

UNIVERSITY OF WEST-HUNGARY
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THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ECONOMIC
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**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
IN INTERNATIONAL MARKET STRATEGY**

Written by:

JÁNOS MÁTÉ

Consultant:

Tóth Attiláné Dr. CSc.
senior lecturer

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Goals of the Research

Management experts, from F. Taylor and H. Fayol to their modern times successors, suggested it indirectly that but one best way could lead to manage and organise industry. In the 1940s and the 1950s the American (and two decades later the Japan) economic success was taken as evidence of their ideas about management being superior and worth adopting. Practically speaking there were no reports recorded about research parties investigating on the society that had developed and applied these ideas.

England and America are individualistic countries, whose leading contributors' theoretical efforts made present day western economics an individualist science. The majority of mankind live in non-individualistic societies, where western economic theories, based on individualist assumptions, are unlikely to apply. When westerners negotiate business with peoples from elsewhere, there is a likelihood of misunderstanding and thus a mechanism should be added for prevention. In fact managers should not accept im-ported ideas unless the value context in which these ideas were developed are taken into account. Intercultural communication takes place among peoples from different cultures who act on a 'how the other side may interpret what I do?' basis.

The goals of this research are to help Hungarian businesspeople to *discover possible problems of communication before negotiations begin* as well as *overcome the so called 'cultural shock'* and *avoid pre-negotiation panic*. In order to do so the study

- *structures business negotiations into sections in such a way that the crucial points of potential (honest) misunderstanding could be distinguishable;*
- *reviews the main sections of business communication in relation to heart-to-heart talks;*
- *highlights the decisions which are to be made prior to negotiations and may have an impact on later results;*
- *reviews the main sections of business communication in relation to talks between delegations;*
- *reviews the main sections of business communication in relation to the press;*
- *reviews the communication values of the everyday private circumstances involved in business negotiations.*

These six issues are conveyed in twelve chapters including a fictive scenario of a business negotiation. Furthermore the study includes 10 supplements and 181 footnotes.

Method and Main Section Points of Research

The main idea of the method is *to present the similarities and dissimilarities between business communication and business negotiation*. The word *communication* means *to make it known*, which is done not merely by words of business talks. Words can transmit more information than what is generally meant by them and are seldom the only carriers of information. There are other ways of communication as well — for example *the selection of words and the way they are said* as well as body language etc.

The distinction between *communication via talks* and *via circumstances* can help negotiators to think over the role of words and auxiliaries. This sort of business skill has an ‘active’ and a ‘passive’ aspect depending on whether someone is just speaking to his or her colleague (showing the visitor round) or vice versa. The ‘active’ one can decide on *what to say* and *what not to say* and *what to say instead* (the answer depending on both the situation and the main features of the culture the other party is coming from) and *in what* (selection of) *words*; *when and how to hold the floor* etc.

Other factors (auxiliaries) of communication may also be informative — may have a communication value. In the ‘active’ sense they are planned, displayed, arranged and used to convey the desired message in full. Someone’s clothes, for example, should be selected to meet the partner’s expectations. The car someone drives and the district in which his head office is located, the sort of furniture with the fixtures and valuables (including paintings and photos and awards) may also be meaningful, so they should be planned in accordance with the basic aims of negotiations.

As far as the ‘passive’ way is concerned, the partner’s selection of words must be strictly observed. The completeness of the communication is also worth noticing — any discrepancy between the spoken words and the presentation of auxiliary circumstances and events may be a useful source of additional information.

As the study is made up from several practical situations plus the lessons one can learn from them, this thesis may not be without several examples representing the general rules of international communication. Such rules always apply to situations.

Chapter 1: What is Expected of Others

Chapter 1 reviews the protocol's communicational values which are often confused with usual functions of protocol. The latter are manifested in any actual process of protocol events while its most important communicational values are *regularity* and *standard-bearing* — both of them communicate *calculability* and *dependability*. Protocol suggests that the business partner who complies with such rules can be trusted. This concludes that protocol has no income-value in itself. Therefore this chapter highlights that no rules of protocol may ever overwrite the negotiator's basic aims; there can be no successful protocol behind any failure of talks.

Another part of this chapter deals with the resemblance between the intercultural communication and the *theory of games*' general concept, which also focuses on adjusting one's action to what is duly expected of the other party. That concept leads us to a general formula of negotiations which concludes in two passwords:

- *taking share* (of burden and profit);
- *giving impression* (letting your opponents think).

Some experts hold that *letting your opponents think* is acceptable. Others believe that this kind of *giving impression* is twinned with bluffing. That standpoint is only agreeable should one realise that elements of bluff pertain to normal business actions without which the economic or social life is neither realistic nor functional. In business negotiations '*giving impression*' means more of 'impressing the other party' rather than 'escaping from a difficult situation by pretence'. The most important of them all is the impression that convinces the other party of 'I am the best partner to choose'.

Every so often the intention of '*giving impression*' is different from the particular way it is interpreted. It may have culture-specific roots that should be taken into account if one is to approach and handle his (prospective) business partners properly. The usual ways of building business relations vary from culture to culture and unless this very way is strictly observed no native in there is likely to be co-operative.

Interpretation and body language are also culture specific.

Chapter 2: Ways to Classify Opponents' Criteria

Chapter 2 considers the question of how to convince the other party of 'I am the best partner to choose'. Such an effort may best be based on spotting words and manners that portray the partner's character. How to give an impression according to this?

For this purpose negotiators can learn a lesson from watching people drive cars. Is there a parallel between someone's driving style and his negotiating attitude? What is it like? Is he or she a workaholic who drives dangerously? A cautious man or woman with high sense of responsibility? A regulated person who observes the law? A grown up who is, at heart, still an adolescent and exhibit a childish or unreasonable behaviour? A boastful and superior parent? A consolidated and self-contained adult? His or her words might indicate the driving style on the basis of which his or her future actions may take place. Such classifications can help us to select the best words in dealing with them. However this is but a resort for someone to build up his or her system of criteria.

The question of accepted ways of communication in different cultures is also aroused. What counts to be normal in the partner's home country? Why do the Americans and the English, despite their common English language, sometimes fail to agree together — especially within a company? Why is it that Germans who keep their office doors shut irritate most Americans at the same corporation? Is it a serious mistake to forget the proper sequence of greeting members of the other delegation? Why is it that a Japanese seems so roundabout and circumstantial in the eye of the American negotiator? And, foremost important, how can a businessman or a businesswoman improve his or her understanding of such curiosities? This chapter not only rises these questions but gives short explanations as well, providing the reader with more information on the difference between communication and spoken words at business talks.

This chapter also deals with the main characteristics of the globally accepted 'businessman international style'. The reader can thus understand certain general rules for negotiators. What do they mean by words like 'friendship' or 'help' or

‘effectiveness’? What important rules must be followed to get them to co-operate?

Chapter 3: Main Mistakes and Opportunities

One must be careful to avoid the main mistakes that generally occur at negotiations. The most typical of them is perhaps the mis-judgement made by having and listening from an inflexible position. That leads us back to the national characteristics — certain habits of which can easily limit the negotiating success.

The national characteristics create frames of interpretation within which we attribute meanings to words and gestures and motions. To build a successful international market strategy one has to learn to outgrow his or her own limits and *interpret the other party's actions in accordance with his or her cultural background*.

Another mistake is overconfidence. For example the assumption that our opponent intends to achieve what he or she marks as main goal. Some unfortunate examples to that were the buyouts of public corporations – in those the new owners, despite their promises, did not improve working conditions and production. Neither did they diversify and create new jobs. Their only intention was to buy markets for commodities they had produced somewhere else. That was something new to our businessmen and the Hungarian culture. The lesson of ignorance of alien investors' culture has been dearly earned.

One of the main opportunities for negotiators is to *give the other party the impression* that his or her words are most interesting and worth listening to. In this respect full attention does not indicate keeping silence but rather a series of hints dropped by a listening audience.

Another good opportunity of this kind is finding the right time to propose. No partner is always ready to listen to new ideas with his or her whole heart. At the same time everybody pretends to have always been listening carefully. So it happens that even good proposals that are tabled ahead of their time will probably be rejected by a partner, who is otherwise likely to prefer to maintain his own judgement. On the other hand even second best suggestions that are submitted in proper time and manner may be accepted. On being rejected you can enhance your position by repackaging your old values replacing a flat refusal with new options.

The study analyses some more points of main mistakes and opportunities — this time it focuses mainly on what is held to be characteristics of the Hungarian businesspeople.

Chapter 4: Tactics and Techniques

Tactics and technics may also be described as plans and their methods for carrying out (international) market strategy. Of the several conversation techniques explained in the study the five main points worth mentioning here are: *how and when to slow down negotiations; how to hold the floor; how to break in; how to force peacefully and how to handle conflicts.*

The slowdown of negotiations is frequently associated with the so called 'killing the time'. For one reason or another one might prefer not to get to the next point on the agenda until, for example, some more information has been received on prior issue. Negotiators seldom name such motives — more often they justify themselves before their opponents.

Interruptions are a natural part of negotiations, yet the way they are done has a communication value especially in talks between people from remote cultures. Interruptions are more common in the western hemisphere, where *holding the floor* means *to prevent other people from interrupting* and *breaking in* means *to interrupt the moment we feel it necessary*. The study enlists a number of ways for these.

'*Forcing people peacefully*' is not a synonym for '*getting people to do things*'. In such a context niceness works to a negotiator's advantage, showing your hand should be omitted — force is seldom rewarding unless it is done peacefully. For such purposes one should refer to mutually accepted goals and methods or generally agreed norms, standards and principles. 'To call a time-out' and making the opponent short on time in some other way as well as creating a framework of unequal conditions may also be rewarding.

Confrontation is seldom planned, more often it is highly emotional. The general rule is never to respond to it with confrontation. If the partner arrives unexpectedly, '*I am ready to talk*' is the magic reply. *After that* excuses may be found for picking a better time and place for negotiations. The time so gained should be used for getting some experts in and weighing the benefit of different solutions. Most conflict-handling methods suggest to set up a cooling off period and discover the emotional reasons and other root causes of disagreement.

To solve such problems the study gives several examples of techniques and guidelines. However it should be noted that there are tactics that win the battle but lose the war.

Chapter 5: Building New Business Relations

Referring to statistics in recent studies some experts point out that on the short run, selling (or purchasing) through new business relations is sometimes a must but more often a sign of ambitions. It has been estimated that in terms of cost to profit ratio, making use of the already existing contacts can also be (equally) reward-ing yet three-four times cheaper. Therefore careful evaluation of actual trends of domestic turnover and product life-circles makes a substantial part of international market strategy.

A thorough analysis of the different market conditions for the Hungarian export is of prime importance. In this respect the inter-national market strategy is prior to aspects of intercultural communication. But as soon as the target country has been selected the aspects and rules of intercultural communication set margin conditions for international market strategy.

What to write in your catalogue and folder in order to whip up natives' interest in a foreign country? What colours should be preferred? What other colours not? What to write on your business card and in what language(s)? What are the accepted ways of introduction in other cultures? A personal visit to the expectant partner's stand at a fair in Hungary or some third country? A reference letter from a foreign Chamber of Commerce? A letter of self-introduction? If so: whom to address the first letter? And what careful drafting is needed?

What day and what hour to propose for the talks? What items for the first agenda? How to make a phone call to distant countries? And what to say? What not to say? Is it useful to say you are of deal-making authority? What reasons are there *not* to leave a message? How to fix up your answering machine for the incoming calls in order to convince your counterpart of 'I am the best partner to choose'.

Once again: the answers to all these questions are of communication value in more ways than one especially in talks between people from remote cultures.

Chapter 6: Meetings

Modern mass media facilities make it possible to look for clues about your opponent and get a wide range of information of the would be partner and his corporation — yearly turnover, number of plants, main business partners, tenders, awards, difficulties, scandals etc. *Directed* search in this direction is advisable, but a ‘general feeling’ of the other party’s affairs may also be useful sometimes.

The study confutes the old myth about businesspeople obliged to wear jackets and ties. The articles of clothing should be carefully selected *in accordance with the conditions of intercultural communication*. In this respect subcultures within one nation should also not be left unnoticed. No entrepreneur in white collar and jacket and tie will be welcomed among blue collar workers getting on strike and no prime minister is cheered by battlefield soldiers.

Hardened negotiators are likely to explore the use of power against their opponents. Superiority may be applied, for example, by making the other party wait. Such a power play can be neutralised if you make ‘good use’ of the time (by typing a letter on your lap top or banging out some figures on your calculator) and stop doing it no sooner than (half) a minute after ‘the boss is free’ notice.

The study gives a short sum up of the communication values of gifts (including flowers).

Another part of this chapter deals with aspects of body language. The study, unlike many other training manuals, classifies this subject into three main groups and respectively names them ‘active’ or ‘transmitted’ as well as ‘passive’ or ‘discerned’ and ‘mutual’ or ‘reciprocally copied’. One is only aware of such a transmission if he or she deliberately applies body language in order to stress the essence of his message. ‘Discerned’ means one’s awareness of the speaker’s body language bearing influence on their audience. ‘Mutual’ is the body language when both or all ‘passive’ parties (unintentionally) ‘copy’ the speaker’s posture thus showing approval *and soon he does the same* after having let (one of) the opponent(s) speak.

The communication values of the so called ‘small talks’ are also mentioned together with recommendations to what to say and what not to say in certain cultures.

Chapter 7: A Scenario

In this chapter the study applies a scenario of usual business negotiations regardless of their size and stakes. The assumed main steps are *how to set an agenda and stay with it; evaluation of the co-operation and the current events; making a bargain; how to wind up a meeting and what to check before signing a contract.*

To set an agenda means *to put items in the focus of discussion*. As the very first step of any business meeting agenda is to be agreed to — yet hardened negotiators later demand not to stay with it. Negotiation is a game for two that nobody can make a one-way-street. However the parties should select a list of items not longer than what has a good chance to be completed by talks. Stepped up agendas are common in North America and less workable in the European Union while the rest of the world are not very likely to accept them.

The evaluation of the co-operation and the current events is subject to two main considerations. One of them is *what points are to be stressed to keep the contact alive* and the other is *what to keep up at sleeves to trade mistakes*. For example you may not remind your counterpart of all his false or unfulfilled performances *until* he blames you for such a thing. In that case you can put your demands on the table last. Some experts name that a ‘back-fire’.

At business talks flat price ultimatums are rarely go well; making a bargain is the usual way to arrive at decisions and make deals. Anticipated risk is always part of any business activity. In the western hemisphere bargaining is more optional than in some countries, say, in the Near East and the Middle East. In this phase (or ‘section’) of business negotiations you can make a checklist of the points already mentioned above such as

- one of the two passwords highlighting that you deserve more on the principle of *sharing* burdens and profit;
- your catalogue and brochure and folder have convinced your partner of *‘I am the best partner to choose’*;
- from mass media facilities and common acquaintances and the partner’s ‘small talk’ you know that others have already been granted a better price;
- from your partner’s body language you conclude that his position may not be so solid as he states;

– by intuition you suggest a price that fits your opponent's values.

Sometimes a few rounds may be lost before winning the big one. Never show triumphant on closing a meeting. It can only be harmful to your image — you can hardly *share* such a feeling. Assure your opponent that he got a good bargain.

In the closing phase enumeration of all the main points of the agreement (*net price, terms of payment, deadlines to meet etc.*) is advisable. It is also useful to make a record afterwards on your partner's 'soft points' like *what sort of hobbies and weaknesses he has; what sort of arguments he resist less; what sort of complaints he omitted to make; what were his needs apart from negotiations etc.*

Business negotiations usually conclude in some sort of an agreement embodied in a contract. Contracts are a delicate business to formulate so it should be left for lawyers. Nevertheless some crucial points of potential (honest) misunderstanding may be detected well ahead of time. The first thing to know is what can be taken as a binding agreement. Parol contracts are accepted not only for stock market deals — the relevant rules change from Great Britain to India, from the Netherlands to Indonesia and from Canada to Germany. To prevent misunderstandings you should use the term '*Vereinbarungsgemäß*' or '*Subject to contract*'. Another important issues of law is what legal system the contract comes under as well as the precise detailed characteristics of fulfilment and agreements related to non-performance.

You must be on the lookout to avoid problems with last minute changes to a deal especially in case of a properly timed casual afterthought.

Chapter 8: Delegations and Third Parties

Managers of our time can hardly look after everything — duties, tasks to perform should be *delegated* to deputies. It is advisable to select delegates according to such competence. It implies the members' involvement in the inter-delegate negotiations; the presence of passive or uninvolved members is not justified. Some-times delegates of different rank and age indicate the personnel policy of a stable company with long range plans to build a staff of their own.

These are some of the main points for you to check prior to (or at the beginning of) talks between delegations — at least as far as delegations from western countries are concerned. Delegations from the Far East can be different through their norms of non-individualism. Elements of intercultural communication should be sorted out respectively. For example: tactics like inducing dis-agreement among members of the opposition only work in Middle Europe. One of the generally acknowledged advantages of such meetings is to compromise the indirect way.

Another part of this chapter deals with arguments for and against hiring interpreters. Never consider a business talk to be an opportunity to practice the language, especially not if it is your counterpart's mother tongue. As wording has communication value, people who lack good language command are handicapped at talks. Even those who are fluent in the foreign language can benefit from the extra time provided by a third party's interpreting. However you put yourself in some hazards by the mere presence of a third party who may witness some of your secrets, try to take over your game or determine the talk in an undesired direction.

Another part of this chapter deals with arguments for and against hiring experts. Their services may be a *sine qua non* some-times *assuming* they are unrelated to the results of the negotiation and would not act as a biased referee. It is advisable to be on the lookout to limit outsiders influence at the negotiating table.

A businessman's 'lobbying' means a deliberate involvement of a third party who promotes one's sales. In this sense the action is aimed at finding the right person who helps you to get round the usual procedure of decision making.

Chapter 9: Business Interests and the Press

The main sections of business communication are reviewed here in relation to publicity. Such an activity has a living practice by posters and sandwich men, but those are left out of focus of the study for being special fields of intercultural business communication general way of which is via the press.

The strong and ever growing desire of businesspeople to get publicity is sometimes unjustified. Mass media may not necessarily promote your market strategies. Getting known and popular through special reports and interviews is not by all means granted. Such ambitions may also go wrong if you are ignorant of news-papermen's obligations and needs apart from presenting the best of yours. Bringing up a scandal is just one of those so you had better prepare to shun questions like '*how long is it since you haven't been violating the law*'. Another common fetch is to request you unexpectedly to make a premature promise publicly — such a request should neither be rejected nor approved.

You must be prepared to be speaking to an audience who, in front of TV-sets or radios, intermingle their everyday conversation with your words from the box. Should you say a sentence like 'It can never happen that *we neglect the consumers' demand*', chances are that they will get only the second half of the message. Therefore one of the general rules is to declare to be always positive instead of being anti-negative. You should name the most important characters of your company and provide a set of credible motives. Avoid giving numbers and quotations of the law. But remember that these are the best way to lull the audience to sleep if you have something to hide.

Another general rule is to adjust your message to the features of the organ. A 'general set of information' about your company or services is likely to miss the target. *Investors* want to learn (more) from you about *prospects*; while *job hunters* (and behind them: the unions) are mainly interested in *job openings*; and your (would be) *customers* may want to hear about *new services* and *sales campaigns*.

The rest of this chapter comes round the question of how to prepare for a meeting with a journalist from a newspaper.

Chapter 10: 'Business' Talks within the Company

Business talks are not by all means an outward activity — considerations put forward in chapters 1 to 9 apply (with necessary amendments) to negotiations within the company. There is also a must to adjust one's action to what is duly expected of the other party and to classify opponents' criterions. Main mistakes and opportunities as well as tactics and techniques also apply. Frequently there are work-meetings with agendas, evaluation of co-operation, bargains (on who should look after and be responsible for what). Continual public relations are recommended.

Such talks vary most from the ordinary ones in three main aspects: counterparts know each other much better than partners from different companies; participants have more reasons to be supportive to one another; if in spite of all these a hostile atmosphere is created, it may cause troubles of a more serious kind that takes longer to adjust.

Therefore it is all too important to prevent conflicts within a company. Possible ways of it can best be demonstrated by different principles of conducting meetings and handling discord. In this respect the West and the East seem to be following different ways of communication which are perhaps typical to the relevant cultures.

The norms of Far Eastern communication would not let a practice of confrontation go. There, according to scare news, the main idea of keeping or restoring 'peace' is mediation by third parties.

On the other hand a great many westerners, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, hold that a direct confrontation, as long as it is kept within standards, is the shortest and most effective way for the best to win. Others generally combine the following two ways (or at least choose one of them) to prevent quarrels. The chairperson of meetings calls for everyone to reason *in support* of one or another particular product or solution instead of criticising the one he or she prefers not. This method assumes that the best figures for different solutions are (or will be) comparable and so the ultimate one can be selected. The other option is to call for everyone not to address and talk to anyone but the chairperson. So the participants may not talk or put questions directly to their colleagues.

Chapter 11: Leisure Programmes at Intervals

As it was mentioned above, stepped up agendas are common in North America and less workable in the European Union while the rest of the world are not very likely to accept them. Not as if the Americans would not like leisure programmes, yet the intercultural differences are to be remembered.

The most common of all programmes is perhaps the business lunch or dinner. A middle-of-the-road policy is to be followed in choosing a restaurant — a five star one is only right when it fits the volume of the business. In all other cases it counts to be either dissaving or even worse.

You may never (perfectly) know your opposition's taste. Promises to give 'something fabulous' can be harmful if he or she decides that you could be satisfied by something that by Western standards is but nothing special.

Though tipping is customary, a businessman is supposed to be saving the pennies and not be satisfied with second best service. Therefore reduced amount or no tip is advisable if something was not first class quality.

Hungarians are (thought to be) famous of their hospitality. That is sometimes mistaken for openness. One should have exceptional reasons to bring the partner home; such an invitation is unusual in most parts of the world and may be without much (if any) reward. Most 'big houses' in Hungary count to be moderate by American standards and personal relations between the visitor and the family members may give way to 'lobbying' (see Chapter 8).

A generally accepted leisure programme for a visiting businessman is sightseeing. Even if a professional guide is hired for that purpose, you should accompany your partner for the main part of the trip. By showing features of (local) patriotism you may *let him think* of your stability and dependability. The best way to that is to make private comments upon the places of interest 'as far as a businessman is concerned'.

A happy medium should be found in terms of the length of time to stay with the partners. Most of them are happy to have you around but not all the time. Privacy is also culture-related, but westerners may have a strong sense for privacy. The host who forgets about it is surely an unforgivable bore.

Chapter 12: Studies on Intercultural Differences

The world's greatest cultures differ from one to the other in many ways. In addition to that there can be several subcultures in each great culture that result in a cultural multi-diversity. On the one hand that colourful pattern of cultures is an infinite source of new methods and inventions. On the other hand it frequently triggers conflicts both on the battlefields and among businesspeople even within one or another multinational company.

Studies on the question of intercultural differences can be made on practice-oriented as well as on theoretical levels. As it was mentioned above, the study titled *Intercultural Communication in International Market Strategy* is made up from examples of practical situations plus the lessons one can learn from them. Such an effort may attempt to do not more than to highlight the problem and wake up interest towards it.

A deeper study into this subject would inevitably be twice or three times longer than the confines of the present one. It could only start from a neutral basis so that no particular living culture would give keynotes to it. Some initiatory steps have been made already — first of them should be mentioned the efforts by the Dutch culture-antropologist, Geerst Hofstede, with his book *Cultures and Organisations*. But there are a number of others as well, including those taking part in the *Cultures and Organisations*' follow up study titled *The Globe Project*.

I myself am fully convinced that the statistical data in *Cultures and Organisations* and *The Globe Project* will give a new impetus to the relevant studies. At the same time there should be concern about researches being curbed to practical needs before the subject itself has been thoroughly explored.

I kindly inform my readers that after several years of preliminary studies and desk research and almost two years of text-compilation I am more than half way through with my sixth and seventh books, a larger with some 450 pages and a smaller about half that size, in which I analyse different aspects of intercultural communication and understanding under the title: *Economics of Value Systems*.

The Background of the Present Study

As to a background of the study it should be mentioned here that ten years ago I wrote a book on negotiations (*Így tárgyalok üzletről*; December 1995) with a one hundred page supplement in English and German. The German-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce wrote the foreword and requested me to hold six lectures in the following three years. I also held several other lectures at the *Hungarian Protocols Club*, the *Budapest University of Economics*, as well as the *University of Law* and chambers of trades and vocational training all over the country.

The (friendly) questions helped me to further unfold the subject and extend the original concept by some additional aspects. All these as well as 70 books and 20 articles and essays from other authors were used as preliminary works to this present study of mine titled *Intercultural Communication in International Market Strategy*.

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János Máté