

**Author: Zoran Vaupot**  
**Title: French for Slovenes: Instructions for use**  
**Date: 09 March 2001**

Recently publicised disputes between the management of a Slovenian subsidiary of a renown French company and their Slovenian employees reflect, at least from the outside, poor intercultural communication. This is that extra component of international management, which is already on a national basis, putting the hard discipline of management, particularly human resource management, to the test with even more difficult tasks. Namely, international business operations are not just a combination of technical businesses, customs formalities, goods delivery and payment flows, as by many faculties and business schools limit them to.

#### The role of intercultural communication in international management

As managers and as humans we are often not aware that our culture is not universal until the moment we enter a foreign country and experience a so-called cultural shock. This is even more noticeable in the case of numerous immigrants, who on arrival in a foreign country are immediately confronted with a different language and do not yet comprehend the different practises, rules and cultural codes (conscious and subconscious) they will have to adjust to. Becoming aware of the reality of these cultural differences triggers a feeling of self-consciousness and understanding of one's own cultural identity, which is seen in relationships with others, foreigners. This sort of perception is, of course, mutual and interactive in a way that every individual creates a certain understanding – urgently subjective and often stereotypical - of themselves and others, of their own, and other cultural groups.

Also, in international management it is not about the awareness of separation (stereotypical) of understandings to positive and negative. So, be aware! There are not better or worse cultures, just different ones. And in understanding these different cultures and in remedying communicational problems, which could lead to a decrease in operational results, the knowledge of providing successful intercultural communication in a world striving toward globalisation is becoming more and more important. Such knowledge is so important that the word "international" in the phrase international management is more and more often replaced by the word "intercultural" (as in intercultural management).

#### Dimensions of national cultures – Model 4-D of Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede conducted research in 1967 and 1973 in which he questioned 116,000 IBM employees from 72 countries, where 20 different languages were spoken. His intention was to explain the differences arising from different cultural environments and to create a basis for improvement of intercultural communication. On the basis of the results, he set standards with which, using statistic researches, approximately half of the differences among national cultures could be explained.

The remaining differences can be explained by the specificity of individual countries. The criteria are:

- a.) *Power Distance-PDI*,
- b.) *Individualism-IDV*,
- c.) *Masculinity-MAS*,
- d.) *Uncertainty Avoidance-UAI*.

With the model shown we are attempting to represent those basic differences between two cultures (as an example, French and Slovenian culture are used) the knowledge of which is necessary for providing successful intercultural communication. Under Hofstede model 4-D, Slovenian and French cultures differ in two important criteria, namely in individualism and masculinity, whereas they are extremely alike in the other two criteria: power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

To start with, we should also mention the results of a study into two of the afore-mentioned four criteria (Power distance and Uncertainty avoidance) show an extreme similarity between the Slovenian and French cultures, whereas the other two criteria show great differences, which to a great extent explains the initial disharmony between the two cultures to a great extent.

<b>Standpoints characteristic of:</b>	
<b>Low value of characteristics (Slovenia)</b>	<b>High value of characteristics (France)</b>
<b>INDIVIDUALISM</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehending "us"</li> <li>• Opinions are determined by group</li> <li>• Priority is fulfilment of obligations towards family, group, society</li> <li>• Punishment for non-fulfilment: shame from others</li> <li>• Values differ within groups and between them - particularism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehending "me"</li> <li>• Opinions are created by individuals</li> <li>• Priority is fulfilment of obligations towards oneself</li> <li>• Punishment for non-fulfilment: loss of self-respect, feeling of guilt</li> <li>• Values should refer to all - universalism</li> </ul>
<b>MASCULINITY</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehension of quality of life, serving someone else</li> <li>• Striving for consensus</li> <li>• Working for life</li> <li>• Little and slow is nice</li> <li>• Compassion towards the unhappy</li> <li>• Surpassing "male" and "female" social roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitions to attain competence</li> <li>• Striving for polarisation</li> <li>• Living for work</li> <li>• A lot and quickly is good</li> <li>• Compassion towards the successful</li> <li>• Strictly separated social roles of women and men</li> </ul>

Under individuality and masculinity we can, beside the results for Slovenia (that collected 27 points for individualism and 19 for masculinity) and France (71 or 43 points), also state some other comparisons among different cultures. Some results:

Individualism		Masculinity	
Guatemala (min.)	6	Sweden (min.)	5
Croatia	33	Croatia	40
Austria	55	Germany	66
Hungary	55	Italy	70
Germany	67	Austria	79
France	71	Hungary	79
Slovenia	27	Slovenia	19
America (max)	91	Japan (max)	95

Under the masculinity criterion Sweden was placed last with 5 points, followed by Croatia with 40, Germany with 66, Italy with 70, Austria and Hungary with 79, and Japan with 95 points (max).

#### Masculinity-MAS

\* small MAS

\* big MAS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comprehending the quality of life, serving someone else</li> <li>- Striving for consensus</li> <li>- Working for life</li> <li>- "Little and slow" is nice</li> <li>- Compassion towards the unhappy</li> <li>- Surpassing "male" and "female" social roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ambitions for reaching capabilities</li> <li>- Striving for polarisation</li> <li>- Living for work</li> <li>- "A lot and quick" is nice</li> <li>- Compassion towards the successful</li> <li>- Strictly separated social roles of women and Men</li> </ul>
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#### The meaning of understanding the intercultural communication in management practice

Even though a concrete comparison between Slovenian and French cultures was used for the understanding of the topic of intercultural communication, the conclusions and recommendations can be generalized on intercultural communication between every nation. The detected cultural differences can namely very easily pass over to the safe sanctuary of stereotypes on the collective level and these stereotypes, usually used by both sides, are seen as practice barriers which need to be unconditionally overcome if we want to improve communication. The easiest way to achieve this is to realise (the speciality of) our own culture and the diversity of other cultures even before communication occurs. Ignoring objectively existing differences often leads to disputes.

Basically we could, from our own experiences at practical experience and theoretical study of intercultural communication, highlight two criteria under which types of disputes among employees can be addressed:

- > Criterion of *organizational hierarchy*:
  - ◆ Dispute among employees of equal hierarchy
  - ◆ Dispute among employees of different hierarchy;
- > Criterion of *interculture*:
  - ◆ Dispute among employees of the same national cultures
  - ◆ Dispute among employees of various national cultures.

This distinguishing is important because of the correct identification of the causes, which lead to a dispute. A dispute can namely be caused merely by bad intercultural communication among employees on equal hierarchy levels. If bad intercultural communication is also accompanied by

communication problems between the "lower" and "higher" hierarchy levels, the dispute becomes even more complicated. For the main cause of bad intercultural communication can be covered up by an apparently "universal" dispute between superiors and subordinates; the trade unions are then very fond of joining in the process of dispute resolution...

And what can Slovenian managers learn from all of this? Firstly, perhaps that also our superior hierarchy position towards employees from other cultures does not ensure peace in the company. Bad intercultural communication cannot be solved merely by using the power derived from the superiority in management structures. It can only be temporarily silenced; but this usually means an outburst in the sense of a later open revolt, possibly in the form of a strike, or that employees whose knowledge and skills are, in the given moment, more sought after on the labour market might simply leave the company. There are quite a few cases of bad intercultural communication in companies in Slovenia (also from mass media). Due to understandable reasons, it occurs especially in companies with invested or prevailing foreign capital.

The resolution of disputes resulting from bad intercultural communication is normally the consequence of pressure of representatives of foreign owners (that often learn about disputes only from the mass media) or political representatives of the countries from diplomatic-consular posts, also ensuring at least a temporary improvement of intercultural communication by giving clear instructions to manager structures. But in most cases it was and is only about putting out the fire. Periodical outbursts of tension, which are basically the consequence of bad intercultural communication, are recurring and will keep recurring until the causes of the problem is eliminated.

The author of the present note has been acquainted with this view on international business operations for several years. Since he lived and worked in France for several years and experienced (and survived) several forms of problems resulting from intercultural communication, he saw the event mentioned in the introduction (so current, yet not the only one by far) as more than just a suitable reason to record present thoughts.