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CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A STRATEGIC ASSET AND A SOURCE FOR ACHIEVING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN MARITIME TRANSPORT COMPANIES

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Abstract. The paper states that interdependence of cultures in the modern world becomes more obvious and it appears at all levels of human vital activity, particularly in professional sphere. On the example of maritime transport companies it is shown, that cultural diversity can be considered as asset and source for achieving their competitive advantage.

Problems and difficulties resulting from peculiarities of intercultural dialogue as well as norms and values of representatives of different cultures in the multinational companies are considered. Necessity of formation tolerant attitude to other cultures during preparation of the future expert for work in the branch of Merchant shipping as a condition of his successful professional work is proved. The paper suggests the way of the educational process arrangement, ensuring formation of the competences necessary in this connection.

Key words: maritime transport companies, cultural diversity, maritime university, educational process, seafarer, manager, multinational companies etc.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Becoming and development of merchant shipping can be considered as meaningful dialogue which penetrates all structure of interethnic interactions and inherently acts as a means of realization of communicative links, a condition of mutual understanding and interaction of participants of activity in the sea branch.

In a context of globalization and interdependence of markets it is important to improve market strategy which promotes increase of competitiveness of the companies working in the sphere of sea industry. Alongside with the basic strategies including: maintenance of advantage on costs, differentiations of services with the added value and purposeful adaptation to needs of a client, we allocate cultural diversity of companies' structure.

Introduction of new technologies, development of container, mixed and other kinds of transportations demand close interaction and coordination of activity all parties concerned, frequently representatives of different countries and nations. Namely, the resource of qualified experts employed in a shipping complex in many ways promotes achievement of competitive advantage of a company.

The issues related to the problems, arising in mixed crews, already have been discussed at different levels for a long time [2, 3, 7-11]. Such interest is proved by the fact, that 60% of the world merchant fleet now is completed by multinational crews. While the mixed crews were the usual phenomenon within many centuries, now crew agencies "purposely" hire crew members of various ranks and from different parts of the world. This theme continues to be actual one, but in this paper we shall concentrate our attention mostly on coastal companies involved in a field of sea transport. If onboard a vessel absence of mutual understanding owing to multi-language nature occurs, diversification of cultures can become apparent immediately, since fulfillment of duties as well as safety of a vessel, crew and cargo depend on it, at coastal companies the effect can be visible not at once, but nevertheless it may have also severe consequences.

2 CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS A STRATEGIC ASSET OF MARITIME TRANSPORT COMPANIES

A cultural diversity can act as a strategic resource of a company working on the basis of international cooperation. The multinational company is one of the most complex forms of the international business, but at the same time, it is quite typical for branch of merchant shipping. The multinational companies, as a rule, use the complex global philosophy of business providing

economic activities both inside of the country, and beyond its borders.

Globalization of modern economy has led, first of all, to increase of interstate and inter-firm competition for economic resources and commodity markets, secondly, to stage-by-stage development of the interstate unions of the interfaced countries created with the purpose of achieving global advantages for the competitors in the world market. There is also fast development of integrated economic activities of sea companies (agency, crewing, forwarding and other companies working as branches of big companies in different ports, in different countries). Integration activity is expressed in increasing level of international competition that compels companies to search for ways of association of potentials and cooperation in struggle for a survival or market leadership.

Different scientists stipulate that the establishment of business partner relations among companies belonging to different countries and creation of business structures of a various degree of integration at the present stage acts as one of the most widespread organizational strategy of sea branch development [1, 4, 6, 11].

At present in world practice the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is considered as one of the most effective control system, permitting to transfer strategy of the company in the balanced complex of key parameters. It is necessary to note, that recently the shipping companies undertake attempts of introduction in a control system modern concepts of management, first of all, BSC concept. One of the purposes of introduction of this system is quantitative and qualitative evaluation of different kinds of risks. Multinational contingent of the sea companies is considered as one of such risks.

We did not intend to allocate and justify all existing parameters, but we shall focus, in our opinion, on one of the most important – a multinational contingent of the transport companies. The reality is that results of shipping companies' work are influenced by numerous, not always favorable, factors of internal and external surroundings. Diversification of cultures is considered as such factor.

Diversification is understood as division, partition of common culture into separate components. Diversification of cultures can be partial and represents increase in degree of culture diversity. Similar process should be evaluated more likely positively as quite often it leads to formation of numerous subcultures and increase in cultural variety that at the end enriches any content. Development of the multinational environment in sea industry defines necessity of recognition factors of cultural diversity while creating relation system among participants of the market, formation of management system and making business by

companies. Solving of this problem is connected with all-round studying of influence of different cultures and religions on economy and management of enterprises, with revealing mechanisms of transition to ethnic business. Absence of taking into account partner business relations such intercultural factors as features of national behaviour, religious morals, ethical standards, organizational culture, negatively influences development of joint activity.

It is expressed in occurrence of disputed situations and, finally, increase in production costs of all participants involved in business that, in turn, results in decrease in competitiveness of joint business. It is well-known, that the higher predictability of partner relations and more reliable expectation from cooperation, the more widely an opportunity of mutually advantageous activity. As the analysis of activity performed in maritime transport companies in a direction of formation and development of organizational culture, during an establishment of business relations among partners, among representatives of different countries and people has shown cultural barriers often arise. Working in other cultural environment or being in a situation of intercultural communication, employees of multinational corporations can overcome these barriers and become successful, if they are guided by the following principles:

- support of mutual interest in culture of partners;
- extending of trust in business relations;
- finding common grounds in the legal field for the guaranteed performance of obligations;
- studying culture of the country in which experts work;
- adaptation of corporate values to national values of the company's employees;
- accounting of specificity of national cultures of partners, in particular valuable orientations, customs and habits in the organization and business dealing.

Adherence to the specified principles helps the experts working in maritime transport companies, in due time to respond to changes in their culture, and also expands knowledge of specificity of clients, partners, employees' culture from other regions and countries. The following fact is also obvious, the more diverse the cultural field of business dealing is, the clearer cross-cultural distinction, the higher risks and communicative barriers are. Poly-ethnic nature of maritime community and influence of globalization cause an expediency of accounting of cross-cultural aspects in sea business. Therefore, it is important for experts to work in a direction of formation and development of the poly-ethnic competence as the strategic resource of the company's development.

The poly-ethnic competence is understood as the integrated unity of following components: communicative (mechanisms, methods and strategies necessary for different nations); social (knowledge and understanding of intercultural contacts consequences, international-legal documents in sphere of interethnic relations) and linguistic (possession of native, state and foreign languages). The degree of poly-ethnic competence formation is defined not so much by amount of knowledge, but by quality of this knowledge.

For use of a cultural diversity advantages in a multinational company it is necessary to create such organizational culture and socially-psychological climate which would promote perception of cultural distinctions, and provide obtaining of synergetic effect from integration of various cultures into business activity, consisting of the use of an attractor, particularly, considering a tendency of the company development with a view of improvement of business quality. It is possession of poly-ethnic competence by experts based on acceptance and respect of a cultural diversity that is capable to provide advantage of maritime transport companies.

3 THE INDUSTRIAL PRACTICE OF FUTURE EXPERTS IN MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

Any business is connected with a system of relations among people and to become successful in international market which, first of all, consists of people, it is necessary to learn to understand the process of "occurrence" in other culture, acquiring knowledge, skills, norms of communication and social experience. Intercultural communication competence is the major goal of students who develop both intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Communication competence reflects having the ability to negotiate and interact well across cultures [2]. The future sea experts gain such experience already during their passage of an industrial practice both on ships in mixed crews, and in the multinational companies (agency, forwarding, etc.).

This experience becomes an important stage while formation of poly-ethnic competence of students. We consider the poly-ethnic competence of students as the necessary personal quality, allowing to cooperate with representatives of other nationality on the basis of respect of their cultural values, the tolerant attitude to intercultural distinctions and to build a constructive intercultural dialogue.

For expansion of opportunities of graduates employment at AUMSU Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University (Novorossiysk, Russia) the Department of students' practice and assistance to employment of graduates is organized. The university has contracts

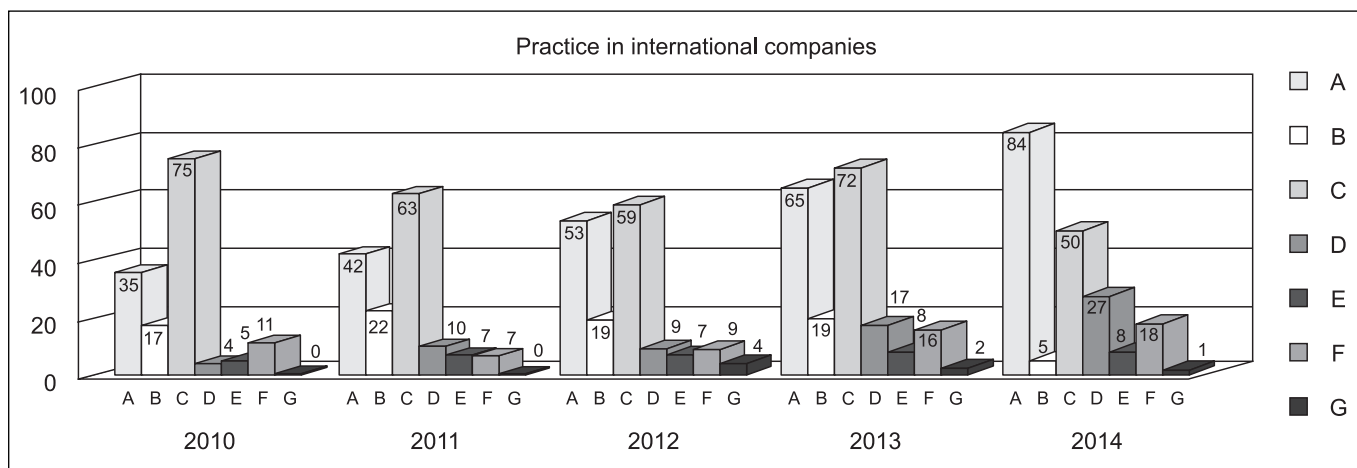


Figure 1 Number of cadets, taking part in industrial practice in multinational companies.

with the leading shipping companies and arranges passage of training and probation period by cadets and students in foreign companies.

Participants of AUMSU cadets, taking part in industrial practice in multinational companies are shown in Figure 1.

Results of the performed analysis of cadets' participation in an industrial practice in the international companies have shown, that interest to these companies grows as a whole. Moreover this interest is mutual: both from cadets, and from employers. Practical training arranged in international companies provides for the continuous and consecutive forming of cadets' knowledge and skills. The cadets' practical training is organized in accordance with State and IMO standards. While practice process cadets are involved in different operations, so they obtain not only practical skills of working in different directions, but have a good practice of foreign language communication and cultural collaboration.

Properly structured and formal cadets' practice provide a unique possibility to combine theoretical and practical training of cadets in real working conditions aboard a modern ship and in shore companies and to qualify specialists for merchant marine. One of the most important factor is that cadets are provided with a strong support system, which includes experienced specialists to guide them through the job training and learning. The main goal of the collaboration with companies is to provide students to start their career as highly motivated and qualified marine specialists.

The multinational structure of crew, special working conditions during voyage, are the factors complicating the organization of joint activity and a coordination of actions of participants.

Now the situation is aggravated with the fact that absence or a low level of the poly-ethnic competence of

students prevents constructability of an intercultural dialogue, influences display of tolerance in interethnic relations. Reasons for existing the said situation can be the following: presence of destructive elements in interethnic interactions – intolerance to another's opinion, egoism, internal hostility, ambition, a categoriality of judgments, unwillingness and inability to compromise, national chauvinism, misunderstanding of real processes occurring in the society, in the world, absence at students of culture of understanding and culture of perception of distinctions, loss of correctness of perception of ("I" concept) and others ("They" concept).

These reasons can be eliminated in a pedagogical process where system centered factor is the cultural diversity of Maritime branch and all Maritime community. In this connection formation of poly-ethnic competence reflecting a formed culture level of interethnic relations of students in poly-cultural educational space acts as grounded and reasonable objective.

4 FORMATION OF THE POLY-ETHNIC COMPETENCE WHILE TRAINING AT THE MARITIME UNIVERSITY

Values of culture, in our case, cultures of interethnic relations, tolerances, an intercultural dialogue – have the special importance in intercultural communication in the branch of sea transport which by virtue of its nature is multinational. Inclusion of cross-cultural content in curriculums of universities is caused by need in modern, polyvalent and freely guided in complex and constantly varying environment experts possessing high business culture, one of professional competence of which is ability to cooperate with representatives of different cultures in the organization, i.e. the poly-ethnic competence.

Today there is an obvious contradiction between objective need for formation at the future experts of readiness for the constructive interethnic attitude, ability to live in a poly-cultural society and insufficient development of theoretical and methodological bases of use of potential of poly-cultural educational space of higher school in poly-ethnic competence formation at students. We have assumed, that formation of poly-ethnic competence becomes effective if:

a) the concept of competence formation adequate to features of activity of these experts is put in the basis of construction of educational process:

- inclusion in the content of competence formation (in our case – the poly-ethnic competence), reflecting necessity to base not only on professional, but also culture knowledge inherent to representatives of other countries;
- use of educational technologies, forms and methods providing an adequate direction of all educational actions to formation and development of both professional competences and poly-ethnic competence;

b) the educational and material basis providing conditions for performance of educational actions is created:

- adequately reflecting industrial situations;
- adequately providing productive trajectory of educational actions;

c) modern information and telecommunication educational technologies and approaches to formation at experts of the poly-ethnic competence are used;

d) ways of performance of the educational actions adequate to modern industrial situations, taking place in branch in sea branch are developed and proved [5, 6].

Just during training of a future expert it is necessary to create conditions aimed at formation of poly-ethnic competence, expressed in tolerant attitude to the representative of other culture. In this case it is a question not only of perception of “Another”, but also about the positive response on cognizable, that is expressed in feeling of tolerance, respect, readiness without aversion to perceive his/her abilities and behaviour and adequately evaluate them. These ideas are appropriated by the student and become subsequently a basis of his/her tolerant attitude to cultural “Another”, defining the further character of professional and individual attitude of the future expert, and also an orientation of his/her actions and acts in sphere of the poly-ethnic communications.

Higher education challenges a complex of problems connected with formation of culture of interethnic attitudes of students in poly-cultural educational space.

Among them there is a development of valuable installations of a personality by means of enrichment of his consciousness with national-specific values of different cultures, education of youth with the purpose of expansion and deepening of its ethno-cultural ideas. These questions often are solved independently on each other, on examples of separate courses or specializations.

Ability to communicate in one language is also an essential factor, determining success of a multinational company irrespective of the fact representatives of what nationalities work in it. A condition of successful work of multinational companies is ensuring basic knowledge of any common language before commencing work for the company. There is an imperative need not only to recognize presence of mixed companies both on language, and on culture, but also necessity in a new way to fulfill interaction and mutual understanding among their members. Both the organizers of educational process, and the heads of multinational companies should pay attention to it.

In merchant shipping English language plays an exclusively important role. It acts as a working language of majority shipping, crewing, stevedore, agency companies carrying out activity in the field of merchant shipping. Specificity of activity of merchant shipping means constant cooperation at the international level, and communication in foreign language.

In our earlier works we've already proved that at use of foreign language studying in process of professional activity training there are means of training of two kinds:

- already generated knowledge is used for understanding of the foreign language text describing the studied phenomena; thus foreign language is used as means of training;
- foreign language phenomena which have not been mastered yet by trainees, are studied to understand described with their use studied cultural and the professional phenomena. Thus, on the basis of foreign language two-floor means of training of activity is built. The first floor is already available knowledge, and the second is the process of studying of new foreign language [6].

Inclusion of future experts in the virtual intercultural communications aimed at formation of the poly-ethnic competence creates not only motivational base for speaking another language, but also form need for dialogue with native speakers, friends and colleagues, also concerned in perception of the culture of “Another”. The organization of virtual communications on the basis of any common issue, which discussion and research is equally significant for partners from different countries, creates the real language environment. Here language acts in its direct function – formation and for-

mulations of ideas, and participants of the communication are involved both in a discussed problem, and in other culture, and in themselves as carriers of cultural identity.

We consider foreign language competence as one of the key features of professionalism of sea specialists. The basic purpose is not formation of only special knowledge and skills, but professional-communicative competence expressed in ability of the communicative organization of professional work including cooperation in multicultural surroundings.

For this strategy, special emphasis is given to the Situational and functional approach to constructing the process of future specialists training [5].

The idea of the Situational and functional approach is in carrying out of the student through the professional situation of training filled with the poly-ethnic content and in its inclusion in functional system operating in this situation of formation of competence by performance of adequate educational actions. In other words, process of formation and development of poly-ethnic competence of students consists of:

a) creation of the initial situation consisting of readiness of a teacher, providing a program of inclusion a student in current poly-profile, poly-ethnic and communicative educational actions and possible means of their performance, readiness of a student for performance of current poly-profile, poly-ethnic, and communicative educational actions of productive and creative character and readiness of offered for a choice possible means of performance of these actions;

b) inclusion and providing action of functional educational system of formation and development of the poly-ethnic competence.

Performance by students of various situations adequately reflecting activity of a multinational company, their decision in different educational communications at continuous and incidental support of a teacher and different interactions with other students and at different levels of independence leads to formation (at students) abilities operatively to perceive, learn and solve the industrial situations arising in poly-ethnic society, to the development of the poly-ethnic competence.

Construction of process of poly-ethnic competence formation consists of the following:

a) creation of a trainee orientation on poly-profile and communicative activity of this expert in poly-ethnic society, prospects of formation of his outlook and ability to live, attitude and motivation on a current mastered component of the content of education in view of a current state of its erudition;

b) drawing up by a teacher of a forthcoming activity program forming a current component of poly-ethnic competence in view of a current condition of a trainee's erudition;

c) preparation of means of performance system by a trainee of his actions creating a current component of his poly-ethnic competence;

d) inclusion of functional system of educational interactions, creating or developing the poly-ethnic competence of the expert of merchant shipping;

e) organization of subject-objective and subject-subjective relations of a teacher and students and educational actions directed to selection and transformation, integration of poly-profile, poly-ethnic and communicative information;

f) use of intermediate results for the organization or corrections of current educational actions.

Criteria of poly-ethnic competence formation are:

- motivational and valuable (aspiration to constant accumulation of an expert features, capable to work in multinational society which is characterized by a cultural diversity);
- cognitive (a set of professional, speaking another language and culture knowledge; possession of bases of analysis of cross-cultural problems, interaction usual for business sphere; knowledge of ways of intercultural conflict management and negotiating on its settlement);
- operational (development of means and forms of interpersonal interaction; recognition of reasons of a cultural shock and a finding ways of its overcoming);
- reflective (subjective approach in purpose formulation; skill to diagnose the personal growth; skill to analyze and project interpersonal and group communications in poly-cultural society).

Summarizing the above-named skills it is possible to group them as follows:

a) professional motives and aims directed to intercultural communication and a cultural diversity;

b) professional communicative (including speaking another language) skills;

c) knowledge of interaction tolerance (formation of emotional intelligence);

d) reflective position.

Formation of poly-ethnic competence is directed to completely organized understanding of social and cultural reality that assumes a support on the value motivational bases of culture of a young man.

We consider it necessary to allocate principles of educational process construction:

- principle of ethno-cultural pluralism (acceptance and understanding of representatives of other cultures; breeding of tolerance to another's opinions and beliefs; a recognition of an equivalence and equality of all ethnic groups);

- principle of acculturation (process of occurrence of a person in other culture; formation of positive attitude to an ethno-cultural diversity; acceptance of idea, that diversification of cultures is not only a norm, but also the advantage);
- principle of culture conformity (the account of specificity of the environment to live and use its opportunities);
- principle of an interethnic dialogue (interaction with representatives of other nations, cultural exchange);
- principle of inter-disciplines (reflection of an ethno-cultural material in different disciplines);
- principle of poly-linguistic arrangement (perfection of native and foreign languages learning).

Practical introduction of model of poly-ethnic competence formation at students in poly-cultural educational space of maritime higher school testifies its efficiency and suitability in vocational training of future sea experts.

Possession of the poly-ethnic competence will allow young men to resist to extremism which is formed on a background of deformation of social, cultural and political life of a society, and also will allow to develop the cognitive interest that will enrich process of their personal and professional becoming. Formation of students' ideas about tolerant interaction in the mixed crews and coastal multinational companies means expansion of "field" of mutual stay and interaction of a future expert and a cultural "Another" in conditions of the international dialogue, providing their inter-cognition, mutual change and possession of experience of positive emotional perception of a partner.

The expediency of the described methodical mechanisms of poly-ethnic competence formation at future experts is based on the fact, that effective interethnic interaction promotes not only the successful ethno-cultural adaptation of a person assuming achievement of social and psychological integration with one more culture without infringement of his own, but also promotes professional development both the separate individual, and all company, as a whole.

5 THE CONCLUSION

The poly-ethnic competence representing the integrated unity of communicative, social and linguistic components reflects feature of a person expressed in availability of a set of objective ideas and knowledge of this or that ethnic culture, realized through skills, the models of behaviour promoting effective interethnic mutual understanding and interaction. As a whole poly-

ethnic competence assumes presence of such amount of knowledge and skills which is necessary not only to adapt to realities of poly-ethnic environment, but also to be ready and capable to operate in it actively.

As mechanisms of poly-ethnic competence formation while vocational training the following types of work prevail: individual, pair and collective interactions occurring in trainings, discussions, performance of projects, participation in role and business games. These interactions can be specially organized (during training) and spontaneous or partially organized (in game, labour activity, especially during an industrial practice or from external sources of information).

The position offered by authors proves necessity of creation special poly-cultural space for the educational institution, including representatives of all groups – social, cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, etc. It is shown, that the urgency of poly-ethnic competence formation at future sea experts is defined by poly-ethnic nature of environment of their ability to live and specificity of a sea profession. The poly-ethnic competence is shown in certain situational contexts and as any competence should be supported and developed constantly in compliance with development of global and local contexts, extended in various new situations of intercultural dialogue, pass check on adequacy and efficiency as both identity of communicators, and cultural contexts, and communicative strategies are constantly developed and diversified.

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