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М.М. Бернштейн

УСТРАНЕНИЕ СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОГО БАРЬЕРА В МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ СТУДЕНЧЕСКОЙ ГРУППЕ

Аннотация: в статье рассмотрена проблема предотвращения трудностей, связанных с социокультурным барьером в международных группах студентов, обучающихся по магистерской программе, который рассматривается как наиболее препятствующий процессу обучения. Проанализированы факторы формирования социокультурного барьера. Автор приходит к выводу, что профилактические меры, среди которых информация об причинах барьера, а также открытая дискуссия о способах его устранения на начальной стадии обучения, могут быть результативными. В работе даны практические рекомендации по обеспечению эффективного учебного процесса и созданию комфортной образовательной среды.

Ключевые слова: коммуникация, барьер, общественное сознание, расхождения, стереотип, шкала оценки, культура.

М.М. Bernshtein

ELIMINATING SOCIOCULTURAL BARRIERS IN AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' GROUP

Abstract: the article looks into the problem of preventing the difficulties connected with sociocultural barrier in the international groups of students of MSc. Program as the most significant barrier that hinders the process of studies. The factors that create such barriers have been analyzed. The author comes to the conclusion that preventive measures such as information about the roots of the barrier, open discussion of the ways of eliminating it at the initial stage of studies can give effective results. Some practical advice on how to make the process of studies efficient and create a comfortable working environment in the classroom is given.

Keywords: *communication, barrier, social consciousness, discrepancy, stereotype, scale of assessment, culture.*

Teaching groups of Russian and foreign students on the MSc. Program “International Management” in English we realized that the problem of sociocultural barrier may prevent our students from fruitful cooperation and needs special attention. All our students are representatives of one or another nation, ethnos, class, social group, religious denomination, demographic group, etc. They are from different countries: Italy, the USA, Germany, Russia, China, Pakistan, Spain, etc. They, at their early or mid-twenties, come to study International management at IBS RANEPА after they got their Bachelor Degree in their home countries or abroad. These factors create their sociocultural differences due to belonging to a particular linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and other community or a number of communities simultaneously. These factors, closely related to each other, could impede fruitful communication and students’ mutual understanding could be significantly complicated, especially at the beginning of work.

Just to avoid the existence of this sociocultural problem that was under research of many scientists [1, p. 31–37; 3; etc.] and realizing this difficulty, each year we started our classes with the students of MSc. Program “International Management” not only with a meeting but with a kind of ice-breaking activity – training session the aim of it is to find the answer to two questions. They are: how well people are able to understand each other and why stereotypes exist.

We offer the students a short training course in business communication the aim of which is to achieve better results in both formal and informal negotiations and improve your negotiations by managing your emotions. The students get information about how personal biases and cultural differences impact negotiations, how to deal with irrational people and challenging relationships. This program is appropriate for all students who want to enhance their negotiation skills and work more productively with group mates, colleagues, partners, vendors, customers and others. No prior training in negotiation is required.

The majority of people are familiar with the situation when the words that they pronounce “do not reach” their interlocutor, or “reach”, but are not properly perceived.

It may appear unintentionally or intentionally when a person defends himself from other people's words, thoughts, experiences, putting obstacles on the way of communication or even tries to trick the partner.

This situation demonstrates one of the key problems of communication – the problem of communicative barriers. According to the researchers of the problem, the communicative barrier is everything that intervenes and ruins effective communication or blocks it [2]. This problem is very important to know about since unsuccessful communication can contain serious troubles for its participants for the simple reason that the transmitted information remains unaccepted, distorted or not accepted at all, i.e. the sender of the message is not able to achieve their goal.

One of the deepest people's misconceptions is that people think it is enough to express their thoughts and immediately other people acquire them in a proper way. This error is based on the assumption that the transmitted message reaches its addressee without any changes. In reality, it often turns out absolutely opposite: a person says one thing, and the other person listens to him and perceives something quite different. This is because all communications are exposed to numerous barriers.

The researchers made various attempts to systemize communicative barriers. We support the system suggested by V. Shepel. Thus, the researcher in his book «Handbook of a businessman and manager: Administrative Humanities» identifies the six most obvious barriers [4]:

- discomfort of the physical environment in which the message is perceived;
- inertia of inclusion, i.e. listener's concern of other problems;
- antipathy to other people's thoughts, perhaps as a result of stereotyped consciousness or ambitiousness;
- language barrier or a significant difference in the vocabulary, or the lexicon of communicators;
- professional rejection, namely, the incompetent intrusion of the communicator into the professional sphere of other interlocutors;
- rejection of the image of the communicator.

Out of these six we decided to concentrate on the barriers created by people, in particular antipathy to other people's thoughts, perhaps as a result of stereotyped consciousness or ambitiousness, rejection of the image of the communicator, and language barrier or a significant difference in the vocabulary, or the lexicon of communicators that may appear in the international small group.

According to the researchers of the problem one of the main reasons for the barriers is the phenomenon of «group social consciousness». Group consciousness that is an integral characteristic of any more or less organized group, forces a person follow the norms, principles and rules of group's behavior. Thus, being formed in a certain social environment, a person is simultaneously formed in a certain cultural environment.

On the one hand, nations, classes, social, professional, religious and other groups tend to create their own sign systems – languages, stereotypes of thinking and standards of behavior that become especially evident when people are confronted with representatives of other cultures.

On the other hand, the existence of many cultures and subcultures in our world is difficult to overestimate: otherwise the world would be monotonous [2, p. 157]. However, representatives of different cultures may face serious communication problems related to the mismatch, and sometimes the conflict of norms, values, stereotypes of consciousness and behavior.

This discrepancy generates cultural barriers to communication. The most obvious among them are linguistic and semantic barriers. These barriers usually arise because of language differences when people communicate in different languages. But sometimes people speak one and the same language (i.e., lingua franca – English) and do not understand each other because of the differences between lexicons – the vast in some and limited in others, because of the discrepancy between thesauruses – the linguistic semantic content of the spoken words. The languages differ not only in nations, but in different social groups in one and the same ethnical group. So, effective communication is possible only if communicants have a common code: a system of signs,

to which the language also refers, and share the meanings attached to these signs by communicants.

The researchers of the problem have come to two interesting conclusions.

1. Complete understanding between communicants is impossible due to the peculiarities of knowledge each of them possesses. Moreover, a full understanding, hypothetically possible with the full coincidence of cultural communicants' potential, completely depreciates any exchange of information between them, makes communication itself meaningless.

2. Complete misunderstanding caused by the absence of points of intersection of cultural potentials of communicants is also impossible, because, due to the universality of certain aspects of human experience, such points as universal sign units always exist. This makes possible to find a common language for representatives of different cultures.

So, the poles of absolute understanding and misunderstanding are equally unattainable, any communicative act is located between them, approaching one or the other pole. There is a kind of qualitative scale of assessments of the effectiveness of communication [2, p. 158].

This piece of knowledge turned out to be of great importance for students and helps them understand lots of things around them.

For successful communication, it is not enough to master only the language code, it is also necessary to master the sociocultural code of the community in the language of which communication is carried out. One and the same value can be associated in different cultures with different signifiers and generate different associations. In his book [3]. D. Gudkov gives several examples of such connotations that illustrate this statement. For example, in Russian culture, Mark Twain's novels about Tom Sawyer clearly have the status of children's literature; Americans consider *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to be a book for adults (which the author himself insisted on, by the way), the characters of the novel are accepted by the Americans as an embodiment of various types of national character.

The same author describes a number of situations that occurred in the class on the history of Russian literature for foreign students at Moscow State University some years ago. Mongolian students, who know Russian well, reading *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, expressed surprise at the fact that this work belongs to the classics and is highly artistic. They explained that the object of the artistic image cannot be a shameful act, which relates to the incompetence of the commander, who at the same time was still in captivity. In their tradition, Poetry should tell about the great victories and praise the heroic deeds of real heroes. This episode should not be included in the range of topics that are acceptable for poetry. Another example is about the Russian tale *By Pike's Command* that caused a sharply negative reaction of practically all students from Japan. They found it deeply immoral, because it tells how a pathological loafer, without doing anything useful received the unjustified reward. They were very surprised that this fairy tale is very popular in Russia and parents even read it to their children [3, p. 122–123].

These examples illustrate the profound differences in the perception of the same text by representatives of different cultures. Their interpretations are largely evaluative in nature and thus show that the problem of interpretation is an axiological problem. This does not mean that the Russians consider laziness to be a positive quality, and the Japanese do not appreciate kindness. The truth is that the Russians and Japanese distinguish different traits of this hero, ignoring the rest as inessential. We completely agree with the author's opinion that the rigidity of the assessments may only be explained by stereotypes of everyday consciousness. Thus, the perception of a text that is sanctioned by one culture is unacceptable to another if it goes beyond the "field" of its interpretations. So, the problem of sociocultural barrier in communication is the problem of interpreting the same text by representatives of different cultures, as the interpretation of the meaning behind the obvious meaning, the disclosure of deeper meanings, concluded in a literal sense.

At the beginning of our MSc. Course we traditionally work out the rules for mutually beneficial cooperation. Practical advice can be formulated as follows.

1. You should never insist that the only correct representations are those developed in one's culture: it is necessary to introduce these ideas and notions to representatives of other cultures, explaining the reasons for their occurrence.

2. It is important to have a correct understanding of the psychology and culture of other people with whom communication is carried out; it is in the underestimation of these aspects that the causes of the majority of communicative failures lie.

3. It is necessary to consider messages from the point of view of recipients, to focus on the recipient's opinion, their interests, feelings, priorities.

4. You need to use different means of message delivery.

5. You should strive for the feedback in the process of communication, check your actions with the recipient's response and reaction.

Practically for all people it is important to be able to communicate in such a way that they are correctly understood, that they are listened to and heard. For many people, the ability to "convey" their opinion, point of view, their knowledge to the partner is a part of their profession, therefore they should give priority to the problem of communicative barriers and improvement of practical skills to overcome them.

We are sure that in order to develop a positive attitude towards intercultural differences, it is necessary to overcome the cultural isolation that engenders negative reactions. Adaptation and integration into another culture, i.e. Russian culture, are based not so much on knowledge of languages, customs and norms but on the values of personal interest, in understanding the values and attitudes, in close emotional contact with its representatives.

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Бернштейн Мария Михайловна – канд. экон. наук, доцент, директор магистерской программы, Институт бизнеса и делового администрирования, ФГБОУ ВО «Российская академия народного хозяйства и государственной службы при Президенте РФ», Москва, Россия.

Bernshtein Mariia Mikhailovna – candidate of economic sciences, associate professor, director of a master's degree program, Institute of Business Studies, The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow, Russia.
