



## Professional Activity at Multinational Aviation Companies: Impact of Socio Cultural Factors

Natalia Pazyura , Nellia Nychkalo 

**CONTACT:** *Natalia Pazyura, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Head of Aviation English Department, National Aviation University, Liubomyra Huzara ave., 1, Kyiv, 03058, Ukraine, E-mail: [npazyura@ukr.net](mailto:npazyura@ukr.net)*  
*Nellia Nychkalo, Full Member of NAPS of Ukraine, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Academician-Secretary of Vocational and Adult Education Department, National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine, Sichovykh Striltsiv street, 52-A, 04053, Kyiv, Ukraine, E-mail: [napn24@gmail.com](mailto:napn24@gmail.com)*

### Keywords:

socio-cultural factors, airmen, corporate development, Asian and European countries, intercultural communication

### Abstract:

The article deals with the peculiarities of professional activity of aviation personnel working for multinational aviation companies and socio cultural factors influencing their work. It is stressed that socio and cross cultural issues may be the reason for misunderstanding in professional and everyday communication. Miscommunications may broadly be applied to a range of verbal communications problems ranging from misunderstandings, such as those due to ambiguity, language structure, to more technical problems. The authors underline that those misunderstandings may be due to cultural differences. Special attention is paid to professional radio communication between an air traffic controller and pilot, which is very important for promotion of flight safety. Studies indicate that miscommunication is a pervasive problem in air traffic control and, although infrequent when considered as a percentage of daily transactions, nevertheless, has been a causal factor in numerous fatal accidents. The conclusion is made about the importance of social factors influencing the choice of certain lexical units and functional styles in radio communication.

## 1. Introduction

The culture of each country is a system of material and spiritual values of a society, it is a means of transmitting social experience from generation to generation through the traditions and beliefs that are represented in the laws and rules of behaviour. There are different shades of the meaning the word "culture" and there are many definitions. But in spite of the different definitions beyond any doubt is the fact that national culture affects individual, social, corporate development, and therefore the professional development of the individual is carried out in a specific environment for each country. At the same time, national and cultural characteristics of any country affect the corporate relations of the enterprise, the employment system, human resources development, the practice of providing training for the staff. In addition, national culture is the main source of resistance to the influence of globalization trends, which can lead to unification and the loss of national distinctions. The authors insist on the interconnection between culture and language, stressing the fact that similarity in culture makes possible similarity in perception and sharing of meaning (Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung, & Ying-Chien, 2011).

Due to globalization cross-cultural studies are of great importance as more and more educational establishments and companies have multinational students and employees who have to be aware of differences in many aspects of the representatives of others cultures in doing their job (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006, p. 346).



The peculiarities of national culture, religious and philosophical concepts that have become the source of corporate rules have their impact on the company's development and organization of work in it. We are convinced that such a study provides a deep understanding of the social system and relationships within a company. Since a company is a large unit that operates on the basis of communication, misunderstanding within it may have negative effect on its work and development. Thus, communication and social interaction is an important basis on which any company is built.

## 2. Theoretical framework of the study

In Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics we can find a definition of culture as "the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society" (Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung, & Ying-Chien, 2011). According to it culture should be considered as an integrated set of rules observed by members of the society and transmitted from generation to generation. At the same time the necessity to understand other cultures representatives makes us turn to the concept of cultural pluralism as an idea encouraging cultural diversity and establishing a basis of unity (Pai, 1990). Cultural diversity is here defined as heterogeneity of national cultures of team members; an individual's national culture is considered to be that of his or her country of residence (Shachaf, 2008). We can not but agree with W. Foley who is sure that "culture itself as well as the study of culture would have to undergo certain changes or face becoming obsolete" (Foley, 1997).

The authors (Wen-Cheng, Lin Chien-Hung, & Ying-Chien, 2011). Considered the link between culture and communication, though two different concepts but very closely connected. As communication is a means to share ideas and the basis of human contact, it is a means to deliver culture.

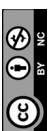
According to P. Shachaf culture is "a complex, multidimensional construct". And as each individual is influenced by a wide range of different cultural factors (ethnic, organizational, and national) we should consider culture on several levels: international, national, regional, business, and organizational (Shachaf, 2008).

The beginning of the study of corporate culture was laid by M. Weber, who presented a theory explaining the relationship between culture and economy, taking "the cultural realm of values and ideology as a social force that interacts with and influences other aspects of society like politics and the economy" (Cole, 2019). Weber explored the basics of corporate self-organization, the interconnection between moral and ethical principles and socio-economic well-being of individual corporate structures, and developed a model of "rational organization of free labor" that required strict discipline, accuracy, responsibility and stability.

Many studies on the peculiarities of Eastern corporate culture and professional staff development indicate that the uniqueness of management was formed and enriched in a specific social context, under the influence of national traditions. Since national culture is reflected in many different aspects of life, it has a strong influence on people's behavior in both daily life and professional activities". Currently, the term is used in the theory of organization, in which culture is seen as a factor that creates a homogeneous set of ideas, values and beliefs that influence professional decision-making in the organization. (Adhikari, 2005).

The issue of cultural factors affecting many aspects in an organization has become of interest to aviation specialists from Asian countries (McMillan, 1998, p. 32). It is a well-known fact that these countries have their own peculiarities in corporate relationships quite different from European ones. Addressing the issue of corporate culture in the East is explained by the successful functioning of companies, which confirms the opinion of many scholars about the Asian model of corporate governance as the most effective out of a wide range of potential types of relationships on the labor market. In this model, an important role in the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills belongs to career growth and in-house training, as an integral and important component of corporate culture (Sookon, 1983, p. 6).

The analysis of many works shows that before the 1980s, the terms "culture" and "ethics" were mentioned mainly in the context of issues related to nationalities. According to B. Ritter "ethics is a systematic, rational choice of a particular model of behavior that can be taught" (Ritter, 2006, p. 154). Admitting the fact that the ideal human traits of character such as justice, honesty, responsibility, ethical behavior remain equally valuable throughout the temporal and organizational contexts, some scholars believe that workers at their workplace are "culturally restricted" in the behavior and judgment (McMillan, 1998, p. 32). Gradually, the concept



of ethics in the practice of human resources development is spread, and changes in views on the development of human resources as a leader in teaching of ethical patterns of behavior in the company are noticed.

An important conclusion of the studied researches we can make about the importance of the socio-cultural context in the study of personnel's activity at any company. When West "meets" East, there are differences in views on national and cultural aspects that may affect the work at any company and aviation one as well. The fundamental difference in western-eastern communication lies in the different styles of thinking. The Eastern model of thinking has its origins in early Buddhism, in which knowledge is equated with the ability to perceive the world. In other words, the ability to perceive things as they are in the world is a top priority in the thinking process of Oriental people. The Eastern mind thinks holistically, does not analyze the world in fragments, and perceives things in relation to each other. In this system, the division between perception and thinking is minimized, which is very different from the Western model of thinking, which originates from the philosophy of Ancient Greece and considers the process of thinking as an analytical process. In this eastern system, more emphasis is placed on personal judgments and decisions (Schultz, Huglen, & Lim, 2001, p. 6).

No wonder that such patterns of thinking affect intercultural communication. Thus, in Eastern cultures there is a tendency to value more the external social role, while in Western cultures the importance of the individual is more emphasized. Eastern cultures operate on the basis of generally accepted consensus, in contrast to Western individual decisions. Any hasty and untimely actions of an individual are perceived by the group as a violation of social harmony. In addition, Eastern cultures pay much attention to non-verbal means of communication (bows, hand gestures, etc.), and Western cultures rely solely on verbal and written messages (Hall, 2002, p.16).

### 3. Culture in aviation

The interest in organizational culture, its impact on the efficiency of the company has led to systematic research in this area. Socio-cultural and intercultural issues are a complex problem and are a source of various misunderstandings in aviation. It is necessary to recognize the existence of "culture in cultures" even when from the external point of view the culture may seem relatively homogeneous (Schultz, Huglen & Lim, 2001, p. 9). Our study has shown that aviation focuses on a safety culture in which there are four critical components - a culture of reporting, a flexible culture (tolerance culture), an information culture, and a culture of trust (Just culture) - an atmosphere of trust in which people are encouraged and receives an award for providing the necessary safety information, and on the other hand, an atmosphere in which the person clearly understands the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

The role of national culture in the models of crew behavior was studied by B. Hayward. National culture has a significant influence on the performance of professional duties, and it can be applied to the performance of functions in the cockpit as well. It is known that in order to ensure flight safety, the crew must act as one team, which sometimes differs from the individualistic behavior inherent in some Western cultures. To remedy this situation, which could have fatal consequences, a "cabin resource management" program was introduced to train aviators. It is aimed to overcome the problem of authoritarian leadership style, development of team building skills and personal interaction of crew members, and meets the requirements for national, organizational and professional culture of aviation personnel. In addition, it was found that national culture influences how a person perceives guilt, which J. Reason calls the "circle of guilt." In Western culture that values personal freedom and where a person is seen as a free agent, mistakes are seen as a voluntary act or a conscious act. Thus, the representatives of this culture accept human errors as the main cause of disasters, although it may be a consequence of other factors (McMillan, 1998, p. 32).

Analyzed materials suggest that the nationality of crew members may have an unexpected impact on the efficiency of radio communication. We should admit that radio communication between an air traffic controller using a radar on the ground to give instructions to pilots is of great interest to us. The main objective of communication between the pilot and air traffic controller is to ensure safety of flight by means of effective communication. Communication that takes place between the pilot and air traffic controller is an example of communication within a community and its effectiveness may be decreased either by foreign accent or misunderstanding between the members of this community. During the radio communications, instructions, information, and confirmation are performed quickly and easily, and informed listener may

not understand the meaning of the conversation. But for the air traffic controller and the pilot it is the only professional routine “shop-talk” which they can perform only due to skills they acquired after thousands of hours of practice. Communication between the pilot and air traffic controller through professional nature is different (it is specifically designed to make it effective in transmitting the largest possible amount of information in a short period of time, communication never happens face-to-face, and radio is the only possible means of communication, equipment design makes simultaneous conversation between two participants impossible) and similar characteristics to usual every day communication (pilot and controller form a linguistic community, they use rules of interpretation for more than one functional style - formal and informal, communicative situations are situational and indexical and therefore functional styles are appropriate only in certain times and place).

Thus, the analysis of the radio exchange between the crew of Avianca 052 aircraft demonstrates the existence of a “subordinate-for-superior” model of the relationship between the pilot and the air traffic controller. According to this model, the pilot accepted the instructions of the air traffic controller, although he had to make his own decision, being better informed about the situation with fuel. Sometimes, on the contrary, the pilot refuses to follow the instructions of the air traffic controller because he is afraid of “losing face”, which can also lead to emergencies (Prinzo, Hendrix, & Hendrix, 2008, p. 32). It is interesting that in case with air traffic controllers there were not any examples of actions found that would characterize them as “confirmed individualists.” It may be explained by the fact that air traffic controllers do not belong to the hierarchical structure that exists in the cockpit (McMillan, 1998, p. 34).

In addition, there is a different attitude of air personnel from different countries to some professional situations. Thus, an American pilot may laugh at his efforts to report “Booolooloo estimating Paraburdoo,” while Korean or Japanese pilots may be too puzzled to ask for a track cut if the report contains words with letters that are difficult for them to pronounce. And this fear of “losing face” is more a question of influence of the cultural factor on professional relations, than a linguistic problem (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2007).

In 1995 C. Owen conducted a study of corporate culture in the air traffic control system of Australia, which revealed the presence of professional groups in the use of special professional language and symbols (McMillan, 1998, p. 33). We consider it appropriate to point out that workplace culture can also act against flight safety, as J. Staunton wrote in 1996 in “Seaview Inquiry”, which reveals the “existence of local culture in Sydney.” With this term the researcher marked certain features of radio exchange procedures by pilots and air traffic controllers, namely: the use of non-standard phraseology, unclear position definition, “certain carelessness in procedures, which significantly affected flight safety.” According to J. Reason, violation of rules and procedures (as opposed to errors) has its origins in cultural factors, so it seems that the use of this non-standard phraseology is a failure to ensure a culture of flight safety. ATC communication is a highly stylized form of communication. Membership of this professional group depends on the ability to use this language competently and without any effort (Allen, 2010, p. 3).

It raises the question about the necessity to observe a professional culture by aircrew, designed to “put air traffic controllers and flight attendants behind the cockpit” as the pilot has more knowledge to assess the situation and make decisions to ensure safety flight. But the problem of the pilot’s lack of a “culture of trust”, which may manifest itself in a reluctance to report problems, involves the question of at what stage the air traffic controller “turns on” the alarm if the pilot does not report the danger. Another question that requires investigation is the fact why flight maintenance personnel do not ask about unplanned but significant changes during the flight. This may be due to the overconfidence of staff and the feeling that they should not be in a state of anticipation for undeclared and undetected anomalies. For example, in the case of Avianca Flight 052, New York, Besko in 1997, when fuel shortages were not expected, air traffic controllers were very busy, but nevertheless they had several opportunities to identify and correct a number of errors, omissions and incorrect conclusions made by both parties. The pilot asked for “priority attention (handling)”. But just because he didn’t use the word “emergency,” or “may day,” or “pan pan,” dispatchers provided instructions according to a low-fuel situation, not an emergency (Drury, Ma, & Marin, 2005, p. 33).

Researchers believe that in order to improve the situation, attention should be focused on cultural peculiarities in the perception of professional situations, coordination of work in the cockpit by changing the pilot’s attitude to the performance of professional duties. Therefore, air traffic management requires constant coordination between staff to ensure efficiency (McMillan, 1998, p. 34).





If we analyze the most common errors in radio communication, we can identify several groups of errors that occur under the influence of certain cultural traditions. Thus, according to the analyzed materials, one of the most common mistakes during air traffic control is the confusion of the registration number. This mistake in many cases led to accidents, as pilots took the permission for a take-off meant for other aircrafts. Thus, the Aviation Incident Report states that errors in radio communication occurred in cases with aircraft that had the same frequency (New Zealand 88, Qantas 28, Qantas 88, Qantas 188, All Nippon 828 and All Nippon 888). This example can be considered an example of the influence of culture, because the number 8 is especially important in Asian culture (McMillan, 1998, p.41).

Another clear difference between the professional culture of East and West is the observance of ranks, which is clearly reflected in the aviation industry. In the Asian world, obtaining an age rank is the main task for an employee of any company. Along with the age hierarchy, there is a rank for experienced workers. Therefore, communication between an experienced worker and a novice occurs with all the rules of respect, and beginners should always seek the advice of experienced workers. And, even when experienced workers break the rules, no one dares to say that it is forbidden. But such a violation is allowed only at a high rank. In Eastern culture, an experienced pilot may perceive some questions as an insult and doubt in his experience (Schultz, Huglen, & Lim, 2001, p. 6-7).

It is an indisputable fact that Western countries have more opportunities to incorporate many different ideas that have led to democracy and independent thinking. The Eastern type of thinking differs in this sense and does not offer many opportunities to disrupt the hierarchical tendencies inherent in their social structure. These cultural traditions also enter classrooms for pilot training and cause conflicts that are difficult for non-English-speaking students to understand. According to the memoirs of an English teacher in one of the military institutions of Eastern countries, the older students always had more weight in the group. Older and higher-ranking students were often honored by their peers below the rank. "Once the boss, the boss forever" that were the explanations (Schultz, Huglen, & Lim, 2001, p. 8).

## 4. Conclusions

Thus, the growing interest in professional culture is explained by globalization and integration processes in the world, the emergence of a large number of multicultural companies. The need to study the features of national culture, religious and philosophical concepts that have become the source of corporate rules, due to their impact on staff performance and the way of carrying out professional duties at a multicultural company such as airlines. The rapid development of aviation in Asia highlights the fundamental differences in communication between representatives of "Western" and "Eastern" culture, which consist of different styles of thinking that influence important decisions taken by the crew on which many people's lives depend.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, J., (2010). "Line Up and wait" in preparation for take off". *FAA Safety briefing*, July/August 2010, 1-3.
- Adhikari, D., (2005). *National Factors and Employment Relations in Japan*. Tokyo: Publishing house Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training.
- Cole, N. L., (2019). Max Weber's Three Biggest Contributions to Sociology, On Culture and Economy, Authority, and the Iron Cage. Retrived from: [http:// thoughtco.com/max-weber-contribution-to-sociology-3026635](http://thoughtco.com/max-weber-contribution-to-sociology-3026635) [07/04/2021].
- Drury, C., Ma, J., and Marin, C., (2005). *Language Error in Aviation Maintenance, Final Report*. New York: Publishing house University of Buffalo.
- Foley, W., (1997). *Anthropological Linguistics: an introduction*. Oxford: Publishing house Basil Blackwell.
- Hall, B., (2002). Runway safety corner: English language proficiency. *FAA aviation news. Aviation safety from cover to cover*, 41 (3), 15–17.
- International Civil Aviation Organization. (2007). *Manual on the Prevention of Runway Incursions*. International Civil Aviation Organization. Retrived from: <https://www.icao.int> [07/04/2021].
- McMillan, D., (1998). *Miscommunications in Air Traffic Control*. Queensland: Publishing house Queensland University of Technology.



- Pai, Y., (1990). Cultural foundations of education. Ohio: Publishing house Merrill.
- Prinzo, O., Hendrix, A., and Hendrix, R., (2008). Pilot English Language Proficiency and the Prevalence of Communication Problems at Five U.S. Air Route Traffic Control Centers. Final Report. Washington: Publishing house Federal Aviation Administration.
- Resick, C., Hanges, P., Dickson, M., and Mitchelson, J., (2006). A cross-cultural examination of the endorsement of ethical leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 63(4), 345-359. DOI: [10.1007/s10551-005-3242-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-005-3242-1).
- Ritter, B., (2006). Can business ethics be trained? A study of the ethical decision making process in business students. *Journal of business ethics*, 68 (2), 153-164. DOI: [10.1007/s10551-006-9062-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9062-0).
- Shachaf, P. (2008). Cultural diversity and information and communication technology impacts on global virtual teams: An exploratory study. *Information & Management*, 45(2), 131-142.
- Sookon, K. (1983). Is the Japanese system of life employment applicable to a developing country such as Korea. Seoul: Publishing house Korea Development Institute.
- Schultz, A., Huglen, M., and Lim, D., (2001). English Education and Communication Studies: Ambiguity in the International Airway. *Institute of Education Sciences*, 143, 3-14.
- Wen-Cheng, W., Chien-Hung, L., and Ying-Chien, Ch., (2011). Cultural diversity and information and communication impacts on Language Learning. *International Education Studies*, 4 (2), 111-115. DOI: [10.5539/ies.v4n2p111](https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v4n2p111).

