Jakub BIELIKOWSKI
Oracle Corporation

CASES IN CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON COMMUNICATION IN IT WORKSHOPS

Summary. The objective of the article is to provide a discussion based on the real-world case IT workshops studies:
1. What were the chief characteristics, from a communication perspective, of the IT workshops conducted across different countries?
2. How the behavior characteristics observed in the case studies are viewed by classical research? Particularly in Hofstede,[1] Hofstede and Bond,[2] Lewis[3] and models defined in Globe Research.[4]
3. What were practical implications of the observed behaviors, how they influenced ultimate workshops objectives and which tactics were used to overcome problems arising from cultural differences?

Keywords: communication patterns, national dimensions, communication barriers

STUDIUM PRZYPADKU WPŁYWU CZYNNIKÓW KULTUROWYCH NA KOMUNIKACJĘ W WARSZTATACH IT

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest przedyskutowanie na podstawie rzeczywistych studiów przypadku warsztatów IT:
1. charakterystyki warsztatów IT prowadzonych w różnych krajach, z perspektywy narodowych wzorców komunikacji,

---

[1] Hofstede G.: Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values. Sage, Beverly Hills 1980.

[2] Hofstede G., Bond M.: The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth. „Organizational Dynamics", Vol. 16, Issue 4, 1988.

[3] Lewis R.D.: When Cultures Collide: Managing Successfully Across Cultures. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London 1996.

[4] Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: Culture and Leadership, Across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Mahwah 2007.

2. jak klasyczne badania postrzegają zachowania komunikacyjne zaobserwowane w studiach przypadku? Szczególnie Hofstede,[5] Hofstede i Bond,[6] Lewis[7] oraz wzorce zdefiniowane w projekcie Globe,[8]
3. jakie są praktyczne konsekwencje obserwowanych zachowań? Jaki jest ich wpływ na przebieg warsztatów i jakie działania były lub mogły być podjęte, by zminimalizować negatywny wpływ narodowych różnic kulturowych?

Słowa kluczowe: wzorce komunikacji, narodowe wymiary kultury, bariery komunikacji

1. Cases background

In the years 2002 – 2012 the author had conducted a number of IT workshops for different clients – mainly telecommunication services providers in a number of countries. The author acted as a representative of a software vendor and played the role of leader or facilitator for the workshops. Those workshops were mostly related to potential or ongoing Commercial of the Shelf (COTS) software implementation, mostly belonging to the Initiation project phase as defined according to the one of the classic Systems Development Life Cycle definition (SDLC)[9]. In this phase, the client decides what the requirements are and what solution should be selected. Some of the workshops related to the Design and Implementation phases and were more focused on how to agree upon solution details and how to deliver them.

The article aim is neither to present comprehensive research into cultural communication patterns, nor to analyze all ethnic-background specific communication behaviors stipulated in literature which could have been observed for the listed ethnicities. The article only focuses on those aspects that represented practical issues during the workshops and which needed to be addressed in the real work. Particular attention was paid to the issues giving raise to communication barriers – i.e. factors really preventing successful workshop completion.

The following cases are included in the article analysis:

Table 1

Summary of the cases included in the article

Year(s)	Country	Company
2002, 2003	Sweden	major telecommunication company
2003, 2010	Greece	major telecommunication company
2004	Bahrain	telecommunication company

---

[5] Hofstede G.: op.cit.

[6] Hofstede G., Bond M.: op.cit.

[7] Lewis R.D.: op.cit.

[8] Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: op.cit.

[9] For definition example see CRSC: ITL Bulletin April 2009. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg 2009.

2004	Austria	smaller alternative telecommunication company
2005	Finland	major telecommunication company
2005, 2007	South Africa	media conglomerate
2006, 2009	Turkey	major mobile communication company
2009	Turkey	mobile communication company
2009	Greek Cyprus	state-owned agency in healthcare
2010 , 2011	Austria	major telecommunication company
2010, 2011	Croatia	major telecommunication company
2010	Australia	national broadband services company
2012	Turkey	major fixed line communication company
2011, 2012	South Africa	major mobile communication company
2012	Qatar	telecommunication company

Source: Own work.

The workshops varied in the number of participants; ranging from 2-3 people in Qatar and Croatia; teams of between 5-8 people in Australia, Bahrain, Finland, Greece, and on some workshops in Austria, South Africa and Turkey; to groups of 10-30 participants in Austria, some workshops in Croatia, Sweden and South Africa.

According to research summarized by Renata Winkler,[10] the socio-cultural model is cited as one of the potential influencers of communication, which had already been signaled in the 60's by Hall.[11] The workshops presented an opportunity to observe distinct communication behaviors in different ethnic cultures as the workshops' (included on the client or partner side) participants were of the following origins (in alphabetic order):

1. Arabs originating from Egypt and Palestine (in Qatar and Bahrain),
2. Australians,
3. Austrians,
4. Croatians,
5. Finns,
6. Greeks (where Cypriot Greeks are treated together with continental Greeks),
7. white South Africans (in South Africa and Australia),
8. black South Africans,
9. Swedes,
10. Turks,
11. Indians (in South Africa and in Qatar).

Such cultural ethnic differences should be visibly observed particularly in situations like:

– Listening to the arguments.
– Presenting an argument.
– Countering an argument.
– Questioning previous agreement.

---

[10] Winkler R.: Zarządzanie komunikacją w organizacjach zróżnicowanych kulturowo. Wolters Kluwer Polska, Kraków 2008, s. 180-183 (Managing communication in culturally diverse organizations).
[11] Hall E.T.: The Hidden Dimensions. Doubleday, Garden City 1966.

– Reaching a conclusion.
– Reaching commitment to deliver some results.

2. Expected behaviors

Following Hall's[12] introduction in the sixties of the proxemics, the study of the human use of space within the context of culture in Hofstede 1980's work,[13] suggested that national background may change people's attitude to work, which in turn may affect rationale in the decision-making process. In this primary work he indentified 4 dimensions:

1. Power Distance – the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Thus the low power distance will allow for more democratic decision making (rather than leader decision-making).

2. Individualism versus collectivism – the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups, where collectivism makes them feel loyal to the group (and stand by group decisions).

3. Masculinity versus femininity – the distribution of emotional roles between the genders, which in practice means either more emphasis on assertiveness and competitiveness versus more on relationship and quality of life.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance – is the degree to which society feels comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. A high degree of Uncertainty Avoidance makes that people follow rigid rules and do not tolerate unorthodox ideas.

In late 1980's, Michael Bond's research in Asia prompted Hofstede[14] to include a fifth dimension:

5. Long-term versus short-term orientation, where societies with a short-term orientation generally exhibit great respect for tradition, and focus on quick results, whereas long-term orientation helps people to believe that truth depends on condition, adapt tradition to new situations and show perseverance in achieving results.

And in 2001 in a publication together with Minkov[15] a sixth dimension was also added:

6. Indulgence versus restraint – where an indulgent society allows for more gratification, enjoyment of life and "having fun", and restraint will follow more strict social norms.

---

[12] Hall E.T.: op.cit.
[13] Hofstede G.: op.cit.
[14] Hofstede G., Bond M.: op.cit.
[15] Hofstede G., Hofstede G.J., Minkov M.: Cultures and Organization: Software of the Mind. McGraw Hill, New York 2010.

For the purpose of this article the "Indulgence versus Restraint" dimension is ignored, as though quite easily observed, its impact on the workshops was moderated by the formal nature of the setting – all parties were in business relation and paid to deliver results.

There is significant research both supporting and criticizing Hofstede and other models introduced such as GLOBE, commenced by Robert House in 1991 – whereby most comprehensive research results were published in 2004.[16] From the nine dimensions included in the GLOBE research, the following were selected as significant for the article's purposes (from Values perspective, as potentially more influencing communication behavior on the unconscious level):

- Power Distance: Acceptance of leader and his/her decision.
- Uncertainty Avoidance: Resulting in stronger adherence to rules and thus potentially previous decisions.
- Collectivism I (Institutional Collectivism): Adherence to group opinion.
- Assertiveness: Degree to which individuals are assertive and aggressive in relation- ships.
- Future Orientation: Impatient, wanting quick results, adherence to timeline.
- Performance Orientation: focus on results and continuous improvement.

There is an ongoing debate between Hofstede and GLOBE supporters, summarized by Xiumei and Jinying,[17] which points both to scope, methodology and reasons for expanding the criteria (however in the article the additional GLOBE criteria were mostly omitted). Hofstede remains popular due to more explanatory, rather than purely quantitative nature of his research.

From the Lewis[18] research, the following traits were considered:

- Activity style – linear-active: who plan, schedule and execute activities one at the time; multi-active: doing multiple things and assigning priorities not according to schedule, but according to current feeling; and reactive: who prioritize courteously and respectfully according to their interlocutor's proposal.
- Dialogue orientation – which are either dialogue-oriented, who make decisions based on surrounding information and people directly; data-oriented, who need facts and figures for their decision; and listening cultures, where people gather information very carefully, from a large network of connection, and therefore can take longer to make a decision.

---

[16] Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: op.cit.
[17] Xiumei S., Jinying W.: Interpreting Hofstede Model and GLOBE Model: Which Way to Go for Cross-Cultural Research? „International Journal of Business Management", Vol. 6, No. 5, 2011.
[18] Lewis R.D.: op.cit.

- Time perception – which is either linear, with absolute view on schedules; personal, so more dependent on a person's perception; or cyclical, who see the past, present and future interweaved and time is not a scarce commodity.
- Leadership approach – which can be either autocratic, hierarchical/structured, casual (where the leading can change based on subject), consensus (or its variant, *primus inter-pares*), or even nepotism, having tight-knit connections which define people's role and power.

Table 2

Dimensions summary – Hofstede

Nationality	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity/ Femininity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long Term Orientation
Swedish	31	71	5	29	20
Finnish	33	63	26	59	41
Croatian	73	33	40	80	N/A
Arabic[19]	70	25	45	80	expected short term
Greek	60	35	57	112	N/A
Austrian	11	55	79	70	31
Turkish	66	37	45	85	N/A
South African black[20]	64	27	41	52	25
South African white[21]	49	65	63	49	N/A
Australian	36	90	61	51	31
Indian	77	48	56	40	61

Source: Own work based on Hofstede.[22]

According to Hofstede,[23] the scores range may be interpreted as follows:
- Power Distance – a low score in power distance (very low in Austria, low in Sweden, Finland and Australia) means people are independent with low regard for hierarchy, with employees expecting to be consulted about decisions. On the other hand, a high score (India, Croatia, Arabic countries, Turkey, black South Africa, Greece) means that people depend on their boss for direction and decisions, hierarchy authority is seldom questioned.
- Individualism – in an individualistic society (very high score in Australia, high in Sweden, South Africa and Finland) people are expected to be self-reliant, show initiative and have a regard for competence. In a collectivistic society (low scores)

---

[19] The aggregated scores for Arabic world are: 80, 32, 52, 68 respectively which confirms pattern in Egypt.
[20] The score for black South Africans was derived from East Africa scores, see also note below.
[21] The Hofstede score for South Africa is assumed to represent white South Africans.
[22] Hofstede G.: Geert Hofstede / National Culture / Countries, www.geert-hofstede.com, 08.30.2012; http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html, 2012.
[23] Hofstede G.: Geert Hofstede: op.cit.

this represents closely-knit groups, people depending on others and decision taking into account the views of others.

- Masculinity/Femininity – in feminine society (extreme in Sweden, high in Finland) people make sure that others are involved, decisions are based on consensus, conflicts resolved on a compromise and managers are supportive of employees. The masculine society (Austria, South African–white, Australia, Greece) is highly success oriented and driven, managers are expected to be decisive and encourage competitiveness.

- Uncertainty Avoidance – low preference for Uncertainty Avoidance (Sweden, medium in India, South Africa and Australia) means relaxed attitude with low need for norms and rules, which are often bypassed, with higher acceptance for innovation. The high preference for Uncertainty Avoidance (extreme in Greece, high in Croatia, Egypt, Turkey and Austria) means following rules, security is very important in decision-making, innovation is resisted and decisions are taken after careful analysis.

- Long-Term Orientation – short-term orientation (Sweden, Austria, Australia, Arab countries, black South Africa) implies impatience for achieving quick results, those being carefully planned, on the other hand long-term oriented societies (India) allow for changing plans as we progress, objectives and deadlines are negotiable and depend on a point of view.

Table 3

Dimensions Values – GLOBE

Nationality	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Institutional Collectivism	Assertiveness	Future Orientation	Performance Orientation
Swedish	2.49	3.45	3.91	3.49	4.96	6.01
Finnish	2.46	4.04	4.34	3.91	5.24	6.23
Croatian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Arabic (Egypt)	3.20	5.24	4.72	3.22	5.60	5.71
Greek	2.57	5.16	5.41	3.05	5.17	5.79
Austrian	2.52	3.65	4.78	2.85	5.15	6.12
Turkish	2.52	4.61	5.18	2.68	5.71	5.34
South African black	3.80	4.92	4.46	3.97	5.25	5.09
South African white	2.67	4.65	4.36	3.65	5.59	6.13
Australian	2.77	3.99	4.47	3.83	5.21	5.99
Indian	2.58	4.58	4.59	4.65	5.43	5.87
Mean	*2.75*	*4.62*	*4.73*	*3.82*	*5.49*	*5.94*

Source: House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta.[24]

---

[24] House R.J., Hanges P.J., Javidan M., Dorfman P.W., Gupta V.: Culture, Leadership and Organizations. The Globe Study 62 societies. Sage, Thousand Oaks 2004, p. 31, 745-747.

The results off the mean are:

- Power Distance – Arabic and South African blacks attributing the highest value to the leader, while Swedes and Finns being most egalitarian.
- Uncertainty Avoidance – Greeks and Arabs expected to be the most rule-oriented, whereas Swedes, Australian and Finns being the most tolerant towards innovation and unorthodox behavior.
- Institutional Collectivism – where Greeks and Turks shows the highest affinity to their institution, and Swedes are most tolerant towards individualism in a corporate situation.
- Assertiveness – Indian being most restrained, and Turks, Austrians, Greeks and Arabs being the most dominant.
- Future Orientation – where Swedes showed the greatest short-term focus.
- Performance Orientation – where Finns, South African whites, Austrians and Swedes showed the greatest results focus, whereas South African blacks and Turks were the least results-oriented.

Table 4

Behavior preferences summary – Lewis

Nationality	Activity style	Dialogue orientation	Time perception	Leadership approach
Swedish	Linear-active	Data	Linear	Primus inter pares
Finnish	Reactive	Listening	Linear	Mix of hierarchy and consensus
Croatian	Between linear and multi-active	Between dialogue and Data	Linear	Hierarchical
Arabic	Multi-active	Dialogue	Personal	Nepotism
Greek	Multi-active	Dialogue	Personal	Hierarchical with great influence of persons oratory abilities
Austrian	Linear-active	Data	Linear	Autocratic
Turkish	Reactive with multi-active aspects	Dialogue	Personal	Mixed – degree of hierarchy with stronger push for consensus
South African black	Multi-active	Dialogue	Cyclical	Hierarchical
South African white	Linear-active	Data	Linear	Casual
Australian	Linear-active	Data	Linear	Casual
Indian	Reactive with multi-active aspects	Dialogue	Cyclical	Hierarchical

Source: Own summary based on Lewis.[25]

---

[25] Lewis R.D.: op.cit.

3. Observed communication and behavior patterns

The table below summarizes some of the communication patterns observed, their consequence, monitoring (remedial) tactics that can be applied (with issues arising because of those cultural behaviors and potential reference to the above-mentioned literature sources). The article does not aim to validate whether all observed patterns can be referenced to existing research and whether they are fully congruent with it. The focus here is on practical implications, so the table includes only behaviors that were of significance to the workshop conduct, communication in the workshop and eventual outcome.[26]

Table 5

Communication behaviors observed in cases

Nationality	Observed behavior	Literature view [27] [28] [29]
Arabic	Slow to start with business – prefers informal one-to-one discussion to settle the solution	The Dialogue Orientation requires people to connect with you before they make decision. Also with Nepotism leadership personal relation is required for decision-making
Arabic	Require that person leading the workshop has proven formal qualification in the area	Not really linked to those 3 literature sources
Arabic	Strong emphasis on "show us where it works"	Short-term focus and high Uncertainty Avoidance time normally leads to such behavior
Australian	Strikingly loose atmosphere and only hierarchy based on perceived competence	That is due to low Power Distance and Casual leadership style
Australian	All options are actively explored with all participants forcing their say	Low Power Distance combined with very high Individualism means that everybody has his right and wants his point to be included
Austrian	Issues are analyzed from all aspects	Though Austrians are Linear-active and have Linear time view, even Lewis (1996) emphasized that they love discussion and may pull back today's decision tomorrow. That is not directly attributable to any analyzed dimension, though high Uncertainty Avoidance may contribute to it (see also point below)
Austrian	Emphasis on "risk reduction"	Very high Uncertainty Avoidance means that any change to existing situation is perceived as threat
Austrian	Emphasis on "partnership" to solve their problem and long-term	Not really linked to those 3 literature sources. However, client's request may be understood as "show to us that we are together in it" which lowers his Uncertainty perception (he is not taking risks alone)
Austrian	No decision taken, as there is a worry that it may undermine existing balance of power	This is a direct result of high Uncertainty Avoidance

---

[26] It should be noted that workshops had usually well-defined objectives, timeframe and they were of importance from both the SDLC perspective and the projects run by the client companies. Therefore inconclusive meetings or not delivering expected results were deemed "negative" from the overall process perspective

[27] Hofstede G.: Geert Hofstede: op.cit.

[28] Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: op.cit.

[29] Lewis R.D.: op.cit.

Croatian	Worry to expose own opinions in front of the management	Croatians being highly Hierarchical in leadership and with big Power Distance are not expected to confront their managers
Croatian	Demand proving that solution brings results on the short term	Croatian having Linear time view and being quite Data oriented supports such behavior. Also uncertainty is lowered when the proven benefit is close (which concurs with high Uncertainty Avoidance)
Greek	No meeting is started on time and participants arrive and leave randomly	That is due to personal perception of time
Greek	Discussion quickly splits into several simultaneous discussions with little regard to main topic	Oratory abilities that play a high role in establishing Greek hierarchy of time often lead to intense discussions on any topic and that may change the hierarchy. That is strengthened by personal view of time, so the topic at hand gains higher priority than workshop objective
Greek	Technical arguments with good structure are treated with awe and often taken at face value	High Uncertainty Avoidance may be one of the contributing factor – as good technical arguments have rule nature. Also presenting "how things work" ties to their high Performance Orientation
Greek	Chief objection / worry is "how our people will manage with that solution?"	High Performance Orientation means that the Greek will require arguments showing short term benefits. As change resistance is one of the major barrier to success in the IT projects, worry about adoption barriers is justified
Finnish	Rapid and strong disagreement	Finns Listening orientation mean that they can make up their mind very unexpectedly, based on information they've collected over a long time. In such a case they very much stick to their opinion. Quite contrasting to the lower assertiveness and more feminine nature of their society, but consistent with directness due to low Power Distance
Finnish	Need to prove that proposed solution works	To the extend only Finns Performance Orientation confirms such an attitude – the proof seems to be a guarantee for success
Indian	Very reluctant to re-open previous decisions	Low Assertiveness makes it more difficult to question decisions of others. Same is true for Reactive style
Indian	Not questioning anything said by manager or by client	Their low Assertiveness means that opinions of others are not questioned. That is also consistent with a Reactive activity style. Furthermore, big Power Distance (here Hofstede differs from GLOBE) and Hierarchical leadership style make questioning the boss difficult
Indian	Finding excuses for no decision on the meeting. Trying to come up with a decision on their own and then to present it to the group as commonly agreed	High Power Distance and worry about loss of face that the decision has to be changed
Indian	Agreeing verbally to unrealistic timeline and undeliverable functionality	The Reactive style of activity makes Indians not to contradict others or question unrealistic demands The Cyclical view of time in India makes them not to pay attention to such commitment
South African black	Strong emphasis on need of management approval	This is a result of one of biggest Power Distances (GLOBE) and Hierarchical
South African black	Very reluctant to re-open past decision, afraid of the time impact	This is again result of Power Distance – the past management decision is not to be questioned. Further Short-term orientation makes them worried if results will be delayed.

South African white	Requires detailed proof with examples and impact analysis that past decision is incorrect	Direct result of Data orientation
South African white	Requires detailed plan of action	Direct result of Data orientation, also supported by high Performance Orientation – project milestones are visible proof of success
Swedish	More people turn up on workshop than ever expected	Swedish regard for individuals' opinion (low Institutional Collectivism) consultative - Primus inter Pares management style and good acceptance of different ideas (low Uncertainty Avoidance) call for participation and listening to the opinions of different parties
Swedish	Everyone has right to say his opinion	Same as above
Swedish	Consensus needed for decision	Same as above
Turkish	Every issue requires a meeting with a high number of participants	Turks show high Institutional Collectivism, so if the issue is important for the organization people will be genuinely interested. Also their tendency for Consensus in otherwise Hierarchical leadership means that more people are consulted
Turkish	Expect chairperson / presenter to lead the meeting decisively and to put forward his/her ideas	This is due to high Power Distance in Turkey (here Hofstede contradicts GLOBE results) and old historic Hierarchical leadership

Source: Own work.

4. Impact on communication, workshops and monitoring required to manage

Below I have summarized the impact of observed behaviors and the monitoring actions undertaken or proposed to deal with those issues:

1. Arabic: Slow to start with business – prefers informal one-to-one discussion to settle the solution
   - Monitoring: one has to be careful not to rush into business and should build the relationship outside workshop environment.
2. Arabic: Require that person leading the workshop has proven formal qualification in the area
   - Monitoring: bring an expert and proof of his expertise.
3. Arabic: Strong emphasis on "show us where it works".
   - Monitoring: prepare references and industry best practices.
4. Australia: Strikingly loose atmosphere and only hierarchy based on perceived competence
   - No point of forcing your solution through the management ranks – it is better to have decision taken by workshop participants.

5. Australia: All options are actively explored with all participants forcing their say
    −   That may delay any decision and solution agreement.
    −   Monitoring: Use the short-term focus and Performance Orientation to switch from discussing to doing – starting with something when benefits and responsibility can be clearly assigned and someone can claim success (interesting in Masculine society).

6. Austria: Issues are analyzed from all aspects.
    −   The discussions planned in the workshop in Austria will take significantly more time and everyone will be participating and contributing his view. That may lead to big inefficiency, especially as the "consensus" decision is easily overturned.
    −   Monitoring: it may be worth to use hierarchy relationship and higher management to make decision and present it as "fait accompli" – such decision because of their autocratic leadership style. Even this may not always work due to very low Power Distance.

7. Austria: Emphasis on "risk reduction".
    −   Even good and workable ideas may be rejected if perceived too risky.
    −   Monitoring: build the plan to reduce risk and show that they will not be taking such risk alone.

8. Austria: Emphasis on "partnership" to solve their problem, and long-term emphasis.
    −   The only problem it may bring is from a commercial perspective of the software vendor – the client may demand long period of working together before they start paying at all. But after commitment they are in for the long term.
    −   Monitoring: be prepared for investment and keep showing to the client how much you invest on a continuous basis.

9. Austria: No decision taken, as there is a worry that it may undermine existing balance of power.
    −   Monitoring: if possible find some short term benefit and sponsor who can claim that success. Austrian Short-term orientation and very high Masculine tendency to succeed will support that. That will force a longer term decision.

10. Croatia: Worry to expose own opinions in front of the management.
    −   Individual opinions and valuable input was suppressed waiting for manager's say
    −   Monitoring: engage into one-to-one or small group discussion and bring opinions to bigger workshop as more of your own.

11. Croatia: Demand proving that solution brings results on the short term.
    −   The short-term focus may undermine longer-term benefits and actions which will bring results on the longer term are not undertaken.

  – Monitoring: quite difficult if the planned implementation has more long-term benefits. Try to find "low-hanging fruits".

12. Finland: Rapid and strong disagreement.

  – Such reaction may puzzle a person leading the workshop or presenter and it is difficult to overturn such an opinion.

  – Monitoring: accept that perceived rashness of communication is not against you and understand what the decision background is. To change it, the underlying information has to be changed.

13. Finland: Need to prove that the proposed solution works

  – That required more extensive preparation, software demonstration and even preparing semi-working version where the particular solution can be tested.

  – On the benefit side, such proof was an unquestionable decision argument.

  – Monitoring: plan for proving.

14. Greece: No meeting is started on time and participants arrive and leave randomly.

  – Time planning for workshop impossible, frustration because of time lost.

  – Monitoring: don't plan too tightly and allow people to settle. If you learn that team will be late don't waste your time to be on time yourself.

15. Greece: Discussion quickly splits into several simultaneous discussions with little regard to main topic.

  – The workshops can last for hours and majority of time is spent on side discussions (most often in Greek) whereas main topic is not addressed. Such workshop does not serve its purpose.

  – Monitoring: have a strong leader/ presenter who cuts the side discussions in buds.

16. Greece: Technical arguments with good structure are treated with awe and often taken at face value.

  – Technical expert from the audience can "steal the show" and force a decision suiting his own objectives.

  – Monitoring: it is beneficial for meeting presenter to prepare such arguments or bring experts.

17. Greece: Chief objection / worry is "how our people will manage with that solution?"

  – Monitoring: it is good to present a specific change management plan. Also it is important to think of material specifically designed for that client in Greek that can be used by end users.

18. India: Very reluctant to open previous decisions.

  – Monitoring: force your opinion, being reactive, they are less likely to contradict you.

19. India: Not questioning anything said by manager or by client.
    – Valuable individual contribution may be lost if that contradicts opinions of others.
    – Monitoring: seek their opinion off-line in more technical discussion, they may express their view in less-threatening environment.

20. India: Be prepared for the whole Indian team to support their boss.
    – Finding excuses for no decision on the meeting. Trying to come up with decision on their own and then present it to the group as commonly agreed.
    – That can affect timeline negatively. However, given the Indian tendency to agree to unrealistic demands publicly, it is better to allow them for deliberation offline, when it will be easier for them to come up with a workable plan.
    – Monitoring: plan time for their offline discussion, but be aware that such an agreed upon decision may be difficult to overturn. One may want to have their own Indian participant in the discussions.

21. India: Agreeing verbally to unrealistic timeline and undeliverable functionality
    – That leads to quite disastrous results later in implementation and is the chief source of disappointment with Indian System Integrators. Client should not assume that what was agreed upon will be delivered and delivered on time.
    – Monitoring: Disregard their verbal commitment. Make sure internally that what is promised makes sense and can be delivered.
    – Test their plan – if it is really realistic. Monitor plan in detail, best having someone speaking their language, working just on that task.

22. South Africa (black): Strong emphasis on need of management approval.
    – It may make difficult to overturn any previous management decision, on the other hand they will act as brokers in the organization willing to secure management support.

23. South Africa (black): Very reluctant to re-open past decision, afraid of the time impact.
    – They can act as blockers for any change
    – Monitoring: if possible prove that old decision will lead to short-term problems. Their Short-term orientation will support it. Demonstrate that change is actually for better and engage people involved in original decision. If they change their mind – it will be easier to win over others.

24. South Africa (white): Requires detailed proof with examples and impact analysis that past decision is incorrect.
    – Monitoring: Prepare such proof, based on that client's of industry references

25. South Africa (white): Requires detailed plan of action.
    - May be very cumbersome to prepare and not really valid if planned too far into the future.
    - Monitoring: Plan in details for the short term, but only roughly for long-term.
26. Sweden: More people turn up on workshop than ever expected.
    - More difficult to manage large group workshops and new participants are unknown to the presenter.
    - Monitoring: be prepared for larger group and open to new participants.
27. Sweden: Everyone has right to say his opinion.
    - Traditional approach of requiring manager to take decision fails. Even low-level person in the organization can overturn management opinion.
    - The benefit is that widely consulted decision is usually better followed and ideas are not constrained. In a way it leads to more implementable solutions.
    - Monitoring: accept it.
28. Sweden: Consensus needed for decision
    - Decision is often not taken on the workshop but requires extended team consultation and longer time.
    - Monitoring: institutionalize consultation making it part of decision process. At least that way time needed to make decision may be shorter.
29. Turkey: Every issue requires a meeting with a high number of participants.
    - More difficult to manage large group workshops and new participants are unknown to the presenter. Meetings take longer.
    - Monitoring: plan for bigger meeting rather than small workshop and assign more time to it.
30. Turkey: Expect chairperson/presenter to lead the meeting decisively and to put forward his/her ideas
    - Monitoring: chose strong presenter and don't be hesitant to push forward your ideas.

From the observed behaviors, some caused major issues and gave rise to communication barriers. Major examples indentified in the cases are:

1. Taking agreement from Indians as true commitment to deliver solution within specific timeframe – that is probably the most serious issue encountered and which needs attention in dealing with Indian System Integrators. It may lead to complete misunderstanding of what is the meeting outcome and agreement reached.
2. Taking rashness of Finns comments as personal attack – they just make a point and are not looking for argument. It is important to concentrate on what the person has to

say not how it is said. If one focuses on the form it may lead to serious disagreement and even argument in situation where strictly substance discussion is needed.

3. Not allowing people to "speak their mind" in Sweden or Australia – as everyone has the right to give their opinion, no one should be ignored, or else that can jeopardize the workshop's outcome as it can be questioned afterwards. On the other hand, giving such freedom is to be avoided in Greece, otherwise meeting will end up without a conclusion. Sensitivity to this communication pattern is needed as it works differently in different cultures.

4. Trying to get information from the group of Croatians or Indians, hoping that someone, other than the leader, will answer – they may feel exposed and not respond at all. It is more appropriate to have one-to-one conversation offline and use its output in group discussion. As mentioned above, this unwillingness to communicate in public – is itself a major barrier – may be used to the benefit by singling out a particular person to expose a completely different point of view.

5. Not being factually/data prepared in Arabic countries, with Finns or white South Africans – without a proof or case, your arguments will be ignored. This is almost true in every culture, but in some countries not to the same extent. For example, in Turkey you may be given credit just because of your expert position, or in Sweden or Australia it is normal to use audience experience to elicit arguments supporting your view. There is a significant risk of being perceived as 'fluffy" when audience expects hard proof which may jeopardize the whole workshop by undermining ones credibility.

Tactics described above allow dealing with those barriers, however they require attention when leading group meetings with specific objectives to achieve.

5. Beyond ethnic influences in the cases

The recent research summarized by Bjerregaard, Lauring and Klitmmøller[30] also questions the assumptions behind cultural determinism, where national culture is seen as a definite set of behaviors and values shaping people's communication and stipulating that the understanding of national culture preferences is necessary for proper communication and performance in multi-national environment. This context-sensitive approach looks for other influencing factors like shared culture of the workplace, economic, political or social processes that shape today's society.

---

[30] Bjerregaard T., Lauring J., Klitmøller A.: A Critical Analysis of Intercultural Communication Research in Cross-Cultural Management. „Critical Perspectives on International Business", Vol. 5, No. 3, 2009.

The cases have not followed a rigorous research method to analyze, deny or confirm ethnic background influence on communication, however, it was noted that other significant factors influenced participants communication behavior:

– Company culture: Companies and their culture influence people's behavior at work, and communication patterns, as stipulated by Renata Winkler[31]. In the cases of this research, at least three examples of this influence can be observed:

   • First, the behavior of the Austrian participants was quite contradictory to expected masculine drive for success and need to show results. This may be justified by specific communications companies culture in Austria, where risk avoidance is compensated more than results delivery – this is visible in management practices and promotion patterns. The author's experience in the Austrian commercial sector, where individuals were more eager to use new ideas as an opportunity for their own advancement, seems to support this assumption.

   • Second, Indian nationals were coming from the large Indian System Integrators and their behaviors were also quite characteristic for System Integrators: reluctance to overturn a past decision as it undermines the company's authority and can have negative commercial influence, or reluctance to commit to delivery as it can have negative commercial influence.

   • Third, in one of the Turkish companies "doing things our way" was a dominant theme, thus arguments pointing to industry practices and external experience were usually wasted, though such behavior may also be attributed to the high In-Group Collectivism of Turkish society as per Chhokar, Brodbeck & House[32] observed in Turkish businesses. However, such behavior was not really observed by the author at other Turkish companies in the cases of this study – so it is likely that the specific company culture was encouraging such internal coherence, natural in Turkey.

– Interestingly, Purohit and Simmers[33] demonstrated significant convergence among business school students' conflict resolution behavior on nations with differences in Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance, such as Americans, Nigerians and Indians (according to Hofstede[34] – scores are 40, 46; 80, 55; 77, 40 respectively). This has been explained not only by natural cultural convergence, but also by specific

---

[31] Winkler R.: op.cit., s. 177.

[32] Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: Culture and Leadership, Across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Mahwah 2007, p 861-863.

[33] Purohit Y.S., Simmers C.A.: Power Distance and Uncertainity Avoidance: A Cross-National Impact of Their Impact on Conflict Management Modes. „Journal of International Business Research", Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006.

[34] Hofstede G.: Geert Hofstede: op.cit.

business school ethos which imposes rules for conflict resolution – similar to a large corporation cultural influence.

– Role: The workshop participants played business roles and workshop roles, which in turn influenced their behavior and communication pattern. In particular, this was visible in Cyprus where people with technical expert roles were actually focusing a lot on substance of technical arguments, accepting them only after careful analysis. Also, quite predictably, management representatives showed a higher resistance to overturn already taken decisions, a higher need to assess risk in proposed designs, and much higher pressure to define deadlines and delivery commitments.

– Situation: Contrary to the research-defined *Personal Time Perception*, the workshops in Cyprus, which required co-ordination of many expensive visiting experts were really run on time and with participants' attention. However, this same customer disregarded any schedule in planning and execution. This shows that maybe a higher-attention situation alters typical cultural behavior, but does not have a longer-term effect.

The factors listed above and those indentified in earlier chapters can play an important role in influencing the mutual understanding between parties involved, the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication process, the ability to achieve understanding of the discussed subject or the solution, and therefore impact the workshops' successful outcome. In the author's opinion, a more detailed, structured and statistically-driven research could have confirmed or denied whether the expected behaviors are really observed beyond specific cases and whether the influence of ethic communication patterns and behavior differences contribute significantly to the outcome of business interactions, especially that of structured workshops. However, such research was clearly beyond this article scope.

Bibliography

1. Bjerregaard T., Lauring J., Klitmøller A.: A Critical Analysis of Intercultural Communication Research in Cross-Cultural Management. „Critical Perspectives on International Business", Vol. 5, No. 3, 2009.
2. CRSC: ITL Bulletin April 2009. National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg 2009.
3. Chhokar J., Brodbeck F. House R.: Culture and Leadership, Across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Mahwah 2007.
4. Hall E.T.: The Hidden Dimensions. Doubleday, Garden City 1966.

5. Hofstede G.: Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values. Sage, Beverly Hills 1980.

6. Hofstede G., Bond M. The Confucius Connection: From Cultural Roots to Economic Growth. „Organizational Dynamics", Vol. 16, Issue 4, 1988.

7. Hofstede G.: Geert Hofstede / National Culture / Countries, www.geert-hofstede.com, 08.30.2012; http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html, 2012.

8. Hofstede G., Hofstede G.J., Minkov M.: Cultures and Organization: Software of the Mind. McGraw Hill, New York 2010.

9. House R.J., Hanges P.J., Javidan M., Dorfman P.W., Gupta V.: Culture, Leadership and Organizations. The Globe Study 62 societies. Sage, Thousand Oaks 2004.

10. Lewis R.D. When Cultures Collide: managing successfully across cultures. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London 1996.

11. Purohit Y.S., Simmers C.A.: Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance: A Cross-National Impact of Their Impact on Conflict Management Modes. „Journal of International Business Research", Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006.

12. Winkler R.: Zarządzanie komunikacją w organizacjach zróżnicowanych kulturowo. Wolter Kluwer Business, Kraków 2008 (Managing Communication in Culturally Diverse Organizations).

13. Xiumei S., Jinying W.: Interpreting Hofstede Model and GLOBE Model: Which Way to Go for Cross-Cultural Research? „International Journal of Business Management", Vol. 6, No. 5, 2011.