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BARRIERS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND WAYS TO OVERCOME

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***Abstract.** In the following article, we propose to analyze elements likely to obstruct the proper development of intercultural communication, contributing to the decrease of the degree of fidelity, accuracy and efficiency of the message transfer.*

In order to have a successful intercultural communication, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of a certain type of national culture, whose representatives come into contact.

The model discussed in the present paper is the most popular one, that of Geert Hofstede with its 6 dimensions, and their values and contribution to communication in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: barriers, intercultural communication, Hofstede, cultural dimension, Republic of Moldova

JEL Classification: A 22, I 21, M14, Z13

Introduction

The process of globalization and integration of civilizations at the planetary level, the growing importance of international business, the intensification of population migration and travel for personal and professional interests, as well as the various challenges related to the pandemic, conflicts, etc., have significantly increased the role of communication in an intercultural context. In this sense, communication has become a much more complex process than we could imagine.

The difficulties that arise in the communication of representatives of different cultures are largely due to the national characteristics of their communicative behavior. Overall, both the verbal and non-verbal behavior of an individual or a group of people is defined through the norms and traditions of the societies they represent.

The subject discussed in this paper is very important. In order to have a successful intercultural communication, it is necessary to take into account the characteristics of a certain type of national culture, whose representatives come into contact. In cultures with different indicators of cultural parameters, there are different approaches to communication. Thus, the knowledge of cultural dimensions from different models: Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and others, becomes an important element in the intercultural approach to communication.

The present study focused on the most used model, that of Geert Hofstede, a Dutch scientist in intercultural management, which includes 6 cultural dimensions. The paper below represents the analysis of the results obtained in the Republic of Moldova. So, in the investigative approach we tried to deduce the impact of intercultural barriers on communication, proposing some suggestions and solutions in order to neutralize the factors that generate them or to diminish their influences.

Barriers in intercultural communication

Intercultural differences can obviously influence the quality of the complex communication process. Being culturally dependent, communicational relationships between individuals and groups at the level of encoding, decoding, message and feedback must always be interpreted in a concrete context.

Both anthropologists and social scientists try to identify, systematize and explain the specific elements/dimensions of cultural, attitudinal and behavioral differentiations. Furthermore, various recommendations are offered in order to reduce differences and overcome possible communication barriers, internal and external, voluntary or involuntary, formal or informal, sometimes very subtle, at cultural or intercultural level, which can generate misunderstandings, ridiculous confusions, considerable mistakes.

In general terms, intercultural barriers represent various obstacles, blockages, disturbances, dysfunctions that reduce to a greater or lesser extent the effectiveness of intercultural skills, especially those of communication. In other words, any element that can obstruct the proper development of communication, diminishing the degree of fidelity, accuracy, efficiency and effectiveness of the message transfer, represents a barrier or an impediment in the process of intercultural communication.

Numerous classifications of communication barriers are present in the specialized literature.

I.-O. Pânișoara argues on the barrier concept, with a processual and progressive vision of the component parts of the communication process, identifying system barriers (at the receiver and transmitter level) and process barriers (resulting from the interaction within communication) [6, p. 95].

Researchers R.M.Cândeia and D.Cândeia call them "disturbances" which can be both external in nature (physical environment, distance between communicators, visual stimuli, time, interruptions in the communication process, technical means, organizational structure and channel system, etc.), as well as internal (physiological factors, semantic, perceptual and serial distortion, tendency to evaluate, defective message formation, individual differences, etc.) [1, pp.121-124.]

A. Prodan lists three categories of communication barriers: reception, understanding, acceptance, and offers some recommendations in order to reduce their effects [8, p. 31].

V. Marinescu, citing Burton and Dimbley, presents three types of factors that inhibit intercultural communication: technical (physical barriers such as noise), semantic (lack of ability to understand the meaning of verbal and non-verbal signals), psychological (erroneous perception of the message) [5, p. 61].

Analyzing the impact and unwanted consequences on intercultural communication, we propose some ways of overcoming the problems, minimizing and mitigating the negative impact, eliminating gaps, decreasing negative incidence. The initial identification of the existing or

potential barriers, according to the typology, and the advancement of solutions capable of optimizing and making the communication process more efficient.

Cultural dimensions in overcoming communication barriers

Intercultural communication requires an awareness of cultural differences, as what may be considered perfectly acceptable and natural in one culture may become confusing or even offensive in another culture. It follows that all levels of communication: verbal (words and language itself), non-verbal (body language, gestures) and etiquette (clothing, gifts, meals, customs and protocol) are affected by cultural dimensions.

Researching cultural dimensions in the Republic of Moldova, as well as communication from intercultural perspective, are fairly recent approaches. However, on the official website of the Hofstede model [9], values regarding our country are also estimated. In 2019, as part of the research of the Center for Scientific Research in Psychology [7], national dimensions were explored according to Hofstede's model, obtaining similar scores for the Republic of Moldova to those proposed by the Dutch researcher on the website official.

Following the comparative study of the results of the investigations mentioned in Figure 1, we can highlight the peculiarities of the national culture in the Republic of Moldova, which determine the orientations of the national cultural profile, with the characteristics influencing the communication process.

Cultural Dimensions in the Republic of Moldova

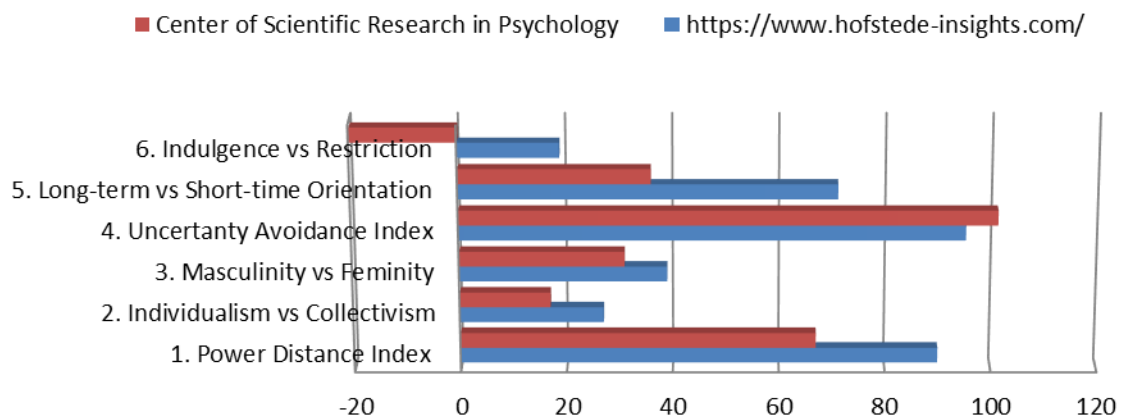


Figure 1. Hofstede dimensions in the Republic of Moldova

Source: Own work based on [2]

Thus, in the Republic of Moldova, a **large hierarchical distance** is noticed, which indicates that authority is concentrated in centralized decision-making structures, there are strict organizational hierarchies, the flow of information is constrained by these hierarchies [3]. Also, there is a lack of information in the framework of horizontal hierarchical communication. In the case of interacting with people from a high power distance culture, a special approach to obtaining feedback and engaging in discussion would be necessary, as their cultural framework may prevent

active participation in the communication process. Less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem.

At the same time, we report a **high collectivism** index in the Republic of Moldova, which implies the involvement of all members of society. Society in the Republic of Moldova tends to cultivate specific communicative values, such as: self-respect, friendship and the feeling of achievement within the group (vertical collectivism), working for the well-being of those closest to the collective. For a successful intercultural dialogue, communication styles favorable to the situation must be applied, being aware of the differences in perception and thinking of the participants in the communication act. In order to overcome possible barriers in intercultural communication and increase collaboration, representatives of collectivist cultures must know and be aware of the main features of individualist culture, such as: autonomy, independence, ambition, inner harmony, etc.

The dominance in communication of traditional **feminine values**, characteristic for the Republic of Moldova, means that caring for others is a dominant value. In communication behavior, society members seek a collaborative environment and request the support of all group members, regardless of their contribution [4]. Thus, in the process of communication, feminine values such as: patience, tolerance, care, the quality of the communicative act, prevail over specifically masculine values: affirmation, competition, achievement, assertiveness, possession of money and goods, but also indifference, carelessness towards others. In this sense, it would be good for communication to combine not only satisfaction and care for loved ones, members of the group/society, but also courage, the desire for achievement and evolution, both personal and professional.

In general, uncertainty avoidance refers to the level of acceptance of uncertainty and ambiguity within a society [9]. The Republic of Moldova is a country with an **extremely high uncertainty avoidance** score, which demonstrates a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.

The high uncertainty avoidance index in the intercultural communication process can be reduced by reducing apparent uncertainties, for example, by introducing rules and following clearly defined procedures, rituals, etc., to make group members less stressed and anxious, more open to change, curious rather than fearful of what is different in the context of linguistic diversity.

In a culture that has a **short-term orientation**, such as that of the Republic of Moldova, it is necessary to put greater emphasis on the reciprocity of the communicative act, of gifts and rewards. While there may be respect for tradition, there is also a predilection for personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity in communication. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term oriented culture, thus contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity [9].

Restriction in communication is specific to the culture of the Republic of Moldova. Due to cultural constraints that inhibit the development of personality, the realization of one's own desires, people become tense, stressed and nervous. This is felt in everyday social interactions where citizens show irritation, nervousness and unkindness [9]. Because expressing personality is difficult, communication is austere, and people fear criticism and others' opinion. In order to reduce the level of austerity, such characteristics as: critical thinking, flexibility, creativity and originality, self-esteem have to be encouraged.

Conclusions

In the era of globalization and cultural expansion, communication with people from various countries and cultures becomes a much more complex process. It is necessary to know, understand and accept specific elements/dimensions or those related to language, religion, cultural evolution, behavior and style of communication, perception of time and space and so on

Recognizing existing and potential barriers, including their impact in an intercultural context, is of particular importance in order to communicate efficiently and effectively at the level of individuals, groups, society.

The study carried out according to the Hofstede model and the analysis of the obtained results, allow us to find some similarities, but also differences in the approach to communication in a cultural and intercultural context.

After analysing the dimensions described in the paper, it is highly recommended to train and develop intercultural skills necessary in a new environment in order to mitigate, minimize the negative effects and to remove blockages and misunderstandings. Communication techniques, including active listening and positive feedback, promotion of common values focused on self-esteem, collaboration, empathy, support and motivation, involvement in decision-making, critical thinking will make a creative and harmonious environment of intercultural interaction.

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