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Development of Intercultural Competence of Russian employees in Korean Companies (the Case of Hyundai Motor Company in Saint-Petersburg)

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ABSTRACT. In the modern world, which is more and more globalized, practices, enterprises and business settings requiring intercultural cooperation become increasingly important. To communicate successfully within international team special characteristics are required – the set of such characteristics generates the concept of "intercultural competence". This is especially important in the field of economic settings, where the success often depends on the ability to create the effective multicultural team and deal constructively with cross-cultural diversity. In the present paper the notion of intercultural competence is examined using the case of Hyundai Motor Company in Saint Petersburg. The aim of the research was to analyze basic principles and components of the development of intercultural competence of Russian employees in the company Hyundai Motor Company in Saint-Petersburg, and to provide possible ways to increase it. Within the confines of the research the corporate culture and the history of the Hyundai Company was investigated and its features were identified. Besides, systems of norms and behavior patterns of Korean and Russian employees were compared and the patterns of effective interaction between them were defined.

Accordingly, the main components of the intercultural competence have been observed in the context of the specific corporate culture of Hyundai Company. The empirical research was based on qualitative methods of analysis: in-depth interviews of Russian employees and expert interviews of Russian managers – heads of the departments and Korean experts.

KEY WORDS: intercultural competence, intercultural communication, corporate culture, cultural diversity, globalization

### 1. Introduction

Process of increasing economic globalization leads to the emergence of multinational companies, becoming major players in a world market. In the world where national boundaries turn to be eroded, the ability to manage and to work in multicultural teams is increasingly important.

In an international company it is essential to deal constructively with cultural diversity – it is obligatory for business to prosper. Successful communication in the international business environment requires not only an understanding of language, but also the nonverbal aspects of communication, as well as ability to create positive atmosphere for effective collaboration between representatives of different cultures.

The exploration of challenges and obstacles of intercultural communication, necessity of increasing intercultural competence (which is a new term and there is a need to clarify it), using the case of this particular company, is an urgent topic, especially in the modern context of globalization and intercultural cooperation in different spheres.

The case of Hyundai Motor Company is suitable to examine this concept because it is the largest Korean automobile factory and it has a leading position in the global automobile market, thus it has branches in many countries. 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2010 there was the ceremony of opening of the company, "Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Rus' (HMMR) in Saint-Petersburg. So it is possible to get access to the employees of this enterprise in order to examine challenges and obstacles of intercultural communication there.

"Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Rus" represents cultural diversity: thus, there are Russian and Korean employees, but Koreans represent management and top-management of the company, while Russians get positions of manual workers and clerks. That means that their attitudes toward Korean persons can be affected not only by intercultural differences, but also by the distribution of job positions. That is why I should explore the corporate (organizational) culture of Hyundai Motor

Manufacturing Rus' – to provide information about structure, mission of the company, processes of decision-making, patterns of interactions between managers and workers, always taking into account cultural diversity; the final goal is not to show how managers communicate with employees, but how Korean managers communicate with Russian employees

The management of St. Petersburg Company is sure that its success is based on the "effective collaboration of Russian and Korean experts." But is this collaboration really so effective? There are specific challenges to develop intercultural competence, and the empirical research is devoted to elicit the obstacles and difficulties of intercultural competence and therefore create a list of recommendations for Russian employees to develop it.

## 2. Concepts

Intercultural Competence is the fundamental acceptance of people who are different to oneself outside one's own culture. The ability to interact with them in a constructive manner which is free of negative attitudes (e.g. prejudice, defensiveness, apathy, aggression etc.), to create a synthesis, something which is neither "mine" nor "yours", but which is new and would not have been possible if we not combined our different backgrounds and approaches (Schmid, 2001).

According to D. Deardorff (2004), acquisition of intercultural competence, which is the capacity to change one's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors so as to be open and flexible to other cultures, has become a critical issue for individuals to survive in the globalized society of the 21st century.

Intercultural communication, as well as any other kind of social communication, has its particular goals, implementation of which causes its effectiveness or ineffectiveness. In this regard, intercultural competence plays a major role. However, this phenomenon is just beginning to attract the attention of the researchers, and therefore the concept of "intercultural competence" has started

to enter into broad scientific discussions and does not have yet an established definition

The process of intercultural interaction can be influenced by both personal characteristics of participants (uncertainty, suspicion, empathy), and cultural factors as well. And if the features of each person are individual, specific to each human being, the cultural characteristics can be summarized and generalized.

To determine the organizational culture requires examination of three aspects (Trompenaars 1997): (a) the general relationship between employees and their organization, (b) the vertical or hierarchical system of authority defining superiors and subordinates, (c) views of employees about organization's destiny, purpose, goals, and their place.

#### 3. Theoretical foundations

The term "intercultural competence" and the evidence of its importance initially were shaped by purely practical interests of American businessmen and politicians. After the World War II sphere of influence of American politics, economy and culture was actively expanding, and new enterprises and business settings consisting of representatives of different cultures required new forms of intercultural awareness. "Birth" of intercultural communication as an academic discipline was in 1954, when the book «Culture as Communication» by E. Hall and D. Tragera was published. In educational system the study of intercultural communication was initiated by foreign language teachers, who first realized that to communicate effectively with other cultures, language skills are not sufficient. There is still in many respects the evidence of ethnocentrism: dealing with other cultures, most people view other people's cultural values using their own cultural values. It is a psychological setting to evaluate the behavior of other cultures and their representatives through the prism of their own culture.

Theory of intercultural communication was described by different authors, such as: *Ethnic Competence* (Gallegos, 1982; Green, 1995), *Cultural Awareness* (Winkleman, 2005), with the majority of authors eventually converging on the term "*Cultural Competence*" (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, Issaes, 1989; Lum, 2005; Weaver, 2005)

Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions was relevant to the present study: he developed the concept of culture as consisting of dimensions that may be predictive of behavior. Hofstede (1980) focused on a group of IBM middle managers across 53 countries. In his work "Cultures and Organizations. Software of the mind", Hofstede found four primary cultural dimensions: (a) power distance, (b) individualism-collectivism, (c) uncertainty avoidance, and (d) masculinity-femininity. As Hofstede continued to study cultural dimensions, he identified a fifth dimension, which was labeled long (short)-term orientation.

Edward T. Hall in his book "Beyond Culture" (1976) distinguished between High Context and Low Context cultures, and we can compare Russian and Korean culture using these dimensions.

Milton Bennett (1993) suggested the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS): there are six stages on the path to developing intercultural competence, summarized into "Ethnocentric stage" and "Ethnorelative stage"

To examine intercultural competence of employees of particular factory, the corporative culture should be carefully explored to answer a question, whether the corporate culture shapes the behaviorist patterns or, vise versa, only national (Russian or Korean) culture determines norms and values. Corporate culture can be defined as the sense making and control mechanism that guides and shapes the attitudes and behavior of employees (Robbins, Millet, Cacioppe 1998).

## 4. Methodology

The research was conducted using purely qualitative methods: in-depth interviews with employees and experts (managers and experts in Korean culture) and analysis of printed materials. Interviews were conducted with employees who work in the

company in the HR department, as well as with manual workers, and the expert interviews were conducted with the Russian management of the company – the head of PR-department and the head of the department of external relations; also, interview with expert in Korean culture – representative of Korean fraternity in Saint-Petersburg. Author of the research had the opportunity to visit the factory and made an observation, especially concerning the features of corporate style, clothing, food etc, thus to compare personal experience with the words of the informants. The interview guides were prepared carefully for each interview, taking into consideration the job position of the respondent and consisted of several blocks: (a) general information about respondent (b) structure of organization and corporate culture (c) features of intercultural cooperation (d) training and retraining programs of employees (e) Intercultural differences and contradictions, and possible ways to overcome them

The spectrum of corporate printed production was analyzed, including 10 issues of the corporate magazine "Autograph" (published monthly), which contain short interviews with employees (Russian and Korean), information about partners and suppliers, innovative proposals of employees aimed to improve the process of production, appeal of managers of the company. Sometimes there can be announcements of particular events or contests (e. g. competition "I am a talent" aims to indicate the most talented person in different spheres among the employees of the factory). The research was conducted in October-May (2011/2012 year): interviews were collected in January-March and majority of them lasted 40-60 minutes.

# 5. Research in "Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Rus"

Company "Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Rus" in Saint-Petersburg represents complicated organizational structure, consisted of two big divisions, administrative and manufacturing. The first one includes about three hundred and fifty clerks in

approximately ten departments (5-50 workers each). The head of the company is Chhon Gvi II, and there is a bunch of Russian directors who deals with particular sphere of the functioning of the company. Chhon Gvi II coordinates the work of Russian directors, but not only this: every morning, at 8 a.m. he comes to the manufactory of assembly and checks out whether the production runs properly or are there any problems with cars. There are only forty four Korean managers, while two thousands Russian manual workers, in four manufactories (*uex*): forging manufactory, welding manufactory, manufactory of assembly and painting manufactory. There are two models of cars produced on the factory: Hyundai Solaris and Kia Rio. The work process is complicated through all the stages of producing car, so it requires the control system. Each department has a Russian "director" and Korean "coordinator". In spite the factory has been launched relatively recently (21<sup>st</sup> September 2010), the production runs 24 hours: there are 3 shifts during a day, and even some office departments work during the nighttime. This can be explained by the huge demand on the Hyundai cars in Russia: in 2011 it was the bestseller among foreign cars; it was sold 76 649 Hyundai Solaris cars and 38 353 cars of Kia Rio cars (Russkyi Reporter, 2011, №48), so about 38 cars per hour are produced now – very high rate, especially in comparison with other car-producing factories.

Among Russian workers there is a large proportion of women (about 20 %); women are highly valued in the assembly line, because they are doing rigorous work well, sometimes better than their male colleagues. Of course, there is larger proportion of women among office workers, especially in the HR and PR departments. There are also Korean women among top-management, but de-facto they do not participate in the process of decision-making – often they organize a group – for recruiting, for instance, and deal with human recourses, mainly.

All decisions are made by Korean managers (or in the central office in Korea) and generally can hardly be challenged. The hierarchy among managers is very strict, and the manager of the higher rank should be treated appropriately to his position. This is the feature which is not always inherent in Russian companies, so

there is a difference in the "power distance" dimension, using Hofstede's terminology – there is evidence of large power distance in Korean value system, while in Russia it is not small neither large, but somewhere in between (by the way, this is the feature of Russian culture in general – transitional state). The same, for example, with the "collectivism-individualism" dimension: Koreans have always been wondering how Russians can change jobs so quickly, put their interests before the interests of collective – in Korea it is impossible: due to the influence of Confucianism, Korean people value group interest more than individual interest. Company's purposes and the group's benefits are given first priority. Thus, long working hours without extra compensation is acceptable for many Koreans, but not for Russians, who used to finish their work than the time is over. Of course, it is presumptuous to argue that Russia has strongly individualistic orientation historically, the situation was opposite. But with the spreading in the end of 20th century Western business patterns, we can suggest that Russian value system is less collectivistic than Korean. Generally, examining Hofstede's dimensions we can elicit differences, not contrasts, but still they can jeopardize the success of intercultural cooperation.

Edward Hall distinguished between high- and low-context cultures. Today it is accepted to include Russia and Korea to the countries with high cultural context, which presupposes less verbally explicit communication, less written/formal information, multiple cross-cutting ties and intersections with others, long term relationships. Again, Russia relatively is much closer to low-context cultures than Korea. In Korea traditions, way of behavior, speech, clothing, changing business cards mean much more than words. It is not accepted to say "No" openly, so interlocutors judge about opponent's opinion on the basis of gestures, mimics, way of speech etc. In Russian business culture everything is articulated more or less openly, that is why we can speak about differences in this dimension too.

The company has its own corporate magazine "Autograph" (printed once a month), as well as books and brochures produced once a year with main results, achievements, projects for the future development, as well as program speech of

the head of Hyundai Motor Company Chung Mong Koo. Besides, a corporate TV broadcasting was launched recently – one can watch in the canteen, for example.

Corporate culture of the company is officially based on five core values: challenge, collaboration, customer, globality and people. These values exist in the general framework of corporate philosophy till the year 2020 (launched in 2011) "Challenge" presupposes the ability to cope successfully with difficulties, "collaboration" – between colleges and partners, the client's interests are top priority for the corporate culture, principle "globality" includes respect for all cultures and traditions in the world and the intention to become the leading company in a car production sphere in the world. Besides, the factory in Russia presupposes participation not only of Korean managers in the production process, but also suppliers of metal, details, equipment – from Europe, China, Spain and other countries. Thus, not only distribution of cars is global – the process of production is globalized. The value "people" mean that the company is interested in the personal and professional development of the company's employees and believe in potential of each of them. This value also presupposes the intention to create the modern car for a man of twenty first century, which is not only a vehicle, but a unique place where people spend significant amount of their lives, so it should be comfortable, advanced and modern.

The basic slogan of the new program – "New thinking, new possibilities"; these words can be seen everywhere: on the paper and video-advertisement, on the corporate souvenirs: pens, booklets, magazines. Heads of the company, according to their interviews, defines the company as "reliable partner in all spheres of life". Than this new philosophy was launched, the special trainings were organized for the employees to make them acquainted with new values. Even contests were organized in order to identify person who is better informed about the core values and can present them creatively (such contests are provided through the corporate magazine "Autograph"). Besides, the contest was announced among employees on the best corporative musical motto, which should reflect the description of core values, aims and priorities of the company. By the present moment, contest is

continuing and a lot of interesting prepositions from workers have been sent to the "Autograph" magazine. The role of authorities is really strong – this is one of the features of Korean culture, which influence relationships within the company. Generally, the process of decision-making is done on the level of top management of Saint-Petersburg Company, and basic requirements are developed in the head office in Korea. Due to the strict hierarchy in the Korean society, the system of communication within the company remains following these principles: age and official capacity are the decisive factors for communication style. This claim is not correct for communicative patterns among Russian employees, since the median age is very young (26-27 years old), and generally more democratic way is accepted due to the less strict hierarchy within Russian society. The corporative holidays are organized from time to time – last year, it was "The Family Day" (each employee could bring relatives to the company in order to show them where and how he/she works), and the "Day of Sports", when sportive competitions were organized – in football, volleyball, basketball – among the company's employees. National holidays are not celebrated widely (except for corporative party before New Year), but on birthdays people usually bring something sweet to celebrate with colleagues - mainly Russian workers, as in Korea tradition to celebrate birthdays is not so widely spread. When the company was just opened, and the number of employees was very small, the relationships between them were closer, but now when the number of people is huge and the production runs in full swing, there is less opportunity for informal communication. For instance, there were situations than Korean managers were worrying about the female employees, and how it was possible for them not to be marry and to take care of their life independently (since in Korea there is still an intention that women tend to be housewives rather than workers). Now such kinds of "small talks" are rare due to the formalization of relationships between employees. It should be noted, that in Korean culture it is completely normal and polite to ask openly questions about marital status and other personal information, such questions should not be perceived as insult or intrusion.

Office workers are required to have higher education and speak English fluently, and there are some extra-paying for those who speak Korean, although there are only about forty Russian persons who do. Although, one of my respondents does not speak nor English neither Korean, but it is a very rare 'exception', according to her words. Also, company provides Russian employees with possibility to learn languages for free. Russian employees and Korean managers communicate in English, sometimes in Korean, Russian employees use Russian language of course when communicating with each other.

There are two canteens in the territory of the factory, Russian and Korean, thus one can choose the food. There are a lot of Koreans who prefer Russian cuisine and visa versa, so there is no intercultural hostility for sure, but still there are problems which can hardly be decided, in spite of special intercultural trainings organized from time to time. One of these problems is the difference in the hierarchical system, which was mentioned above. Also, different styles in space and time perception can be seen in Russian and Korean culture. One of the examples is that Russians finish their work at certain time which is officially prescribed while Koreans only when their work is done. Koreans perceive their work as the most important part of their life; according to one of Korean managers, "we (Koreans) put our company on the first place. The second place – family and the third – myself. In Western countries situation is the opposite."

Employees who deal with production process are not necessarily required to speak English or Korean fluently or to have the higher education, although masters (бригадиры) — heads of brigades — often have the education in the sphere of engineering or mechanical engineering. Nevertheless, these positions can be achieved without such an education — for instance, there is a "corporate legend" about a person who used to be a cook, then he changed his career and was hired as a regular worker in Hyundai company; due to his fast progress and outstanding capacities, he was promoted soon and became a master. Although, this case can be considered as an exception, because in most cases, to be promoted, employees have to work for a long time in the company. Some workers named the "long-

term" work as one of the main requirements to be promoted, as well as "loyalty to company", which expresses in being acquainted with corporate norms and ethics of behavior (including maintaining corporative style in clothes), acceptance of basic values of the company. Besides, employees should be emotionally stable and stress-resistant, because work is often connected with extra hours, strict deadlines. One of the features of Asian companies – the mutual will (of the employee and employer) to work as long as in is possible in the same company. So the management of Hyundai tries to avoid firing people, and the main reason for quit – the own will of the worker, according to the respondents.

In the process of communication within homogeneous groups, Korean managers use their own patterns of behavior, Russian – their (manner of greeting, talking, gesticulation etc.) Nevertheless, they respect cultural patterns of each other, Koreans learn about Russian culture, but it is still difficult to create a synthesis based on two cultures within the company. Managers argue that corporate culture is based neither on Korean nor on Russian patterns, but represents the global, international model of business setting, without national affiliations. Although, Russian employees, while communicating with Koreans, sometimes use specific Korean patterns: they bow instead of a handshake (it is not a rule, but sometimes it is done, especially when meeting with top-ranking Korean managers; also they pass documents (or any things) to Koreans using both hands, as it is the sign of respect in Korean culture.

In terms of Adler (1997) company can be define as synergistic in its response to cultural diversity, as it represents the possibility for more than one culture to exist and flourish and some problem elicited do not mean that the authorities of the company want to make it ethnocentric. Besides, according to managers of the company it is not correct to perceive the Hyundai company as Korean one – it is global, and, whenever its branches exists, they represent the ability to create multinational successful cooperation, taking best features from Korean culture and cultures of host countries.

# 6. Development of intercultural competence through different types of intercultural education

The results of the research elicited some problems concerning the intercultural competence of Russian employees. In order to make the process of cross-cultural communication and interaction more effective, participants should be aware of some aspects that affect the culture and, consequently, the communication between people of different cultures. Participants of intercultural communication are required to develop tolerance and empathy, ability to adapt quickly and use the universal patterns of behavior, in order to integrate successfully and communicate effectively. Program of development intercultural competence can help to reduce the risk of intercultural communication. The use of active methods of intercultural training increases the probability of development cross-cultural competence. The trainings of increasing intercultural competence are compiled on the basis of the interpretation of the theory of cross-cultural sensitivity of M. Bennett (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity). M. Bennett identified six stages of personal growth, reflecting the person's relation to similarities and differences between their own and others' cultures. These stages correspond to the denial, minimization and protection of cross-cultural differences in the initial stages and acceptance, adaptation and integration to them in the future. The initial phase of the program of development intercultural competence was focused on awareness of the differences between cultures, further work was aimed to accept these differences and be able to use, apply the information. The objective of the training is to provide awareness of stereotypes, the definition of the image of Korea and Koreans through the prism of Russian people's eyes. The training program includes work on the cognitive, affective and behavioral level. Cognitive level includes linguistic competence, paralinguistic competence (including: gestures, mimicry, ways of greeting, farewell, promotion, frustration, sympathy, expressions of humor etc), knowledge of cultural context: attitude towards the organization of labor, space and time, the difference in color preference, choice of food and beverages, vehicles, recreation, intercultural knowledge, reflection on stereotypes. Affective level reflects the inner emotions of participants: confusion, avoidance, discomfort, stress, frustration, fear which further can be transformed into sympathy, comfort, trust; intercultural socio-psychological sensitivity (empathy), ability to "put oneself in another's shoes" and attitudes toward representatives of different culture: respect; openness (withholding judgment); curiosity and discovery. Finally, behaviorist level includes successful interaction: ability to communicate in a situation where the communicative styles are different, including business communication (order/oral report, negotiations, meetings, signing of a contract) and skills: to listen, to observe and evaluate, to analyze, interpret and relate.

The first place in the training constitutes the work of the participants with their own feelings, thoughts and feelings, their awareness and acceptance, and only then – getting the information, facts and guidance. Much attention was paid to the differences of Russian and Korean cultures. The main purpose of the first part of intercultural training is to familiarize participants with the Korean culture through visual informing in the form of a presentation and lecture descriptions. The program also includes a preview of extracts of Korean movies. Lecture program includes such topics as geographical position and climate conditions, history, features of education, relationship in the family, cuisine, traditional holidays and festivals, the description of Korean culture using the parameters of cultural dimensions suggested by G.Hofstede. After the training, participants should realize their views, their stereotypes about Koreans, to make up the image of Korea and Koreans.

### 7. Conclusions

Due to the short existence of the company in Saint-Petersburg, it is difficult to make generalizations: whether the Korean culture is predominant in the company? Or there are no national differences and the type of "global" corporate culture has been successfully built, as it is declared by the management? Or, using the principle "When in Rome, do as Romans do", Korean management follows Russian patterns and adopts Russian values? There is no correct answer, because Russian and Korean patterns and values exist through all the level of corporate culture, changing and influencing each other, being supplemented by Western patterns (English as common language); management, in effort to built successful global company is close to its aim: synergistic, not ethnocentric company demonstrates respect to cultural diversity. That does not mean that problems of intercultural cooperation do not exist. To name a few: strong hierarchy and decision-making process are not so accustomed for Russians employees, cultural, religious, family traditions are not so well-known as it should be, lack of information about time and space organization is evident. Apparently, these factors do not influence a lot the financial success of the company (the sales of cars are extremely high), but can jeopardize the positive relationships between Russian and Korean colleagues and make Russian employees quit their job, what they do often. The aim of the present research was to elicit these problems and to provide ways to cope with them for Russian employees – thus, to increase their intercultural competence. Although the lectures and seminars about Korean culture are provided, that is not a sufficient measure; more advanced programs should be suggested. Learning about another culture is just the first step: one must leave the ethnocentric views and recognize cultural diversity as positive feature of modernity. It seems that only global, transnational companies and projects can be successful today, thus the requirements for development intercultural competence are extremely important in wide ranging situations: from planning new business enterprise to managing existing enterprises and everyday business activity and communication.

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