

# LITTERA SCRIPTA

Economics

Management

Corporate Finance

Finance and  
Valuation



1/2024

# Littera Scripta

(Economics, Management, Corporate Finance, Finance and Valuation)

Ing. Jakub HORÁK, MBA, PhD. (Editor-in-chief)

## **Address Editor:**

Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice

Okružní 517/10

370 01 České Budějovice, Czech Republic

Tel.: +420 387 842 183

e-mail: [journal@littera-scripta.com](mailto:journal@littera-scripta.com)

ISSN 1805-9112 (Online)

Date of issue: June 2024

Periodicity: Twice a year Since 2010

## **The Journal is indexed in:**

- ERIH PLUS (European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences) – in 2015
- CEJSH (Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities) – in 2015
- EZB (Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek) – in 2017
- GOOGLE SCHOLAR – in 2017
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# Content

<b>Analysis of competitiveness of the postal services industry in Mongolia</b>	<b>1</b>
Enebish Jambal, Oyuntungalag Yadamsuren, Oyuntungalag Buyantur, Sumjidmaa Tumurchudur, Tsolmon Jambal	
<b>The development of e-commerce turnover in the Czech Republic during economic crises: a case study</b>	<b>16</b>
Kristína Korená, Petra Pártlová, David Vyšín	
<b>Rules for Expert Institutes' Work Procedures Ensuring Proper Performance of Expert Activities</b>	<b>37</b>
Petr Ševčík	
<b>Assessing factors Affecting Tax Compliance Intention</b>	<b>48</b>
Galmandakh Urlee, Sumjidmaa Tumurchudur, Oyuntungalag Buyantur	
<b>Effectiveness measurement for cleaning services</b>	<b>61</b>
Ekaterina Chytilová, Petra Palmová	
<b>Assessing Global Innovation Index: A Comprehensive Analysis of its Metrics, Methodology, and Implications</b>	<b>74</b>
Gjergji Tafa, Besarta Tafa	
<b>Multicultural Training as a Tool Increasing the Work and Management Efficiency in an International Environment: Qualitative Survey of Czech Businesses Experience</b>	<b>93</b>
Jan Urban, Zdeněk Čaha, Michal Ruschak, Mario Bogdanović	

# Multicultural Training as a Tool Increasing the Work and Management Efficiency in an International Environment: Qualitative Survey of Czech Businesses Experience

Jan Urban<sup>1</sup>, Zdeněk Čaha<sup>2</sup>, Michal Ruschak<sup>3</sup>, Mario Bogdanović<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, Czech Republic

<sup>3</sup> Pan-European University in Prague, Czech Republic

<sup>4</sup> Istrian University of Applied Sciences in Pula, Croatia

## Abstract

Cooperation with people, both managers and employees, coming from different national cultures is becoming increasingly common in business practice. It often brings with it new perspectives, stimuli, or inspiration, but sometimes it also becomes the cause of misunderstandings, resulting from different culturally conditioned customs and expectations. In extreme cases, it can even result in cultural clashes and conflicts in the workplace. To avoid or overcome them successfully requires usually to be aware and know the different traditions of corporate behaviour in individual cultures and to apply and respect the main rules of successful intercultural cooperation and communication. The article deals with important prerequisites for successful employees' cooperation in a multicultural setting including work in multicultural teams and leading these teams, the focus being the use of intercultural trainings. Using the method of a qualitative survey, it aims, in its analytical part, to find out to what extent do mid-sized and bigger Czech companies deal with the issues of a multicultural management through multicultural training. It looks at the main topics, methods and effectiveness of these trainings and formulates recommendations on how to organize these trainings in the most efficient way.

**Keywords:** People management, multicultural work and management environment, management skills, employee training and development, training effectiveness

## Introduction

With the rapidly advancing globalization of the economic world, the ability to cooperate with people from different national cultures is becoming an important part of both employee and management skills (Alsola, 2023). Crucial prerequisite of this skill is to know and understand work and management practices typical and/or common in diverse cultures and to respect their differences (Čuhlová, 2019).

Also, it often requires the ability to admit that different culturally conditioned approaches and customs, as far as work and management are concerned, can lead to the same, or even better results as "home" approaches (Maddux et al., 2021). Appropriate managerial ability is often referred to as management in conditions of cultural diversity or intercultural management (Adeshola et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022).

Several skills are part of intercultural management (Akpapuna et al., 2022). Their most important issues include ability (Paresashvili et al., 2021) to

- communicate and cooperate in an international corporate environment,
- adapt to new international trends,
- understand and respect the different expressions, customs and values of different national cultures and understand the diverse needs and customs of foreign partners, customers, and consumers,
- understand differences in national corporate cultures, the source of which are differences in legal regulation or labour market conditions.

In the case of managers, they are then followed by abilities (Hussain 2018; Chang & Tharenou, 2004) to

- manage multicultural work groups or organizations and use international differences for their higher performance,
- to prevent problems of intercultural communication and solve problems and misunderstandings in this area in a prompt manner,
- use tools aimed at changing attitudes towards cultural differences. These mainly include training (Salzman, 2018) to support intercultural communication and overcoming its misunderstandings (Seward, 2019).

When working or doing business with people from different national cultures, language skills or knowledge of common "national stereotypes", i.e., extended, generalized and, in most cases, greatly simplified ideas about the characteristics of members of certain nations, are thus usually not enough (Dias et al., 2017).

Examples of common national stereotypes are ideas regarding, for example, Americans as informal and individualistic, Germans as careful, precise, and narrow-minded, Japanese, or other Asians as polite but tough, French as somewhat less hardworking, with a tendency to greater social distance, Scandinavians as socially considerate and informal, the British as cold and rather closed, the Dutch as gentle, etc. (Wilczewski et al., 2019). Broader stereotypes about the differences between geographically defined

cultures, for example the cultures of "southern" and "northern" countries, "eastern" and "western" countries, etc., are also similar (Dustin et al., 2019; Vallone et al., 2019).

These and other stereotypes may reflect certain differences in national cultures, but they may not apply to all persons or organizations of a given country. Above all, however, they may not reflect the significant differences that can exist - and very often do exist - between individual persons or organizations within individual countries and cultures (Perkins, 2020).

Similarly, national cultural "self-stereotypes", i.e., the widespread and overgeneralized ways in which members of certain nations perceive themselves, can also be misleading. These are mostly generalizations about their difference from the characteristics of members of other cultures. One of the peculiarities of self-stereotypes is that characteristics or assumptions that one's own national stereotype perceives as strong or positive are sometimes perceived by members of other nations as weaknesses (Varela, 2019).

For example, in the Czech environment, the often-valued ability to improvise or deal with new or non-standard situations is often interpreted by foreign workers as carelessness or a lack of systematicity. An example can be the surprise and astonishment that sometimes arises for foreign partners in a situation where, after having agreed on a certain procedure with the Czech employees, they discover that the domestic employees went ahead differently and did not inform the foreign partners about it. The cultural misunderstanding consists in the fact that what Czech employees perceive as their flexibility is understood by some foreign managers as rather a manifestation of unreliability or disloyalty.

At the same time, some manifestations of national culture may remain relatively unnoticed in the given national environment and only come to the fore when they are confronted with the customs or approaches of other cultures. An example is the feeling of problems as threats to which one must adapt, or, on the contrary, as challenges that can bring with them new opportunities.

In contrast to common national stereotypes, for successful international cooperation with members of diverse cultures it is usually significantly more important to know and understand the differences associated with national customs and traditions, which are reflected in differences in managerial style, working habits or attitudes to work (Pauliene et al., 2019).

It can be, for example, differences regarding the method of decision-making or co-decision-making in the company or at the workplace (the degree of its centralization or, on the contrary, decentralization), the emphasis on the formal authority of managers, the use of teamwork, space for independence or personal initiative of employees, etc. Similar differences sometimes affect work attitudes, for example work motivation and morale of employees, or specific ways and methods of human resource management, for example criteria and methods applied in selecting and accepting people, methods of

promotion, evaluation, remuneration or dismissal of employees, etc., which are not captured by common and simple national stereotypes (Perkins, 2020).

Similarly, national cultural differences can condition the typical needs and requirements of employees, for example the need for job stability, justice, personal recognition, identification with the organization, personal independence, personal development opportunities, etc. (Tudoran et al., 2022). Their approaches to work flexibility (for example, the willingness to change jobs) can also be different or move to another location), work responsibility or honesty, requirements for participation in decision-making, their tolerance for higher differentiation in reward or in relation to changes. Working in a multicultural corporate environment requires not only understanding these national differences, but in many cases also influencing and managing them (Steenhuis, 2019).

### **Main distinctive features of national corporate cultures**

Based on international comparative surveys, national corporate cultures reflected in the way of management and decision-making, intra-company relations, but also the behaviour of organizations externally can be largely described and explained because of four main cultural manifestations. These manifestations or features of national corporate cultures can understandably be interconnected in diverse ways.

The main different manifestations of national corporate cultures, which the analyses point to, relate primarily to

- to what extent there is a higher or, conversely, weaker power or social distance between workers of various levels in individual corporate cultures,
- to what extent there is or is a usual tendency to avoid risk and uncertainty,
- whether there is a tendency towards individualism or collectivism,
- to what extent there is an intense pressure on performance in the company.

The higher power or social distance between superiors and subordinates that prevails in each culture refers to the extent to which companies originating from certain national cultures tend to centralize decision-making powers at higher levels of corporate management, or to what extent on the contrary, it applies a tendency to delegate certain decisions to lower management levels. At the same time, the markedly unequal distribution of decision-making powers can also be reflected in significant differences in the social status of workers, or in their social distance (Brett et al., 2020).

The different propensity to avoid risk and uncertainty reflects the extent to which businesses of diverse cultures try to avoid situations where certain procedures are not fully described or adjusted in advance. Companies from cultures for which this tendency is higher usually create detailed corporate rules for most situations and do not tolerate different procedures or ways of behaving. The opposite is the case with national cultures, for whose businesses it is common to leave some procedures open and adapt them to the situation, i.e., not to be afraid of improvisation.



A higher level of individualism in the national corporate culture is manifested by a higher tendency to evaluate and reward employees primarily as individuals, i.e., based on their individual performance. The opposite is the tendency to support team cooperation, to prevent excessive or unnecessary rivalry among employees, and to evaluate and reward workers to a considerable extent also based on their joint results, cooperation, or willingness to be replaced (Sogancilar & Ors, 2018; Steenhuis, 2019).

The different pressure of companies on performance is manifested mainly by a higher or lower emphasis on performance, cost control and time use. In cultures with a higher pressure on performance, it also occurs at the expense of the interests and needs of workers or their mutual relationships.

Distinctive features of national corporate cultures, corresponding to the above typology, can be illustrated by companies from different areas. For example, North American companies are characterized by a relatively small distance between superiors and subordinates, higher individualism, a higher level of pressure on performance and a lower or medium level of fear of uncertainty. Japanese companies, on the other hand, are characterized by greater distance between superiors and subordinates (greater respect for authority and centralization of decision-making), but at the same time, higher collectivism, or a greater tendency to avoid uncertainty.

Businesses from German-speaking countries are characterized by a smaller to medium distance between superiors and subordinates, medium individualism, medium or higher pressure on performance, a higher degree of fear of uncertainty; for Romance countries, medium to high individualism, higher distance between superiors and subordinates, lower level of fear of uncertainty and lower pressure to perform, for Nordic countries medium to higher individualism, smaller distance between superiors and subordinates, low to medium fear of uncertainty and rather average pressure to performance, for Russia a high distance in relations between superiors and subordinates, a medium level of individualism, lower to medium pressure on performance and a high level of the tendency to avoid uncertainty, etc.

However, national cultural differences are understandably not immutable. The evidence is that certain national management approaches are being successfully extended in other countries as well.

Thus, for example, the teamwork practiced today in most "Western" businesses was originally largely inspired by Japanese traditions of informal self-control and non-directive management. Similarly, the above-mentioned feeling of problems as a threat in the conditions of our businesses is gradually changing into an understanding of them as a challenge that can bring with it new opportunities.

### **The culture of multinational companies**

Multinational companies are mainly confronted with the need to reconcile the influences of different national cultures (Isotalus & Kakkuri-Knuuttila, 2018). The fundamental questions of the creation of their organizational cultures therefore include to what

extent they will leave space in their branches or subsidiaries for the influence of national cultures corresponding to the local environment or how much they will try to ensure that a strong and common central corporate culture prevails in their branches, usually the culture of the mother country companies (Liu et al., 2020).

According to the strength of the influence of national cultures or the corporate culture of the central company (or the culture of the parent company), these companies can therefore be divided into two basic groups (Ward et al., 2018):

- polycentric culture. It is a culture that respects the influence of the local environment and thus allows the emergence of corporate subcultures in individual countries. It arises in conditions where all branches of the company are relatively independent from the point of view of corporate culture, they are governed mainly by local customs, and the head office's interventions in their culture are limited. Employees and managers are selected preferably from local sources (Mantel, 2023).

The advantage of this type of corporate culture is sensitivity to national peculiarities. However, in countries with quite different customs compared to the culture of the parent company, within this model, problems may arise when contacting the employees of the parent company with the adoption of a culture that is not following the mindset of the local employees. This situation may force the need for programs leading to the facilitation of international communication and cooperation, for example in the form of creating teams to solve global issues, strengthening the unified vision of the entire company, etc.

- uniform, or global culture. It is the opposite of the earlier model. In this case, the international company shows a strong corporate culture that is uniform in all its subsidiaries. Sharing identical values, rules and goals strengthens the corporate identity, the company is usually perceived from the outside as a "strong player".

The advantages of this model are mainly in easy mutual communication (Tabassi et al., 2018). The condition is primarily the simplicity, clarity, and comprehensibility of the entire system, which should not conflict with national differences. The management of a multinational corporation that decides to introduce this model should approach its introduction sensitively and gradually, especially if it is not about setting up a completely new company but taking over an existing company.

### **Sources of intercultural problems**

Dealing with employees of foreign companies often tend to confirm or reinforce certain national cultural stereotypes (Enshassi & Burgess 2006). The reason is often that the perception and evaluation of people tends to be selective - it focuses mainly on features that correspond to established stereotypes or that seem to confirm them and does not register those that contradict them.

At the same time, less attention is often paid to the stereotype with which members of one's own nation are perceived, or to what extent one's own national stereotype

coincides with the way domestic employees are perceived by members of other nations (Gressgård, 2011).

### **Different expectations**

More serious problems can arise in a multicultural environment because of misunderstandings that stem from different expectations that one or the other party is often not fully aware of. These are expectations about how employees or their superiors will - or should - behave in certain situations (Kamales & Knorr, 2019).

For example, managers from English-speaking countries, like managers from Scandinavia, usually expect greater independence from employees. It may also refer to the habit or ability of their co-workers to obtain some of the information they need for their work on their own. They are often not used to the fact that employees only start working when they have all the information they need for their work. Likewise, they may not be completely used to telling employees exactly what to do (Halse, 2021).

These expectations, if they are not clarified in time, may conflict with the expectations of employees of another culture, who wait to work until they have received all the information they need for their work from their supervisor (Karjalainen, 2020).

A similar "conflict of expectations" can also arise between employees who assume that their supervisor will specify their tasks in detail, and managers who expect that if employees are not completely sure of their tasks, they will come to ask them.

For employees who are not used to this approach, this management style may even lead to fears that if they come to ask a question to their superior, they will look incompetent in his eyes. Rather than asking him about something, they will make mistakes in their work in the hope that they will not be found out.

### **Differences in personnel management methods**

The implementation of certain foreign or international personnel management methods that are not usual in another country can also cause problems. An example is the introduction of employee evaluation systems based on very direct and open "feedback" or methods requiring employees to openly evaluate themselves (Pongrácz & Sipos, 2018).

In countries whose culture expects or encourages a more indirect and "softer" way of assessment, these demands may sound undesirable, unreasonable, or even harsh (Kotsona, 2021).

## **The influence of prejudice**

The most serious difficulties arise when relations with other nationalities are burdened by prejudices that lead to a one-sided view, or mistrust that prevents cooperation (Kung et al., 2023).

The most serious problems occur when employees or managers are not willing to respect cultural differences (for example, because they feel personally threatened when confronted with the demands of another culture), or when these differences cause them to react inappropriately defensively. In both cases, the tendency to reject the customs of diverse cultures can be combined with the tendency to uncritically emphasize one's own, "positive" cultural difference (Lindheim, 2021).

## **Solution of intercultural problems by training**

Basic tools for overcoming intercultural communication and cooperation problems include training (Bhawuk, 2020; Möller, 2020). Its goal is to increase understanding and/or acceptance of cultural differences, overcome cultural prejudices, strengthen openness to adopting practices from different cultures and build mutual trust between their representatives (Egan & Bendick, 2008).

The main requirement for multicultural training to become an effective tool of cultural management (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018) is to be "tailor made", i.e. to focus on the specific and most important cultural misunderstandings and communication barriers between or among employees from different cultures in the company as well as to serve as an instrument for drafting specific rules of multicultural communication on which their participants can agree (Bhawuk & Landis, 2020; Hart et al., 2019).

## **The benefits of cultural diversity**

Cultural differences do not always have to be a problem. Quite on the contrary, cultural diversity often has an incredibly positive effect on the performance of work groups and teams (Kadam et al., 2020).

Although it usually places greater demands on communication (sometimes even verifying whether all members of the group understand how certain topics or problems are perceived by others), one of its indisputable benefits is that it brings new or different views and perspectives to the organization. With them often comes greater openness to innovative ideas, higher flexibility, or increased creativity (Pencheva & Sokolova, 2018).

However, the effectiveness of work groups composed of people with diverse cultural backgrounds also depends on the nature of their tasks, the extent of their shared experience and the way their cultural diversity is managed (Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2019).

Multicultural teams are therefore generally more suitable for solving tasks connected with the creation of innovations, and less so for solving tasks of a routine nature. However, at the same time, the prerequisites for their higher performance may also

include the extent to which the cultural differences that exist within the work group are used by its management as their strengths and are thus not deliberately removed.

However, the rules of managing multicultural teams also include that group members should be selected based on their abilities and experience and not based on nationality (Thrassou et al., 2018).

## **Methods and Data**

The purpose of the analytical part of this article, based on a qualitative analysis using management questionnaires and semi-structured management interviews, mainly with human resource managers of mid-sized and bigger businesses, was to find out what importance do the companies surveyed put on multicultural training to prevent intercultural misunderstandings and increase the effectiveness of international cooperation including teamwork.

More specifically, the research questions covered the following issues:

- (i) do the companies surveyed feel the need of intercultural trainings to prevent cultural misunderstandings and cooperation barriers in work and management?
- (ii) what importance do they attribute to cultural training as a cultural management tool?
- (iii) what type of training in terms of its focus/contents and training methods used do they consider most useful?

Data collection was conducted in the second and third quarter of 2023, using targeted sampling, focusing on subjects which either operate internationally and use intensive cross-border cooperation or employ locally people and/or managers coming from different countries and cultures.

The subjects surveyed were based mainly in Prague and central Bohemia. A total of 32 companies were included in the research whereby the number of local, both domestic and foreign employees in these companies ranged from 323 to 745 persons. Most of the companies operated in manufacturing, energy, logistics, trade, finance, and personal services industries.

## **Results and discussion**

The main results of the analyses of the data obtained from questionnaires' answers and interviews statements of managers in the surveyed companies were the following:

- (i) most companies surveyed did not deliberately try to prevent the occurrence of intercultural misunderstandings and and/or culturally based communication barriers before they had appeared. At the same time, more than a third of the companies surveyed, claim that even though their employees frequently must

cooperate with individuals from differing national cultures they do not feel the necessity to foster their cooperation by intercultural trainings.

- (ii) more than two thirds of the companies which have experienced intercultural barriers in their employees' and/or managers' cooperation have decided to organize some sort of intercultural trainings.

In these companies, targeted training was regarded as the basic tool for overcoming the problems of intercultural communication and cooperation. Their goal was to increase understanding of cultural differences, overcome cultural prejudices, strengthen openness to adopting practices from different cultures and build mutual trust between their representatives. The surveyed companies have so far, a limited experience with interculturality targeted coaching, mainly due to a lack of coaches available.

- (i) the companies which declared the highest need of intercultural training were either those which relied on frequent international teamwork and those whose foreign managers who were not locally based oversaw local managers and/or employees. The percentage of companies falling into this category which used multicultural training was relatively high, namely 69 percent.
- (ii) intercultural trainings, according to the managers of the companies surveyed, to be effective should be focused primarily on two areas of topics, namely on the change of employees' attitudes towards cultural differences, and on understanding of the basic practical and day-to-day rules of successful intercultural communication and cooperation.
- (iii) the trainings of the first group, aimed at changing attitudes towards cultural differences because of fears, mistrust or negative attitudes towards members of other nations can usually be very effective reduced if focused on management practices and work behaviour in other countries.

Training of this kind should therefore explain to employees what they should expect when working with members of other nations and what they should be prepared for. An example is how their foreign colleagues perceive and interpret certain work or management situations, what management style (e.g., in project management) they are used to, what are their typical expectations regarding the role of employees and managers, etc.

Also, they should make it clear why representatives of other, often very different, national corporate cultures are successful in fulfilling their tasks despite their differences, and what can be the cause of unnecessarily negative attitudes towards other national customs.

An example can be a successful intercultural training, used by one of the companies surveyed, focused on cooperation with German partners, which emphasizes the importance of clear corporate rules and relationships in German companies. Although the culture of German companies is gradually changing in connection with the globalization of economies, their employees are generally used to following the instructions of their superiors as they are formulated.

Therefore, they are usually not used to discussing their decisions with managers (unless they are explicitly asked to do so). However, at the same time, their superiors give them precise instructions on how to proceed and what results they expect from them. They also make sure that employees have all the essentials they need for work, that they understand their work procedures well, that their roles in work teams are clearly defined, etc.

Another goal of this training is to stress the emphasis that German companies place on the use of working hours and compliance with deadlines. Maximum commitment is therefore expected here during working hours. However, neither employees nor managers are usually expected to work longer than the working hours require. Deadlines are considered binding, and non-compliance is considered a serious offense.

As for typical social distance, the training stresses higher social distance between employees and managers in German companies which, however, is gradually decreasing, especially in new businesses and in high-tech sectors, slower or more careful implementation of changes, including due to concerns about disruption of existing social relations, the habit of communicating directly and clearly. In work matters, it is therefore not customary "to take napkins" when pointing out shortcomings, when rejecting certain proposals or requests, etc.

A similarly focused training used by one of the companies surveyed looks at some typical manifestations by which Czech workers draw attention to themselves in the German environment - both in a positive and a negative sense, for example considerable practicality, but at the same time a somewhat slower personal pace, a looser attitude towards tasks and deadlines, higher sensitivity to national differences, etc.

- Training focused on the practical rules of successful intercultural communication and cooperation should explain and emphasize the rules that should be followed during intercultural communication. These trainings, according to managers of the companies surveyed, are suitable primarily for leaders of multicultural teams. The rules of intercultural cooperation in these teams can sometimes, as more than one third of the surveyed companies claimed, be at least partly derived by their attendees themselves.

Properly oriented trainings of this type include the main principles and assumptions of managing multicultural groups and teams. These are principles of a universal nature and therefore do not depend on the specific nature of different cultural customs or expectations.

The main skills that these intercultural trainings should focus on for successful international cooperation - and that leaders of multicultural teams should gain, include, according to the managers who organized, attended, or led them, the following abilities or habits:

- patience and ability to listen. Working in an intercultural environment can be slower and can sometimes be frustrating or tiring, especially at first. Its participants should therefore prepare for the increased demands associated with working in this environment and arm themselves with patience,
- establishing rules. Working in an intercultural environment usually requires establishing clear rules of cooperation or communication, even when this slows down the progress of the work at the beginning. Examples can be rules regarding punctuality or time management, the way meetings are conducted, expressing disagreement, etc. It is always better if these rules are set by the intercultural group itself than if they are determined "from above".
- asking questions. If the participants of intercultural cooperation do not understand something in mutual relations or the way of working, or if they do not understand why someone behaved in a certain way, they should not feel inhibited in asking about it. Asking a question and clarifying what appears to be unclear prevents the tendency to form prejudices and alerts the other party to possible sources of misunderstanding.
- mutual respect. The basis of successful intercultural communication is the mutual respect of the parties. If we show it to the other party, it is easier to get it. At the same time, we will strengthen openness in mutual relations.
- the importance of written documents. The ability to understand a foreign language is usually higher if it is a written text. When working in an intercultural environment, it is therefore appropriate to record the main results or conclusions of negotiations or joint work in writing. This reduces the probability that different parties will have different ideas about the results or conclusions of the negotiations.
- understanding different attitudes to time. Distinct national cultures differ in their approach to time: for some, "time is money", others approach time more freely. Similarly, different national cultures may also differ in the priority that work takes among their values, for example in relation to family.

As a result, as the interviewed managers claimed, members of distinct national cultures may differ in their expectations of the extent to which other members of the group will - to meet deadlines or tasks - sacrifice their free time.

Members of cultures for which meeting deadlines is a priority can therefore help when negotiating or working with people whose tendency to meet deadlines is weaker if they create certain time reserves.

- abilities of dealing with humour. Some jokes can sound like insults in an intercultural environment - due to the different sense of humour. Jokes or picking on certain people should therefore be approached more carefully in this environment. However, humour can also serve to overcome mutual mistrust, for example when it focuses on certain international cultural stereotypes.
- information verification. The easiest way to limit problems in intercultural communication is to verify whether there were no misunderstandings during



cooperation or information exchange, in the understanding of the agreement, contents of instructions, etc. Verifying whether all parties understand mutual communication in the same way can save considerable time associated with eliminating the consequences mutual misunderstandings in the future, the interviewed managers stressed.

- positive attitude. If problems arise in intercultural communication, mutual blame should be avoided. Instead of conflicts, it is necessary to analyse the causes of problems and to jointly search for ways and solutions to prevent similar misunderstandings in the future.
- self-reflection. Successful intercultural communication requires the ability to look critically at one's own communication, management, or motivational abilities. Part of it is the ability and willingness to think about how to improve intercultural cooperation.

Most companies which used intercultural training as a tool to deal with intercultural misunderstandings and/or interculturally based communication barriers (74% of them) claimed that these training should ideally be organized as a preventive tool, i.e., before intercultural communication problems arise. At the same time, however, they usually admitted that the effectiveness of these trainings tends to be higher once the employees get first experience with intercultural cooperation, especially in teams.

The analyses of the research questions which followed from the questionnaires answers and interviews statements were the following:

- (i) most companies surveyed did not deliberately try to increase the effectiveness of their soft skills training and do not make principal difference between soft and hard skills training activities. Only 18% of the companies surveyed claimed that soft skills training, due to the substance of these skills and specific requirement of their training do deserve special approach. Most companies (63%) did, however, feel the importance of soft, mainly communication and management skills and tries to come up with more and individualized methods of their development covering mainly coaching. At the same time most of these companies are convinced the training of employees in the field of soft skills should be entrusted to persons who have both the professional and personal prerequisites for it. When it comes to external lecturers, it is important to make sure of these assumptions, and not just trust the claims of educational companies. In the case of internal lecturers, the trainers themselves need to be trained first.
- (ii) unlike trainings in hard skills, more than a half of the companies surveyed (69%) feel that one of the most important ways how to increase the effectiveness of soft skills training in the involvement of employees (participants) into their planning, both in terms of their focus and methods used. Another preferred method used in soft skills training is the role-playing method. Rather that methods increasing the effectiveness of training both

these methods are rather used as an instrument raising employee interest in training and employee satisfaction with their execution.

- (iii) only a minority of companies surveyed (15%) clearly specify the goal of the training in terms of specific social skills used in a concrete situation. Related to this, only a minority (38%) of companies surveyed do use a method evaluation an increase in skills trained. Practically all of them (95) do, however, get feedback from participants of training, though this feedback typically does not concern an objective evaluation of newly learned skills.
- (iv) Though more than a half of the companies surveyed (78%) have a relatively clear idea of the area the training should be focused on, the leave great space to the lecturer in terms of the specific contents of the training. Most of the (71%) do not feel the need to monitor the training, either through a HR specialist or a line manager.
- (v) About a third of the companies surveyed claimed that higher effectiveness of soft skills training requires to establish standardized content, uniform procedures, and proven principles on which trainings of these across the company skills are based. Also, according to their experience, it is advisable to create written manuals for employees, the aim of which is to specify the main steps of the newly learned skills and sometimes even the most common problems concerning their use they may encounter at work, including their solutions. These requirements are, however, as they admit, not always fulfilled.
- (vi) The prevailing view (70% of companies surveyed) is that it is usually not enough to explain or demonstrate new skills to employees. If they are to learn new skills, they need to acquire them based on their own practice and/or experience. For positions where employee failures can cause serious problems (including senior positions), training should be based on practicing simulated situations. One of the goals of this training is to alert employees to potential mistakes before they can make them while performing their tasks.
- (vii) When developing soft skills, it must be assumed that a few days of training alone is not enough to acquire them. Longer-term attention, support, and feedback from a superior or external coach and sometimes even repeated trainings is also important.
- (viii) Most companies (68%) agreed it is important for the employees to gain trust in the newly learned soft skills. An important part of a soft skills training covers thus convincing the employees that the skill they are learning are really appropriate, important and efficient. The reason for this maybe they have doubts as to whether the new skills are really more effective than the skills they used before. Overcome the employee distrust in the new skill should be based on practical illustrations. An example, quoted by a company, is a situation where a lecturer/superior advises an employee, handling complaints, not to argue with the persons who complain. The reason for this is that it is very likely to calm them down sooner. However, the employee does not agree with this procedure. He argues that if he does not argue with them about the

content of their complaint, he will show them that his position is weaker and thus strengthen their position.

- (ix) Objections to a certain course of action are often even stronger found on the part of the leaders. Their views on, for example, how to manage their subordinates sometimes differ significantly from what their trainers, organizations or coaches is right. Even these situations, and usually even more than the previous one, must be handled in a soft skills training. Companies are, however, continually coming to the view that training is not an effective way to solve this issue. Almost a half (45%) of the companies surveyed agree that this is an issue which can be best handled by coaching.
- (x) Resistance to changing habitual procedures (and sometimes even prejudices) should be regarded as natural and the superior should anticipate it in advance. Most companies surveyed (79%) claimed the superior should give the employee time to familiarize himself with the new soft skill procedure and gradually accept it as his own, and he should not promote the adoption of the new procedure too quickly. Too much pressure on employees can increase their resistance to adopting a new procedure. This rejection can then be difficult for them to take back.
- (xi) At least in theory, most companies surveyed agreed that for all major soft skills training programs, appropriate model situations, must be created to verify that employees have learned the new skills. These situations should assess their ability to solve certain model social situations. If employees are unable to solve these model social situations, they need to either continue training or have a coach help them learn them.

## **Conclusion**

The research found that the surveyed companies in their majority use training as the basic tool for preventing as well as solving the problems of intercultural communication and cooperation. Also, according to the survey findings, the surveyed companies believed that targeted trainings are most effective instrument of multicultural management.

Their goal is to increase understanding of cultural differences, overcome cultural prejudices, strengthen openness to adopting practices from diverse cultures and build mutual trust between their representatives.

Intercultural trainings, according to the experience of the surveyed companies, should be focused primarily on two areas of topics, namely on the change of employees' attitudes towards cultural differences, and on the basic practical rules of successful intercultural communication and cooperation, mainly in intercultural teams. These rules of successful intercultural communication and cooperation can sometimes, after the first experience with intercultural teamwork be derived by their participants themselves.

The research showed that the main requirements of successful intercultural trainings are the same, regardless on the industry in which the company operate. The cultural differences they explain should, however, correspond to individual nations and the practical rules of intercultural cooperation should meet the needs of the company.

The survey found that most companies with intensive multicultural management experience feel the need to organize such trainings once they encounter intercultural communication barriers in their employees' cooperation. The effectiveness of these training tends, namely, be higher if the participants of multicultural training have not lost mutual trust and can develop the rules of multicultural communication under the management leadership at least partly by themselves.

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#### **Contact address of the authors:**

doc. PhDr. Ing. Jan Urban, CSc., Faculty of Corporate Strategy, Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, Okružní 517/10, 370 01 České Budějovice, Czech Republic, e-mail: 21537@vste.cz

doc. et doc. PaedDr. Mgr. Zdeněk Caha, Ph.D., MBA, MSc., Faculty of Corporate Strategy, Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, Okružní 517/10, 370 01 České Budějovice, Czech Republic, e-mail: caha@vste.cz

Ing. Michal Ruschak, MBA, Faculty of Corporate Strategy, Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, Okružní 517/10, 370 01 České Budějovice, Czech Republic, e-mail: ruschak@vste.cz

doc. dr. Mario Bogdanović, Istrian University Of Applied Sciences Pula, Zagrebačka 30, 52 100, Croatia, e-mail: mario.bogdanovic@unipu.hr

**How to cite this article:**

URBAN, J., CAHA, Z., RUSCHAK, M., and M. BOGDANOVIĆ, 2024. Multicultural Training as a Tool Increasing the Work and Management Efficiency in an International Environment: Qualitative Survey of Czech Businesses Experience. *Littera Scripta*, 17(1), pp 97-116. ISSN 1805-9112.