

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: The article examines the essential features and role of communicative competence in modern international business. The increasing influence of cultural, historical, geopolitical factors and national security considerations on the landscape of international business and the interaction of existing and potential partners is described. The study also touches on the phenomenon of glocalization and its impact on international business and cross-cultural communicative competence. A three-dimensional model of cross-cultural communicative competence in international business, covering factors (dimensions) of globalization, glocalization, and national security is proposed.

Keywords: international business; cross-cultural communicative competence; globalization; glocalization; multicultural landscape.

1 Introduction

In today's increasingly linked and globalized world, cultural competence has become a must-have talent for worldwide enterprises and organizations. Cross-cultural competence is the capacity to comprehend, communicate, and engage effectively with people from various cultural origins. It entails not just understanding diverse cultures, but also the capacity to adapt and appreciate cultural differences.

In a globalized world, the connection between culture and communication has become more apparent, which has caused an increase in interest in this topic from the business community. The dominant elements of different national cultures in the process of intercultural communication influence each other and sometimes provide mutual integration, while in other cases - rejection.

Considering the above, as well as increased attention to cosmopolitanism as a philosophy of modern man, expectations for greater standardization and unification of the communication process among the world community have increased. However, globalization and the increase in the number of intercultural contacts have not yet led to the formation of universal rules of communication acceptable to all cultures, nor to the formation of a culturally homogeneous society.

International businesses face the reality of adapting both their products, their management approach and the way they do business to the cultures of the countries in which they operate. In addition, international business operating in countries with different cultures, in order to succeed, must know the current economic, social, and legal situation in each country and predict the future situation well, which is also an important component of multicultural communicative competence in the modern world [8].

Against the background of the war in Ukraine, relations with a number of countries have become significantly more complicated, thus the more urgent is the development of intercultural dialogue with strategic partners, improving mutual understanding and interaction, as well as increasing intercultural communicative competence in order to be ready to build new business relationships.

Once separated by vast oceans, our world's populations are now incredibly mobile and more connected than ever before in history. Leaders manage teams composed of representatives of different countries and cultures, located in different parts of the globe, speaking different languages, having different worldviews, beliefs, values, lifestyles and customs. But even in this interconnected world, people do not always understand each other and cannot always be understood in the process of intercultural communication. The less similar cultures are, the greater the influence culture has on intercultural communication. Therefore, knowledge of the most characteristic features of communications of different cultures can improve the effectiveness of communication in international business.

The current reality is that international business is fraught with many threats, to which TNCs are exposed much more often than firms operating only in national markets. In the theory of international business risks, first of all, it is about country risks [25]. Within the country risk, commercial risks are distinguished, namely economic, financial, currency, and political risks. The latter are divided into local, regional, international, global and special. Special political risks, in turn, are divided into macro risks and micro risks.

However, today analysts warn that due to political and economic instability in the world, the number and degree of risks changes every year. As a result of research in the field of business risks, many factors have been identified that either already threaten the activities of international corporations or may threaten them in the future [2; 3; 24]. Thus, the credit crisis, non-compliance with legal requirements, deepening recession, radical greening, cost reduction, personnel policy, strengthening the role of the state in the economy, and so on were called at one time significant risks that led to negative consequences [10; 12; 13; 17; 19]. However, a number of experts today emphasize that it is also worth paying close attention to such a factor as intercultural business communication and including it in the list of possible risks of TNCs activities [22].

Well-known economic theories have recently begun to cause distrust for the simple reason that in Asian economies these theories often conflict with cultural characteristics. This in turn can lead to completely different results than those implied by the theories. Language, as it is known, is closely related to culture as "the socially inherited set of practical skills and ideas that characterize our way of life" [18]. The use of language in speech in most cases depends on sociocultural background knowledge, and communicative connections are established between texts of business culture and everyday culture. Namely the communication process generates the rules of economic behavior [14].

Back in 2012, the British research and consulting company Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), together with the international educational center for teaching English EF Education First, published a comprehensive study, "Competition without Borders," which was conducted among 572 executives of commercial and non-profit organizations around the world. The study showed that almost half of respondents (49%) believe that inaccuracies in translation and misunderstandings in communication not only interfere with the conclusion of international transactions, but also lead to large financial losses [1].

All these realities determine the need for a comprehensive consideration of issues of communicative competence in international business in a multicultural landscape.

2 Materials and Methods

The methodological basis of the study represents several theoretical approaches, which together make it possible to cover in detail and comprehensively the phenomenon of intercultural

communication being studied - theories of the relationship between geopolitics and economics, the theory of glocalization, cultural dimensions. The research is partly interdisciplinary in nature and accumulates scientific achievements in various fields of knowledge: communication theory, management, Political Science and World Affairs.

The work is based on laws, categories, and principles of dialectical logic. To solve the research problems, such general scientific methods as scientific abstraction, deduction and induction, systemic and comparative analysis were used.

3 Results and Discussion

Researchers have repeatedly resorted and are resorting to attempts to comprehensively describe the ethnocultural style of intercultural communication among representatives of different nations. Various criteria for the typology of cultures have been proposed. In general, the behavioral styles of representatives of different cultures are considered according to such markers as sociocultural, axiological, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic. A special place is occupied by intercultural communication, which studies all manifestations of culture in the course of communication from linguistic to non-verbal.

Intercultural business interaction occurs in the environment of different cultures with their inherent characteristics. Effective management of international constructive communication and negotiation requires reliance on adequate theoretical solutions and effective organization of practical communication work. Communication between representatives of different cultures in the global world creates additional difficulties in assessing the negotiation skills, business interaction skills of communicating subjects and in modeling strategic decisions. All this suggests the need to find modeling approaches that focus on cross-cultural compatibility and better knowledge of the context of cross-cultural business interactions.

At business meetings, Americans primarily focus on the problem and strive to discuss not only general promising solutions, but also the immediate details associated with signing the agreement. Also, the high level of professionalism in the communication style of Americans is noted. In a group of American entrepreneurs, it is difficult to meet a person who is incompetent in any matter, so they demand the same professionalism from their future international partners [1].

As for the Asian region, business people in China remain reserved and do not show strong emotions and enthusiasm in any situation. Intense gestures, hugs, kisses, pats on the back and even light touches are unacceptable for them in business. In this regard, the assertive American style can be seen as very unprofessional in Eastern business culture. Also, familiar American language patterns and various idiomatic expressions will be unacceptable, such as: *Let's get going; Who wants to start the ball rolling?*, etc.

Before signing a contract, Chinese businessmen prefer to establish trusting relationships with business partners, and this takes time, so often several meetings are required before the deal is completed. Also, in China it is very important to maintain a hierarchy when entering a conference room or meeting place, so the head of the delegation must be at the head of the delegation; it is important to remember that the first person to enter the room will be perceived by the Chinese side as the leader of the group.

One should understand that the process of intercultural communication is more than just the interaction of several people, but the meeting of different cultures. The first condition of communication is the understanding that all elements of communication, from utterances to unspoken words, from facial expressions to body movements, are formed by comparing the interpretative frames of different worlds.

Communication styles also vary significantly across cultures. Their knowledge is important both for understanding the value systems of the national culture of business partners and for

eliminating cultural communication barriers. Similar communication styles in intercultural contacts promote mutual understanding, since the behavior of business partners is understandable and, to a certain extent, predictable. If the communication style of business partners is not known or understood by representatives of another culture, then behavior that differs from what is expected may be assessed as "wrong."

EIU research project leader Abik Sen attributes differences in communication skills among residents of different regions to their political and geographical characteristics. Moreover, he notes that when entering international markets, companies try to facilitate the international integration of personnel, and therefore they consider it especially important, first of all, to teach them foreign languages. 47% of managers admitted in a survey that language training is not fully organized in companies. This significantly affects the process of communication with foreign partners and leads to communication problems. About 40% believe that when recruiting personnel, insufficient attention is paid to experience and skills in working in international business circles [25].

It is difficult to disagree with this. For example, when externally observing memorized cross-cultural "prescriptions" regarding business etiquette, all the subtleties associated with the regional affiliation of the communication partner are often not taken into account. Meanwhile, it is important to understand, for example, that the Arabs consider themselves the heirs of the great civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, Babylon, Carthage, although, to put it mildly, is not entirely true, while, however, in fairness it must be said that they are the descendants of the great Arab civilization, which included elements of ancient civilizations, made an invaluable contribution to the entire human culture and brought to this day numerous monuments of history and culture of the ancient world. The history of the victorious march of the troops of the first Arab caliphs across countries and continents, moreover, richly embellished by the rich eastern imagination, contributed to the development in the minds of the Arabs of a complex of their own superiority in relation to the peoples around them, "whose ancestors were slaves of the descendants of Muhammad and Abu Bakr". This superiority complex still exists today, although it is carefully hidden and used by Arab rulers mainly for domestic political purposes [6].

But, on the other hand, the Arabs are burdened by a different complex. Firstly, it is the historical period associated with humiliating colonialism, three hundred years of subjugation to the Turks, British and French, and secondly, the existing lag of the Arab East from the post-industrial West. Infringement, on the one hand, gives rise to admiration for the power and prosperity of the West, and on the other, hostility, developing into hatred, which sometimes takes the most extreme forms of expression [15]. This fact also manifests itself in business communication with Arab partners, but lack of its knowledge can lead to critically erroneous conclusions and, accordingly, harm to business relations.

The speed of decision-making is also more a cultural feature than a characteristic of professionalism. An interlocutor who hesitates to answer is regarded by Americans as secretive, because only a reliable person is capable of answering quickly and directly. The Japanese trust those who thoroughly think through what they hear and are not in a hurry to respond. Therefore, long pauses do not bother the Japanese, while Americans always strive to fill a long pause in a conversation.

The state of uncertainty in life and business situations is understood and interpreted differently in different cultures. Thus, the British, Swedes, and Danes welcome a minimum number of laws, norms, and rules that can somehow limit the scope of the situation. These cultures are characterized by low levels of fear of uncertainty, and people feel quite comfortable in loosely structured environments. In contrast, representatives of the Portuguese, Greek, and Japanese cultures, where there is a high level of fear of uncertainty, strive to establish clear rules. This helps them avoid the emotional discomfort associated with a situation of uncertainty.

Cultural differences are also evident in the definition of social roles. The business card of a Japanese entrepreneur not only shows his or her position in the company, but also clearly defines the degree of respect that should be shown to him or her. Asian and South American countries have high power distance scores. This is expressed in the fact that the authority and correctness of the boss are never challenged, while in the USA and Western European countries it is customary to erase the status barrier. There, organizations prefer not to demonstrate power, not to emphasize official inequality and to more encourage the initiative of subordinates.

To achieve understanding, it is imperative to take into account the filter of values and perceptions of the addressee, as well as the context and interference of communication. The latter refers to national stereotypes, good or bad relationships, emotions, differences in goals, vision of the subject and the influence of the external environment. The individual behavior of communicants is also influenced by other participants in communication and the media. Accordingly, the reaction of the message recipient will not necessarily correspond to the intention of the sender. In order to transform the improbability of communication into its probability, it is necessary to take into account not only linguistic and cultural diversity, but also other factors, such as the individual and group interests of communicants, their preferences and motives. Therefore, it makes sense to increase the costs for communication participants to prepare for interaction, which can significantly help reduce the risk of communication failures.

It is interesting to trace the dynamics of size of the cross-cultural training market (see Figure 1).

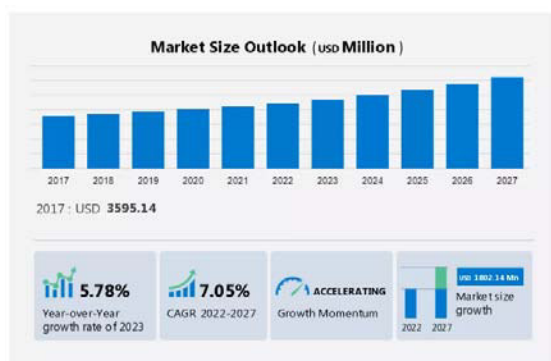


Figure 1. Size of the cross-cultural training market, with forecast [8].

As can be seen from the diagram, the size of the cross-cultural training market is showing strong growth, and this trend is expected to continue in the near future. At first glance, this should lead to improved cross-cultural interactions in international business. But the problem is that existing training programs are too “linear” and do not take into account the latent factors influencing the international business landscape. Graduates of these programs are well acquainted with the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, trained in the intricacies of business etiquette in international business, but do not think about the existence of hidden “pitfalls”, the peculiarities of the history of a particular nation and ethnic group and the traces of conflicts stretching for centuries, do not know how to think systematically and perspective, taking into account all the nuances of the situation in the field of geopolitics and national/regional/global security. Managers and owners of international businesses are forced to learn these skills only through practice and common sense management flourishes here, that has no theoretical basis or algorithms of action, which, naturally, often leads to mistakes detrimental to business.

Many large economies are closely interconnected, and since there is no expediency to wait for the end of uncertainty in the global economy, companies must be more erudite in the field of risk management, take a broader view of problems and

constantly predict the risks of future changes. In this regard, international companies should pay attention to the issues of intercultural business communication, which is often not considered by firms as a threatening factor.

As evidenced by the results of a 2016 McKinsey survey of top managers of large corporations on the topic of globalization, geopolitics is increasingly putting pressure on business. Today, top managers are more concerned than ever about the negative impact of geopolitics on the global business climate. Over the past two years before the survey, the number of respondents who consider geopolitical instability to be an important factor influencing the corporate world has doubled [15]. Managers are worried about the growing geopolitical tensions. 84% of managers are confident that this factor will have a direct impact on the commercial world in the next five years. In a previous McKinsey survey, only 61% of respondents thought so [15].

According to the majority of respondents, corporations do not make adequate efforts to reduce geopolitical risks, although they understand the scale of the threats. Only 13% of top managers said with confidence that their companies are actively addressing problems associated with growing global tensions. Analysts attribute this inaction to the lack of appropriate mechanisms in corporations: geopolitics is still not given enough attention when drawing up a company’s development strategy [21].

Today, geopolitical risks for business have increased even more. Perfect intercultural communication skills and intercultural competence play in such a turbulent environment one of the most important roles that determine not only the success, but sometimes the very survival of a business [7]. The ability to balance, to find an approach to representatives of different cultures, avoiding “sharp corners”, knowledge of the attitude towards geopolitical conflicts that is inherent in specific cultures - all these are necessary components of communicative competence in today’s international business. At the same time, it is worth remembering how quickly the picture of the world is changing and being prepared for new challenges.

It is essential that business leaders understand the context in which they exist. This is the only way they can learn to adapt to today’s conditions. In turn, the most important component of this context is culture, which, under the conditions of glocalization, has again acquired great weight.

Modern researchers of the phenomenon of globalization talk about the complex process of intertwining global trends in social development and local features of cultural development, defining this phenomenon as ‘glocalization’. The term “glocalization” was first used in the writings of Roland Robertson and entered scientific use at the end of the 20th century, by combining the two words “globalization” and “localization”. It implies that the global culture is accepted, but with significant local modifications. This model describes the mixing of cultures and peoples as the generation of cultural hybrids and new global cultural networks. Social movements and associations are growing, initiatives are being put forward, even political programs and bills are being developed in defense of folklore, one’s own local traditions, languages or dialects [26].

The glocal reorganization of physical and social space provokes the genesis of “glocal ethics” and creates conditions for the formation of the “ethos of glocal citizenship” against the backdrop of the moral crisis of the modern era. “Glocaloethics responds to the challenges of the era and demonstrates to an energetically globalizing world a new ethical matrix, which involves not so much a compilation of different cultural and anthropological models of morality (a kind of postmodern “moral pate”), but a cognitive perspective and cultural identification possibility that is fundamentally innovative for all classical ethics – ‘docking’ - the coexistence of rational morality and real mores” [26]. This is especially evident, in particular, in the revival of Islamic ethics.

It is also important to note that “government leaders have ceased to be ashamed of their connections with business and are not

emphatically distancing themselves from the business class. Some of them themselves came from the entrepreneurial environment (Trump, Macron), others have always been closely associated with it (Berlusconi, Sarkozy), while others prepared “reserve airfields” and went into business after government service (Schroeder, Blair). In modern conditions, it is considered good form for civil servants to cooperate with representatives of big business and finance, and top managers of large corporations. Rotation of personnel between the public sector and private enterprise has become the rule” [24]. The world has entered an era when the state lives not by ideological “isms”, but by the interests of national business and puts all its resources and influence at its service [6; 20]. The intensified competition between the great powers in this area, which resulted in unexpected results for the adherents of liberalism, caused a protracted crisis of globalization and an aggravation of interstate contradictions. It is not surprising that today's representatives of international business have to master the communication competencies of not only businessmen, but also politicians and diplomats. The cross-cultural component in such competencies comes to the fore.

Of course, the majority of transnational businesses do not need political upheaval, especially the ones that disrupt markets, destroy decades-long partnerships (supply chains), impose tariff barriers, introduce prohibitive sanctions, and start full-scale trade wars. However, they have to survive in this landscape.

Cross-cultural management and ethics help to take preventive measures and solve existing problems, often anticipating them. The main task of cross-cultural management and business ethics in business is the adoption of effective solutions to problems that are most adapted to situations. Various cross-cultural aspects include approaches to standards, business practices, laws of different countries, national ethics, culture, customs, management system, and socio-economic system.

In addition, today there is an increasingly close convergence of industrial espionage and political espionage, and the so-called “magic weapon” [5] is being increasingly successfully used by China. The strategy of “magic weapon” is to buy up the assets of high-tech companies (especially those that are at least indirectly related to the military-industrial complex), energy and infrastructure companies abroad, with the aim of acquiring political influence through economic leverage. China is now even stronger than it was before the pandemic, and is now one of the fastest growing economies in the world [27], which allows the “magic weapon” strategy to be actively practiced. Some countries, including New Zealand, have already recognized this problem and have taken unprecedented measures. In particular, in December 2018, the GCSB (Government Communications Security Bureau) prohibited PRC telecoms firm Huawei from participating in the 5G setup for New Zealand's largest telecommunications provider, Spark, citing national security concerns [4].

In October 2023, the Five Eyes alliance's domestic intelligence chiefs warned firms of a “sharp rise” in hostile state attempts to steal intellectual property. MI5 director general Ken McCallum, along with his counterparts from the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS), warned that “across all five of our countries, we are seeing a sharp rise in aggressive attempts by other states to steal competitive advantage” [16].

The occurrence and rising dominance of trade blocs is reducing the typically deep and fast-growing trade routes between China and the United States and the European Union. Five growing global trade dynamics will shape the globe in the next decade. As the global economy responds to chronic economic and geopolitical pressures and shocks, the conventional trade routes that defined the world map are being rebuilt, with trade blocs playing an increasingly important role. Furthermore, total global commerce is rising at a slower rate than the global economy, signaling a fundamental change away from the trade-led

globalism that has prevailed since the Cold War's conclusion. According to a new BCG report, worldwide commerce in goods is expected to rise at an average pace of 2.8% per year until 2032, compared to a projected 3.1% growth rate in global GDP during the same time (See Figure 2) [11].

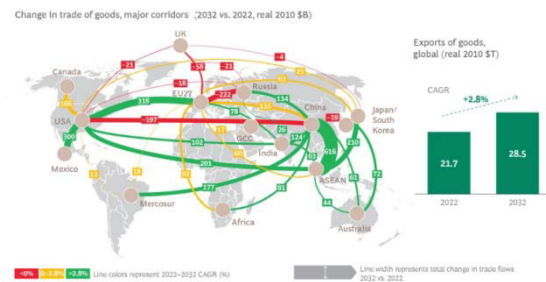


Figure 2. Forecast on trade flows reshaping by 2023 [11].

Of course, in such conditions, the complexity of the task of effective and safe intercultural interaction and communication in international business increases significantly, acquiring a multidimensional character, where national security becomes one of the dimensions. Schematically, cross-cultural communicative competence in international business today can be represented as a coordinate system (Figure 3).

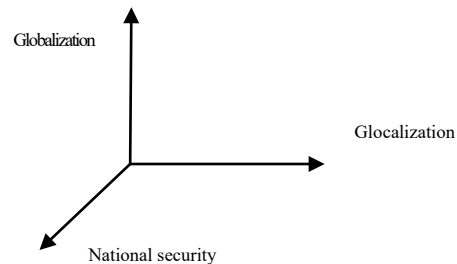


Figure 3. Dimensions of cross-cultural communicative competence in international business

Cohen distinguishes two paradigms of negotiations and business interaction: American and Eastern [1]. In addition, negotiations and various meetings and gatherings form the basis for cross-cultural business interactions.

The American culture of business interaction and negotiation is based on a verbal, explicit, low-context communication style. Cultures with low contextuality are characterized by: 1) direct and expressive speech; 2) limited attention to the use of nonverbal forms of interaction in communication; 3) a clear and accurate assessment of all topics and issues raised; 4) interpretation of reticence as insufficient competence or lack of information; 5) open expression of dissatisfaction [1]. This paradigm is based on the principles of “I can do” and “Give and take.” In business interactions and negotiations, representatives of the American paradigm, seeing the benefits of “give and take”, can do many things that were not fully included in the business meeting agenda, as well as negotiate things other than what was originally intended. During negotiations, solutions are constantly sought with the negotiating partner, since it is believed that both parties should be motivated to solve problems just as they are interested in making a profit. Time for representatives of this paradigm is always of real value, especially for representatives of the United States.

The Eastern paradigm of negotiations and business interaction is based on various negotiation characteristics. It is dominated by an internal, high-context communication style. High contextual cultures are characterized by: 1) unexpressed, hidden language, multiple pauses with multiple meanings; 2) orientation towards non-verbal communication and the ability to “speak with eyes”; 3) accurate, detailed transmission of information; 4) avoiding open display of dissatisfaction and anger in various conditions. The Eastern paradigm is characterized by the fact that business interaction,

negotiations, and decision-making occur to a much greater extent on the basis of collective opinion rather than personal attitudes. Establishing and strengthening personal relationships during business interactions and negotiations is considered a very important aspect of communication. In this paradigm of intercultural communication, great importance is attached to history, flow of the meeting, atmosphere, patience and tolerance. An agreement can only be reached after good relations have been established and without rushing to complete negotiations. This paradigm is represented by countries such as Japan, China, etc. [27].

Today, against the backdrop of the processes of globalization and glocalization, there is a convergence of these paradigms, including and especially under the greatly increased influence of geopolitical factors and "hybrid peace". However, this process has not yet received proper scientific understanding.

Johnson et al. back in 2006 rightly claimed that "despite the mounting volume of academic research on cultural issues in international business, firms appear not to be doing enough to prepare managers for the international business environment" [14, p. 526]. The same authors stress that, despite the apparent relevance of cross-cultural communicative competence in the study of international commerce, there is no consensus on what constitutes cross-cultural communicative competence. Second, there are very no in-depth examinations of this competence in international business.

According to Devenyl, "the concept of cultural intelligence refers to "a person's ability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" [9, p. 57].

It seems that in order to solve the accumulated problems and contradictions, it is possible and advisable to use a transcultural approach that expands the framework of traditional liberal doctrine and is more responsive to the realities of "behavioral" economics. This transcultural approach requires a rethinking of established methodological foundations and the development of a fundamentally new conceptual apparatus for studying the problems of globalization. In our opinion, it can be most fully and adequately implemented within the framework of a relatively new scientific direction - synergetics. Namely the transcultural approach most fully reveals the real determinants and mechanisms of national competitiveness, since in addition to the macroeconomic or microeconomic parameters itself, it takes into account its most important components such as institutional culture, national business culture, and management ideology. Cross-cultural integration is carried out both at the national (compatibility of national business cultures) and corporate (compatibility of organizational cultures) levels. All integration transactions are based on one general principle - obtaining a synergistic effect when integration brings additional value to the company.

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