UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL INTEGRATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract   The extent to which relationships in organizations are co-operative depends on the level of internal integration between functional and departmental groups. These relationships become even more critical in international businesses as well as in geographically dislocated subsidiaries. Cultural characteristics and different factors which managr, facilitatr and/or hinder internal integration present the basis for studying internal integration of different functions. Therefore, the following paper discusses various theories of internal integration and its role in organizations. More specifically, it focuses on logistics and marketing functions and explores studies that have investigated and examined the levels of internal integration of logistics and marketing functions. With the objective to identify potential implications, high/low levels of internal integration may have on intercultural communication which occurs in international business practices, the most prominent cultural frameworks are presented to identify implications different levels of internal integration may have for intercultural communication, in particular between Slovenian companies and their foreign subsidiaries.

Paper type: Research paper

1. INTRODUCTION

Greater emphasis and focus on logistics functions can potentially have a positive impact on competitiveness, especially competitiveness of global production companies (Fawcett & Closs, 1993, p. 4). In companies, logistics functions cooperate with various functions such as production, marketing, procurement (Gustin, 1991, p. 1), (Murphy & Poist, 1992, p. 16), engineering, development of new products (Gustin, 1991, p. 2), and financial functions (Coyle, Bardi & Langley, 2003, p. 28). Each of these functions or co-operation between logistics and its complementary functions can be a key element for competitiveness of the company. The special connection system or the so called integration between the two functions is particularly important due to their strategic aspects. Namely, the areas of their mutual activities are broad and present a system of the basic logistics-marketing network that includes products, pricing, place, promotion and the human factor. The increased level of market competitiveness encourages and somewhat forces businesses to alter their way of conducting business by focusing on processes that add value to the customer (Kingman-Brundage et al., 1995), (Majchzak & Wang, 1996, p. 91). By increasing the level of integration between various function areas within businesses, added value can be created.

Additional competitive advantage and added value presents the ability to communicate effectively within the same culture as well as across cultures. When people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other, different worlds collide, as each and every one of us perceives their inner world individually and in a unique way. Therefore, communication within one culture is likely to cause fewer misunderstandings due to shared values and norms. Cultural patterns are not something we were born with; rather, they are based on tradition and agreements, which, through time, are internalized and people are not aware of them unless someone breaks them. Today, meeting people from other cultures with different value systems and different habits has become a part of our daily lives.

International business, too, is different because countries are different. Hence, global business success requires a certain level of knowledge of such differences. This has become even more important in the past few decades, as the world has not only developed at a rapid pace, it has also moved closer together. Modern information technology connects people and builds bridges in ways we could not have imagined. As a result, qualified people are being sought after for whom working in international teams and working internationally comes naturally. Therefore, the development of intercultural skills is crucial for smooth communication. Only

those will operate successfully in an international environment that embrace different cultures and different working methods and at the same time take into account their own strengths and drawbacks. To this end, it is not surprising that employers are increasingly demanding a higher level of cultural understanding in response to the challenges of operating in an increasingly globalized business environment. This is just as important for a small country like Slovenia as is for the globally operating logistics industry.

Objectives and hypotheses

The main objective of the article is to examine theories of inter-functional integration, particularly of logistics and marketing functions in companies and to discuss cultural characteristics of logistics managers from foreign subsidiaries and the potential influence they may have on each other. More specifically, the aim is to investigate whether and to what extent the level of integration of logistics and marketing functions in one company may have implications for their communication in company's subsidiaries abroad. The main objective of this paper is thus to argue that the level of internal integration has implications for communication in intercultural business encounters.

2. FEATURES OF INTERNAL INTEGRATION AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LEVEL OF INTERNAL INTEGRATION OF LOGISTICS AND MARKETING FUNCTIONS

Theorists researching organizations and their structures suggest that inter-dependence is the *catalyst* for inter-functional integration (Brown, 1983, pp. 93-103), (Pfefer & Salancik, 1978, pp. 62-77). The theory of inter-dependence stipulates that relationships between two working units can be described as individual or collective (Ellinger, 1997, pp. 37-38). Inter-functional internal integration can be achieved after an optimal adjustment between structural organisation of a company and relations of its environment had occurred.

2.1. Internal integration

Internal integration is present (or should be present) when specialized functions or departments in a company are interdependent and when operations and procedures occur that enable and require cooperation. Hence, internal integration studies operations within companies. It aims to eliminate traditional silo functions and calls for a better co-ordination between function areas. Internal integration means that at least two (or more) complementary company functions operate as a unified entity, despite the fact that they are not integrated as such. Two departments (two function areas) in a company are complementary when they compete with each

other and have a certain set of functions that are interconnected and need to be complemented with other functions from complementary departments.

Previous literature characterizes inter-functional integration as interaction or as communication activity (Rinehart et al., 1989, p. 67), (Griffin & Hauser, 1996, p. 191) maintaining that the high number of meetings and information flows between function departments results in more effective integration. Interaction philosophy for management of inter-functional relations possibly stems from a philosophy which is based on various business theories and managerial procedures (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1993, p. 7). Managers define interactional philosophy as a system of contacts, interacting in form of transactions with other functions and departments. The transactional aspect of integration defines departments as mutually dependent entities that compete for the company's resources, whereas contacts between departments may be understood as temporary and present fiscal loss. In light of competitiveness and costs, managers view the process of holding meetings and information flow as negotiation system where each department or function aims to benefit in as much as possible from the meeting or the data exchange.

The interactional aspect of inter-functional integration thus presents behaviour that includes information exchange. In this respect, Bonoma, Slevin and Narayanan (1977, pp. 31-42) assert that integration between functions or departments depends on unimpeded data exchange. Monaert et al. (1994, p. 37) found a positive link between integration aspect of data exchange and company success, whereas Gupta, Ray and Wilemon (1985, p. 14), Ruekart and Walker (1987, p. 9) identified lack of inter-functional contacts or integration as one of the more important reasons for poor company performance. In an empirical study, Kahn (1996, p. 149) found that within the framework of interactional system of integration, data exchange and formal meetings display clear behavioural patterns. In situations, where direct communication cannot be achieved, information flow can only be one-sided, i.e. information flow comes from the logistics function into the marketing function and not vice versa.

Further literature defined integration as collaboration (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, p. 23), (Lorsch, 1965, p. 33) that facilitates team work, sharing of resources and achieving mutual goals between complementary functions which, again, is to result in a more effective integration. Further interesting is the fact that team work is important from other viewpoints as well, as argued by Knez et al. (2010), especially from the viewpoint of innovation management. Their main argument is that a successful company needs competence, creativity and creative collaboration.

Integration was further characterised as a sum of interaction and collaboration (Gupta et al., 1985, p. 17), (Gupta et al., 1986, p. 14), (Song, 1991, p. 97), (Song & Parry, 1992, p. 57). Such aspect of integration can be an attractive philosophy given that it defines inter-functional or inter-departmental integration as a multi-dimensional approach. Souder and Sherman (1993, p. 183) defined integration as a state of high-level value, mutual goals and collaborative behaviour. Lorsch (1965, p. 23) defined it as a process of mutual efforts between different subsystems in the process of implementing company tasks. In his research of integration of

the department of research and development and department of marketing, Song (1991, p. 111) discovered that the level of integration was only partially achieved. It is, therefore, clear that companies are struggling in achieving the highest possible level of integration.

According to O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2002, p. 229), integration refers to the level to which certain functions co-operate in order to achieve mutual goals. Integration is thus a puzzle that depends on the level of co-operation, co-ordination, interaction and collaboration and is likely to influence the company's performance.

2.2. Internal integration of logistics and marketing functions and their influential factors

Logistics is seen by some people as the other half of marketing. The basis for this may be in the underlying assumption that logistics concerns physical distribution, is responsible for moving and storing of goods for consumers, and plays an important role in product sale. In some cases, physical distribution and carrying out orders play a key role in product sale. (Coyle et al., 2003, p. 67)

There are different interpretations of integration. In this respect, the integration of logistics and marketing functions may be defined as: a process of interaction and collaboration in which logistics and marketing functions co-operate with the objective to achieve results for the company.

Today, a large number of companies have already integrated logistics and marketing functions to a certain extent. However, Bowersox et al. (2008, p. 90) argue that there are two catalysts or initiators that place logistics into the system of key strategic resources, time and competitiveness, which are based on quality, efficiency and success. But what can influence the level of integration of logistics and marketing functions? Barki and Pinsonneault (2005, pp. 172–173) assert that standard procedures, work results, norms, planning and mutual adjustment can have a positive impact on integration. On the other hand, separated function areas and separated frames of operation reduce the level of integration. Moreover, Mollenkopf et al. (2000, p. 97) maintain that education, learning and co-operative behaviour have a positive impact on integration whereas conflicts between these two functions hinder it (cf. Ellinger et al., 2000, p. 13). As already mentioned, collaboration plays an important role if the level of integration of logistics and marketing functions is to be increased (Ellinger et al., 2000, p. 18), (Mollenkopf et al., 2000, p. 93). In their research, Stank et al. (1999, p. 16) present positive and negative aspects that influence the integration of logistics and marketing functions; positive aspects are communicative activities, sharing of information, informal operation and team work. In a similar vein, Kahn and Mentzer (1996, p. 147) found out that interaction hinders the integration of logistics and marketing functions. A research by Topolšek et al. (2010) also investigates factors that influence the integration of logistics and marketing functions. The findings revealed that the level of internal

integration has an impact on collaborative behaviour (whereby a linear link between the two functions has been identified).

However, whether and to what extent cultural characteristics which refer to nationality can influence the level of internal integration of these two functions or vice versa, has, to our knowledge, not yet been investigated and has not yet been tackled by similar researches. The aim is not to study whether and to what degree culture can influence the success of relationships within a single company. Rather, the aim is to examine the link between the degrees of internal integration in individual subsidiaries that belong to larger companies. The most important characteristic of subsidiaries that we have been observed is the fact that they are located in countries other than the company's headquarters. Hence, the level or degree of internal integration in individual subsidiaries is likely to have implications for intercultural communication, which occurs when employees from different subsidiaries communicate with each other, whether it be face-to-face or through mediated forms of communication (telephone, e-mail, video-conferencing etc.).

3. CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The following section will shed light on how cultures have been studied in different organizations. To this end, the most prominent frameworks for studying different cultures in organizations and the findings from relevant studies will be presented.

3.1. Intercultural awareness in Slovenian companies

The ability to recognize how cultural differences affect relationships is becoming an essential managerial skill in international businesses. Such skills might include looking at situations from different perspectives, learning how to cope with confusing or ambiguous situations, choosing a more direct or indirect communication strategy etc. (Fowler & Blohm, 2004). To this end, a good grasp of the national and other cultures is a requirement, for mismatches in work styles, values, cultural and conversational norms, power relationships can lead to misunderstandings or even communication breakdowns. Theoretical models of different cultures and empirical studies, which classify nation states according to various cultural dimensions, are a prerequisite for understanding and managing cultural differences. Cultural comparisons can help identify potential differences in value systems and based on personal experience, can help to interpret and cope with them. However, it is important to note that cultural profiling may quickly lead to generalisations

and stereotyping. Next, we will briefly look at the most prominent models for ana-lysing cultures.

3.2. Frameworks for studying culture in business models

3.2.1 Hofstede's framework

A comprehensive study of cultural differences and mapping of cultures was first conducted by Hofstede (1980, 2001) in 1970's when he studied over 116.000 em-ployees from a number of IBM subsidiaries from around the world. Based on the findings, Hofstede (1980, 2001) proposes the following five cultural dimensions that describe contrasting cultural values:

Table 1   Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Indicator	Description
PDI (Power Distance Index)	refers to the employees' perception of power distribution in an organization. On the one hand, there are cultures with small power distance, where people expect and accept power relations to be of more consultative or democratic nature, more equal. On the other hand, there are cultures with large power distance, where power relations are perceived in terms of formal, hierarchical positions.
UAI (Uncertainty Avoidance Index)	The level of uncertainty avoidance is measured according to people's preference for explicit rules and instructions versus implicit or flexible rules or guidelines on their job. Moreover it also refers to the length of time employees wish to remain with their current employer. Hence, in cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance, employees tend to change employers more frequently that those from cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance.
IDV (Individualism)	Individualism/collectivism refers to the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups, whereby people from collectivist cultures tend to be more group oriented and less likely to display their individual personalities.
MAS (Masculinity)	Masculinity versus femininity depends to the degree placed on traditionally male or female values. Accordingly, masculine cultures value success, competitiveness, ambition and achievement (material things), whereas feminine cultures value inclusiveness, relationships and quality of life.
LTO (Long-Term Orientation)	Long vs. short term orientation refers to the importance attached to the future versus the past and present. Long-term oriented societies value actions and attitudes that affect the future: persistence/perseverance, thrift. Short-term oriented societies value actions and attitudes attached to the past or the present: tradition, fulfilment of social obligations, protecting one's own face.

In this respect, power distance, for example refers to the way in which a corporate culture approaches and deals with status differences and hierarchies, whereby cultures with small power distance tend to value equal power distributions, symmetrical relations, a mixture of positive and negative feedback messages, and reward systems based on individual merits. On the contrary, cultures with large power distance tend to accept unequal power distributions, asymmetrical relations, authoritative feedback from superiors and rewarding systems based on rank, seniority, status etc. (Ting-Toomey, 2009, p. 231)

Since Hofstede's seminal work, different frameworks have been developed by different scholars, who have identified different dimensions, for example Hall (1959), Trompenaars (1994, 2005) to name but a few.

3.2.2 Trompenaars' framework

Another framework that has been applied to numerous cultures is an integrative typology of organizational culture proposed by Trompenaars and Woolliams (2004). Trompenaars' studies (1994, 2005) have focused primarily on the effects of intercultural communication on company management and corporate life. According to him, national cultures can be described using seven dimensions, the so-called dichotomous features.

Table 2   Trompenaars' typology

Indicator	Description
Universalism vs. Particularism	*particularism* indicates that preference is given to a flexible approach to a particular problem, whereas *universalism* means strict adherence to standards and rules.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	cultures belonging to the former tend to value individual success and creativity, cultures belonging to the latter, however, stress common goals and teamwork.
Neutral vs. Affective	Cultures differ according to whether emotions are strictly controlled and rarely displayed *(neutral)* or whether emotions in business relationships are displayed *(affective)*.
Specific vs. Diffuse	Difference between cultures with a low level of intermixing business and private relationships *(specific)*, and cultures where different types of relationships are intertwined *(diffuse)*.
Internal vs. External Control	refers to the level of influence (control) on the environment which can be perceived as either high *(internal)* or low *(external),* where an individual has to adapt.
Achievement vs. Ascription	concerns the status and power which are attributed based on competences and results achieved *(achievement),* or based on formal position in hierarchy, title, gender, age, etc. *(ascription).*
Sequential vs. Synchronic	refers to time perception: past, present, or future-oriented.

3.2.3 Hall's framework

Hall's works (Hall, 1959, 1989) too, are based on data collected in managerial settings, focusing on the degree of context, temporal and spatial features.

Table 3 Hall's model of cultural variability

| Indicator	Description
High vs. Low Context	refers to the amount of contextual information needed for communication, i.e. low-context cultures thus rely primarily on verbal language to express their thoughts, high-context cultures rely on non-verbal behaviour such as facial expressions and prosody, which they regard as highly communicative.
Monochronic vs. Polychronic Time	Monochronic means doing one thing at a time, adhering to deadlines and plans, weak short-term links etc. Polychronic means doing several things at the same time, changing plans frequently, strong long-term links etc.
High vs. Low Territoriality	refers to the space (personal bubble) of an individual, i.e. big (high) versus small (low).

3.3. The case of Slovenia

Culture affects communication and communication affects culture (Hall, 1959). For this purpose, numerous attempts have been made to collect large databases and map national cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 2001), (House et. al., 2004), (Trompenaars, 1993, 2004), (Hall, 1959, 1989). In his research, Hofstede (1980) explored four basic dimensions in approximately 60 countries, adding a fifth dimension a decade later. Three republics from the former country Yugoslavia were also included in the research: Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The findings indicate a number of similarities in the way of thinking as well as in their belief and value systems. However, a more recent research on Slovenia, which was conducted by Jazbec (2005) and was based on Hofstede's parameters, indicates that Hofstede's research from 1980 is somewhat outdated, as significant differences have been identified. The research (Jazbec, 2005) was carried out amongst 563 Slovenian managers. The findings indicate that Slovenian managers – quite contrary to Hofstede's findings – are highly individualistic, favour low power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Moreover, Slovenian managers score high on the feminine index and are fairly short-term oriented (Tab. 4).

Table 4   Adapted from Prašnikar et al. (2005) and Jazbec (2005)

	Hofstede (2001)				Jazbec (2005)			
	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI
Slovenia	71	27	19	88	28	107	20	72
Croatia	73	33	40	80				
Serbia	86	25	43	92				

The high score on the PDI (*power distance index*) scale was said to be the result of the former political communist system, which was imposed upon Slovenians after World War II and never really suited the personal nature and tradition of Slovenians (Jazbec, 2005),(Žižek, 1982). Companies with low PDI tend to be decentralized, managers are easier to approach by their employees and are less eager to supervise. Employees in companies with lower PDI tend to observe and outweigh the privileges and status symbols of their superiors. Another result that differs greatly from Hofstede's (2001) findings is the IDV (Individualism/Collectivism), the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups, 27 as opposed to 107. This places the Slovenian managers at the very top of the IDV scale. According to the survey, Slovenian managers value their personal time, freedom and challenges and welcome work that is varied.

In Slovenia, multiculturalism has slowly started to increase after the accession to the EU in 2004 and continued with the falling of borders. Today, the vast majority of people in Slovenia regularly encounter individuals from different ethnic, religious, racial and cultural backgrounds from a number of countries at the workplace. It is therefore imperative to understand how culture, ethnicity, national origin, race and gender intersect within our business environments. To our knowledge, very little research has been undertaken on cultural attitudes of Slovenians and their impact on business operations.
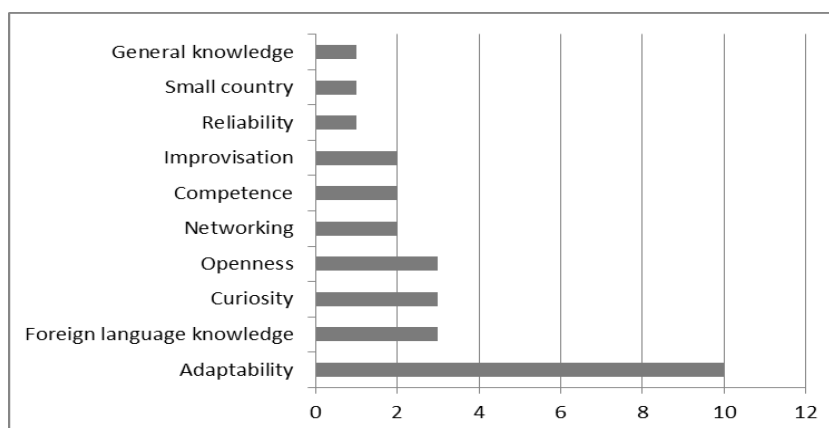
Fig. 1 Advantageous characteristics of Slovenian businessmen – based on the number of companies that chose a particular advantage (adapted from Jazbec, 2005, p. 101)

According to Jazbec (2005), there are at least two reasons as to why until recently Slovenian companies did not see the need to incorporate intercultural training into their companies. The first being the fact, that parent companies employ almost exclusively Slovenian nationals. The second reason lies in the nature of the Slovenians and their characteristics which in an international business environment may be perceived as beneficial, such as adaptability, knowledge of foreign languages, or curiosity (Fig. 1) (ibid.)

According to Jazbec (2005), adaptability may result from the fact that Slovenia is a fairly small country. Characteristics such as adaptability, foreign language knowledge, good networking skills and curiosity ought to mitigate the culture shock and enable a less stressful adaptation to other cultures and working conditions. The drawbacks, on the other hand, that lie in international presentation may be due to the almost stereotypical reserved nature of Slovenians and in the general belief that Slovenians tend to be naïve, believing that international and national business do not differ in any way. In addition to that, the majority tend to value anything foreign more than their own. To this end, humility is said to be another, less favourable, Slovenian characteristic (Jazbec, 2005), which may have a negative impact on managers' negotiation skills.

3.4. Comparison with Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

A similar research was conducted in a research undertaken by Prašnikar et al. (2005). The research investigated cultural profiles of young managers from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Russia. The study, however, was based on Trompenaars' (2004) methodology and subsequently compared the findings to the studies from other groups of countries. The findings revealed that cultural profiles of young managers from the aforementioned countries from the common background are quite similar; however, they differ greatly from Russia. Differences amongst managers of the same culture further differed in terms of age, in that Slovenian junior managers are more future-oriented than senior managers. Junior managers tend to favour collectivistic values, and rules and success over status. Moreover, the research also found that cultural dimensions of Slovenian, Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian junior managers resemble those of Austrian managers with the exception of the dimension "individualism versus collectivism". (Prašnikar et al., 2005)

3.5. Implications for intercultural communication

To date, studies have only focused on how cultural values influence organizational communication and not vice versa. As already mentioned, valuable characteristics of Slovenians are said to be adaptability, knowledge of foreign languages,

or curiosity, but the somewhat lower level of internal integration, compared to other nationalities in question, may imply that their behaviour is less collaborative, what may potentially have (negative) implications for intra- and intercultural communication. The latter refers to behavioural expectancy violations and communication clash issues, which result from "perceived incompatibility of value orientations, norms, interaction goals, facework styles and meanings between two interdependent parties or groups" (Ting-Toomey, 2009, p. 227). Namely, individuals from two different cultures may apply different meanings to verbal and nonverbal activities in business interactions, particularly in face-challenging communication situations, i.e. emotionally-threatening (Ting-Toomey, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

How companies function, across countries and across organizational units, depends to a large scale on intercultural communication and collaboration. The former becomes salient when employees from organizational units, located in different countries, meet unknown value patterns which may potentially have negative implications for organizational practices if reacted to inappropriately. According to Hofstede (2001, p. 440), foreign subsidiaries of multinational organizations function internally more according to the value systems and beliefs of the host culture, even if they formally adopt home-culture ideas and policies. It was further found that only managers of foreign subsidiaries who present the main link with the core organization need to be bicultural, and not all employees, because they need to maintain the double-trust relationship with their superiors from home-culture and their subordinates from the subsidiary they represent. However, recent studies (Fussel et al., 2009), (Xia, 2009) suggest that cultural factors influence computer-mediated communication at the workplace, which is also prominently present in communication between dislocated units such as between the home organization and its foreign subsidiaries. The findings have revealed that auditory and visual cues appear to have more importance for members of collectivistic, high-context (indirect, often ambiguous) (Hall, 1989), relationship-oriented cultures than they do for members of individualistic, low-context (verbally explicit) (Hall, 1989), task-oriented cultures (Fussel et al., 2009, p. 1801). Failure to account for these differences may thus have a negative impact on group communication and team-work outcomes, which in our case is of great importance, especially when employees from subsidiaries from different countries communicate with each other and share information. Moreover, language and discourse play important roles that are often underestimated (Hofstede, 2001, p. 423). For example, when expressing disagreement, people from low-context cultures tend to use direct communication strategies, whereas people from high-context cultures prefer to disagree using indirect communication strategies such as indirect speech or silence.

Due to the lack of studies investigating and analysing how the two phenomena, the degree of internal integration in a company and intercultural communication relate to each other and affect one another, the following paper provided a theoretical evaluation of different conceptualizations of both phenomena and presented the findings of relevant research undertaken in individual areas. We also explored how such internal integration may affect intercultural communication. Based on extensive literature on internal integration, collaboration and intercultural communication, we thus presented some propositions that will be empirically tested.

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