

## **CROSS-CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM**

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The article is analyzing the process of cross-cultural communication between three business professionals with different backgrounds. The focus is put on their general identities. The potential negotiation between the professionals is presented, as well as the challenges and proposed solutions.

**Keywords:** National identity and communication, cross-cultural challenges, power distance, individualism/collectivism, low/high-context culture, non-verbal behavior.

Kiryll Shumsky is a 48-year-old Belarusian entrepreneur with more than 20 years of business experience. Currently he is running a paper recycling company with more than 70 employees, among whom are Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians.

The first aspect to be considered in the cultural analysis of Kirylyl as a business professional are his identities, that operate in combination and create a polyhedral compound (Samovar et al, 2017, p.245). According to the theory of Turner's identity categories, all the identities could be assigned to the human, social or personal category (Turner, Reynolds, 2012). Since the object of the paper is communication, the focus will be on social identities.

Ethnically Kirylyl identifies himself as Belarusian. However, being born in 1973 he had spent his childhood and teenage years as a citizen of the USSR, which created a certain affinity with other states-members. One of our interview questions was if he feels a difference in business communication with representatives of other cultures he works with (Russian and Ukrainian). Kirylyl answered he had never faced any difficulties. For instance, he always used the pronoun "us" when talking about Russians and Ukrainians.

The regional identity of the professional does not outweigh his nationality: As two big offices of his company are located in Grodno and Brest, the recipient was asked if he felt any difference working with people from other regions - the answer was negative.

Despite the fact that, according to Hofstede's model, Belarus is a collectivist culture (Hofstede Insight, 2021), Kirylyl's organizational identity is rather weak: he never mentioned the name of his company in an interview.

Talking about the historical aspect, the Soviet past and current regime in the country have the biggest impact among historical events on the cultural identity of Belarusians which can be seen through Hofstede's value dimensions. They

provided very high Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance scores (95 out of 100). However, in the professional's company, the main rule is to make as few rules as possible. For the recipient, there is no difference in communicating with people of the lower, higher or same rank. Based on this, we can conclude that Kiryll does not implement a classic national managerial scheme. The professional also mentioned the company's traditions of giving personal presents which reflects the femininity of Belarusian culture, characterized by the value of equality, solidarity, and quality of working life (Hofstede Insight, 2021).

### **CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF HANNA JOHANSSON**

Hanna Johnsson is a 33-year-old Swedish Coffee Shop Manager (CSM) who has five years' worth of experience of working in the coffee industry. All these five years have been spent working at the multinational enterprise (MNE) Espresso House (EH), though under different titles.

By referring to Turner's identity categories theory, we can analyze the business professional's different aspects of social identities. (Turner, Reynolds, 2012). Considering the fact that Hanna identifies herself to have a strong Swedish identity, she is able to educate those, who have a different national identity, in the Swedish culture and norms as EH is a multinational company.

Hanna also has a strong regional identity with Kalmar. However, her regional identity does not outweigh her national identity since she would continuously refer to herself as a "Swedish" person in general.

During the interview Hanna would multiple times mention the company's name, Espresso House, when describing her work life. Meaning that the employees will identify themselves rather with the EH group than just their individual self, as described in Hofstede's value dimensions of a collectivistic culture. (Samovar et al, 2017). Considering these factors, it can be concluded that Hanna has a strong organizational identity.

### **CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF SRIRAM KRISHNAN**

Sriram Krishnan was born in 1983 and grew up in Chennai, India from where he immigrated to the United States in 2005. He worked as a product creator for successful companies such as Microsoft, Facebook, Snap, and Twitter (Sriram Krishnan, 7 August 2021; Silicon Valley Girl, 7 August 2021; Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021).

From the beginning of the interview, Sriram Krishnan mentions his Indian roots. It is unmistakable that in the first part of the interview the listener gets the sense that his national identity strongly belongs to India, where he grew up in a

lower-middle-class family in a very “traditional Indian household” as he calls it (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021).

However, further into the interview (of the 12th of August in 2021), the listener has the feeling that his national identity perspective changes. Despite demonstrating that India continues to play a big role in his life by, he begins to mention his naturalization process to the American culture and society. For instance, his mention of the memorable quote “Welcome home.” (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021) (which an airport employee said to him when he returned to America from India) underlines the importance for him to finally become an American citizen. Nevertheless, he also mentions other difficulties he faced on his first time abroad including not having money, lack of knowledge about cultural differences, and experiences. In the end we can see that his national identity might be divided into partly American as well as Indian identity which leads to his ability to have multifaceted viewpoints (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021; Silicon Valley Girl, 7 August 2021; Andreessen, 2021).

By already mentioning Microsoft above, we come to another one of Sriram Krishnan's strong portrayed identities in the interview which is his organizational identity. During the interview, he mentions Microsoft uncountable times and describes it not only as a working space but also as a home and protector.

As a result of Sriram Krishnan working in an American environment, he is able to see differences in the Indian environment especially regarding collectivism/individualism and low/high power distance. India as a more collectivist culture agreeing with Hofstede’s score of 48: the lines between work and family as much “blurrier than in the U.S.” (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021). Contrary to that, in his new job at Microsoft he barely socially interacted with his colleagues matching Hofstede’s score of 91 concerning individualism (in the U.S.) (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021; Hofstede Insight [U.S.], 2021; Silicon Valley Girl, 7 August 2021).

Another aspect of the Hofstede model is the power distance. Krishnan directly emphasized the difference there since in the U.S. there is not a lot of deference to authority and the power gap is lower than in India, agreeing with Hofstede’s calculation (e.g., India: 77; United States: 40 according to Hofstede) (Hofstede Insight [U.S. and India], 2021).

#### **CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: KYRILL SHUMSKY**

Belarusian people have a national trait called “pamyarkounast the understanding f which is crucial for the comprehension of Belarusian culture and, accordingly, the style of communication. “Pamyarkounast” combines such concepts as complaisance, moderation, compliance, patience, conformity, and

tolerance. In other words, it means that on any terms Belarusian will try to avoid any potential conflicts or clashes of interests.

However, during the business meeting, Kiryll might face several challenges related to the strong organizational identities of two other professionals: both Hanna and Sriram tightly associate themselves with the companies they are working for. This fact might be incomprehensible or sometimes even a bit annoying for him. There is no doubt that Kiryll would manage to tolerate that, nevertheless, he could politely mention that the three of them should focus more on the common project than on their “home” companies.

Another challenge that might arise is a misperception of non-verbal behavior or, more precisely, of silence. For both Swedish (Welander, Astvik and Isaksson, 2019, pp.89-90) and Indian (Jain and Matukumalli, 2013, pp.252-254) cultures making pauses and keeping silent for some time in the conversation is considered normal. However, for a Belarusian, it usually seems awkward and might look like a sign of indifference. In this case, Kiryll should learn in advance about the peculiarities of non-verbal behavior for his partner cultures.

#### **CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: HANNA JOHANSSON**

Swedish people are known for showing politeness and respect to others, both in their verbal and non-verbal communication. Especially with the people who they are not close with in order to not seem rude and to reduce the risk of any conflict arising since Swedes dislike any form of confrontation, unless deemed necessary. If that is the case, “they will often address the conflict or confrontation directly, yet diplomatically” (Cultural Atlas, 2022). Hanna incorporates this cultural trait when communicating with others and therefore, in a meeting with other business professionals it is unlikely for conflict to arise due to poor communication skills.

Another aspect is how one interrupts somebody who is currently speaking. According to Swedish culture, as well as most Western cultures, when a person is repeatedly being interrupted in a conversation “it is thought to indicate that one does not have a genuine interest in what the other is saying” (Cultural Atlas, 2022). Sometimes it is considered rude since the other person is not being allowed to finish their sentences. However, in the Indian culture it is normal for people to interrupt each other in a conversation. Therefore, in a business meeting it is crucial for Hanna to in advance be aware of this significant difference in their cultures to avoid misunderstandings. Though this is not very likely to happen considering the fact that Sriram is familiar with the American culture (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021).

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: SRIRAM KRISHNAN

From the perspective that Sriram Krishnan's Microsoft background, in this case, is his most important asset in the common business venture of the three professionals, Krishnan would likely come across and conduct himself as an American business actor, as his experience in the company comes from an international, mostly U.S. environment (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021). Although strong differences exist in his past Indian culture, if compared to Johnsson's Swedish background and Shumsky's Belarusian one, Krishnan's U.S. approach to the negotiations would be more familiar to them than his Indian.

It can be drawn from the interview (Silicon Valley Girl, 12 August 2021), that Krishnan has adapted to the American culture of low-context, high substance communication. Krishnan could easily find a common language with Hanna, as her Swedish communicational culture is similar to the U.S. one. (Samovar et al, 2017, p. 246).

While differences might exist in-between the U.S. and Belarus' way of conducting a negotiation, it will not necessarily lead to misunderstandings. The matters discussed would likely be practical and therefore, the conversation would need to have a strong substance regardless of the communication style.

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