is not the globalization language because of the less important role this country played in the international economy and politics associated to this process.

If in the British English the meaning of the saying "nothing sucks like an Electrolux" used by the Swedish producer of vacuum cleaners has a different meaning in the American slang and the advertising message loses its meaning.

2.5. The specific characteristics of different languages

Chinese writing and spelling are completely different from the ones in the European languages (such as English), hence a written word in English has no meaning for Chinese unless he knows the letters or their pronunciation. Such a difference has a major and sudden impact on the names of the brands. So, a brand name like Coca-Cola, used everywhere in the West like that, is meaningless in China. Ever since the American company penetrated the Chinese market (1979), it used this brand name for 11 years, like everywhere in the world and as a result, the Chinese consumers do not recognize the products of this company and are not attracted by them at all, the market share being therefore very low. In 1990, the American company decided to use "ke-kou ke-le", as a Chinese name for Coca-Cola because it sounded like the original name and meant "delicious and funny". Later on the company largely extended on the Chinese market. Therefore whenever companies want to enter the Chinese market, they should pay careful attention to the brand name in order to make it desirable for the Asian people.

Nevertheless, there are many ways of "transferring" the brand names and the advertising messages from one language to another, such as the following: **free translation**: the words are transferred from a language into another considering only the meaning of the words without the phonetic aspects;

↳ **word-for-word translation**: the words are transferred from a language into another considering the original sounds without the original meaning;

↳ **creative translation**: the message is transferred into another language considering neither the phonetic aspect nor the original message. The new message has apparently no connection with the previous one but attempts to impress and win over the consumers on the new market.

Every foreign company on the Chinese market chose a particular type of translation to fit its target. Some of the best known examples are shown in the table below (the characters in Chinese are not rendered):

Table 1:

Type of translation	Original brand name	The new brand name Chinese pronunciation	The brand meaning in Chinese
Free translation	General Motors	tong-yong qi-che	Identical
	Apple Computer	ping-guo dian-nao	Identical
Word-for-word translation	Colgate	gao-lu-jie	High quality and clean
	Marlboro	wan-bao-lu	The path with 10.000 treasures
	Pepsi Cola	bai-shi ke-le	It always makes you happy
	Head&Shoulders	hai-fei-si	Big with silky and disheveled hair
Creative translation	BMW	bao-ma	Valuable horse
	Hewlett-Packard	hui-pu	Useful and popular

Source: abridged form Dong and Helms, [2001]

For instance, the German BMW cars manufacturer chose "bao-ma" for the brand name on the Chinese market, translated as "valuable horse". The horse is one of the most appreciated animals in Chinese culture and the name picked by the German company suggest the Chinese the exquisite quality of the BMW cars, making them more attractive on this Asian market. The suggesting technique when translating a brand name or some messages is also used by the Chinese as they want to win over the American public. This is the case of the Chinese actor Jackie Chan, whose original name is Cheng Long, meaning "the one who becomes a dragon".

3. CONCLUSIONS

The cultural differences are very important. If they are handled properly it can mean success of a business.

The differences are even bigger when various languages and cultures are considered, like those from the West compared with the Asian ones. For instance, in Chinese there are used characters instead of letters as in the European languages and these characters are used in Japanese and Korean although the pronunciation and the stress are different – a person from Korea and a Japanese cannot speak with a Chinese but they can finally understand the characters he uses while writing.

In the present business environment it is not sufficient to have financial knowledge, but

also information about the cultural customs in the country that the company is developing an activity.

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