

ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ

УДК 394.912

MELNIK Volha

Member of the Coordination Council of Eastern European Network for Citizenship Education (EENCE)

Lecturer of the psychology department State Educational Institution «Academy of the postgraduate education»,
Minsk, Republic of Belarus



Received 19 March 2021

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS AN ADVANTAGES OF MULTICULTURAL PROFESSIONAL TEAMS¹

In today's global business environment, international teams have become an essential part of corporations and organizations. A team of people from diverse cultural backgrounds can have tremendous benefits like knowledge of different markets and culturally sensitive customer service. Unfortunately, cultural differences within teams can create obstacles to effective teamwork. Employers should strive to bring together a diverse company culture, whether it be people of various socio-ethnic backgrounds or those from different countries – the advantages are numerous. The article explains some of the highlights and benefits of working on multicultural teams. Further, describes how intercultural competence is viewed in the context of multicultural teams, and outlines the basis for researching and practicing intercultural communication.

Keywords: *culture, society, globalization, socialization, intercultural dialogue, intercultural differences, team, personality*

О.А. МЕЛЬНИК

Член Координационного Совета Восточно-Европейской сети гражданского образования (EENCE), старший преподаватель кафедры психологии Государственное учреждение образования «Академия последипломного образования», г. Минск, Республика Беларусь

КУЛЬТУРНОЕ РАЗНООБРАЗИЕ КАК ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВО МНОГОКУЛЬТУРНЫХ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ КОМАНД

В современной глобальной профессиональной среде международные команды стали неотъемлемой частью корпораций и организаций. Команда людей с разным культурным происхождением может иметь огромные преимущества, такие как знание различных рынков и

¹ Статья публикуется в авторской редакции.

взаимодействие с клиентами на основе учета культурных особенностей. К сожалению, культурные различия внутри команд могут создавать препятствия для эффективной совместной работы. Руководители должны стремиться объединить разнообразную корпоративную культуру, будь то люди разного социально-этнического происхождения или выходцы из разных стран – преимущества многочисленны. В статье объясняются некоторые основные моменты и преимущества работы в мультикультурных командах. Далее описывается, как межкультурная компетентность рассматривается в контексте мультикультурных команд, и излагается основа для исследования и практики межкультурного общения.

Ключевые слова: культура, общество, глобализация, социализация, межкультурный диалог, межкультурные различия, команда, личность.

Introduction. Teamwork has become a common way of organizing in the contemporary workplace. In recent years six types of different groups have emerged: project teams, focus groups, brainstorming groups, advisory groups, quality circles, and decision-making groups. In the professional world, groups are formed for such reasons as to share workloads, build social networks, gain support from organizational stakeholders and to transfer experience from more experienced members of an organization to less experienced. Groups develop constitutive and regulative rules that group members understand and follow when they interact with each other [9]. Group rules increase productivity and effectiveness of a group's performance and help group members to manage conflict situations.

An example of such an international team is Eastern European Network for Citizenship Education (EENCE). EENCE is a network of organizations and experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine aiming at promoting exchange and development of knowledge, skills and values on citizenship education in the region of Eastern Europe.

Within the framework of the Network, thematic working groups and project consortia are created and operate. Themes of their work can cover any topical issues related to civic education and relevant to the mission and priorities of the Network. In 2021 there are more than 15 working groups [1].

Main part. Cultural diversity not only poses some challenges to performance and operational outcomes of multicultural teams, but can also bring a number of advantages and increase team effectiveness and decision-making. In many cases, cultural diversity of team members creates

a “double edged sword”; they are advantages and disadvantages at the same time. In fact, even though cultural differences are probably the primary challenge of working in multicultural teams, they are also a primary reason offered for developing and utilizing multicultural teams in organizations. Further, cultural differences are necessary for generating cultural synergy together with the members of multicultural teams to develop a “global mindset” permitting multi-perspective and flexible action, and they are the essential factors for intercultural leadership development (Maznevski & Peterson; Rhinesmith). Multicultural teams can be very effective provided that they exploit the respective culture-specific strengths (Adler; Moran & Harris). Multicultural teams can be more productive and can yield a higher level of performance than monocultural teams. Members of multicultural teams can put forward different viewpoints and more creative ideas when solving a problem or developing an organizational strategy [6].

The dynamism of multicultural team processes forces an immediate awareness of different viewpoints. This immediacy of interaction in multicultural teams allows for reconciliation of otherwise latent differences in viewpoints and values that need to be addressed in any multinational organization. Empirical findings on team diversity argue in favor of a potential cognitive gain through diversity and therefore greater performance and effectiveness. Diverse or heterogeneous teams are able to solve problems more quickly if the members of the team are able to contribute complementary skills relevant to the task. Diverse or multicultural teams can also reflect a larger number of alternatives, develop better ideas, be more creative, adapt more quickly to changing

environmental conditions, and render decision making more effectively than homogenous teams (Miliken & Martins; Podsiadlowski & Spiess; Smith & Noakes). Bantel and Jackson argued that greater diversity in top management teams causes an increase in innovation. Janis determined that diversity reduces the danger of erroneous decisions, conformistic behavior, and group pressure due to groupthink. Diverse teams working on business case studies improved their results continuously over a long period of time and generated more creative alternatives to solve a problem than the homogenous control group (Watson, Kumar, & Michaelson) [2].

Marquardt and Horvath explored the topic of advantages that multicultural professional teams can bring to modern organizations. Ten of the key power advantages of multicultural teams are: reduced cost of operating in global markets, access to specialized skilled talent, increased problem solving capability, increased potential for becoming a global organization, speed of operations, greater understanding of local customers, developing future global leaders, access to knowledge and information, more opportunities to form alliances, and becoming a learning organization [7]. Those are mentioned with detail below.

1. Ability to solve complex problems. The increased complexity of twenty-first century problems will require team members to learn more adaptive approaches to problem solving. The adaptive abilities require professionals to apply intelligence and skills to job tasks, to unlearn the habits of a managerial lifetime, and to develop a capacity to explore novel solutions. Multicultural teams are the formations with necessary diversity and complexity to address the adaptive challenges. Multicultural teams are much more effective than homogeneous teams when generating a broad range of novel ideas is necessary.

This increased creativity of multicultural teams is achieved because of the diversity of cultural upbringing and experiences and higher synergy levels. Multicultural professional teams comprise members from different cultures and, therefore, bring out a variety of viewpoints and creativity to problem solving. From their research, Triandis and colleagues concluded that heterogeneity was most beneficial for tasks requiring creativity. In addition, multicultural teams usually perform better than homogenous

groups because of the team members' ability to present a wider range of alternative perspectives and novel solutions than homogeneous teams.

2. Ability to capture foreign markets and understand local consumers. Successful operations of many global corporations depend on how sensitive they are to local markets and how strong of a relationship they are able to build with local customers and suppliers. Multiculturalism enhances knowledge of foreign markets by means of a better access to local knowledge and information. Members of professional teams who are employed in a local branch in close proximity to the organization's customers are able to understand the buying habits and cultural characteristics of the local consumers. An effective and well-organized multicultural team can be instrumental in communicating the nuances of the local business environment to other members of the team and departments of the organization. Because of an increased creativity, flexibility, and understanding of the local markets, multicultural teams can facilitate effective global strategies and successful operations. In addition, multicultural teams help corporations to build the capacity to capture opportunities in attractive foreign markets, which might not be as available domestically.

3. Access to specialized and skilled human resources. The necessity for multicultural professional teams forces the organization's HR department to seek and develop specialized, skilled talent with diverse cultural background and experience. The power of communication technology enables multicultural teams to perform organizational tasks asynchronously from different locations. Multinational companies regularly build the capacity of attracting and managing specialized skilled labor. Multicultural capacity building not only provides access to the specialized labor, but also allows companies to develop the internal intercultural management practice. For example, multinational corporations such as Nokia, Microsoft, and General Electric are among the best practices in attracting and preserving the high skilled people from countries of their presence and developing multicultural project teams.

4. Ability to develop global leaders and create a global company. Multicultural teams can serve as a solid base to develop versatile

employees and future leaders of organizations. Working on multicultural professional teams can prepare future leaders to work effectively in diverse cultural environments and to tackle many managerial tasks, which enable them to make future contribution to the organization. For example, people working at a distance can demonstrate their skills and experience through working on global assignments from a local location. Using multicultural teams for future labor capacity building and expanding the HR capabilities is the critical advantage that companies need to acquire to ensure future success.

5. Ability to become a learning multicultural organization. Multicultural teams can put forward a wide spectrum of ideas for an organization on how to obtain knowledge from diverse markets and locations, how to utilize it to the best advantage of the organization, and how to distribute it to different parts of the company. Acquiring, using, and transferring knowledge and information where it is most needed are the criteria of the learning organization. The organizations that utilize multicultural teams can develop the capacity for faster learning and align learning with the organization's business goals.

However, such heterogeneity can lead to conflicts among team members. Conflict usually includes interpersonal dissonance, tension or antagonism between two or more individuals based on their differences in values, beliefs, and/or attitudes. Conflict can be defined as an expressed struggle between people who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.

Different types of conflict can occur in interpersonal relationships. Braiker and Kelley (1979) defined three types of conflict: behavioral, normative, and personal. Behavioral conflict refers to specific behaviors of one or more persons in a relationship that can be viewed negatively by another person. Normative conflict, which is more common for romantic or marital relationships but also happens in organizational settings, occurs when a person in a relationship does not like the norms and rules of the relationship. Personal conflict evolves when incompatibilities exist based on personal characteristics, values, and attitudes. All three types of interpersonal conflict are present in an

organizational setting and can be found across cultures [3].

Communication and communicative competence play an essential role in the conflict process. First, certain communication can move conflict closer to or away from a solution phase depending on what strategy communicators choose to pursue. Communication can either help to solve the problem or damage the situation even further. From a relationship perspective, communication changes the nature of the conflict by taking it from an intrapersonal stage to a relational stage. When people talk about conflict and discuss the reasons underlying the presence of conflict, that conflict becomes a public matter. Communication changes the process of conflict by altering the attitudes of individuals involved in the conflict. People might have different attitudes about a conflict prior to communicating versus after they interact.

In an intercultural situation, conflicts can occur more often because of the ambiguity of the relationships among people from different cultures. People in intercultural relationships have different ways of expressing and interpreting the same symbolic action. According to Ting-Toomey (1985), aspects of cross-cultural communication such as language barriers, verbal and nonverbal differences, value and cultural differences and intercultural misunderstandings can easily start an interpersonal conflict [6]. From a cultural systems perspective, conflict can serve two major functions in a culture. First, the generative function of conflict is in evidence when conflict activates change and promotes for innovation and development within a culture. Second, the regnant function of conflict is in evidence when a conflict situation serves to unite individuals together and reinforce group cohesiveness. The two functions of conflict not only influence the culture, but also the way people behave in conflict situations and the way they manage conflict. The relationship between conflict and culture is not transparent. Conflict as a form of social action is guided by the underlying normative characteristics of a particular culture. While culture defines and regulates the significance and meaning of a conflict situation, conflict also influences culture and serves many roles within a culture. Since symbolic action is determined by a specific set of cultural norms,

the normative movements of a culture define conflict.

Interpersonal conflicts enter organizational and social environments, and negatively influence organizational performance. Hence, people view conflict as a negative phenomenon, detrimental to interpersonal relationships. However, conflicts can be beneficial to relationships and bring better understanding and improved communication. Conflict can bring change, novelty, and new ideas to relationships. By building on prior personal experiences and experiences of others in conflict resolution, communicators can develop strategies and techniques that help them to deal with conflict situations.

Successful intercultural communication and interaction does not occur by chance. On the contrary, certain exchanges and behavior patterns can result in a successful communication activity. According to Ricard, effective intercultural communication or constructive interaction skill is “the ability of an individual or a group to achieve understanding through verbal or non-verbal exchange and interaction between cultures” [10]. To achieve the desired outcomes in the cross-cultural context, people have to possess a well-defined set of skills, which includes intercultural competence.

The key intercultural communication skills that are often targeted in organization development programs are:

1. Valuing – understanding personal, group, and cultural values of the country where you are working such as attitudes toward independence, happiness, quickness, courtesy, and equality.

2. Observing – the ability to sense the immediate environment and see the total picture and the relationship of parts to the whole.

3. Listening – awareness of your own listening style and the culturally different listening style of your communication partner, frequency patterns of speech, and duration intervals.

4. Thinking – understanding the variation in thinking patterns and approaches to problem solving and recognition of similarities and differences.

5. Speaking – primary verbal communication, speech patterns and the relationship of oral and written communication, arrangement of words, relationship between the

choice of words and creativity and voice and sound patterns.

6. Gesturing – nonverbal expressions of feeling and meaning in cross-cultural human interaction, understanding of cultural patterns with facial and body position and motion [10].

Communication in conflict situations differs based on how people handle conflict and what response they communicate. People from different cultures hold different attitudes toward conflict and apply different communication strategies. Communication during conflict situations and conflict management styles depends greatly on value systems of a particular culture, perception of self and perceptions of contextual social relations in this culture. Business professionals have learned that relying on one mode of reasoning or information processing, which works successfully in one culture, can cause problems in another culture. International negotiators frequently find that discussions are disadvantaged because the two sides seem to be following different paths of logic. Western cultures tend to employ a more Aristotelian logic, using pieces of information to structure their argument. In other societies, such as the former Soviet Union, people tend to think and communicate in general terms and move to specific information [8].

The most common conflict management technique is negotiation. According to Broome et al., negotiation is a process, in which participants employ communication to identify behavioral alternatives and attempt to move toward outcomes that are individually and mutually beneficial. Other negotiation or conflict management outcomes include relational development, “saving face”, and increasing self-esteem. In an intercultural negotiation context, cultural values can influence what interactants bring to the conflict, the process of negotiation and the modes of conflict resolution. Differences in conflict management across cultures play a significant role in the success of negotiation among business professionals.

A traditional conflict management approach in North America includes confronting the disagreement and holding open discussions about the issue. In Asian cultures, people try to avoid conflicts, usually do not disagree, and express a very polite and soft behavior. In cultures where face saving is highly valued, such

as Japan, Malaysia and Korea, conflict situations can damage personal and professional relationships. In these cultures, conflict has to be managed in a more indirect and tactful manner, while public and direct conflict resolution can cause shame and negative reactions. A model of intercultural negotiation developed by Broome et al. is based on the assumptions that individuals bring to intercultural communication transactions, culturally defined orientations toward conflict and conflict resolution strategies. The cultural background of an individual influences conflict negotiation because of differences in perspectives about conflict, personal constructs and interpretations of the context and cultural rules guiding negotiation strategies.

Conclusion. If employees do not feel secure at their workplace, they waste a lot of energy in forming relational alliances with their coworkers, which is a very costly activity. When a natural human tendency of forming groups is respected and supported in an organization, employees can work very effectively in their groups and feel secure in their emotional environment. «Teams recreate much of the social climate of earlier societies, allowing people to feel more emotionally secure and able to devote more of their energy to productivity and creativity in the workplace» [11]. There are why activities of the members of the EENCE Network are regulated by internal documents that are adopted at the general meeting [4].

Understanding common challenges of multicultural teams and maximizing their potential advantages can help multicultural teams to deal productively with cultural diversity and to increase team performance. Managers of multinational organizations use a number of preparatory measures (team composition, clearly defined goals, transparent structures, and strong leadership) and accompanied measures (team building, effective communication, team norms, and team members' roles) to address common challenges and develop multicultural teams' positive potential. All of these measures demand high intercultural competence: team members must be able to communicate and listen effectively, change perspectives, tolerate ambiguity, and deal with varying action adequately. The following section explains the role that

intercultural competence plays in development of multicultural teams.

References

1. About EENCE Access mode: <https://eence.eu/about-us/>
2. Carmel E. Global software teams. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall; 1st edition., 2011, 269 p. (In English)
3. Culture as the core: Perspectives on culture in second language learning. / Ed. by D. L. Lange, R. M. Paige. Information Age Publishing; Illustrated edition., 2003, 384 p. (In English)
4. EENCE documents Access mode: <https://eence.eu/category/documents/>.
5. Gudykunst W. B., Kim Y.Y. Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication. McGraw-Hill Humanities / Social Sciences / Languages; 4th edition., 2002. 448 p. (In English)
6. Hofstede G. Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. McGraw-Hill Education; 3rd edition, 2010, 576 p.
7. Marquardt M. J., Horvath L. Global teams: How top multinationals span boundaries and cultures with high-speed teamwork. Nicholas Brealey; Illustrated edition, 2012, 268 p. (In English)
8. McCroskey J. C., Richmond V. P. Willingness to communicate: Differing cultural perspectives. The Southern Communication Journal, 56, 1990, pp. 72-77. (In English)
9. Maderer D., Holtbrügge D., Schuster T. Professional football squads as multicultural teams: Cultural diversity, intercultural experience, and team performance. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management –14 (2), 2014, pp. 215-238. (In English)
10. Ricard V. Developing Intercultural Communication Skills: Krieger Pub Co., 1993, 184 p. (In English)
11. Ray D., Bronstein H., Bronstein H. F. Teaming Up: Making the Transition to a Self-directed, Team-based Organization? New York; McGraw-Hill, 1995, 247 p. (In English)

Список литературы

1. Об EENCE [Электронный ресурс]. – Режим доступа: <https://eence.eu/about-us/>

2. Кармель, Э. Глобальные команды разработчиков программного обеспечения. / Э. Кармель. – Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall; 1-е изд., 2011 г. – 269 с.
3. Культура как ядро: взгляды на культуру при изучении второго языка. / Под ред. Д. Л. Ланге, Р. М. Пейдж. – Издательство «Информационная эпоха»; Иллюстрированное издание, 2003. – 384 с.
4. Документы EENCE [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: <https://eence.eu/category/documents/>
5. Гудикунст, В. Б. Общение с незнакомыми людьми: подход к межкультурному общению. / В. Гудикунст, Ю.Я. Ким. – Макгроу-Хилл гуманитарные / социальные науки / языки; 4-е изд., 2002. – 448 с.
6. Хофстеде, Г. Культуры и организации: Программное обеспечение разума. / Г. Хофстеде. – McGraw-Hill Education; Издание 3-е, 2010. – 576 с.
7. Марквардт, М. Дж. Глобальные команды: как ведущие транснациональные корпорации преодолевают границы и культуры с помощью высокоскоростной командной работы. / М. Дж. Марквардт, Л. Хорват. – Николас Брилли; Иллюстрированное издание, 2012. – 268 с.
8. Маккроски, Дж. С. Готовность общаться: разные культурные точки зрения. / Дж. К. Маккроски, В. П. Ричмонд // Южный журнал коммуникаций, 56, 1990. – С. 72-77.
9. Профессиональные футбольные команды как мультикультурные команды: культурное разнообразие, межкультурный опыт и командная эффективность / Д. Мадерер, Д. Хольтбрюгге, Т. Шустер // Международный журнал межкультурного менеджмента – 14 (2), 2014 – С. 215-238
10. Рикар, В. Развитие навыков межкультурной коммуникации / В. Рикар. – Krieger Pub Co., 1993 – 184 с.
11. Объединение: переход к самостоятельной командной организации? / Д. Рей, Х. Бронштейн, Х. Ф. Бронштейн. – Нью-Йорк; McGraw-Hill, 1995. – 247 с.

Статья поступила 19 марта 2021 г.