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*Research interests: development of foreign language teachers' moral attitudes, English language teaching/learning process, foreign language didactics, intercultural communication, intercultural competence*

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## SOME ISSUES OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND VALUES

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*Intercultural sensitivity, being defined as an attitude reflecting the degree of willingness to interact with people from different cultures, is considered to be crucial to promote dialogue between cultures and social cohesion in today's diverse and globalised world. Based on the qualitative research carried out at Vilnius University, the article presents the findings of students' viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment. The respondents' answers revealed their emotional empathy as well as readiness to solve conflicting situations in a constructive way, in the form of dialogue and negotiations, with reference to values as the criteria of evaluation. A conclusion is made that the demonstrated level of students' emotional empathy and their reliance on values could have a positive impact on their intercultural sensitivity.*

*KEY WORDS: intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, values, intercultural workplace environment.*

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### Introduction

Intercultural communication takes place everywhere in our contemporary daily life on different micro (intra and inter-personal) and macro (inter-institutional or inter-organisational, international) levels. For such a communication to be effective and constructive, universities are expected to prepare knowledgeable leaders being ready and capable of working in diverse multicultural environments. Therefore, university curricula should provide the necessary theoretical knowledge important for understanding diverse multicultural societies and offer the opportunities for their practical implementation thus enabling students – future leaders in many spheres of our life – to live in pluralistic democratic societies.

In S. Hurtado's (2005) opinion, it is necessary to develop our students' moral imaginations, cultivate their moral virtues, foster their moral reasoning skills, and link this with their multicultural experiences. For instance, S. G. Sample's (2013) research, based on the experience of students studying abroad for at least a semester, proves the importance of

having taken courses in cultural adaptation before leaving their home country and coming back. When they return from abroad, substantial positive changes are found in intercultural sensitivity of these students (compared to those who have not studied abroad), which was proved by different assessment methods both direct (reflection papers and the reporting of critical incidents) and indirect (use of the Intercultural Development Inventory).

Other researchers such as L. Endicott, T. Bock, D. Narvaez (2003) also acknowledge the importance of multicultural experiences. The results of their research, which was partly built on M. J. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), indicate that moral judgment and intercultural development are significantly related to one another. Besides, both are considered by the researchers to be related to multicultural experiences. They claim that multicultural experiences influence both types of development, i.e. moral reasoning and intercultural sensitivity. According to them, intercultural and moral development share a common element of the critical shift from rigid to flexible thinking. In moral reasoning, this is characterized by the shift from conventional to post-conventional thinking (Kohlberg, 1981). In intercultural development, it is believed that a similar movement occurs between the ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations of intercultural sensitivity.

The issues of intercultural sensitivity are frequently viewed as important in both theoretical analyses of people's adjustment to other cultures and in applied programmes to prepare people to live and work effectively in cultures other than their own. An interesting research was carried out by R. B. Bhawuk (1992), who attempted to specify exactly what people should be sensitive to when they find themselves in other cultures. R. B. Bhawuk (1992) measured intercultural sensitivity by examining people's understanding of the different ways they can behave depending upon whether they are interacting in an individualistic or a collectivist culture, their open-mindedness concerning the differences they encounter in other cultures, and their flexibility concerning the behaviour in unfamiliar ways that is determined by norms of other cultures. The researcher arrived at a practical conclusion for the content of cross-cultural training programmes, i. e. people can be encouraged to modify specific behaviours so that they are appropriate to the culture in which they find themselves and so that they will have a greater chance of achieving their goals.

Another researcher S. Hurtado (2005) in her description of research findings indicates a relevant pedagogical technique called "relational sculpting" that could be used in order to enhance students' emotional awareness and understanding of other people's perspectives as well as empathy for them. Intercultural sensitivity being interrelated with empathy was also reported by P. Mico-Cebrian, and M. J. Cava (2014) in their research that aimed at establishing the link between intercultural sensitivity, empathy, self-concept and satisfaction with life of 10–13 year-old-students. Their findings revealed that students who had higher levels of emotional empathy, social self-concept and satisfaction with life demonstrated higher intercultural sensitivity.

Intercultural sensitivity, being defined by some authors (Ruiz-Bernardo, P, Ferrández-Berruero, R, & Sales-Ciges, M 2012) as an attitude reflecting the degree of willingness

to interact with people from different cultures, is considered to be crucial to promote dialogue between cultures and social cohesion in today's diverse and globalised world. Some researchers (Brew, Cairns, 2004; Marsella, 2005; Mitchell R. Hammer, 2011) look into the importance of intercultural sensitivity in workplace surroundings and the ways how possible intercultural conflicts in workplaces can be avoided. Anthony J. Marsella (2005) argues that we must recognize the power of culture in constructing our realities and the reluctance we have as human beings to tolerate challenges to these realities because they introduce unacceptable levels of uncertainty and doubt. Following a discussion of various examples of cultures in conflict associated with political and religious reasons, the author provides recommendations for understanding, negotiating, and mediating conflict via the use of cultural understanding, learning, and the development of cultures of peace.

In many cases of intercultural communication, as M. T. Brown (2005) puts it, there can emerge differences but they may not always mean disagreements. If a decision or a judgment should be passed by intercultural communicators, however, then difference can lead to disagreements or even conflicts. Openness to both differences and disagreements depends on the type of cultural context, as well as on people's beliefs, values and attitudes, encompassing their knowledge, readiness and motivation to be open to others. Mitchell R. Hammer (2005) examined how disagreements and emotion function across cultural context in resolving conflict. The author proposed a theoretical framework for understanding differences in conflict resolution styles based on high/low levels of directness and high/low levels of emotional expressiveness: (1) discussion style (direct & emotionally restrained), (2) engagement style (direct & emotionally expressive), (3) accommodation style (indirect & emotionally restrained), and (4) dynamic style (indirect and emotionally expressive).

F. P. Brew, D. R. Cairns (2004) proposed that in a multicultural workplace, cultural orientation alone may not predict the choice of strategy as situational constraints may also contribute there. Their study examined three examples of situational constraints in work conflict interactions: time deadlines (non-urgent or urgent), cultural identity of the other person (same or different), and work status of the other party (superior or subordinate). The results of their research showed that East Asians only managed conflict more indirectly than Australians with superiors, particularly a Western superior. Urgency, cultural identity of the other and the work status of the other were all found to moderate conflict choices based on cultural predictions.

As A. Hamburg (2012) claims nowadays international business cannot be imagined without intercultural communication. Issues of acceptance and management of cultural diversity play a key role in successful international business relations. Business people who lack intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity with no acceptance for and knowledge about cultural differences and their importance cannot hope for great success in maintaining harmonious relationships in multicultural working environments. What is more important, intercultural communication involves the dimension of values, beliefs and different societal expectations. As L. Endicott, T. Bock, D. Narvaez (2003) put it, intercultural communication and the domain of values are closely connected and are integral components of our daily social functioning. Intercultural skills are considered

to help people live and work in multicultural societies, whereas their abilities to solve ethical dilemmas “are critical at even the most minor levels of interpersonal interaction. Increasing diversity also presents ethical challenges and we find that some of the most difficult moral dilemmas are those that involve conflicting value frameworks” (Endicott, Bock, Narvaez, 2003, p. 404). In conflicting situations when decisions have to be made by intercultural communicators, the question remains whether or not to adapt to the values of other cultures.

Obviously, there are many classifications of values; philosophers still cannot agree upon the hierarchy of values and controversial discussions among scientists (philosophers, psychologists, scientists of education) are still ongoing. A representative of educational philosophy, Terence McLaughlin (1997), for example, claims that most of the discussions in contemporary democratic societies evolve around the choice of moral values. Being a representative of a liberal educational trend, he suggests that there should be societal values which, due to their inevitably fundamental nature, should be obligatory to all the members of the society and personal values that could be chosen by everyone freely. However numerous and complicated the classifications of values might be, there has been a trend to give priority to moral values: *solidarity, peacefulness, respect, love*, which usually manifest themselves in relationships with oneself, others and the world at large. Some authors (Wick, Freeman, Werhane, Martin, 2010) also suggest that a way out might be universal values, however, many contemporary philosophers reject this idea claiming that the context and culture play a substantial role in shaping morality. On the other hand, others acknowledge that there is a cross-cultural aspect of morality. Thus, there should be universal moral principles that cut across different cultures and that most people can at least agree, such as *fairness, justice, helping others in distress*, etc., around which the moral reflection can take place leading to the most appropriate solution for the interested parties in a conflicting situation. As it has been mentioned, intercultural communication and the domain of values are interconnected and are integral components of our daily life, the questions raised in the research are whether conflicting situations in intercultural workplace environments can be primarily viewed from ethical rather than intercultural perspective.

Therefore, **the aim** of this article is to determine the respondents’ approach to values in a conflicting intercultural situation. The following **objectives** of the research are set:

- 1) To reveal the respondents’ viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment.
- 2) To determine the respondents’ readiness to look for solutions in a conflicting situation in an intercultural workplace environment.

## Methods of research

**Theoretical:** *analysis of scientific literature.* Analysis, comparison, evaluation of psychological, philosophical, pedagogical literature.

**Empirical: Qualitative research:** *a situation evaluation method* was used to determine the respondents’ ability to predict behavioural strategy in a free-choice situation and to find out if behavioural intention meets the requirements of moral values, if personal and

social consequences of possible actions are taken into consideration, accepting or rejecting requirements of moral values as well as making an attempt to find out the underlying motives of those actions. The method of the situation was chosen, which, as B. Bitinas (2006) suggests, helps to assess the level of social conscience, or even allows to predict the actual behaviour of a person in different situations. The respondents were given a free choice situation where they had to assess the situation, the behaviour of its protagonists and to project possible behavioural patterns from the point of view of moral values.

**The research sample** consisted of 103 students (aged from 19 to 25, 35 male, 68 female) of international business management (56) and foreign languages (47) of Vilnius University. The research was carried out at Vilnius University in 2013.

## The methodological background of the research

The research was built on *the ideas and insights of*:

- *humanistic psychology and pedagogy*, according to which education and self-education are the most necessary factors in the development of a personality; education inspires one's efforts to improve; favourable conditions of education provide the possibility for one's self-realisation and free choice of values (Maslow 2006, Rogers, 2005);
- *constructivism theory* claiming that each person is a uniquely constructed individual that cannot function separately, any intention of human behaviour is collectivist in nature, social reality is determined by all the members of the group, therefore maintaining relations with others requires respect for others; the decision making process should focus on the welfare of the community preserving each member's honour and fairness of pluralistic societies (Boudourides 1998, May 1987);
- the interpretation of an *intercultural (communicative) competence* comprising attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the view that a language learner moving between cultures is an intercultural learner involved in a dynamic, developmental, ongoing process of intercultural competence development which engages him/her cognitively, behaviourally, and affectively (Byram 2000, Neuliep 2006);
- *cognitive psychology*, the parallelism of cognitive processes and moral development of a personality; the relevance of cognitive processes in solving moral dilemmas; cognitive skills determining characteristics of logical thinking: reasoning, abstraction, conceptualization, constructive imagination, on the basis of which arguments are constructed; that a person can consciously manage and change his/her behaviour having a deeper awareness of the causes of one's behaviour (L. Kohlberg, 1981; J. Piaget, 1999);
- *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)*, the framework consisting of six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference, claiming that one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations increases. Each stage of DMIS indicating a particular cognitive structure that is expressed in certain kinds of attitudes and behaviour related to cultural difference (Bennett, 1993);

- *the attitude towards values and their place in educational process of Lithuanian and foreign scientists of education as well as on their view that all objects of the material and spiritual world are values since they are valued according to the criteria of human morality (Aramavičiūtė, 2005; Bitinas, 2004; Jovaiša, 2003; R. Popovici, 2006).*

### **The respondents' viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment**

As it was mentioned before, the aim of the qualitative research was carried out to reveal the respondents' readiness to focus on values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment. The participants of the research were given a situation (*An X manager working in X country is unhappy that his secretary usually arrives 30 minutes (or even more) late. He knows that the traffic in the city X is really very bad, but this is getting ridiculous. One morning when she arrives late, he explodes in front of the others in the busy office. He then takes her aside and tells her that if she can't get to work on time she may risk losing her job. She responds by handing in her resignation.* Gibson, 2002, p. 34) and they had to evaluate the behaviour of its protagonists and to project possible behavioural patterns, i.e. they had to assess the manager's behaviour, the secretary's behaviour, the secretary's feelings and to project the possible behaviour of the secretary. The respondents were given some guiding questions (*What do you think the manager should have done or shouldn't have done? Why did the secretary behave in such a way? How would you have felt in the secretary's place? What would you have done in her place?*) which they were asked to answer by commenting and providing their arguments for or against the manager's and the secretary's behaviour. The analysis of the research participants' answers to the questions revealed the following categories and subcategories that helped to determine their viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment presented in the above mentioned situation.

It seems obvious that nearly a half of the respondents (51) considered the manager's behaviour as inappropriate and expressed their opinion that the manager should have resorted to a dialogue, should have found out the reasons for the secretary's late arrival to work and considered an attempt of a compromise as a suitable outcome of the situation. Nearly a third of the students (30) thought that the manager's behaviour was unethical as they considered that no one had the right to shout at others and even thought that the manager had to apologise to the secretary for shouting at her in front of other colleagues. Less than a quarter (15) considered the manager's behaviour as unprofessional and explained that it was the manager's responsibility to maintain good atmosphere at the work place and to avoid any kind of tensions and, in case of an emergence of conflicting situations, to solve them in a peaceful manner. Only the minority of the respondents (9) associated the manager's behaviour with a lack of intercultural knowledge by saying that the manager should have been aware of cultural differences of the country he was working in; blamed him for being insensitive and lacking empathy for others by shouting at the secretary in front of other employees. Only very few students (5) responded that

Table 1. The respondents' evaluation of the situation (categories and subcategories)

CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES	NUMBER OF STATEMENTS	EXAMPLES OF STATEMENTS
Manager's behaviour	Attempt of a dialogue, compromise	51	'<...> the manager should have found the reasons why the secretary was late <...>'
	Lack of intercultural knowledge	9	'<...> the manager should have paid attention that he was working in another cultural background; he didn't pay attention to cultural differences <...>' '<...> the manager should have been more flexible because he was working in different cultural environment <...>' '<...> the manager lacked sensitivity, acceptance of inappropriate behaviour of a representative of different culture <...>'
	Unethical	30	'<...> he should have spoken with the secretary alone and explained to her that it was wrong to be late<...>'. '<...> the manager should have given a chance to the secretary <...>'. '<...> the manager should have apologized to her <...>'. '<...> no one has the right to shout at other people. There is such a thing as respect and control <...>'
	Unprofessional	15	'<...> the manager should have reprimanded her earlier in his office <...>'. '<...> the manager should have explained that she was acting wrongly and should have lowered her salary for being late <...>'. '<...> it is the manager's responsibility to maintain good atmosphere in the workplace <...>'
	Right	5	'<...> the manager behaved in the right way as he had warned the secretary about her problem and the actions which might be taken in the future <...>'. '<...> the secretary did not show respect for the company's values <...>'. '<...> the manager should have fired the secretary at once <...>'
Secretary's behaviour	Impulsive	13	'<...> the secretary acted impulsively, she should have stayed as she was to be blamed <...>'
	Irresponsible	25	'<...> inability to plan time <...>'. '<...> it is her responsibility to work well; it's her duty, so she must not be late <...>' '<...> she should have improved her time management <...>'. '<...> unacceptable behaviour of the secretary <...>'

Secretary's feelings	Humiliation, shame, embarrassment	93	'<...> she felt humiliated being shouted at in the presence of all the other people <...>'. '<...> the manager acted impulsively and she felt humiliated being shouted at in front of the others <...>'. '<...> the criticism of her was destructive <...>'.
	anger	16	'<...> a ngrly with the manager as well as angry with herself for being unable to plan time <...>'. '<...> would not recommend anyone to work for such manager <...>'. '<...> boss had not said anything before, so she just used this opportunity of being late <...>'. '<...> the boss had not told anything earlier <...>'.
	Guilt	18	'<...> she might have felt that she was to be blamed for being late <...>'. '<...> she should have acknowledged her fault <...>'.
Possible projected behaviour of the secretary	Dialogue, compromise, readiness to keep the job	53	'<...> would try to explain the reasons of being late <...>'. '<...> try to change my habit of being late and stay; try to work more seriously <...>'. '<...> the manager did not force her out; so she should have kept her job as she herself was to be blamed for being late <...>'.
	Apology	17	'<...> the secretary should have apologized as she was herself to be blamed <...>'. '<...> Promise to change <...>'. '<...> maybe working processes are undermined due to the secretary's absence, she should have apologized for that<...>'.
	Resignation	28	'<...> could not put up with such humiliation and would resign immediately <...>'. '<...> should resign and give a lesson to the manager to make him understand that his behaviour was wrong <...>'. '<...> sue the employer and resign <...>'.

the manager's behaviour was right and that he should have fired the secretary at once because by being late she did not respect the company's values. Thus, it could be said that the students viewed the situation as an ethical dilemma and evaluated the manager's behaviour from the point of view of the values of responsibility and respect for others without giving much regard to the intercultural context of the situation.

Nearly a quarter of the respondents (25) evaluated the secretary's behaviour as irresponsible because they considered that it was her duty to arrive on time and that she had to improve her time management. The minority of the research participants (13) viewed the secretary's behaviour as impulsive. Thus, it could be maintained that the respondents



did not assess the situation from the perspective of a different cultural point of view, but through the lens of their previously acquired schemas and expectations of how one should behave in such working environment.

When asked to imagine how they would have felt in the secretary's place, while evaluating the secretary's feelings in the given situation, the majority of the respondents (93) acknowledged that she must have felt humiliated, ashamed and found the whole situation really embarrassing for her. The minority of the respondents (16) thought that the secretary must have felt anger, the feeling being mixed with some kind of revenge ('<...> *would not recommend anyone to work for such manager <...>*') and blame ('<...> *the boss had not told earlier <...>*'). Almost the same number of the students (18) expressed the opinion that the secretary herself was to be blamed for such behaviour. Therefore, it could be assumed that the majority of the respondents empathised with the secretary.

While projecting the possible behaviour of the secretary, half of the respondents (53) were in favour of maintaining a dialogue with the manager as well as expressed the opinion that the secretary had to compromise and even apologise for her inappropriate behaviour (17 of the respondents were in favour of an apology). However, a little less than a third of the research participants were of the opinion that the secretary should resign at once, this action being associated with a kind of revenge as well ('<...> *should resign and give a lesson to the manager to make him understand that his behaviour was wrong <...>*', '<...> *sue the employer and resign <...>*'). Thus, it could be said that the majority of the students were more willing to maintain a dialogue and expressed readiness to negotiate and keep both interested parties satisfied.

## Conclusions

- The analysis of the research data revealed positive results: the respondents treated the given situation as an ethical dilemma and referred to values in decision making process while offering solutions to resolve the conflicting situation in an intercultural workplace environment. It should be mentioned that the respondents were surveyed prior to the courses in intercultural communication and business ethics and corporate social responsibility. It could be assumed that these courses could broaden their understanding of intercultural working environments and enable students to increase the level of their intercultural sensitivity.
- Another positive conclusion could be drawn as well: the respondents expressed willingness and readiness to solve the conflicting situation in an intercultural workplace environment in a constructive way, by means of dialogue and negotiations. The analysis of the respondents answers showed that the students expressed emotional empathy to the main protagonist of the situation, which may as well lead to the assumption that the demonstrated level of their emotional empathy could have a positive impact on their intercultural sensitivity.

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*Research interests: development of foreign language teachers' moral attitudes, English language teaching/learning process, foreign language didactics, intercultural communication, intercultural competence*

## **SOME ISSUES OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND VALUES**

### **Summary**

The article deals with a research into students' viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment. Intercultural sensitivity is considered to be essential for successful intercultural communication in today's diverse and globalised world. Therefore, universities should provide the necessary theoretical background to foster their students' understanding of multicultural societies and offer opportunities to master practical skills how to communicate successfully. Besides, intercultural communication is closely related with values that are integral components of our daily social functioning. Intercultural skills are considered to help people live and work in multicultural societies, whereas their ability to solve ethical dilemmas is critical for everyday interpersonal interaction. Based on the qualitative research carried out at Vilnius University in 2014, the article presents the findings on students' viewpoints on the place of values in decision making process in an intercultural workplace environment. The analysis of the research data revealed that the respondents, who were students of business management and foreign languages, demonstrated emotional empathy as well as readiness to solve conflicting situations in a constructive way, in the form of dialogue and negotiations, with reference to values as the criteria of evaluation. A conclusion is made that the students' emotional empathy and their reliance on values could have a positive impact on their intercultural sensitivity. As the students were surveyed prior to the courses in intercultural communication and business ethics and corporate social responsibility, an assumption is made that these courses could broaden their understanding of intercultural working environments and enable students to increase the level of their intercultural sensitivity.

KEY WORDS: intercultural communication, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, values, intercultural workplace environment.

**Roma Kriaučiūniene**

Viliaus universitetas

**KAI KURIE TARPKULTŪRINIO JAUTRUMO IR VERTYBIŲ KLAUSIMAI****Santrauka**

Straipsnyje aptariamas studentų požiūris į vertybes sprendžiant konfliktines situacijas daugiakultūroje darbo aplinkoje. Norint sėkmingai bendrauti dabartiniame pasaulyje, būtinas tarpkultūrinis jautrumas. Būtent todėl universitetai turi suteikti studentams ne tik teorinių žinių, bet ir sudaryti galimybes įgyti praktinių sėkmingo bendravimo su skirtingų kultūrų žmonėmis įgūdžių. Be to, bendravimas su skirtingų kultūrų žmonėmis yra glaudžiai susijęs su vertybėmis, kurios neatsiejamos nuo mūsų kasdienio socialinio gyvenimo. Bendravimo su skirtingų kultūrų žmonėmis įgūdžiai padeda gyventi ir dirbti daugiakultūroje visuomenėje, o gebėjimas spręsti etines dilemas yra svarbi kasdienio ir daugiakultūrio bendravimo dalis.

Remiantis kokybinio tyrimo, atlikto Vilniaus universitete 2014 metais, duomenimis, straipsnyje atskleidžiamas studentų požiūris į vertybes priimant sprendimus daugiakultūroje konfliktinėje darbo vietos aplinkoje. Tyrimo duomenų analizė parodė respondentų, kurie buvo verslo vadybos ir užsienio kalbų studentai, emocinę empatiją bei nusiteikimą spręsti prieštaringas situacijas daugiakultūroje darbo aplinkoje konstruktyviu dialogo ir derybų būdu, atsižvelgiant į vertybes kaip į vertinimo kriterijų. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad studentų emocinis įsijautimas ir jų požiūris į vertybes gali turėti teigiamą poveikį jų jautrumui bendraujant su skirtingų kultūrų žmonėmis. Studentų apklausa buvo atlikta jiems neišklausius tarpkultūrinio bendravimo, verslo etikos ir įmonių socialinės atsakomybės kursų, todėl daroma prielaida, kad tokie kursai padėtų praplėsti jų supratimą apie daugiakultūrę darbo aplinką, taip pat padidintų jų jautrumą bendraujant su skirtingų kultūrų žmonėmis.

**REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** Tarpkultūrinė komunikacija, tarpkultūrinis jautrumas, tarpkultūrinė kompetencija, vertybės, tarpkultūrinė darbo vietos aplinka.

Įteikta 2014 metų liepos 15 d.