

TIME PERCEPTION FOR FRENCH AND RUSSIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE LIGHT OF THE LACUNA THEORY

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Аннотация. У каждой культуры есть свое понятие времени. Это означает, что во время межкультурной встречи обе стороны могут иметь разное отношение ко времени. Исследователи обсуждали эти различия в восприятии и предложили свою собственную классификацию (Hofstede 2005). Некоторые из них придуманные именно для международного бизнеса (Trompenaar 1997, Meyer 2014).

Действительно, такие различия окажут непосредственное влияние на международный бизнес. Безусловно, так обстоит дело между Россией и Францией, которые являются давними партнерами по бизнесу. Россия - более краткосрочная, синхронная и гибко-планирования культура. Франция - долгосрочно ориентированная, последовательная и структурно-гравитационное планирование культура.

Abstract. Each culture has its own perception of time. This means that during an intercultural encounter, both parties may have a different relation to time. Researchers have been discussing these differences in perception and suggested their own classification (Hofstede 2005). Some of them have been modelled specifically for business (Trompenaar 1997, Meyer 2014)

Indeed, such differences are likely to have a direct impact on international business. This is certainly the case between Russia and France, who are long-time business partners. While Russia can be considered a short-time oriented, synnchronic and flexible-scheduling culture, France is the opposite : long-term oriented, sequential and structured-scheduling.

Ключевые слова: Восприятие времени, русский, французский, международный бизнес, межкультурная коммуникация, теория лакуны

Keywords: Time perception, Russian, French, international business, intercultural communication, lacuna theory

Introduction

The study is designed to get a better understanding of time perception between different cultures: the French and the Russians. We will focus mainly on the business setting.

Time is of utmost importance in this sphere, since a different perception of time between two business partners can have important undesired outcomes. In this article, we are going to explore the different ways of classifying cultures according to their relation to time and we will use the lacuna theory to understand these differences.

As universal as time may be, all cultures do not have the same perception of it. We can divide the world's cultures according to their relation to it. This is what Geert Hofstede (2005) did by using dimensions. According to him, cultures belong to one of two categories when it comes to the interpretation of time: short-term orientation or long-term orientation. The terms are self-explanatory. A short-term oriented culture might favour actions that will bring immediate results while a long-term oriented culture is more likely to and see the bigger picture.

Hofstede's dimensions are not the only way of categorizing perception of time. Trompenaar (1997) developed a framework specific to the business setting. He formulated it in a different manner: he describes perception of time as being either sequential, or synchronic. On the one hand, sequential cultures see time as hierarchical, divided into sequences. On the other hand, synchronic cultures regard time as flexible, rather than linear. As a consequence, less emphasis is put on planning and punctuality.

Erin Meyer (2014) developed another model specific to the business sphere. In her view, scheduling can be either structured or flexible. A structured-scheduling culture puts a strong emphasis on organisation and deadlines. A flexible-scheduling culture see organisation as less important and see tasks as more movable.

All in all, the perception of time in a culture can be divided in several ways: short-term oriented or long-term oriented, sequential or synchronic, or structured-scheduling or flexible-scheduling.

Lacunae can be defined as the phenomena of a culture that have no equivalent in another culture regarding both linguistic as well as cultural specifics (Jolowicz, 2006).

The lacuna model is a major theory of Russian psycholinguistics. It was developed by Yury Sorokin and Irina Markovina in 1977. This model is a tool for describing and understanding cultural differences.

Methods

We selected 43 people to be part of a survey: 29 Russian people who work in France, and 14 French people who work in Russia. They were asked a series of questions on the cultural differences they noticed and the habits they picked up after living in the other country. They were also asked to quote proverbs from the language of their host country, provided that they knew the language.

Finally, they were to agree or disagree with statements and describe the reaction they would have in an hypothetical situation. The assumption was the following: *"You work in Russian offices in Moscow. You have been told for several*

months about a very important meeting for which you will have to make a presentation. You devote a lot of time to its preparation and you even have a head start. But here's the thing... 3 days before the big day, you are told that the meeting is cancelled. What is your reaction? Are you surprised?"

Results

The results were very revealing. When asked about cultural differences, a French participant answered *"The relation to time for Russians is not the same as ours : for them, long-term equals 3 months"*.

When asked about changes in habits, Russian participants reported having improved the structure of their time. One participant mentioned that since living in France, they started 'planning ahead. A few participants reported a change in eating habits, namely eating at fixed hours. This is common in France, but less in Russia, where people tend to eat whenever they feel hungry.

Likewise, the study of proverbs has yielded interesting results. The most quoted proverb used by the Russians was *"Qui vivra verra"*, which translates to *"Time will tell"*. This further emphasizes the importance of living in the moment, and planning later.

The case study highlighted similar results in the work environment. Most participants agreed that they would not be surprised if a Russian company postponed a meeting at the last minute. The reaction was, however, not the same on both side. Most French participants reported that they would have been angry and would try to understand the reason for cancelling the hypothetical meeting. Russians tend to display less emotions. A small portion of the participants reported to feel upset, but the majority seemed indifferent. One participant answered *"No difference"* and another one *"It happens"*. We can infer that such reactions are due to the fact that they are used to it and flexible scheduling is a part of the culture, unlike the French who care about the structure of time.

Conclusion

Time is perceived very differently in Russia and in France. Russians, as the results of our study shows us, are indeed short-time oriented, have a sequential perception of time and a flexible approach to scheduling.

The perception of time of a culture is not obvious, but hidden under the surface. Nevertheless, differences in interpretation can have far-reaching consequences. The French are more comfortable planning for the long-term and consider what may be beneficial in the long run while the Russians are likely to favour actions that yield results on the short term.

This is why it is particularly important to understand the perception members of a culture have on different matters to enable them to better communicate with others. The same study could be carried out between any two cultures. It could be used in a totally different sphere, still using the lacuna model as a tool to describe and understand the differences between different cultures. In other words, filling the gaps.

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