

POLISH YOUR HR ENGLISH

ANGIELSKI (nie tylko) DLA HR-OWCA



personel & zarządzanie

POLSH YOUR ENGLISH

ANGIELSKI (nie tylko) DLA HR-OWCA

PRACA ZBIOROWA POD REDAKCJĄ

XX

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CZĘŚĆ

1

CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS SPOTKANIA MIĘDZYKULTUROWE

W ramach części pierwszej zachęcamy do lektury serii artykułów, które koncentrują się na kwestiach komunikacji międzykulturowej w kontekście biznesowym. Będziemy analizować naturę i przyczyny nieporozumień ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli języka. Pokażemy, w jaki sposób język jest odzwierciedleniem naszej kultury i nierzadko nieświadomych postaw w życiu codziennym. Przyjrzymy się nieudanym fuzjom, nie do końca przemyślanym restrukturyzacjaom i zmianom w kulturach korporacyjnych. Sprawdzimy, jak nasze działania i wypowiedzi są zaprogramowane przez język. Pokażemy, że ich zrozumienie może pozwolić uniknąć błędów większych niż językowe. Cross-cultural Encounters to tematyka dla osób, które chcą lepiej zrozumieć kulturę korporacyjną i język wielonarodowych przedsiębiorstw.

LEKCJA 1

FIRST ENCOUNTER: CULTURE

PRZYSTANEK PIERWSZY: KULTURA

Podczas pierwszej lekcji dowiemy się, że zarówno dziewiętnastowieczny brytyjski ambasador, jak i europejski biznesmen z XXI w. są zaprogramowani kulturowo i językowo. Pomimo globalizacji, pewne skróty myślowe nadal są niezwykle karkołomne, zarówno dla języka, jak i kieszeni. Winna temu jest kultura, w której funkcjonujemy. Trochę o historii, trochę o biznesie i trochę o obieraniu cebuli... A wszystko z użyciem popularnych idiomów, które nie zawsze brzmią tak samo po polsku i po angielsku.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

To start with, could you please have a look at these two seemingly different texts to find out what they could have in common:

Somewhere in Central Europe, a highly successful automotive company *decides to make hay while the sun shines* and enters a new market in Western Europe. So far, the company has recorded major profits from the sales of one of its models called NOVA – a nice, sporty city car with dynamic design. However, it seems that the success won't be repli-

cated in Spain, where the company is expanding now. Everybody in the company is wondering why the model is not doing as well as in other parts of Europe. It takes some time until the Sales Department at the headquarters realizes that the name chosen for the car is extremely unfortunate. In Spanish it means “doesn't go”, which sounds rather like a mockery than a catching product name. Pity that nobody had checked it earlier... (a story based on facts)

The English elchi (ambassador) had reached Tehran a few days before we arrived there, and his reception was as brilliant as it was possible. (...) Then all the proper attentions of hospitality were shown.(...) All these attentions, one might suppose, would be more than sufficient to make infidels contented with their lot; but, on the contrary, when the subject of etiquette came to be discussed, interminable difficulties seemed to arise. (...) First, on the subject of sitting. On the day of his audience of the Shah, he would not sit on the ground, but insisted upon having a chair; then the chair was to be placed so far, and no farther, from the throne. In the second place, of shoes, he insisted upon keeping on his shoes, and not walking barefooted upon the pavement; and he would not even put on our red cloth stockings. And then, on the article of dress, a most violent dispute arose. (...)He said, that he would appear before the Shah of Persia in the very same dress he wore when before his own sovereign.

(THE ADVENTURES OF HAJJI BABA OF ISPAHAN BY JAMES MORIER, 1780-1849)

Incomparable as the two stories may seem, they have one thing in common. In both cases the nature of the problem **stems from** cultural misunderstanding or, in other words, cultural miscommunication. What leads to communication **gridlock** is the fact that we tend to **take** other people and their behavior **for granted**. This means that we impose our beliefs, values, behavioral patterns on other people and their respective beliefs and values which do not necessarily have to be the same and actually very rarely are when we consider multinational organizations and societies.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF CULTURE

All communication is cultural. It draws on the ways we have learnt to speak and act. It draws on our culture. But what is culture? It can mean various

things. There is culture understood as civilization and is used to refer to education, literature and **fine arts**. And in a much broader sense, there is culture which describes patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, which includes as **mundane** things as eating, greeting, showing or not showing your feelings, keeping a certain physical distance or maintaining body hygiene.

Culture is learnt, not inherited. It derives from our environment and not from our genes. According to Hofstede, *it is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. What is more, it should not be confused with human nature on the one hand and human personality on the other.* Human nature is inherited and is universal for all human beings. It constitutes a sort of an operating system which defines basic physical and psychological abilities, like being able to feel fear, desire for love or the ability to observe and interpret environment. However, the way we express emotions is conditioned by our culture. Hence, it means that the same human ability to express, for example, joy can manifest itself in various ways, depending on the culture and its code. It is crucial to know the code to **decipher** the superficial representation of a type of emotion which is known to the whole human race. Finally, at the top there is personality, which is a collection of person-specific features both inherited and acquired through environment and our personal experiences. To sum up, at the bottom of the pyramid there is human nature, universal and inherited, on the second level there is culture, acquired and group-specific and at the top there is personality, both learnt and inherited, which is person-specific. It means that only culture does not depend on our genes and is totally conditioned by the environment.

PEELING ONION

In order to understand the concept of culture let's think about an onion. Each culture is specific and manifests its unique features in several ways or **layers**– through symbols, heroes, rituals and values.

SYMBOLS build the outer layer of the onion because they are the most visible. They include e.g. language, fashion, haircut or status symbols. What country does Coca-Cola trademark make you think about? I am pretty sure it is the USA. The next layer corresponds to **HEROES**

– alive or dead, real or imaginary characters, whose traits are highly prized and valued in a given culture. Heroes constitute **role models**: Batman in the USA, Asterix in France, etc. Heroes are more stable than symbols but still they are time and fashion-bound, which means they may come and go.

Having removed the second layer, we get to RITUALS. These are collective activities which, despite their superfluous character, are thought to play an essential role in a society. Rituals can include various activities like ways of greeting, good manners, social and religious norms.

And finally, we reach the core of culture – VALUES. Values are preferences expressed by people living in a given culture which help them to make choices and take decisions. Values are acquired mostly subconsciously at a very early age and it is difficult to change them when a person is adult. Generally, it is not possible to see somebody's values. They can only be inferred from behaviour and accompanying circumstances. So, **don't judge a book by its cover!**

To sum it up, the layers help us visualize how complex the concept of culture is and hence, how difficult it is to change culture.

WHEN IN ROME...

... do as the Romans do. Better said than done. It seems that it is not enough to learn a language and cultural norms to be able to live in a foreign country. When a foreigner comes to a new country, they can only see the outer layers of the onion, i.e. the visible aspects of the culture: its symbols, heroes and rituals. These can be, to a major extent, understood and learnt. Yet, at a first glance it is not possible to understand the underlying values, which constitute the core of the culture. Hence, most foreigners go through a difficult and painful phase until they reach a moment of comfortable existence in a foreign country.

At the very beginning each foreigner experiences a period of euphoria. It is also referred to as honeymoon time. We come to a new place as if we were tourists and are overwhelmed by its unique character and exotic, social environment. Everything is interesting and exciting, at least for the first three or four weeks.

Then there is a phase of culture shock. Once the euphoria has **evaporated**, a foreigner starts to live a normal life in a new environ-

ment and that is where difficulties appear. Although one can communicate in a foreign language and has some cultural knowledge, they get the impression that they are always **getting the wrong end of the stick and talking at cross purposes** with the locals. It is culture shock. Every foreigner has to go through this phase to understand that the values and norms of the new culture are different from their home culture.

With culture shock behind, a foreigner can start the adaptation process. They acquire local values and social norms. They slowly learn to think in a new culture. This takes time, depending on the person and the new country. Ultimately, it should lead to the state of balance, when one **feels at home** or even better. And when the person comes back to their home country, they experience another culture shock...

THREE GOLDEN RULES

I hope you have seen that there is more to CULTURE than meets the eye. A foreign language, although indispensable to survive, is only a tool of the mental software – the culture.

Before we embark on the next episode of our cross-cultural encounters, please do bear in mind the three golden rules of a cross-cultural communicator:

- Don't take anything for granted!
- Read between the lines.
- Be open – minded

See you soon.



GLOSSARY:

behavioural patterns – wzorce zachowań

better said than done – łatwiej powiedzieć, niż zrobić

decipher – rozszyfrować

don't judge a book by its cover – nie sądz po pozorach

evaporate – ulotnić się, wyparować

feel at home – czuć się jak w domu

fine arts – sztuki piękne

get the wrong end of the stick – źle kogoś zrozumieć

good manners – dobre maniery

gridlock – zator, impas

impose – nakładać

incomparable – nieporównywalny

layer – warstwa

make hay while the sun shines – kuć żelazo póki gorące

mockery – drwina, kpina

mundane – przyziemny, zwyczajny

read between the lines – czytać między wierszami

role model – wzór do naśladowania

stem from – brać się z, pochodzić od

superfluous – zbędny, zbyteczny

talk at cross purposes – mówić o różnych rzeczach, nie zdając sobie z tego sprawy

to take sth for granted – brać coś za pewnik

unfortunate – niefortunne

When in Rome (do as the Romans do) – Jeśli wszędzie między wrony, musisz krakać jak i one.

EXERCISE:

MATCH THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS WITH THE CORRECT IDIOM:

- a. feel at home
- b. take for granted
- c. make hay (while the sun shines)
- d. When in Rome (do as the Romans do)
- e. don't judge a book by its cover
- f. talking at cross purposes
- g. got the wrong end of the stick
- h. read between the lines

1. Anne _____. I said how nice he was and she thought I wanted to go out with him.
2. There's a sale at K-mart this week. I think I'll _____ and buy myself something at cut price!
3. We will do whatever we can to make you _____. Enjoy your stay here.
4. Jill: Everyone in my new office dresses so casually. Should I dress that way, too? Jane: By all means. _____.
5. Don't believe everything she says so literally. Learn to _____.
6. I think we're _____ here. You mean the old building, but I was talking about the new one.
7. We _____ so many things in this country – like having hot water whenever we need it. But it's not like this everywhere.
8. She doesn't look very bright, but _____. In fact, she is really good at what she's doing.

Key: 1.g 2.c 3.a 4.d 5.h 6.f 7.b 8.e

LEKCJA 2

SECOND ENCOUNTER: TIME FOR BUSINESS DRUGI PRZYSTANEK: CZAS NA BIZNES

W drugiej lekcji Cross-cultural Encounters spróbujemy zmierzyć się z pojęciem czasu. Przyjrzymy się, jak czas, pomimo swojej obiektywnej natury, jest postrzegany i interpretowany w różnych kulturach. Spróbujemy zrozumieć, dlaczego punktualność może oznaczać wiele rzeczy, w zależności od szerokości geograficznej, i dlaczego w niektórych krajach lepiej jest dogrywać interesy po oficjalnych godzinach pracy. Przy okazji poznamy angielskie słowo „czas” w wielu bardziej i mniej znanych konfiguracjach. Czas na lekturę!

SIX HOURS LATE = BEING ON TIME IN GHANA

*I was invited to attend a women's conference in Ghana, West Africa. Before I set off, I brushed up on all things African – from greetings, to dress, to food, and language. I even prepared myself, or so I thought, for understanding the African concept of time (...) The driver that was arranged for me was an hour late the first day. After **conveying** the message of how I need to be at the conference the next day on time,*

he assured me he understood. The next day, as promised, he came early, technically, and was only 45 minutes late. Some progress had been made. But when I tried to arrange a trip to the Cape Coast Castle, one of the longest surviving slave export points in Ghana, the wheels fell off again. After trying twice to get to the castle (once, he was a no show, and the next time he arrived 4 hours late!), I was able to secure another driver. I understood now that being 2-3 hours late was customary and was even considered punctual. Realizing that I had my American blinders on with everything I read, didn't allow me to fathom that lateness could extend to up to 6 hours. Thinking in American terms, I understood „late” to be at most an hour. Factoring in the lateness and knowing that the castle closed around 4pm, was an hour away, and I wanted to be there by noon, I was able to convey that I needed to be at the castle by 10am. I was told the driver would be there at 8am. I had time to rest, get breakfast and be ready by 10am. Success! The new driver came 2 hours „late”/on time and I managed to get to the castle by noon.

(Monica Moffit, Business News, July 2012)

The story above illustrates how the perception of time **varies** across cultures. In this article, we are going to see how the idea of time, lateness and punctuality is deeply **rooted** in one's culture. The concept of time may be a universal one, however the perception is subjective and depends on a range of factors. Hence, it is not that unlikely that different attitudes to punctuality, arriving at meetings and **sticking to deadlines** can lead to misunderstandings or a personal affront. Last but not least, we will take a closer look at how these differences are reflected in a language when dealing with or talking about time. So **take your time** and read this article carefully!

RELATIVITY OF TIME

The notion of time seems to be universally shared and understood. After all, aren't 90 seconds the same in Berlin and in Beijing? 90 seconds are 90 seconds everywhere, but the attitudes to these 90 seconds can vary immensely across cultures.

Time is also heavily related to space. Spatial representations of time are **ubiquitous** around the world. People use clocks, **sundials**,

hourglasses, calendars and graphs to represent and measure time. This relation is also visible in language. You can **postpone a meeting**, or *move it forward*. A student can be bored by a long seminar and may need to **take a short break**. Or when you are so tired that you can hardly **tell the time**, it means that you must be **working round the clock**.

In the European and American way of thinking, time starts in the past, continues in the present and stretches further into the future. In contrast, the African perception of time exists basically in two stages: deep past and present. Technically speaking, these two notions of time are not compatible. On a practical note, how should one talk about future intentions and plans?

USING TIME: MONOCHRONIC V. POLYCHRONIC CULTURES

Depending on the way we treat time in our culture, we use it in different ways. To illustrate two totally different ways of using time, let me give you an example of an American and a Mexican businessman. Almost instinctively, we know that Mexican and American businessmen are more than likely to have problems when they start to do business together. And it is not because one is a bad businessman and the other a good one but because their cultural roots, including their attitudes towards time, are different.

There are cultures that tend to view time as a **commodity**. In such cultures people know they should not **waste** or lose time because **time is money**. Such an attitude is typical of the USA and Nordic European countries. Because time is valuable, it should be used in the most effective way. You should do one thing at a time and move systematically from one topic to another. People like to focus on one issue at a time and are concerned with completing tasks and meeting objectives. In such cultures, very frequently referred to as MONOCHRONIC cultures, punctuality is highly valued. Showing up late for a meeting is interpreted as a lack of respect for other **attendees**. During a meeting, one should stick to the agenda and avoid **going off at a tangent**. Similarly, deadlines are stuck to and obeyed in monochronic cultures.

In POLYCHRONIC cultures, on the other hand, time is viewed as something that cannot be controlled and is rather flexible. This at-

titude is typical of southern European and Latin American countries as well as the Middle East. Here, things are planned, not that much on the basis of an agenda but rather on events. Sticking to a plan or agenda is not the ultimate aim. Building a relationship, networking or problem solving is perceived as equally or even more important a goal than the agenda itself. In practice, timetables and deadlines are **superseded** by the focus on individual needs and strengthening interpersonal bonds.

Going back to the American and Mexican businessmen, it is clear that major **discrepancies** are bound to appear. The Mexican prefers to *spend time*, seeing it as an opportunity, while the American views time as a precious commodity, which should not be wasted. Naturally, this will lead to major differences in the way the two men do business. The American will expect things to be done systematically, one at a time, while the Mexican businessman will engage in many activities **simultaneously**. When talking to his American partner, the Mexican businessman will be calling his son to pick up his car from the garage or answering a phone call from his wife. It will not necessarily be a sign of impoliteness when he invites questions from his secretary, popping in every now and then to find out something, which seems totally trivial and uninteresting to the American guest. Without adequate insight, both men could feel offended by what seems to them an inappropriate business attitude. In fact, it is **merely** a difference between the MONO-CHRONIC and POLYCHRONIC culture.

HOW LATE SHOULD A PUNCTUAL PERSON BE?

The differences in perception of time, translate into **tangible** discrepancies in everyday activities. Take, for example, the idea of **scheduling meetings** and punctuality.

In the USA, business meetings are scheduled in the morning when people are supposed to be fresh and the most resourceful. In polychronic cultures, like Spain, people tend to schedule meetings later in the day. Their working day starts later because they take time to be with their families in the morning. Additionally, they take longer lunch breaks, which may stretch up to 2–3 hours. This relaxed attitude to time, which usually manifests itself after a weekend, has a special

term that has been coined to refer to high absenteeism on a Monday – St. Monday, which is likely to become a national holiday.

At times, in polychronic cultures business time and personal time **overlap**. In countries like Japan, real business takes place over dinner and drinks, hours after the working day finishes. Not realizing this and turning down such an offer from a Japanese partner could result in losing a real opportunity to strengthen business bonds and do business.

As for social occasions, the notion of punctuality is also far from universal. For a dinner invitation at 8 pm, representatives of monochronic cultures (e.g. Germans, Americans, the Dutch) arrive **at 8 pm sharp** or by 8.15pm at the latest. Such punctuality would embarrass an Italian or a Latin American, who might still be running around in their underwear. According to the polychronic culture and its etiquette, one should not be more than thirty minutes late, leaving **ample time** for the host to get ready for unpunctual guests. It is worth taking this into consideration, especially when hosting guests of different cultural origins.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The fact that different cultures perceive time in different ways does not make one culture better than the other. It simply makes it different.

When doing business overseas, one should try to keep a clear understanding of time and differences of time perception across cultures and use it to one's own advantage.

When doing business in a foreign country with different time orientation than you own cultures, try to start to measure time with the local clock. It should save your time and spare possible mistakes.

Good luck!



GLOSSARY:

ample time – wystarczająco dużo czasu

at 8 pm sharp – punkt ósma

at times – czasami

attendee – uczestnik spotkania

commodity – towar

convey – przekazać, zakomunikować

discrepancy – rozbieżność

go off at a tangent – odbiec od tematu

hourglass – klepsydra

merely – zaledwie

overlap – nakładać się na siebie

postpone a meeting – przełożyć spotkanie

rooted – zakorzeniony

schedule a meeting – planować spotkanie

simultaneously – jednocześnie

stick to deadlines – trzymać się/przestrzegać terminów

sundial – zegar słoneczny

supersede – zastępować, wyprzeć

tangible – namacalny

take a break – zrobić sobie przerwę

take your time – nie spiesz się

tell the time – powiedzieć, która jest godzina

time is money – czas to pieniądz

ubiquitous – wszechobecny

vary – różnić się

waste time – trwonić czas



EXERCISE

CHOOSE THE CORRECT ANSWER:

- I've been working for 3 hours now and I feel extremely tired. I desperately need to _____ a break.
 - bring
 - take
 - took
 - brought
- _____. We don't need to hurry. There's plenty of time left before the train leaves.
 - Take a time.
 - Leave a time
 - Leave your time
 - Take your time
- Let's stay with the topic and not go _____ a tangent.
 - of at
 - of by
 - off at
 - off by
- I suggest we meet at 9 am. But 9 am _____. Try not to be late.
 - sharply
 - sharp
 - hard
 - hardly
- Could you please wait until I've finished my presentation. You'll have _____ time for questions later. I will answer all the questions then.
 - few
 - little
 - ample
 - sample
- Germans are famous for _____ to deadlines.
 - keeping
 - sticking
 - getting
 - obeying
- Although Anne is only 5, she can already _____ the time.
 - tell
 - say
 - speak
 - read
- Because of the rain the match had to be _____ until next week.
 - moved
 - scheduled
 - postponed
 - shifted

1. b 2. d 3. c 4. b 5. c 6. b 7. a 8. c

LEKCJA 3

THIRD ENCOUNTER: IS IT ALL ABOUT POWER?

TRZECI PRZYSTANEK: CZY ZAWSZE CHODZI O WŁADZĘ?

W trzeciej lekcji *Cross-cultural Encounters* staniemy oko w oko z władzą, a właściwie przyjrzymy się jej z różnych odległości – w zależności od subiektywnego punktu widzenia przyjętego w danej kulturze. Spróbujemy zrozumieć, jak hierarchia kształtowana od dzieciństwa przez szkołę i powielana w pracy wpływa na funkcjonowanie w biznesie. Od strony językowej skupimy się na słownictwie związanym z relacjami personalnymi i pozycją w hierarchii społecznej.

All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others. This famous maxim from G. Orwell's *Animal Farm* cynically illustrates the idea of **egalitarianism**. This is an ironic twist to the original purpose of the Seven **Commandments**, which were supposed to keep order within *Animal Farm* by uniting animals together against the humans and thus prevent the animals from following humans' habits. Yet, the original idea that all animals are equal was gradually **amended** to differentiate between the equal and the more equal ones, trying at the

same time to stick to the illusion of an egalitarian society. **To cut the long story short**, everybody knows how unequally it finished.

By nature, people, societies and nations are not **equal**. To be precise, depending on the culture one has been brought up in and in which one lives, people cultivate different levels of **inequality**. Why? To answer this question, I will direct you to the first article from this series, where I explained the nature of culture with its layers. Social practices, **i.e.** patterns of behaviour, which originate in the deepest and most unconscious part of our culture, stem from values. This means that to a major extent, more or less equal practices are not something that we can consciously steer and **mould**. These are behavioural patterns, which are triggered by the software of the mind, **i.e.** culture. In other words, one can be an advocate of **egalitarianism** or a supporter of social inequalities without realizing it. It is only when the two attitudes are compared that the differences start to be visible.

One of the most important attempts to **tackle** and systematise the subject is the development of the **power distance** dimension, as one of the dimensions to describe various national cultures. The author of the theory, Geert Hofstede, a Dutch researcher in the field of organisational studies, defines power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed **unequally**. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand **justification** for **inequalities** of power.

WHY SHOULD IT MATTER?

Scientific as it may seem, the theory can have a very practical impact on our lives. Allow me to tell you a story about Korea Air lines of the 80s, an airline that had crash rates **substantially** above those of the industry norms. Much of these were attributed to a high power distance culture. The reasoning behind it was that pilots were always held in the highest esteem and their decisions could not be challenged

because subordinates were not expected to speak up. As a result, there was a lack of communication and collaboration, which led to further increases in human error, simply because there were not enough checks and balances in the process. This mismanagement can be said to be largely due to the high power distance, which was not appropriately dealt with in this particular industry.

HIGH POWER DISTANCE VS LOW POWER DISTANCE

AT WORK...

In the work environment, high power distance demonstrates itself in centralised power, a vertical hierarchy and major esteem for **superiors**. Contacts between bosses and subordinates, initiated only by superiors, are emotionally **burdened**. This means that emotionally neutral attitudes are not common in such an environment. On the contrary, employees bear feelings, which are either extremely bad or enthusiastic towards their bosses. There are two extreme boss models in the high power distance working place: 'a good old father' or 'a bad stingy boss'. The position one holds within a structure is clearly marked. Status symbols of all sorts are more than welcome: a bigger and more accessible parking space, an expensive company car, a bigger office, a higher salary, etc. If there is a case of malpractice and using power to one's own advantage, it can be justified and **hushed up**. The positive version of this cultural model has employees cherishing a high esteem for the boss and indentifying themselves with him/her and the company both inside and outside the working environment. Countries typical of high power distance culture include: Malaysia, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, China, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In contrast, low power, distance cultures are characterised by a flat hierarchy. It is not that easy to differentiate between superiors and subordinates because the differences are not that clearly marked. There should not be any major discrepancies between the two groups in terms of education and **remuneration** as it is not that unlikely that one day the roles will be **swapped** or reversed. As a consequence, sta-

tus symbols are few and they are not overtly manifested; the same parking space, toilet and canteen. Any malpractice on the side of the management is stigmatised. **Whistleblowing** is highly appreciated. Typical low power distance countries include: Austria, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, UK, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands.

AT SCHOOL...

The power distance pattern at work stems in a natural way from the power distance learnt at school. In high power distance countries, the role of the teacher is central to the educational development of the child. The teacher is in a position to plan, oversee and control the student's learning path. On a practical note, students stand up when the teacher enters the classroom and they can speak only when the teacher allows them to do so. The teacher deserves utmost respect and obedience, both inside and outside school. In fact, the transmission and dissemination of knowledge depends to a major extent on the teacher, their skills, knowledge and wisdom.

Low power distance countries prefer a decentralised educational model. It is the student who plays a central role in the process. The relation between the teacher and the student is founded on mutual respect and partnership. The students are expected to search for the answer on their own. Creativity and initiative are highly appreciated. In the classroom, students are encouraged to ask questions whenever they do not understand something, which can even lead to open dissent which is not penalized. The teacher facilitates the dissemination of knowledge, which as such is conveyed to the student in a form of objective data and facts. Multiplied in adult life, these two extreme models of the educational system reinforce further social differences in the work environment.

AT HOME...

Looking for the origins of the differences in power distance, we should go back to the family as a pattern-setter. In cultures with high power distance, family members build a hierarchy with the parents,

typically the father, at the very top. Independent thinking and creativity are not perceived as virtues. Children are expected to be obedient and respectful towards their parents. In exchange for this, parents protect or even overprotect their children from any outside risk. These strong family bonds do not get weaker as time passes and children grow up. Even when they are adults, children can rely on their elderly parents when taking important decisions. These proportions are reversed in low power distance families, where children are taught to be independent and creative. What is more, they are allowed to make mistakes because this is treated as a part of the learning process. Family relations are partner-like and no major hierarchy **emerges**. With time, children become more and more independent at the expense of weakening **family bonds**. Ideally, each family member should be an autonomous identity with a life of their own, loosely connected with other family members.

NOT EQUALLY GOOD FOR EVERYONE

Multiplied respectively in the family, school and work **milieus**, these two power distance patterns: the low and the high one, represent two extremes. Obviously, there is a lot of room between them for more moderate versions. What should be remembered is that in business terms, there is no universal management model for all cultures. The famous MBO, management by objectives, which implies smooth and ongoing partner-like negotiations between the subordinates and superiors, is undoubtedly good for the American culture (low power distance country). However, it would be a mistake to apply the MBO model to a Chinese business (high power distance country), where the expanded vertical hierarchy disables smooth communication across management levels. To put it in a nutshell, all animals are...different.



GLOSSARY:

amend – poprawić

burdened – obciążony

commandment – przykazanie

cut the long story short – przejść do sedna

egalitarianism – egalitaryzm

emerge – pojawiać się

equal – równy

family bonds – więzy rodzinne

hush up – wyciszyć

i.e. (łac. id est) = that is – to jest

inequalities – nierówności (społeczne)

inequality – brak równości

justification – usprawiedliwienie

milieu – środowisko

mould – kształtować, modelować

power distance – dystans władzy

remuneration – wynagrodzenie

subordinate – podwładny

substantially – znacząco

superior – przełożony, zwierzchnik

swap – zamienić

tackle – stawić czoło, wziąć się za

unequally – nierówno, w nierówny sposób

whistleblowing – reagowanie na sytuacje wskazujące na nadużycie władzy, donosicielstwo w pozytywnym znaczeniu



EXERCISE

COMPLETE THE SENTENCES WITH APPROPRIATE WORDS:

1. Despite his junior position he had a good working relationship with his immediate s_____.
2. Developing countries frequently face the problem of u_____ distribution of wealth. The rich are few and have a lot and the poor are many and have very little.
3. The writer's work perfectly reflects his own social and cultural m_____.
4. Dishonest and illegal practices of the former boss wouldn't have been disclosed if it hadn't been for the internal w_____ channels in the company.
5. Despite the crisis, the steel industry still enjoys high rates of r_____. Its employees are ones of the best paid in the country.
6. The emotional b_____ between mother and child is said to start already in the womb.
7. The government is working on a policy aimed at reducing i_____ between men and women.
8. The whole affair was h_____ by the government and very little information leaked to the media.

1. superior 2. unequal 3. milieu 4. whistle-blowing 5. remuneration 6. bond 7. inequalities 8. hushed up

LEKCJA 4

FOURTH ENCOUNTER: I OR WE? **PRZYSTANEK CZWARTY: JA CZY MY?**

W czwartej lekcji przyjrzymy się relacjom jednostki z grupą. Przekonamy się, że postrzeganie siebie w stosunku do grupy, w której się funkcjonuje, ma ogromne znaczenie dla relacji rodzinnych, szkolnych i biznesowych. Będzie też kilka wskazówek dla menedżerów, m.in. jak uniknąć wpadek językowych i biznesowych, oraz możliwość sprawdzenia, czy jesteśmy bardziej typem indywidualistycznym, czy kolektywistycznym. Od strony językowej skoncentrujemy się na przymiotnikach i rzeczownikach opisujących relacje społeczne.

THE SWEDISH AND THE SAUDIS – NOT A PERFECT MATCH

‘A medium-size Swedish high-technology corporation was approached by a compatriot, a businessman with good contacts in Saudi Arabia. The company sent one of their engineers let me call him Johannesson to Riyadh, where he was introduced to a small Saudi engineering firm, run by two brothers in their mid-thirties, both with British university degrees. Johannesson was to assist in a development project on behalf of the Saudi government. However, after six visits over a period of two years, nothing seemed to happen. Johannesson’s meetings with the Saudi brothers were always held in the presence of the Swed-

ish businessman who had established the first contact. This annoyed Johannesson and his superiors, because they were not at all sure that this businessman did not have contacts with their competitors as well but the Saudis wanted the intermediary to be there. Discussions often dwelt on issues having little to do with the business like Shakespeare, of whom both brothers were fans. Just when Johannesson's superiors started to doubt the wisdom of the corporation's investment in these expensive trips, a telex arrived from Riyadh inviting him back for an urgent visit. A contract worth several millions of dollars was ready to be signed. From one day to the next, the Saudis' attitude changed: the presence of the businessman-intermediary was no longer necessary, and for the first time Johannesson saw the Saudis smile, and even make jokes.

So far, so good; but the story goes on. The remarkable order contributed to Johannesson being promoted to a management position in a different division. Thus, he was no longer in charge of the Saudi account. A successor was nominated, another engineer with considerable international experience, whom Johannesson personally introduced to the Saudi brothers. A few weeks later a telex arrived from Riyadh in which the Saudis threatened to cancel the contract over a detail in the delivery conditions. Johannesson's help was asked for. When he came to Riyadh it appeared that the conflict was over a minor issue and could easily be resolved but only, the Saudis felt, with Johannesson as the corporation's representative. So the corporation twisted its structure to allow Johannesson to handle the Saudi account although his main responsibilities were now in a completely different field.'(Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organisations*)

This true story illustrates how the perception of oneself and the relation with other members of a group can have long-term effects on various domains of our life, including business. The 'miscommunication' described above shows how the two nationalities, the Swedes and the Saudis, have different concepts of the role of personal relationships in business. The underlying difference between the two nationalities concerns with whom the business is done: for the Swedes it is with the company, for the Saudis – with the person they have got to like and trust. This shows another fundamental difference across cultures: the role of the individual and the role of the group.

INHERENTLY COLLECTIVIST

It is estimated that a vast majority of people in our world live in cultures where the interests of the group **prevail over** the interests of the individual. These are collectivist societies. Collectivism represents preference for **tightly-knit** social framework across the society. It starts in a family which will be understood here as a number of people living closely together on an everyday basis. In collectivist cultures, the immediate family apart from parents and children typically includes further relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. Hence, the term ‘extended family’ has been coined to reflect this social phenomenon. The child born in a collectivist culture is consistently equipped with key values and beliefs which make them think of themselves as part of a ‘we’ group as opposed to a “they” group. An individual builds their identity on group identity. What is more, the group is seen as a source of protection from the outside environment, in exchange for which the individual owes lifelong loyalty to the group, both in psychological and practical terms. This can have extremely tangible effects especially when we take into consideration that in collectivist cultures resources are shared. A typical example will include family members collectively covering the cost of sending one member of the family to university, the expectation being that when this person gets a well-paid job in the future, the income will be also shared.

As there is a correlation between collectivism and high power distance, we can foresee what will happen with an individual from a collectivist culture at school. On top of the **rigid** hierarchy and the distance between the teacher and students, the teacher will perceive a student as a member of an ‘in-group’, not as an independent individual. This will prevent both sides from entering into open conflicts as the loss of face will not only affect the student or the teacher but the whole group (s) he belongs to and could possibly lead to hostile relationships between the two groups. Last but not least, the purpose of education in collectivist cultures is to acquire skills and knowledge that are necessary and **indispensable** in order to be an acceptable group member. One’s own interest and **aptitudes** are not of the main objective when deciding on an individual learning path.

PROGRESSIVELY INDIVIDUALIST

It is estimated that a minority of people live in societies where the interests of an individual prevail over the interests of the group. Yet, the majority of these people are located in developed parts of the developing world, hence, they are more outstanding than their collectivist counterparts who are either in the minority in developed countries or constitute a majority in developing and under-developed countries, thus being less 'visible'. Individualism can be defined as a preference for a '**loosely-knit**' social framework in which individuals are expected to only take care of themselves and their immediate relatives. In such societies, children are born to 'nuclear families', consisting of parents and **an only** child or possibly two or three children. Interestingly, in some societies there are an increasing number of single-parent families. Other relatives are either unknown or live too far to be regularly seen. From their early childhood, individuals tend to define their self-image in terms of 'I' and not 'we'.

Since a high level of individualism is correlated with low power distance, at school students expect to be treated as individuals. This **impartial** attitude without taking into account the student's background is fundamental in achieving the main objective of education, which is to equip a student with skills, knowledge or a qualification to allow them to function on their own in a society of other individuals. Key decisions concerning education are dictated by individual preferences. Hence, in typically individualist cultures it is less likely that children will share the occupation of their parents.

WHICH ONE IS WHICH?

Naturally, the two models described above show two extremes and there is a lot of room in between. In order to take a look at individual examples that can share some features of both models, let's have a look at how individualism is measured in practical terms. Geert Hofstede, who conducted his research on a representative sample of IBM employees, decided to examine the dimension of individualism vs. collectivism by measuring the importance attached to work goal items, which for the individualist pole included:

- *Personal Time* – having a job with the right **work-life balance**, leaving sufficient time for personal life
- *Freedom* – having enough **authority** to decide how to approach working tasks and objectives
- *Challenge* – having work that is a source of **self-accomplishment**

On the opposite side, it was believed that collectivist employees were to appreciate:

- *Training* – opportunities to improve one's skills
- *Physical conditions* – having good physical working conditions, such as AC, enough working space, etc.
- *Use of skills* – the impression of one's skills and abilities being fully used by the employer

Having arrived at the scale 0–100, where 0 indicates a highly collectivist culture, while 100 a highly individualist one, Hofstede positioned Sweden somewhere towards the very top of the scale with the score of 71 while Saudi Arabia scores around 26. The discrepancy is more than visible. It is, however, even more striking when we compare the index for countries from the same continent: Portugal (27) and Great Britain (89). Individualism is typical of western countries, an example being Germany (67) with its major focus on personal achievement and personal rights. Yet, probably the best illustration is the USA (91) with its '**from rags to riches**' American dream. This belief that anyone, regardless of their social status and roots, can achieve a better quality of life than their parents' is a perfect **embodiment** of individualism.

As for Poland, according to Hofstede's research, we represent a certain contradiction in terms with quite high individualism (60) and even higher power-distance (68), which should be negatively correlated. In practical terms it means that we are individuals with a strong need for hierarchy. A piece of advice for managers who would need to establish a second level of communication with individuals in a structure, giving the impression that they see and appreciate how these individuals are important yet unequal in the hierarchy.

As for oneself, have a look at the work goal items and see which set seems more **like your cup of tea**.

I, WE AND THE COMPANY

Speaking about the workplace in individualist and collectivist societies, one should speak about managing a group vs. managing individuals. This translates into plenty of factors that condition e.g. the hiring process, relationships with the employer as well as the appraisal and bonus system. To highlight the most extreme examples, let us look at South Korea (score of 18), where the employee/employer relationships are perceived as family bonds and hiring policy dwells on the membership in a certain in-group (which in other countries could be classified as nepotism). In contrast, in individualist countries like the Netherlands (80), the relationship between the employer and the employee is purely business-like. All decisions concerning hiring and promotion need to be transparent and based on merit alone. To conclude, one does not need a great imagination to foresee most basic problems when managing staff from such different cultural backgrounds.

HOW NOT TO GET LOST

The key takeaway is to bear in mind the fact that management and training techniques have almost exclusively been developed in individualist countries. This means that their basic assumptions will not hold in more collectivist societies. There is no 'one solution' here. Properly trained managers who are aware of the differences in cross-cultural communications are definitely an invaluable asset to the company. And finally, **far-fetched** assumptions and **mental shortcuts** in multinational environments are the easiest way to managerial failures. At times, a longer route can be more economical.



GLOSSARY:

prevail over – dominować nad

tightly-knit – zwarty

rigid – sztywny, niezmienny

indispensable – niezbędny

aptitude – talent, zdolność

loosely-knit – luźny, o luźnej strukturze

an only child – jedynak

impartial – bezstronny

work-life balance – równowaga pomiędzy pracą a życiem osobistym

authority – władza

self-accomplishment – samorealizacja

from rags to riches – od pucybuta do milionera

embodiment – ucieleśnienie

(not) be your cup of tea – odpowiadać komuś, (nie) być w czyimś guście

far-fetched – naciągany, daleko posunięty

mental shortcuts – skróty myślowe



EXERCISE

COMPLETE THE SENTENCES WITH CORRECT ADJECTIVES OR NOUNS

1. The firm prides itself on giving _____, objective and quality advice to clients.
2. Despite the overwhelming stress she maintained _____ control over her emotions.
3. Mobile phones have become an/a _____ part of our lives.
4. It is a very close and _____ - _____ community. You will need some time to get accepted by them but then in exchange for your loyalty, you'll receive a lot of support.
5. He's one of the people who made his American dream come true. His "from rags to _____" story is really impressive.
6. In literature, this character is a classical _____ of evil.
7. The number of _____ children in developed countries is increasing as people tend to have their first child quite late.
8. Since people are shifting towards a nuclear family, the _____ family can be seen in more traditional societies.

1. impartial 2. rigid 3. indispensable 4. tightly-knit
5. riches 6. embodiment 7. only 8. extended

LEKCJA 5

FIFTH ENCOUNTER: BETWEEN MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY; IS CULTURE GENDER-SENSITIVE?

PRZYSTANEK PIĄTY: MIĘDZY MĘSKOŚCIĄ I KOBIECOŚCIĄ,
CZYLI CZY KULTURA MA PŁEĆ?

W piątej lekcji przekonamy się, że kultury mogą mieć cechy męskie i kobiece. Nie są one zależne od liczby kobiet i mężczyzn w populacji, lecz od wartości ważnych dla danej kultury, które stereotypowo są postrzegane jako męskie lub kobiece. Przyjrzymy się również kwestii płci kulturowej. Czytelnicy będą mogli sprawdzić, czy pod względem wartości i zachowań są bardziej kobiecy czy męscy.

A POLITICALLY (IN) CORRECT JOKE

As the subject of gender seems to be a **divisive** one, let me start with a joke to make a light and friendly beginning:

A teacher was explaining to her class that in French, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine.

„House” is feminine „la maison” „Pencil” is masculine „le crayon”.

A student asked, „What gender is ,computer’?”

Instead of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into two groups, male and female and asked them to decide for themselves whether „computer” should be a masculine or a feminine noun.

Each group was asked to give four reasons for their recommendation.

The men's group decided that „computer“ should definitely be of the feminine gender („la computer“), because:

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic;
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else;
3. Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long term memory for possible later retrieval; and
4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

The women's group, however, concluded that computers should be masculine (le computer“), because:

1. In order to do anything with them, you have to turn them on;
2. They have a lot of data but still can't think for themselves;
3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they ARE the problem; and
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you had waited a little longer, you could have gotten a better model.

As we already know, cultures only exist by comparison. Here, we have a perfect opportunity to make comparisons. The different worlds of men and women have been **juxtaposed** and opposed by anthropologists, sociologists, and all possible types of researchers. In the popular culture, the belief has been rooted and **nourished** that men are from Mars and women from Venus (as if we really knew what life on these respective planets is like). A lot has been said about this topic. Yet, the aim of this article is not to further discuss the differences between the women's and men's worlds but to build on what is culturally perceived as typical of men or women and thus analyse another dimension of cultural differences: masculinity and femininity.

SEX VS GENDER

First, it is crucial that we sort out some metalanguage issues as the English language has developed a lot of words to describe features typical of men and women. It is obvious that men and women represent different sexes with real and measurable biological differences,

which can be referred to as male and female. Yet, in each culture there is a set of behavioural patterns which are considered to be characteristic of men and women, thus building their gender identities. These culturally determined roles are described as masculine and feminine. This differentiation, unlike the biological one, is subjective. A woman can be said to be behaving in a masculine way, which means that her behaviour **deviates** from what is culturally classified as feminine. To sum up the linguistic repertoire at our disposal, there are male and female sexes to refer to objective biological differences and masculine and feminine **genders** to talk about cultural behavioural patterns.

BUILDING ON STEREOTYPES

What is **masculine** and what is **feminine** differs across cultures. Yet, generalizing there is a certain behavioural pattern which is attributed to men and a different one attributed to women. To some extent, you can call them stereotypes and **frown upon** such a simplification. But these are the founding criteria of yet another cultural dimension: masculinity vs femininity, which describes how 'hard' or how 'soft' a culture is.

If you were to describe your ideal working place, which of the following criteria would be of major importance to you? Please choose from the following:

A.

1. salary – a possibility to earn a good salary
2. recognition – being rewarded for one's achievements
3. promotion – a possibility of being promoted; a clear **career**

path

4. challenge – a motivating and demanding job which gives a sense of personal satisfaction

B.

5. good relations with your supervisor (s)
6. cooperation – working in a team of people who like working with others

7. place of residence – a job which offers good and comfortable living conditions for the employee and their family

8. job security – security of employment, a stable job

If you have chosen most of the criteria from group A, it means that you represent a masculine culture. If your ideal working criteria come from group B, you seem to come from a feminine culture. In his research on a group of IBM employees, Geert Hofstede discovered that men pay most attention to criteria 1 and 3, while women typically cherish criteria 5 and 6. Translating this pattern into a broader perspective, it is possible to analyse cultures according to their masculine and feminine factors. The masculinity side represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Society at large is more competitive. The countries representing high masculinity index include: Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, Mexico, Great Britain and Germany. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented. Countries typical of feminine values include: Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal and Spain.

BUILDING MASCULINE/FEMININE SOCIETY

Gender roles are absorbed in a gradual yet consistent way. Starting from the family which provides the basic source of cultural programming, children absorb their inherent values, gender behaviour included. The relationship between the wife and the husband constitutes the first gender pattern. At the one extreme there are cultures which score high in terms of masculinity and power distance. In other words, these are 'unequal' and 'tough' cultures with a strong and powerful father and a **submissive** mother. Here, a popular term 'machismo' is used to describe the role model of the father. At the other extreme, there are cultures which are 'equal' and 'soft'. This means they are characteristic of low power distance and low masculinity index. In such cultures, both the mother and the father **nurture** personal relationships, the quality of family life and emotional well-being of family members. The wife and the husband share their housework in an unbiased and cooperative way.

At school, the gender roles get fossilized. In feminine cultures, an average student is a norm while in masculine ones each student tries to be

the best. It is so because in masculine countries students are taught to be competitive and win. On the contrary, in feminine countries students consider competitiveness **pathetic** and value **modesty** and group solidarity. Students from masculine cultures aim at a brilliant career with promotion opportunities while their more feminine colleagues pay attention to personal interests and self-satisfaction when deciding on their career path.

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY AT WORK

Equipped with their cultural programming, innocent graduates start their first job. They will have plenty of opportunities to activate their inherent feminine or masculine behavioural patterns. In masculine cultures, conflicts at work are resolved via confrontation according to the maxim *Let the best win*. The working ethos is very strong and people tend to think that they live in order to work. Employees are highly competitive and get adequate recognition for their achievements. In feminine cultures, negotiations and mutual concessions are the best ways to resolve conflicts. Hence, trade unions or any other forms of employees' self-representation are present and consulted with. People believe they work in order to live. When dealing with their co-workers, employees are cooperative and modest. The employer tends to reward their staff equally, according to individual needs, not achievements. Interestingly, in masculine cultures men are expected to make progress in their career. Masculine professional success is taken for granted, while women can decide for themselves if they want to embark on a competitive career path. In feminine cultures, on the other hand, there is no such discrepancy in terms of work ambitions. This means that in masculine countries men have more masculine traits than women while in feminine cultures both men and women are equally feminine in their work attitudes. The fundamental issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine).

Where is Poland on this scale? According to Hofstede, Poland with its index of 64/100 is a masculine society. This means that we tend to believe that we live in order to work and emphasise competition, performance and assertiveness at work. Yet, our masculinity is not as strong as e.g. Japan's so there is some chance of mutual understanding when working with colleagues from feminine countries.

CLASSICAL MISINTERPRETATIONS

Being able to differentiate between masculine and feminine features of cultures, let's try to explain the source of miscommunication in the following situation. A young Dutch engineer decided to apply for the post of a junior manager in an American company based in Europe. He submitted a cover letter together with a brief CV listing his educational background (university diploma with good notes), work experience (quite rich) and personal interests (quite unique). To his surprise, during the interview, most questions concentrated on his experience in designing tools, especially the ones produced by the company in question. The English terminology used by the interviewer was incomprehensible to the interviewee, who believed there was no point in asking about things he would be able to learn in the new job. He was prepared to answer questions focusing on his education and past work experience. But such were only few. To cut the long story short, the company turned him down, leaving him **puzzled, perplexed** and ... jobless. The source of this miscommunication lies in totally different attitudes of the Dutch (feminine) and the American (masculine) culture. American candidates treat job recruitment process as a true competition. Their **boast** of their qualifications and achievements in their CVs, at times promising things which will be almost impossible to deliver, e.g. learning the local language in three months. The American employer from our story had been expecting such an "overdone" CV. Instead, he got a brief selection of university and work dates with volunteer work highlighted, which he interpreted as not good enough. The Dutch employee, on the other hand, had been taught to prepare a true yet modest picture of oneself. He expected further questions to elaborate on his skills and qualifications but these did not come. In his opinion, the employer should have been interested in his work experience and qualifications instead of focusing on his future skills. In the end, a good candidate did not get a job because the prospective employee misread his communication.

A personal piece of advice: it is worth being more feminine because the emphasis on cooperation helps to understand other people. And how feminine/masculine are you?

GLOSSARY:

divisive (adj.) – sporny	career path (n.) – ścieżka kariery
juxtapose (v.) – zestawić, porównać	recognition (n.) – uznanie
nourish (v.) – wspierać, żywić	deviate (from) (v.) – odbiegać od
male(adj.) – samczy, o człowieku: męski	submissive (adj.) – uległy
female (adj.) – samiczy, o człowieku: kobięcy	nurture (v.) – pielęgnować
gender (n.) – płeć (rozumiana kul- turowo i społecznie)	pathetic (adj.) – żałosny
masculine (adj.) – męski	modesty (adj.) – skromność
feminine (adj.) – kobięcy	puzzled (adj.) – zdziwiony
frown upon (v.) – wyrazić swoją dezaprobatę	perplexed (adj.) – wprawiony w osłupienie
	boast of – chwalić się



TASK

AFTER READING THE ARTICLE CLASSIFY THE FOLLOWING ATTITUDES AS EITHER MASCULINE (M) OR FEMININE (F). GOOD LUCK!

1. Managers should be decisive and assertive.
2. The major driving factors at work are competitiveness and challenges.
3. Both parents take care of material and emotional issues in a family.
4. One should be modest and humble.
5. We live in order to work.
6. A child is expected to achieve average grades at school.
7. Conflict are resolved by fighting them out.
8. Personal relationships and friendships are the most important.
9. One sympathises with the strong ones.
10. An intuitive and mediating managerial style is appreciated.

1. M, 2. M, 3. F, 4. F, 5. M, 6. F, 7. M, 8. F,
9. M, 10. F

LEKCJA 6

DIFFERENT IS DANGEROUS – ABOUT UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE IN CULTURES

INNE OZNACZA NIEBEZPIECZNE – O UNIKANIU NIEPEWNOŚCI W KULTURACH

W szóstej lekcji postaramy się oswoić temat niepewności. Pokażemy, że zachowawczość lub chęć podejmowania ryzyka są uwarunkowane kulturowo, a poziom odczuwanego stresu u dorosłego zależy od tego, czy nasi rodzice pozwalali nam się bawić brudnymi zabawkami w piaskownicy. Menedżerowie dowiedzą się, jak pogodzić chęć tworzenia i przestrzegania przepisów z gotowością działania bez zbędnych formalności. A wszystko to przy okazji ćwiczenia strategii słowotwórczych.

FRANCISCUS OF ASSISI AND CORPORATE MEETING CODES

People have always tried to think up new rules that they could later learn to avoid. It seems to be true at different times and in different cultures.

‘Franciscus of Assisi heard moaning in the night and found a monk who was starving. He didn’t want to eat because he was deter-

mined to fast. But his body was collapsing and he went too far. Franciscus urged him to eat but the monk said „No, I want to persist”.

Then, Franciscus sat down in the moonlight and started to eat though he wasn't hungry. He said: „We honour God by fasting but also by staying healthy. How can we serve him if we are too weak to stand on our legs? Tonight, I honour and serve him by eating.” And he ate some more. Finally, the monk joined him and started eating.'

And on a similar note but in different times:

'A new employee has organised a meeting at 10:00 AM. He arrives on the dot and he opens the door and... another meeting is still going on. The employee reminds the people inside that it is 10:00 AM and one man says: "yes, we know but it's not still 10:10 AM!"

In terms of cultural behaviour, Franciscus of Assisi can be described as flexible and innovative, unlike the new employee, who wasn't familiar with the unwritten rule that meetings do not start on time and a 10 minute delay is universally accepted.

These two anecdotes describe how people approach situations, which are novel and surprising. Some people feel comfortable in unknown conditions and can adapt easily, while others need a set of rules in order to acclimitise to new situations. The same can be said about cultures. There are cultures, which maintain rigid codes and laws and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Their members feel uncomfortable in new situations and thus can be said to exhibit 'high **uncertainty avoidance**'. At the other extreme, there are cultures whose members feel quite comfortable with novelty and change. These are 'low uncertainty avoidance' cultures.

READINESS TO TAKE RISK

In practical terms, uncertainty avoidance deals with approaching risk. If you belong to the group that needs fixed rules to proceed, it means that your uncertainty avoidance is high. If, on the other hand, you prefer to let things happen and see how the situation is going to develop in practice, your uncertainty avoidance is low.

In more philosophical terms, uncertainty avoidance deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and **ambiguity**; it ultimately refers to man's search for 'the Truth'. It shows to what extent a culture

programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimise the possibility of such situations by adopting strict laws and rules, safety and security **measures**, and on the philosophical and religious level with a belief in the absolute 'Truth'; 'there can only be one Truth and we have it'.

UNCOVERING UNCERTAINTY

It is believed that researchers first came up with the idea of uncertainty avoidance when they asked how people perceive and rate stress at work. Although stress seems to be an inherent part of professional life, respondents' answers appeared to show a certain pattern, depending on their country of origin. Funnily enough, British employees always exhibited a lower level of stress when compared with their German counterparts, regardless of the job status and responsibilities. The study showed that a German cleaning lady experienced more stress at work than a British manager.

The key questions asked when studying the dimension of uncertainty avoidance dealt with:

- The estimation of the level of stress at work
- The approach towards rules at work; should they be **unconditionally observed** even if their **breach** could be profitable for the company?
 - The **willingness** of the employee to stay in one job:
 - a) not more than two years
 - b) between two and five years
 - c) more than five years
 - d) until retirement.

When analysed globally, the answers to these questions help us to understand the general idea of avoiding new and potentially risky situations. An employee who is **prone to** stress is believed to observe the rules and will not risk potential ambiguity resulting from an unauthorised change of rules. Similarly, they will not be **tempted** by new job offers, unless forced to look for a new job, because the change of workplace will result in plenty of new and dangerous situations. Coun-

tries typical of high uncertainty avoidance include: Greece, Portugal, Belgium, Japan, Poland, Peru, France and Spain. In these cultures there is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work) time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation.

At the other extreme, there are cultures, which score low in terms of uncertainty avoidance. These are: Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Hong Kong and Great Britain. Adherence to laws and rules may be flexible to suit the actual situation and pragmatism is a fact of life. People do not need a lot of structure and predictability in their work life. Plans can change overnight, new things **pop up** and people seem to be fine with it. It is a natural part of their work life. What is more, curiosity is natural and is encouraged from a very young age. On a practical level, at the workplace low uncertainty avoidance is also reflected in the fact that people admit that they are in doubt or do not know something. It is ok to say "I do not know" and employees are comfortable in **ambiguous** situations in the workplace.

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE TRAITS

In general, the difference in the degree of avoiding uncertainty depends upon various socio-economic and socio-religious factors. Countries with a high uncertainty avoidance index appear to show certain similar characteristics:

- Countries who have a long history rank higher on the uncertainty avoidance scale.
- The population of the country is **homogeneous**.
- New ideas are not encouraged and instead, sticking to the structure is preferred.
- Citizens are cynical of their nation.
- Belief in **superstitions** and luck is higher.

Looking at countries where citizens are more likely to take risks, the following traits apply:

- These countries have been formed recently or have gained independence recently.
- The population consists of multicultural and multilingual people.

– Risk taking ability is valued and is seen as a quality of successful entrepreneurs.

BUILDING (UN) CERTAINTY

As with previous dimensions, all cultural patterns are first absorbed in the family. A small child is taught what is good, and what is bad, what is dirty and what is clean and what is dangerous and what is safe. The idea of 'dirtiness' seems, however, to be culture-bound. Children are taught to classify what is dirty and what is dangerous, starting from their playground and immediate environment. Interestingly, Italian nannies tend to prevent children from going into some places and touching certain objects because they are dirty and dangerous, while American parents or grandparents will not mind letting their children do so because they see no dirt or danger in it. The reason for this lies in the fact that Italy has uncertainty avoidance index of 75, while the USA scores 46.

The basic classification is later translated into more complex ideas. At school, students from high uncertainty avoidance cultures expect the teacher to know answers to all the questions and have the knowledge to be transmitted in a difficult and highly scientific way. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, on the other hand, teachers are allowed not to know everything and encourage **unorthodox** solutions and ideas.

In the professional life, work is the basic factor contributing to the feeling of certainty. Thus, high uncertainty avoidance cultures exhibit the internal need to be professionally occupied and value punctuality and precision. Their opposites, low uncertainty avoidance cultures, do not **condemn inactivity** and do not pay that much attention to punctuality and details. The most visible difference lies in the attitude towards written rules and regulations, which are treated as **indispensable** in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, while the low uncertainty avoidance countries try to minimalise them as much as possible. Maybe this could be the answer – at least to some extent – why Great Britain has no single constitutional document, but an uncodified, unwritten constitution in form of many written and unwritten sources?

LOOKING AHEAD

The approach towards risk and new situations has a major influence on people's outlook on the future. High uncertainty avoidance cultures are sceptical of the future in general and dislike changes and innovations. They are not interested in seeing **what the future will hold** for them. They would rather stay where they are. On the contrary, low uncertainty avoidance cultures are curious about the future. They see it in bright colours, envisaging positive changes and innovations.

On a final note, these unconscious attitudes are reflected in the language we speak. In English '**curiosity killed the cat**', in Polish it 'takes you to hell and is the first step to condemnation'. Does it mean that our uncertainty avoidance changes when we speak a foreign language? This is food for thought...