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**SELF-MANAGEMENT IN THE AREA OF INTER-CULTURAL  
DIFFERENCES**

**Summary:** Self-management is the activity directing to augmented self-consciousness. The majority of literature in this area concentrates on better decision making, developing better self-awareness in relations, obtaining better efficiency in job. In this article, the author is concentrating on another aspect of self-management – the ability of man to influence his or her inter-cultural skills. The author, encouraged in the cross-cultural course, takes test of his inter-cultural abilities. Then, knowing the (expressed in numbers) results, he is performing extra activities in cross cultural environment. After the exercises, the test is taken again. The difference in numerical outcome is noted. The author expands the results trough consideration about differences between his biggest cross-cultural experience (Turkey), its comparison to the culture of his family (Poland) and its possible influence on his ability to recover the inter-cultural skills.

**Key words:** Cross-cultural skills, inter-cultural abilities, communication self-management.

## **Introduction**

This article is the result of Inter-cultural Communication course lectured by Barbra Blackstone, PhD, the international specialist of cross cultural interactions. The course was conducted in Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu – National Louis University in Nowy Sącz. Action Plan Performance is the exercise leading to self-improvement basing on below described aspects.

### **1. Measuring the self cross-cultural skills. The starting point.**

During the Inter-cultural Communication course with Barbara Blackstone participants had the task to perform the CCAI personal improvement plan (the self – assessment based on Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory Scale Dimensions). Through answering the fifty questions and counting the scores each participant got the information about his or her abilities in four areas: Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity and Personal Autonomy. My personal values for above-mentioned fields were:

Emotional Resilience: 77

Flexibility/Openness: 72

Perceptual Acuity: 53

Personal Autonomy: 34

## **2. The discussion on results and action plan to improve**

The action plan assumed improvement in two lowest graded areas. The reason to make an attempt to improve both of them was twofold. First of all, possessing all four values at the level of around 70 to 80 will let me obtain the synergy between all these factors and, I believed, the entire cross-culture ability will increase in significant way. Secondly, I had thought that steps I took can be very similar for the improvement of both areas so I decided to try to improve both. However, improving both in the same level would be improper. In my opinion, it was better to concentrate on bigger drawback (low personal autonomy) what assumed active action in terms of interaction with people from different cultures. The second improvement was rather treated by me as additional and I could be rather more observant, thus a little more passive, than in case of the first area. Moreover, I felt lack of skills that are part of or are related to both of my lowest-scored areas. I have described them below. Low perceptual acuity meant to me lack of proper knowledge about language what makes verbal and non-verbal communication much more difficult. It involves paying more attention to context and lets properly recognize peoples emotions in interpersonal relations. To me, the right level (I mean enough high) of personal autonomy is required to feel comfortable in every situation because personal autonomy gives the strong sense of identity. For the next two weeks after the self-assessment I was meeting with people from different countries. They were mostly Erasmus program students' exchange participants and a few other foreign students. We have been eating meals together (restaurants, our flats at dormitories), talking, it happened that I was helping some persons with their projects for a few times (otherwise they could not have enough time for me so I have decided to help them and stay longer in their company).

Finally, the number of meetings started to bring results. I have begun to feel even more open in expressing myself and more autonomic. Also, I have discovered that I do not really need serious disputes about autonomy or perceptual acuity. I think, this must be related to my previous international experience. I guess that many of my behavior patterns that are cross-culturally proper had been already mold during my stays in Turkey and in England (together more than half a year abroad). I conclude that my inter-cultural abilities vary and depend on my personal relations with representatives of various cultures. When I stop doing this as frequently as before then my personal autonomy and perceptual acuity start deteriorated. Probably the rest of dimensions are also becoming worse but much slower. Fortunately, both of deteriorated dimensions are self-recovering in the cross-cultural environment.

### **3. The self-assessment repeated. Discussion on results.**

In order to verify the assumptions described in previous point, I have decided to perform the self-assessment once again. The outcome is situated below.

Emotional Resilience: 72

Flexibility/Openness: 75

Perceptual Acuity: 65

Personal Autonomy: 55

The two previously worse dimensions climbed significantly. Perceptual acuity rose almost 23% and personal autonomy – almost 62% (!). In my opinion, these results are very good. Actually, I claim that such great increase could have place only because of my previous contact with

other cultures because, in my perception, it is impossible to observe a 62% increase just in few weeks. Subjects related to culture, approach to culture, cross-cultural abilities and, finally scored dimensions are complex issues, they reflect lots of things for example the way of thinking, openness of the culture that somebody grew up, his of her family and more. In general, these dimensions cannot be really changed in short time, without going through time-consuming stages of change: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, cognitive adaptation and behavior adaptation.

#### **4. Brief comparison of Turkey as anticipated business context**

During the course Turkey was chosen for anticipated business context, that requires inter-cultural communicative adaptability. I am going to analyze the significance of emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity and personal autonomy in the Turkish business context. First of all, the most important thing for Pole that is going to do business in Turkey, is openness. The time perceptions in Poland and Turkey are different. In Turkey time is much more flexible than in Poland. For Pole, being to strict with defining the time of business meeting or project completion would certainly mean plenty of misunderstandings. Moreover, as majority of Poles prefer doing rather than being, Turks are different. In Turkey, many businesspersons have already adjusted their behaviors that they present regarding to foreigners from west but there still can be a problem with recruiting Turkish staff by Polish managers. What is more, openness is also important because of the dominating religion in Turkey. Islam is strongly different religion than Christianity. Poles coming to Turkey cannot be closed in terms of religion. Otherwise, they will treat Muslims as unbelievers what would

not be good for business. To be honest, openness is the basic trait for westerner in Turkey. It helps with various approach to task performance (single versus multitasking), communication (Polish more instrumental attitude versus Turkish, high context culture). Moreover, openness is a trait that is the background for the raise of perceptual acuity and objectivity. For example, person with high perceptual acuity must be more objective and recognize whether strong behavior of Turkish businessperson is the expression of real satisfaction or just politeness. Personal autonomy at the high level will let the businessperson express his or her emotions despite some, often in business, pressure. This pressure can be strong because Turks have comparably strong group orientation. Pole in Turkey may make a decision under the group pressure, thinking that certain behavior was strongly expected by business partners and would be impolite to discuss with them. Instead, such businessperson should explain his or her point of view to Turkish partners, justifying also, that in Polish culture approach is different.

Please see the Hofstede's dimensions for Poland and Turkey attached below. The range of the scale is from 0 to 100.

	Power distance	Uncertainty avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity
Turkey	66	85	37	45
Poland	50	50	60	70

**Table 1.** Comparison of the Hofstede's dimensions for Poland and Turkey

**Source:** Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (1984). Hofstede's culture dimensions: An independent validation using Rokeach's value survey. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 15(4), 417-433.

There are especially different scores for three of Hofstede's dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. Again, I would like to emphasize the openness of the visitor. During doing business in Turkey, Polish businessperson may need emotional resilience in order to cooperate with people that are having much stronger uncertainty avoidance incentive. However, as his individualism and masculinity are much higher than in Turkey, he should be rather delicate in expressing his personality (exception: emotions) and masculinity in order not to be offensive. What is more, because individualism is much bigger in Poland than in Turkey, the personal autonomy level can be also found as too low rather by a Turk coming to Poland than the other way around.

### **Conclusions**

To conclude, I have achieved my goal to improve perceptual acuity and personal autonomy. I re-took the self-assessment after the implementation of the action plan. However, the increase was too high to think that it was the effect of my action plan only. I perceive the role of previous cultural experience here. Fortunately, the dimensions I had decided to improve seem to be recovered. In terms of my contextual business environment, the most important seem to be that dimensions, which I had mostly developed previously: openness/flexibility and emotional resilience.

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