

# **Complex or Simplistic approach (as per Richards Nisbett) by analyzing the culture orientation on media articles - the view of students of Intercultural Management in DOBA Faculty. Case Study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Different cultures perceive events from different point of view. Western cultures deal with the actor or who while Eastern cultures deal with context or why. As Nisbett states in the book “The Geography of Thought” media show the difference in approach and can tell us a lot about the culture of society. In the school year 2016/2017 students of International Week on DOBA Faculty were providing their analyses of their media as per culture analyses based on Nisbett book. We can get some insights about the countries cultures, reflected in national media and as well about the way how students of Summer School on Doba Faculty contemplate and understand the present situation in the world. Interesting answers from their Assignment 2 were gathered and presented shortly for purpose of this article.

Key words: East values, West values, media approach, interpretation of an event, who versus why, Intercultural Management, Doba Faculty

## **POVZETEK**

V različnih kulturah se na dogodke gleda različno. V zahodnih kulturah je poudarek na izvajalcu (na tem kdo dela), medtem ko vzhodne kulture dajejo poudarek celoti in vprašanju zakaj. Kot je v knjigi The Geography of Thought poudaril avtor Nisbett, nam pregled medijev pove veliko o razlikah pri pristopu in o tem, kakšna kultura prevladuje v določeni skupnosti. Na DOBA Fakulteti smo v šolskem letu 2016/2017 v okviru mednarodnega tedna s študenti izvedli nalogo analize medijev v njihovi državi z vidika kulturne analize – glede na omenjeno knjigo. Tako smo dobili vpogled v kulture posameznih držav, kakor tudi v načine razmišljanja študentov poletne šole. Zanimivi odgovori iz šolske naloge so zbrani in predstavljeni v pričujočem dokumentu.

Ključne besede: Vzhodnjaške vrednote, Zahodnjaške vrednote, pristop medijev, tolmačenje dogodka, kdo v primerjavi z zakaj, medkulturni menedžment, Doba Fakulteta.

## **1. Introduction**

At DOBA Faculty, Maribor, Slovenia the subject Intercultural Management has been thought since 2010. It is a four week online program, with goals to enable students:

- To develop skills those are applicable in everyday life and to make students capable of coping with the challenges in the global world.
- To develop an intercultural awareness and an efficient communication to act in a global world.
- To get to know the intercultural differences based on different, i.e. Hofstede's model.
- To make students understand the way the process of communication varies throughout different cultures.

This Case Study will focus on the students' view of media approach in their country. They did try to find out whether the media reports in the month of the attending the study were more »western« or »eastern« oriented and what this tell about their countries culture. It is a extended case study, as we have multiple students with their answers. All the conclusions are done on one year students only (2016/17), so the countries that are presented and number of the students from one country varied. No hypothesis can be confirmed. Anyway, some patterns in their judgment of the media approach are seen and from student's reports some valuable information about media world in this countries are presented. In the future steps additional patterns can be detected and open a base for a more scientific research on a present culture, as mirrored in media reports in different countries.

Subject of Intercultural Management is a part of DOBA Summer School and is taking part each year in June, beginning of July. There were 69 students joining the programme in the mentioned school year. The third week of the programme is a little different. There is a group of international students, which join the students of regular program. In this week they do work in mixed team. In School year 2016/17 in this so called International Week there were all together 101 students from 28 countries: Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Croatia, India, Ireland, Canada, Kenya, China, Latvia, Macedonia, Nepal, Netherland, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Tanzania, Turkey, United Arab Emirates. Some of the students do study in one country (as assigned in application), but they are from other nationality/country.

## **2. Theory Section**

### **2.1. Assignment at Intercultural Management as a base for Research**

Students basic literature are 2 books: Hofstede, G. J., Pedersen, P., & Hofstede, G. Exploring culture and Nisbett R.E., The Geography of Thoughts,

Getting in touch with different cultures is easier when one is aware of possible ways how to structure culture. Exploring Culture by G. Hofstede present training that contain all Hofstede dimensions. The book uses the triad: awareness-knowledge-skills to indicate order of learning and hence possible level of goals for learners. (Hofstede, 2006)

Autor Nisbett R.E. in the book "The Geography of Thoughts" states that people understand the world differently, depending on their background, the environment they have been raised in, the ecologies and social structures they have been involved in. (Nisbett, 2009). According to Nisbett, in the west, the behaviour is based on the personality traits and other dispositions. In the contrary, in the east, the focus is on the context and the relationships. (Nisbett, 2009) Different cultures perceive events from different point of view. Western cultures deal with the actor or who while Eastern cultures deal with context or why. West got their heritage from ancient Greece and East from ancient Chinese traditions of thought. Even today in the

West are a strong sense of individual identity, freedom and love for a good debate (Nisbett, 2009). On the other side East values collectivisms, family and harmony. We can notice those differences clearly in two great philosophers, Aristotle (Greece) and Confucius (China). In their work we can see reflection of societies they lived in.

For this assignment's title was a reference to the chapter 5 of the book *The Geography of Thought*, written by Richard E. Nisbett – *The other boys made him do it*. The author explores through media articles, some on sports and some on crime, how different cultures, Western American on one side and Eastern Chinese on the other see the world. In one case how media interpret the reasons behind similar crimes committed by a Chinese physics student at the University of Iowa and an American postal worker in Royal Oak. The American media, for the aforementioned cases, pointed out the individuals' qualities that led to the crimes, while the Chinese media stressed the circumstances of the two individuals as being the main reasons for the crime (Nisbett, 2009). These two different ways of interpreting the reasons for the same situation reflect two different worldviews of two different cultures, each with its own history of evolution (at least until recently).

On the base of this literature students prepare an individual work of analysing the chosen media in their country and followed by step 2, which is the team work, where students share the results among themselves and come to new knowledge and conclusions.

Some points in both theories are indeed overlapping and it was interesting to read students reports with profound understanding the influence of different viewpoints. As Hofstede says: The pattern of life for example in more individual societies is different from collective. (Beschrijving, 2017) This can be demonstrate by measuring how fast people walk in the street as well. Collective societies walk more slow, than individual. There is deep influence on our behaviour which can be traced in the language as well. Hofstede points that English is among strict individualistic languages (linguistic approach), where word I is written in capital letters. There are language where You is written with capital, and even languages, where using of first person singular form (I) is more or less taboo..

The task for student was to combine the knowledge about the cultural dimensions, and new theory from Nisbett book and prepare the analyse of media in last month in their society.

Our article will cope with their individual answers.

### **3. Empirical Section**

#### **3.1. Survey on student answers**

All together gathered replays were from 65 students. International Week as a special DOBA Faculty offer gather students from across the globe. Some of them are not strictly following the study instructions, therefore not all of them prepared this Assignment.

In some cases students of one nationality do live in another country (Croatian in Switzerland, Nepalese in Germany, Croatian in Slovenia and Slovenian in Great Britain). There were able to choose which countries media they want to analyse.

On the base of the literature students prepare an individual work of analysing the chosen media in their country and followed by step 2, which is the team work, where students share

the results among themselves and come to new knowledge and conclusions. They were free to choose media or more media and the articles.

a) Table 1: Content on the articles, that were chosen for the exercise

| <u>content</u>           | <u>number of students answers on subject</u> |
|--------------------------|--|
| • public events          | 5  |
| • sport                  | 9  |
| • <u>criminal events</u> | <u>37</u>                                    |
| sum                      | 51   |

It is interesting how many students decided to analyse crime. The book examples were from crime and sport, but we can see significant interest in crime by student. As answers of some students were not prepared according to instructions, or even not prepare answer to this Assignment, there is smaller sum, that number of students at the course

b) Table 2. Decision about the main culture orientation, seen in media

As answers of some students were not prepared according to instructions, or even not prepare answer to this Assignment, there is smaller sum, that number of students at the course

| <u>students answer about media approach</u>   | <u>num</u> |
|---|------------|
| • student stated that cannot make decision  |            |
| • student stated that he can trace both versions of culture orientation (Slovenia, Croatia, Latvia) |            |
| • students answer was clear about the media approach*   |            |
| • students wrote about other subjects and there was no answer to teachers question                  |            |
| <u>(India, Poland, Greece, Croatia 5x, Slo 2x)</u>  |            |
| sum   |            |

\*( Examples of answers: Slovenia – W, Croatia – W, Serbia – E, Be

c) Table 3: Number of students, provide additional comments to the Assignment.

Maybe this was not exactly what was the Assignment question, but some students indeed prepared deep report and give us so much information, that this “side effect” brought to

another way of understanding needs of our student and their deep wish to live in a better world.

### how students prepared answer

provide an answer about cultural context in media

provide additional comments on the media in their country

sum

## **3.2. Some interesting extracts from students work in school year 2016/17**

This Case study leads us through students view of their media based on the theory of culture context. Some individual cases were so interesting, that even if we can see them as generalization on the base of single comment, they present broader picture and are here as a samples of further explanation of gathered answers.

Some students noticed that situation and culture change and maybe the style of writing changes through time. Especially if country is going through system transition. Sometimes they can notice overlapping of both styles. As well they noticed that style depends on media in their country. Some are using more one way and others more other way of commenting.

It was interesting to see, that some students provide the papers that were off the subject completely. They were discussing some social issue in their country, but not following the instructions for Assignment. My believe is that bad understanding of instructions is not the case. They were indeed not touching the book subject not even a little. Not open the materials/book at all. This on line course does not give any points of marks. If student provides the work, he gets points and the certificate. It is possible, that some just tried to provide something and believe that teachers will not read what was posted.

Some interesting answers and comments are added here. It is important to have in mind that this are all excerpt from bigger answer and out of context.

### **3.2.1. Turkey**

As a very cliché sentence for Turkish people, The Republic of Turkey is a bridge between East and West. Being a country between East and West means embracing both of cultures, while someone is reading Plato and discussing the Cave Allegory, her/his neighbor can tell the stories of The Thousands and One Nights from Persian culture.

When the topic is Turkey, we have to clear up which media we are talking about, the controlled several media channel or independent a few ones. This was too much apparent recently. Turkey had a referendum regarding system change on 16.04.2016 and the president, his assistants, prime minister and other ministers were in television almost every day. Channels organized joint diffusions and public didn't hear opponent voice too much. The government side talked with biased channels and they answered the questions which were

reported to them before the diffusion. They also didn't accept to be on the same diffusion with opponent parties despite the opponent ones call for it several times.

Besides that, press members have difficulties too. According to Progressive Journalists Association (PJA) Media Report over October-December 2016, 80 press members were arrested, 299 of them were taken into custody, 32 of them were violated, threatened...etc.. (Nur Bakir, 2016/2017)

### **3.2.2. Saudi Arab**

In the Arab ancient history and before Islam, Arab society has been appreciating poems and poets. After Islam's effects, Islam with its religious and after-life thoughts, needed to talk to people and used oral way of communication and reciting because that what was the only way back then. The modern country has somehow inherited this oral communication and at the same time neglected the writing way of processing information and spreading news.

As to the articles we read and how American and Chinese may have different way of thinking. However, the Chinese way of thinking is closer to the Arab and more so to the Saudi way of thinking and analyzing techniques. In Saudi Arabia, most people think in situational factors more than the personal dispositions in any story or any life event. People do not believe in following such steps and laws that lead to a full rightly understanding. In related to different culture, people in Saudi think of the whole instead of the small details. For example, people in Saudi may say "life in the U.S or in China completely different" and neglect possible similarities such as Saudi eat burgers as Americans and rice as Chinese. (Aldujayin, 2016/2017)

### **3.2.3. Slovenia**

Since all media are accessible online, we are no longer so loyal subscribers and readers, and read more information and news on various online portals. The editors of these portals are trying and having the opportunity to present the information more picturesque, up to date and attractive than the newspaper press allows. I notice that the younger generations are mostly following the news online. (Grmek, 2016/2017)

I am aware that every medium has its own owners who expect that the business of the media will be financially positive. Therefore, the media adapts to the interests. In Slovenia some media deal with facts and others with unverified information or even gossip. Everything for more readers or viewers. Most of them can also be seen aligned to some political party. The mainstream media who shows affection to the current government reports objectively and uses the official channels as their sources. These reports are usually dull and only black and white. (Mrgole, 2016/2017)

### **3.2.4. Nepal**

Each publication or station in Nepal presents accounts based on their political affiliations. Ninety percent of Nepalese newspaper do not sell advertisements and rely on sponsors, usually politically related. Journalists often are active members of political parties and use the media to advance their political careers. Many editors and publishers gain their positions through political appointments and lack journalistic education and experience. As a result, reports tend to favour partisan agendas. Representatives of independent media are usually

unable to convince political parties to share news with them. Reporters risk losing usually unable to convince political parties to share news with them. Reporters risk losing their jobs if they attempt to write or broadcast pieces contrary to government media dictates. The lack of credibility of many journalists causes Nepalese to be sceptical about news. (Mishra, 2016/2017)

### **3.2.5. Greece**

Reading the book “The Geography of Thought” by Richard E. Nisbett, I came across with some very familiar characteristics of the Greek way of thinking, especially when commenting on subjective issues based on personal beliefs. There is certainly a tendency to focus on certain and distinctive dispositions of the main character, in order to interpret the causes or the results of an action. This tendency has recently started to be influenced by the context. The constant exposure to different cultures and the ease of finding a vast amount of information has broaden Greeks’ way of thinking and started to consider important the context in which someone acts. Nevertheless, according to my assessment there is an apparent priority given to inherent attributes when describing a situation. (Dimopouios, 2016/2017)

## **4. Conclusions - Interpretation**

In our Case Study real life examples (articles) were base for students analyses. We gathered their answers and structure them in this report. Generalization can be done to some level and some conclusions about the subject (media in different countries) as well as deeper insight into DOBA students points of view and life wishes. The study of this subject indeed is a “Learning by doing” example, which enables gains to students immediately.

Many times different countries, different cultures and nations tend to have different understanding of the same event or message. Richard E. Nisbett, with, The Geography of Thought present the diversity between the ancient Greeks and the Chinese civilization, and we can trace this into nowadays society as well. Chinese had bigger focus on the collectivism in their culture, while individualism is more present in so called Western societies. The fact that the Chinese believe in the constant change and movement of everything in interactions in the whole. Even today, we have different cultures with different approaches and standpoints on the same things. Getting to know this two different approaches was a basic input for students, that were searching in their own countries media to find out what is the type of media messages and if they could trace the orientation present in their environment. Their works were precise, with deep comments and as well with stress, that we cannot just divide anything in simple boxes. It is a privilege to teach this subject on DOBA, with so many students, coming from different countries. With their answers new horizons opened for me as well. And the most important is to know that all coming generations are hungry for knowledge, good in perceiving, contemplating and dedicated to be tolerant and open.

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