Cultural Sensitivity in Communication for Multinational Enterprises with International Operation Sites

by

Dorothee Simpfendörfer

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts

in

Cross Cultural Communication

HORIZONS UNIVERSITY

Paris, France

March 10, 2020

Statement of Authenticity

I understand Horizons University policies on plagiarism and I certify that the content of this thesis entitled

Cultural sensitivity in communication for multinational enterprises with international operation sites

is all my work and does not contain any unacknowledged content from other sources. I certify that I have also obtained authorization to use all images, photos, illustrations, maps and charts from their authors/publishers (provide at the end of the thesis, in an appendix the authorization letters), unless they are in the public domain.

Number of words of this thesis : 27.342

Signed: D. [illegible]

Date: March 16, 2020

Intellectual property

I hereby agree to submit a paper and electronic copy of the following thesis Cultural sensitivity in communication for multinational enterprises with international operation sites to Horizons University (HU) for inclusion in its collection. From this date, I authorize HU to catalogue, index, archive and quote my thesis, create and distribute summaries thereof, and produce and share catalogue records, in France or around the world on any platform and portal of its choice, in the sole aim of contributing to research.

Therefore, I authorize HU to make my thesis freely available, in whole or in part, for consultation onsite, borrowing and interlibrary loan — via the internet/intranet — in France or abroad. Rights granted to HU through this agreement are entirely nonexclusive and free from any royalty throughout the duration of intellectual property protection provided by French law to authors, their beneficiaries or representatives, including any extensions thereto.

As the author, I will remain the copyright owner and free to publish my thesis.

D-[illegible]

Student's signature

HOERBRANZ (Austria), 03/10/2020

Place and date

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. William Wardrope for his expert advice. My gratitude also goes to the interview candidates who gave me their time and provided enriching insights by sharing personal cross-cultural experiences with me.

Foreword

I have always felt uneasy when I suspected misunderstandings in communication or a misinterpretation of behavior to trigger anger, frustration or whatever other negative emotion. What if we did not allow such unnecessary aspects to induce us talking at cross purposes or to debilitate our cooperation? What if we could understand and accept the role that cultural deviations play in this? What if we took into consideration that our own personal ways of perceiving things, of thinking, communicating and proceeding were to a high degree culturally conditioned instead of interpreting our approach to the world as the only logical one, the one given by nature? What if fewer people believed to be the only ones, who knew how to do things right?

Abstract

The business activities of multi-national enterprises (MNEs) are by nature affected by cross-cultural communication and cooperation. At first sight, there are Sales and Project Mangers travelling the world attending important meetings. Most of them are able to negotiate in a foreign language; they get intercultural trainings and gather real-life cross-cultural experiences. But what about the innumerable others in the background; those with supportive and administrative tasks who are part of the interwoven cross-cultural global business network as well? This work aims at providing helpful answers to all of them to the following research question: “What role do cultural differences play in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for multinational enterprises (MNEs)?”

The goal of this work is to help develop a broader understanding for the topic of cultural influences on perception, communication patterns and behavior as well as to open the readers’ eyes for potential misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The approach is intentionally very general. It is not about listing useful tips for cross-cultural settings that could never really comply with the many-sidedness of culture. Instead it aims at simply helping to develop awareness for the sources of problems in cross-cultural communication – no matter whether with external parties or MNE-internal ones. The approach considered appropriate for this goal was providing information available in literature and sharing additionally experiences and insights of cross-culturally experienced practitioners who were chosen in a pre-defined MNE and interviewed.

The literature input ranges from classical works analyzing and describing cultural traits in general to cross-cultural challenges in international business with external parties or in MNE-internal communication in particular. The sources considered comprise

several areas of expertise to offer a comprehensive picture. The authors cited are culture specialists like Geert Hofstede, anthropologists like Edward T. Hall or Franz Boas, communication specialists like Richard D. Lewis, linguists like Michael Minkov and Guy Deutscher and researchers experienced in error management and learning in organizations like Amy C. Edmonson or Michael Frese. The insights gained in practice were provided during interviews with seven candidates of five different nations situated in the three continents Africa, Asia and Europe. It must be admitted that seven participants is a small sample. This does, however, satisfy the qualitative and inductive approach.

With the consideration of various fields of expertise in the literature review and by providing practitioners with different cultural and professional backgrounds a chance to share their experiences, opinions and insights this work provides an opportunity for members of MNEs and other participants in global business to get a broad picture about the role of cultural differences in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems.

Table of contents

List of tables

Introduction

Since the 1950s global exports have risen enormously. In the crisis year 2008 they were 32 times higher than 1950 (Our world in data, 2014). Even though the global export volume of trade in goods has undergone some setbacks in 2009 and again in 2015 and 16, the trend in total was upwards in the decade of 2008 to 2018 (Statista, 2019a).

Communication is subject to the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations and without a doubt, cultural differences play a role in creating such communication problems. Furthermore, considering that their national economies are ranking first, sixth and seventh in the TOP 50 globalization countries (Statista, 2019b), employees in the German-speaking countries Switzerland, Austria and Germany are particularly affected by the challenges of cross-cultural communication.

In their globalized working conditions many of them, particularly those working for multinational enterprises (MNEs) active on many different national markets all over the world, are regularly confronted with culturally shaped different ways of perception as well as styles of communication and behavior. Due to the relevance of the topic, this paper therefore deals with cross-cultural communication in international business and the research question reads as follows:

What role do cultural differences play in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for MNEs?

The work is to a high degree focusing on the impact of national culture on peoples' perception of the world, their communication patterns and their behavior. However, the thesis also considers professional and organisational cultures. The examples and interpretations are concentrating on business contexts and foreseen to enrich the

general informational background by such that is particularly relevant to employees in multinational corporations and others interested in the topic.

In accordance with this intention, this thesis also contains insights gained during interviews with employees of a multinational company headquartered in Austria chosen for this study. It was considered very important to explicitly give practitioners a chance to contribute and it indeed turned out that their comments enrich the literature part.

Target group

The main target group of this thesis are employees in multinational corporations working in multi-cultural contexts. However, the input is consciously kept as general as possible to provide insights and learning potential for everybody interested in the topic – whatever position, profession or sector they are in.

Even persons with a wide range of competences and experiences are unlikely to already be sensitive to all the aspects described in the thesis or to link the single experiences together in a helpful way respectively. This work is foreseen to help them developing a broad sensitivity towards others that allows them to authentically integrate the respective communication patterns and ways of behavior into a valuing working style.

Literature Review

By definition culture can in general be described as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group”. When considering regional/national deviations between people, the term is used to highlight the typical features characterizing people’s way of living in a particular place. In the context of organizational or institutional culture the term mainly stands for the values, goals, attitudes and practices shared in this particular context. The expression is also used when

people share a particular activity or field that is accompanied with the sharing of certain values, social practices and conventions (culture. Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

In any discussion about culture, it is important to be aware of and keep in mind, that “culture is not personality” (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002, p. 42) in order to succesfully fight the temptation to suspect others of having bad intentions or a bad character rather than “acting according to different rules” (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002, p. 42).

Already in 1976, the anthropologist Edward T. Hall highlighted that amongst anthropologists it was not only generally accepted that culture is something shared within groups and defining the boundaries between these groups but that it is furthermore “not innate, but learned” (Hall, 1976, p. 16). In 2005, the renowned culture specialist Geert Hofstede even refers to culture as “software of the mind”. In the same-titled book he, his son Geert Jan Hofstede and the Bulgarian linguist and sociologist Michael Minkov explain that, while there are basic aspects that belong to human nature and are accordingly universal to everybody and inherited, the culture within a specific group or category is learned while at last the personality is a combination of inherited and learned and as a consequence specific to the individual (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2005).

Hofstede categorizes culture in so-called value dimensions. His original five dimensions are identity, hierarchy, gender, truth, and virtue (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002). They are better known as individualism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation (Hofstede, n d.-b). A sixth “related to national levels of subjective happiness and life control” (Hofstede, 2015a, p. 2) was added in 2010 based on the work of the a.m. Bulgarian linguist and sociologist Michael Minkov, and is referred to as indulgence (Hofstede, n. d-b.). In each of these six dimensions, there

are two defined opposite poles and a scale ranging from 0 to 100. According to people's answers given in large-scale international surveys, national cultures get attributed a so-called individual index score (IDV) on this 0-100 continuum between the two extremes.

The dimension "identity" or "individualism" respectively ranges from collectivism to individualism. Low scores stand for collectivist societies, high scores for individualist ones (Hofstede, 2014a, p. 5). The following table gives some examples ranging from highly collectivist to highly individualist:

country	Panama	Russia	India	Austria	Germany	GB	USA
score	11	39	48	55	67	89	91

Table 1 Example scores "collectivism vs. individualism".
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

In collectivist cultures people belong to strong in-groups clearly differentiated from other groups. In-group harmony is essential and consequently relations are more important for them than tasks. The higher a culture scores in individualism, on the other side, the more people in this society focus on themselves and their closest families. They furthermore perceive others as individuals. For them the task is more important than the relationships with others (Hofstede, 2014a). Furthermore, people in individualist societies tend to be characterized by "low-context communication" which means that "everything must be specified" (Hofstede, 2014a, p. 4.) while in collectivist societies people use a so-called "high-context communication", which means that "many things are obvious" to them (Hofstede, 2014a, p. 4.).

The dimension “hierarchy” or “power distance” respectively describes people’s beliefs in the context of authority, how they interpret and experience it, how the less powerful expect and accept that power is “distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). This dimension ranges from small to large power distance. The following table gives some examples ranging from exemplarily low to high power distance:

country	Austria	Germany	India	Arab countries	China	Mexico	Russia
score	11	35	77	80	80	81	93

Table 2 Example scores "low vs. high power distance".
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

The smaller the degree of power distance, represented by low scores in this dimension, the more people expect that hierarchies do rather exist for administrative reasons than represent an attribution of real power. The subordinates expect that they are consulted. For them authority has to be gained and power legitimated. In general, business executives are younger than in societies with a high power distance index (Hofstede, 2014c). On the other hand, the larger the power distance is in a society, the more people perceive power and influence of someone over the other as normal. In some societies this power of some persons over others is even accepted as the result of some natural superiority. Respect is a main virtue and “subordinates expect to be told” what to do. In accordance with the mental picture of a powerful person deserving a respectful treatment the business executives are older in such societies (Hofstede, 2014c, p. 4) (Hofstede & Peterson, 2000, p. 407).

While Austria is the country with the lowest power distance index of all the countries analyzed and represented in Hofstede's dimension data matrix, India (77), China (80), the Arab countries (80), Mexico (81) or Russia (93) are examples for countries with high degrees of power distance (Hofstede, 2015), (Hofstede, 2014c). Hofstede and his co-authors of *Exploring Culture* additionally point out that "large power distance is easier to maintain in a situation of poverty and limited resources" (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002, P. 36).

The dimension "gender" or "masculinity" respectively describes to which degree gender roles in a society are clearly distinguished between masculine and feminine or to what degree "emotional gender roles overlap" respectively (Hofstede, 2014b, p. 3). This dimension is referred to as "masculinity vs. femininity", however, the scores range from low for feminine to high for masculine:

country	Sweden	Russia	India	South Africa (white)	Germany	Austria	Japan
score	5	36	56	63	66	79	95

Table 3 Example scores "masculinity vs. femininity".
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

The lower the score in this dimension, the more a society is at the feminine side of the scale. This means for example, that also men are (expected to be) tender and modest (Hofstede, 2014b). The higher a society scores in this dimension, the more it is at the masculine side of the continuum, which means that men are more likely expected to be tough and assertive and women to focus on life quality.

In the dimension “truth” better known as “uncertainty avoidance”, societies are categorized to the degree its members avoid or tolerate uncertainty (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002). The following table gives some examples ranging from low to high uncertainty avoidance:

country	Singapore	Denmark	India	South Africa (white)	Germany	Austria	Russia
score	8	23	40	49	65	70	95

Table 4 Example scores "uncertainty avoidance".
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

The more societies tend to be characterized by uncertainty avoidance the more its members fear unsure and new situations. With a score of 95 Russia is amongst the highest uncertainty avoiding cultures. The scores of Austria with 70 and Germany with 65 are still so high that people there can be expected to rather avoid and fear uncertainties than embracing them (Hofstede, 2015). What is deviating from their interpretation of normal is perceived as dangerous. On the other hand, in societies in which uncertainty is accepted as something normal, people feel lower stress in new uncertain situations. They tend to be tolerant and curious about what is different rather than feeling threatened by it (Hofstede, 2015c).

When it comes to the dimension “virtue” or “long-term orientation” respectively, the distinction is made by scores on a continuum ranging from “short-term orientation” to “long-term orientation”. The following table gives some examples ranging from short- to long-term orientation:

country	Ghana	Iran	India	Austria	Russia	Germany	Korea South
score	4	14	51	60	81	83	100

Table 5 Example scores "short- vs. long-term orientation".
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

The higher a society scores in long-term orientation the more people tend to be persistent in their efforts towards long-term goals. They are willing to learn from other cultures and able to integrate opposing truths. Short-term orientation, on the other hand, "stands for the fostering in a society of virtues related to the past and the present, such as national pride, respect for tradition" and similar (Hofstede, 2015b). In business contexts it is recommended to consider that short-term orientation is likely to be correlated with a regular change of the employer, while in long-term oriented societies employees tend to aim at a long relationship with the employing company (Businessmate, 2009).

The Bulgarian linguist and sociologist Michael Minkov worked out three additional cross-national value dimensions and published them in 2007. Hofstede came to the conclusion that two of them were already represented to a sufficient degree in his five existing cultural dimensions. However, he also noticed that Minkov's third one was completing his cultural dimensions framework. Accordingly, he invited Minkov to contribute the additional dimension called "indulgence versus restraint" as a co-author to Hofstede's 2010 third edition of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (Hofstede, 2011, p. 14). The following table gives some examples ranging from restrained to indulgent:

country	Egypt	Russia	India	Germany	Austria	South Africa (white)	Mexico
score	4	20	26	40	63	63	97

Table 6 Example scores “indulgence vs. restraint”.
Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

Per definition indulgent societies “allow relatively free gratification”; having fun and enjoying life is important to people and accepted by society. According to Hofstede, people in indulgent countries tend to have a leisure ethic, are happy and optimistic. The tendency towards less moral discipline is, however, accompanied by higher crime rates. On the other side are “restraint” societies. People value work ethic, and tend to be both more pessimistic and more cynical than their indulgent counterparts. The stricter moral discipline is accompanied by a lower crime rate (Hofstede, 2015a).

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions framework overlaps with concepts of other researchers in the field. His before-mentioned attribution of high-context communication to collectivist societies and the allocation of low-context communication to individualist societies are linked to insights of Hall’s High-Low Context Model. In his classical book *Beyond Culture* the anthropologist Edward T. Hall explains that transactions are either high-, middle- or low-context. In high-context societies a lot of information is provided in the setting, this means the receiver of a message gets most of the information from the context, while there is only “minimal information in the transmitted message” itself (Hall, 1976, p. 101). A precondition for this is that the people involved had been programmed sufficiently to get all the unspoken information from the context. Provided there is such a common understanding of the context, high-context communication is “economical, fast,

efficient, and satisfying" (Hall, 1976, p. 101). On the other hand, in low-context transactions people do not get information out of a common understanding of the context. Accordingly, in this case "most of the information must be in the transmitted message" (Hall, 1976, p 101).

In his article *Cultural Differences in Business Communication* the author John N. Hooker, professor at the Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh (USA), even calls Hall's division of cultures in high- und low-context "probably the single most useful concept for understanding cultural differences in business communication" (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). Hooker explains that communication within families and close friends tends to be high-context all over the world. In such close relationships the context provides implicitly and deeply understood information to everybody involved. The societies at large, however, are split into rather low-context in many European countries and those which have historical roots in Western Europe (like the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and high-context in most of the other nations (Hooker, 2008). As Philippe Rosinski describes in *Coaching Across Cultures* the high-context-low-context dimension does also have an influence on the communication media people prefer. The more on the high-context side of this dimension the more people expect and feel well with face-to-face communication. As an example, Rosinski explains that accordingly the procedure of conducting coaching over the phone popular in the low-context USA might not be appropriate for people conditioned to high-context. He therefore recommends remote teams to be "particularly concerned with this cultural dimension" (Rosinski, 2003, p. 156).

Besides Rosinski's business context example, there is also one in Hookers article. He uses an example to describe how this cultural trait can be experienced in practice:

Munich Airport situated in the low-context culture Germany is full of signs informing about the way to ticket offices, public transportation, taxis, the tourist information or lavatories. The same is true for the surroundings with detailed street maps everywhere as well as bus and tram schedules. He explains that this would not be the same in high-context cultures in which people "are accustomed to providing information through a social context rather than impersonal signs" (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). According to Hooker such social context can be a person sent to greet and fetch a stranger at the airport, behavior that is likely to be experienced in high-context cultures. He emphasizes that on the other hand not greeting a visitor at the airport in low-context cultures is not a sign of inhospitality but an indicator for the fact that information is passed on differently.

This example illustrates well that signs and schedules and similar are more than mere information providing tools and the associated predictability does more than simply help reduce uncertainty. Whether there are signs that show travelers the way to the airport's taxi stand or not does, however, not have a high impact on their lives. On the other side, there are safety-sensitive contexts as well, in which some cultures do indeed attribute importance to signs and written information, which in other cultural environments are not automatically perceived as important. Low-context is often to be found in normative settings like e.g. in industries which are obliged to adhere to strict guidelines. In the European mechanical engineering and automation sector e.g. a mandatory standardized safety concept is applied. The European Machinery Directive obliges enterprises to identify potential dangers linked to the future operation of a machine in advance in a so-called risk assessment. Besides installing mechanical protection devices and defining programmed solutions like emergency stops, it is also foreseen to apply standardized warning signs and to inform of residual risks in the associated manual (European Machinery Directive). Directives like this are common and

highly normative in style and content. It can be imagined that in some national and professional cultures this is considered the only logical approach, while others perceive the level of detail in provisions and rules as excessive.

As far as company norms and rules are concerned, Hooker points out that it is necessary to communicate them personally to staff in high-context cultures and that it is furthermore essential to personally supervise their compliance, else the rules "may be seen as non-binding" (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). This allows the conclusion that employees with a high-context background require more verbal information when they are expected to observe rules, like e.g. in safety contexts.

It is as well important to understand the differences in the area of contracts. In low-context societies contracts are thoroughly worked out in detail and once signed can only be modified when both parties agree to do so. Accordingly, parties with low-context backgrounds automatically assume that it is the task of the legal system to enforce compliance in case one of the parties fails to deliver. Hooker furthermore explains that on the other hand in a high-context society a written contract "may be more a memorandum of understanding than a binding legal document" (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). For people there, the actual agreement is seen in the mutual understanding and its compliance is likely to be based on a trust relationship established in advance. Hooker accordingly warns managers with a low-context background to take into consideration that partners in high-context cultures might just draw up contracts in order to please them. They might want to regularly modify them because they expect flexibility in the adaptation to changing circumstances rather than "enslave" themselves "to a piece of paper" (n.p.).

The high-low context dimension does not only influence the amount of informative and warning signs or the significance and depth of detail in written

information provided, but also has an influence on spoken language. Part of the contextual information in high-context cultures is provided in indirect communication. While direct communicators use words to transfer a message, indirect ones convey information also nonverbally, use pauses, change the tone of voice, etc. (Joyce, 2012).

According to Hooker low-context negotiators are warned to be careful to not rely on the spoken word too much (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). Depending on the context a spoken "yes" can just be a confirmation that some message is understood and is not necessarily a sign of agreement (n.p.). For a direct communicator, however, a "yes" means "yes" (CIE Purdue, 2016, 01:10), because "direct communication is when you say what you mean and you mean what you say" (CIE Purdue, 2016, 0:35-0:43). Cynthia Joyce of the University of Iowa confirms that direct communicators tend to have problems with indirect communication. She furthermore explains that on the other hand indirect communicators tend to be able to also pick up nuances of indirect communication that do not derive from their own cultural background and which they are not familiar to (Joyce, 2012).

While understanding intonation and also body language are important to get the real message of indirect communicators, these aspects are of general importance as conversations never only consist of messages transmitted by words. Justine Cassell of the University of Pennsylvania and her co-authors emphasize that any spoken message is additionally intonated in a way suitable for the context as well as accompanied by facial expressions, directions of gaze, gestures, etc. (Cassell et. al, 1998, p. 2). They point out that speech and gestures are highly interconnected and highlight the large contribution of behavior and meaningful utterances to conversations. According to Cassell feedback to a conversation partner can be given with a mere facial expression. Furthermore, there are

even situations in which speakers rely completely on the information conveyed in gestures, without considering what is simultaneously conveyed in speech (p. 6).

Another aspect influencing the use of nonverbal elements is whether the conversation is held in the native language of everybody involved or not. Tammy S. Gregersen of the University of Northern Iowa points out that for those participants using a second language the verbal content may not be completely clear. With non-native speakers involved it is accordingly likely that nonverbal elements like facial expressions and gestures are used to compensate for the restricted flow of verbal information. Due to nonverbal behavior's significant role in communication, Gregersen even advocates for incorporating body language into foreign language teaching. Learners should get help to "go beyond the linguistic context and heed the nonverbal cues of their interlocutors" (Gregersen, 2007, p. 51). Tarjani Sheth of the Indian Uka Tarsadia University does additionally point out that a match of nonverbal signals and the spoken words increase clarity, rapport and trust, while a mismatch results in confusion, tension and mistrust (Sheth, 2017, p. 69).

Persons' individual cultures and their national ones have an impact on organizational culture. Nevertheless, the latter differs from them (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007, as cited in Gutterman, 2015, p. 2). As a consequence it is necessary to consider dimensions of organizational culture as well. According to Gutterman, organizational culture is even likely to be "a more influential force than any other set of internal laws – rules and procedures" (p. 1). In order to complete the view of national culture, dimensions of organizational culture should be focusing on tasks to be carried out and the corresponding practices applied by the organization's members (p. 3).

In the 1980s already, Geert Hofstede's Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (IRIC) also carried out studies on organizational culture. In this context, Hofstede provides six dimensions of practices. These are "process-oriented versus results-oriented", "job-oriented versus employee-oriented", "professional versus parochial", "open systems versus closed systems", "tight versus loose control" and "pragmatic (flexible) versus normative (rigid)". He explains that the particular industry or business contributes to how an organization scores in these dimensions. In this context Hofstede admits, that his original study was not representative due to the small sample of organizations as well as the local restriction to the Netherlands and Denmark (Hofstede, n.d.-a).

Despite referring to Hofstede's dimensions of organizational culture as "rudimentary", Gutterman interprets them to be "useful" nevertheless (Gutterman, 2015, p. 5). He summarizes them well as follows: Process-oriented cultures are in contrast to results-oriented ones characterized by "an elaborate system of technical and bureaucratic routines" (p. 5). An astonishing fact is, that this high degree of pre-defined routines causes "vast differences among the members <…> with respect to perceptions of how work should be conducted (p. 5), while the more results-oriented the organization the more homogenous its members are in this context. With reference to Peters and Waterman he explains that more results-oriented cultures are strong cultures and the other way round (Peters & Waterman, as cited in Gutterman, 2015, p. 5).

In job-oriented cultures employers focus on their employees' job performance while organizations categorized as employee-oriented also care for their employees' general well-being (Gutterman, 2015, p. 5). Gutterman explains, that according to Hofstede's research, this is a cultural trait to a high degree shaped by the founder(s)'

philosophy. In professional cultures opposed to parochial ones, employees are highly qualified and identify with their professions. In parochial organizations, on the other hand, members are “reliant on the organization itself for their identity” (p. 5). The dimension “open systems versus closed systems” describes the degree of openness towards externals in general and new employees in particular, i.e. about how easy these get access to the organization or get integrated into it respectively (p. 6). Gutterman explains that Hofstede suggested an interconnection between societal and organizational openness (p. 6).

While the openness present in an organization seems to be influenced by the society of its environment, the degree of control seems to be partly influenced by the sector an organization is active in. Pharmaceutical companies are considered examples of “tight control”, while advertising agencies tend to be characterized by rather “loose control” (Gutterman, 2015, p. 6). Hofstede’s sixth dimension of organizational culture “pragmatic (flexible) versus normative (rigid)” describes an organization’s method in dealing with other parties like e.g. customers. With reference to this, Gutterman explains that contexts, which force to apply rules create more normative cultures. Selling services on the other hand is accompanied by a higher degree of pragmatism or flexibility respectively (p. 6).

Every organization has one leading culture style, but there are normally also four subculture types present, which in the “Competing values framework model” by Cameron and Quinn are referred to as clan, adhocracy, hierarchy and market cultures (Bridge Business College, 2018). They tend to be appropriate answers to particular tasks at hand. Accounting departments with their need for structure and stability e.g. tend to be shaped by a hierarchy culture that is also referred to as a “control” culture. R&D departments, on

the other hand, with their focus on innovation are likely to be adhocratic, which is also referred to as a “create” culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 54). There is some natural competition or tension between these subcultures.

In cross-cultural organizational contexts it is additionally recommendable to consider the influence of people’s deviating time concepts. This means that the cultures are categorized according to how its members perceive and use time. For this classification Lewis uses the terms “linear-active”, “multi-active” and “cyclic” (Lewis, 2018, p. 44-48). On the one hand there are countries that can clearly be assigned to one of those categories. These are e.g. Germany and Switzerland as textbook examples for linear-active, Vietnam, China and Japan as typical examples for reactive and Latin American, African or Arab cultures as examples for multi-active. On the other hand, there are also cultures that are characterized by a combination of two concepts. Australia or Belgium are e.g. positioned between linear-active and multi-active, Arab countries or India are examples for cultures which show traits that are categorized as multi-active and such that are typical for reactive societies as well, while Canada is interpreted to as well show reactive behavior, but being culturally closer to the linear-actives (p. 35).

Linear-active persons prefer to work in accordance with a fixed schedule and to carry out the items on it one after the other (Lewis, 2018, p. 45). This particular linear-active aspect of preferring doing just one thing at a time before starting the next is also referred to as monochronism. Its opposite polychronism describes people preferring doing things in parallel, valuing multitasking. According to the literature, a polychronic use of time is dominant amongst Latin Americans, Arabs, Africans and Indians. It is also found to a high degree in Mediterranean cultures. Its degree is, however, varying. Northern Italians are e.g. considered less polychronic than Southern ones. Such deviations can also

be found amongst Slav cultures, with the Central Europe Czechs, Slovakians, Slovenians and Croats found to be less polychronic than other Slavs (Monochronic and Polychronic countries, 2003).

Lewis describes linear-actives to plan ahead methodically, and he even interprets them to be “dominated by timetables and schedules” (Lewis, 2018, p. 27). This monochronic way of managing time and proceeding with tasks conflicts with the polychronic approach in multi-active cultures, where people are happy and fulfilled when doing many things at the same time. People who use their time in a multi-active way do attribute only very limited value to punctuality in general and the adherence to schedules in particular (p. 45). Lewis explains e.g. that „Arabs are much more relaxed in their timing” (p. 376).

There are also further conflicting traits between linear-active cultures like the German or Swiss ones and the multi-active cultures like the Arab or Latin American cultures. The first ones tend to gather information in statistics and databases, the second ones rely on information they got first-hand (orally). Linear-actives stick to plans and facts, the multi-active tend to change plans and juggle facts; the first ones work in accordance with correct procedures, the others try to pull strings. Furthermore, the linear-actives tend to separate their social and professional lives while it is typical for the multi-actives to interweave their social and professional lives (Lewis, 2018, p. 28). All these deviations make clear why Edward T. Hall already in 1976 explained that the mono-chronic Americans would be “psychologically stressed in many ways when confronted by” polychronic-time “systems such as those in Latin America and the Middle East” (Hall, 1976, p. 17).

Indeed, Latin Americans are classified multi-active cultures, similar to the Arabs though. However, contrary to the predominantly Muslim countries of the Arab world the Latin Americans tend to simultaneously be indulgent, which means that they are openly "enjoying life and having fun" (Hofstede, 2015a, p. 3, p. 6). With a score of 97 in Hofstede's cultural dimension "indulgent vs. restraint" Mexico e.g. is the prime example for indulgence (p. 6). The Arab countries, seen as a cluster, on the other hand only score 34 (Hofstede, 2015), which identifies them as restraint. While the Arab's restraint-oriented, controlled way of living compared to the enjoying Latin Americans might indicate that that they are totally different, it is important to consider that their multi-active perception and use of time is very similar nevertheless. In this aspect, Latin Americans and Arabs are together on the opposite side of Germans or Swiss on a multi-active/linear-active scale (Lewis, 2018, p. 27). It is recommendable for people working in a linear-active way to be aware of the risk that multi-active persons forced to observe a schedule might only pretend to do so (p. 45).

Persons with a cyclic use of time finally do not perceive it as a straight line from now to then. Nor is the way to go in a straight line from here to there. They believe that similar conditions of the ones already experienced will present themselves again in future and that they should take the chance then to handle them better than the time before. For them, the future cannot be planned and as a logical consequence they are less disciplined in planning it (Lewis, 2018, p. 50). Also in the context of working together with people who have a cyclic understanding of time, linear-active persons should be aware of the potential conflicts based on a discrepancy between strict schedules organizing future steps and an inner conviction that the future is somehow unplannable (p. 51). Another interesting aspect is that in cultures with a cyclic time concept people tend to feel a natural urge to learn from experiences in order to cope with negative ones better the next

time. This approach is also accompanied by the development and establishment of business concepts like kaizen (“change for better”). This “Japanese way of running a company by always trying to improve the way people work and what they do” (kaizen, n.d.) is seen as a valuable concept worth being imitated also in cultures that do not share the-cyclic time concept.

The time-concepts should, however, not be considered in isolation. They shape a person’s working and proceeding style, which in turn has an influence on cooperation in further aspects than managing time. There is e.g. an interesting relation between a linear-active proceeding style and a reactive style in communicating. Reactive cultures are those Lewis also refers to as listening cultures, because its members prefer to listen to the other party and understand its view before reacting. Japan is classical example of a reactive culture (Lewis, 2018, p. 26). On the other hand, Germany is the linear-active culture par excellence (p. 27). In line with that, a linear-active person like a German will probably feel good and work successfully when finding attentive listeners in reactive cultures like Japan.

Attentive listening is also to be found in Arab countries. These cultures are, however, not as typical reactive as the before-given example Japan (Lewis, 2018, p. 35). Lewis e.g. writes about the Iranians that they „can be loquacious but are not idle chatterers, particularly in business” (p. 371). According to him “they will listen attentively if they think that their interlocutor has something new to say” (p. 372).

In Lewis’ opinion, reactives and linear-actives are likely to work together successfully and satisfactorily as the respect-oriented listeners in reactive cultures value the high degree of organisation and planning in linear-active cultures (Lewis, 2018, p. 32). Nevertheless, linear-active persons should be aware, that not only people with a

cyclic time concept have problems with extreme scheduling, but even those with a reactive culture “will only allow the linear-oriented concept of time to dictate their behavior to a limited extent” (p. 51).

On the one hand, the attentive and uninterrupted listening of members of reactive cultures like Japan supports linear-active persons to present their well-worked out schedules and plans. On the other hand, it may also cause irritation. According to Lewis Westeners have “an extremely weak tolerance for silence” (Lewis, 2018, p. 29). A person brought up in a culture in which it is expected to show interest by posing questions or approval by spoken remarks might misinterpret the Japanese behaviour as disinterest. This example shows how subtle cultural deviations influence cross-cultural cooperation. Any constellation of cultures is subject to particular advantages on the one side and typical obstacles on the other.

In the following some cultural clusters are presented to more detail. Even though every national culture is independent from the others, some can be presented in clusters together with similar countries under certain circumstances (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002 , p. 44). Accordingly, despite the deviations amongst East-Asian cultures, amongst single states of the USA or amongst the German-speaking countries, these three geographic areas are for the sake of simplicity presented as cultural clusters in some of the following examples of cross-cultural constellations.

The German speaking countries Germany, Austria and Switzerland are often referenced to in common. They themselves often call their compound of nations the DACH-region, with D standing for Deutschland=Germany, A standing for Austria and CH for Switzerland. (Note: with its mere 38,600 inhabitants (Countrymeters, 2019), the German-speaking country Liechtenstein is not considered separately in most of the

cultural comparison literature available, and therefore not considered in this work. Nor are countries with German minorities.) When it comes to structuring world-wide sales activities, deviding consumer or sales markets in logical clusters, and similar this might be reasonable. In such cases a shared language is a good basis for categorizing.

Nevertheless, people should be aware that besides the shared language German these nations do indeed deviate in some cultural dimensions. (Note: Switzerland does also have a French, an Italian and a Romansch part. Some scores for national cultural dimensions are available in Hofstede's database separately for French and German Switzerland. If this is the case, the score presented in this work is the one of German Switzerland and clearly named accordingly. Else, the score for Switzerland presented here, is the one for Switzerland as a whole.) While Austria, German Switzerland and Germany are all scoring low in Hofstede's cultural dimension "power-distance", there are nevertheless significant deviations to be found. With a score of just 11, Austria is the country with the least power-distance in Hofstede's complete database provided online (Hofstede, 2015). The following table shows the scores in power distance in the chosen German-speaking countries:

country	Austria	German Switzerland	Germany
score	11	26	35

Table 7 Chosen German-speaking countries in the dimension "low vs. high power distance". Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

The smaller the score in power distance, the more it is likely that people perceive inequality as wrong and “subordinates expect to be consulted” as mentioned before (Hofstede, 2014c, p. 4). It can be assumed that the self-perception of employees reflected in the power distance score has an influence on their behaviour and their expectations in cross-cultural cooperation situations. Not being aware of the deviations in this dimension within the German-speaking world, might lead to a wrong and misguiding perception of the people involved.

With scores of 63 and 66, respectively, Austria and Switzerland are similar to each other in the dimension “indulgence versus restraint”, while Germany scores only 40 (Hofstede, 2015). (Please note: This Swiss score is representing Switzerland as a whole, as in this dimension no separate values are made available in Hofstede’s online database for its French and German parts.) The higher the score in the dimension “indulgence versus restraint”, the less restraint people are (Hofstede, 2015). Despite having less annual leave days and longer official working hours than the Germans, their higher scores in this dimension e.g. indicate that the Austrians and Swiss are likely to attach more value on leisure and on the cultivation of friendships than the Germans (Hofstede, 2015), (Hofstede, 2015a, p. 4). In this aspect they are culturally closer to the USA (with a score of 68) than to Germany (Hofstede, 2015).

The following table shows the scores in the national dimension “indulgence vs. restraint” of the main German-speaking countries compared with the USA:

country	Germany	Austria	Switzerland	USA
score	40	63	66	68

Table 8 "Indulgence vs. restraint” - Germany, Austria, Switzerland compared with the USA. Own representation based on Hofstede (2015)

Hofstede also worked out a matrix in which the “indulgence vs. restraint” dimension is represented together with the dimension of “long- versus short-term orientation” (Hofstede, 2015a, p. 8). Contrary to Germany, Austria and Switzerland are on the indulgence-side together with nations like the USA. As far as the three German-speaking nations’ long-term orientation is concerned, they are, however, together on the opposite side of the USA. With the combination long-term orientation plus restraint, Germany is in the same matrix-field as Japan and China are (Hofstede, 2015a, p. 8).

Indulgent + short-term South Africa, USA	*Indulgent + long-term* Austria, Switzerland
Restrained + short-term Islamic countries	*Restrained + long-term* Germany, Eastern Europe, India

Table 9 Matrix “short-term vs. long-term-orientation” / "indulgence vs. restraint” of example countries. Own representation based on Hofstede (2015a, p. 8)

This indicates that putting countries like the USA and Germany in some kind of common category called “Westeners” or similar as opposed to Asians – something that is often done – can be an error-prone categorization.

The same is true, when the efforts to get informed and learn about other cultures remain stuck on a level of stereotypes. With stereotyping we simplify our perception of others. With reference to Snyder & Haugen Dr. Wallace V. Schmidt, specialist in organizational communication, and his co-authors explain that the stereotypes we hold create expectations about how others will behave and that during our communication with them we tend to perceive primarily what is consistent with these stereotypes of ours (Snyder & Haugen, 1995, as cited in Schmidt, Conaway, Easton & Wardrope, 2007, p. 35). When learning about cultural dimensions and getting similar information about other cultures we should nevertheless be sensitive to the risk of stereotyping. It is e.g. suggested that the more people are experienced in adapting to other cultural settings, the less they fit into the picture others have of their nation of origin. Behavior and communication patterns based on culture exist accordingly in individual dispositions and not in unalterable national standards.

People tend to put under the same umbrella what is perceived as similar at first sight, like in the a.m. example of thoughtlessly categorizing US-Americans and Germans in a common culture of “Westeners”. When deviations are more obvious, they enter people’s awareness more easily. People in non-Asian cultures e.g. tend to prepare themselves well when entering business relationships with Asians and the other way round. How to exchange business cards in the particularly respectful Japanese way is such a classical example that there are hundreds of book entries, articles, blog entries, youtube videos, etc. on the topic. Lewis refers to this example as a “mandatory, two-minute

exchange of business cards" (Lewis, 2018, p. 49) and describes it as marking the starting point of a new relationship.

The problems occur when non-Asians meeting each other forget the deviations amongst their own cultures. The long-term orientation combined with a restraint culture is not the only aspect that places Germans and East-Asians culturally closer to each other than Germans to US-Americans. In *Cultural Differences in Business Communication* John N. Hooker of the Tepper School of Business (Pittsburgh, USA) exemplarily explains that American ice breaker jokes would be perceived as inappropriate by Germans who rather valued seriousness in a speaker as a prove of professionalism. The same is true for flashy visuals in presentations or expressions like "fantastic opportunity" (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). In his opinion, the Germans prefer charts and graphs providing decent research data instead and he assumes that this is based in their uncertainty avoiding culture and their desire for predictability (Hooker, 2008, n.p.). Not being aware of deviations in culture might lead a person to misinterpret a certain behavior as unprofessional instead of recognizing it what it is: a proof of professionalism corresponding to the expectations in the other person's culture.

Cultural deviations and their unnoticed contribution to potential miscommunication and misinterpretations furthermore often lay much deeper than we are aware of. Our cultural imprint/conditioning determines how we see the others and the world. This naturally leads to misconceptions.

With reference to his dimensions of national culture Hofstede presents some examples like these: People with an individualist background might e.g. interpret the behavior in collectivist cultures as corrupt and dishonest. The other way round those with individualist traits might be misperceived as rude and heartless by the collectivists. Some-

one with a small power distance in contact with a large power distance culture might be irritated by the perceived rigidity of the high-status persons and the interpreted cowardice of the low-status persons, while they in turn might be seen as rude and disrespectful by their large power distance counterparts. People of feminine cultures risk to perceive men in masculine ones as aggressive and boastful as well as women in a role of playing the pretty doll. On the other hand, they themselves might be misperceived as weak men or unfeminine women in masculine cultures. Strong uncertainty avoiders might perceive weak uncertainty avoiders as amoral and unprincipled and might in turn be perceived by them as paranoid. Long-term oriented persons might interpret the behavior of short-term oriented ones as irresponsible, while short-term oriented might take them in turn as stingy and cold (Hofstede, 202, p. 43).

However, not only the interpretation and misinterpretation of behavior is likely to be influenced unconsciously of one's own cultural conditioning. The US-American Joseph Shaules, highly experienced PhD in intercultural communication and associate professor at the Japanese Rikkyo university as well as director at the Japan Intercultural Institute in Tokyo, describes in his book *The Intercultural Mind* how difficult it is to "understand the cultural impact on one's own way of thinking and experiencing the world" (Shaules, 2015, p. 7). He explains that our cultural background shapes even our thinking and perceptions and that it is unlikely to become aware of this (p. 7). Citing Richard E. Nisbett he exemplarily states that Westeners would "see a wall where the Asian sees concrete" (Nisbett, 2004, as cited in Shaules, p. 6).

Nisbett and Masuda provide an insightful example about cultural influence on our perception by presenting the results of a test carried out by Liang-Hwang Chiu, who did pioneering work in this field: American and Chinese children were shown a card with

three objects on it: a cow, a chicken and a bundle of grass. They were asked to state which of the two objects belonged together. The children with European-American background answered to nearly 70 % the cow and the chicken would belong together, because they were both animals, while about 60 % of the East Asian participants said grass and cow would belong together because cows eat grass. The differences are interpreted to be due to the fact that Americans tend to classify in rule-based categories, while Asians tend to classify objects on the basis of relationships. The third group of participants, consisting of Asian-Americans, were intermediate in their responses, i.e. showed a tendency towards the Americans' answer and perception (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003, p. 11164f). Subsequent tests and studies supported these results. Even when being shown the same picture, people of different cultural backgrounds nevertheless perceive something different. The results of mixed-culture control groups additionally show that people's perception can be influenced by several cultural backgrounds.

Shaules emphasizes that our interpretation of a situation „rests on interpretive knowledge that is largely cultural" (Shaules, p. 9) and points out that we are furthermore blind to being culturally conditioned like this (p 8). As an example he states that Americans passing studying time abroad in Japan tend to interpret the silently listening Japanese students to be shy. Having been raised in a culture in which active participation in class is expected and praised and in which not doing so is a sign of shyness, they unconsciously project their culturally conditioned view on the Japanese students, who indeed are not shy but expected and used to listen respectfully and attentively in their own cultural setting (p 8). The same is true for Westeners giving a presentation to a Japanese audience who – as mentioned before – according to Richard D. Lewis have "an extremely weak tolerance for silence" (Lewis, 2018, p. 29) and therefore risk to misinterpret an uninterrupted, attentive listening as disinterest.

We are not only culturally conditioned by the environment. Even the language we are raised in has an influence on our perception and interpretation of the world. According to the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, the language we speak determines to a high degree how we think and view the world. This concept is also referred to as linguistic relativity (Subbiondo, 2015). Based on this, Lewis explains that the minds of people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who experienced the same scene in common may nevertheless organize their shared impressions in different ways (Lewis, 2018). He therefore calls thoughts "internalized language" and states that there is a lot of "scientific support for the hypothesis that higher levels of thinking depend on language" (p. 10). The Israel linguist Guy Deutscher provides a lot of insightful examples in his book "Through the language glass. Why the world looks different in other languages".

The German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas explained already in 1938 that grammar is more than a way to structure sentences. The grammar of a language determines what people are obliged to express (Boas, 1938). This insight remained rather unnoticed, though, until the Russian linguist Roman Jacobson during his time as professor in Harvard and the MIT referred to it. Besides others, Jacobson researched on the difficulties for translation caused by aspects in languages that do not exist in other ones. With reference to Jacobson, Deutscher provides the word "neighbor" as an example. While in English this can be a male or female person and doesn't really matter as long as nobody decides to mention the gender additionally, many other languages explicitly require the information about the gender, because there are deviating male and female forms of the word and one of them has to be chosen (Deutscher, 2010, p. 151).

Boas' focus lay on the role of grammar in languages and Jacobson's work was mainly about the difficulties for translation based on the differences between languages. Deutscher emphasizes that even though none of them had explicitely analyzed the influence of their findings on the mind, they nevertheless provided "the key to unlocking the actual effects of a particular language on thought" (Deutscher, 2010, p. 152). He comes to the following conclusion: If a language forces its speaker to be attentive to certain aspects that have to be expressed (like the neighbor's gender in the a.m. example), people grown up with this language particularly pay attention to such peculiarities whenever they speak or listen. This "can eventually settle into habits of mind with consequences for memory, or perception, or associations, or even practical skills" (Deutscher, 2010, p. 152).

Based on this it can be said that knowing other languages expands the perception. Deutscher stimulates the readers to reflect whether e.g. Germans who only have one word for the English "when" and "if" necessarily fail to understand the difference of the two (Deutscher, 2010, P. 147). Already in the 1950s Jacobson furthermore explained that people amplify their language by loanwords or loan-translations when they do not have a word available in their own language that expresses something as aptly as the foreign word (Jabobson, 1959, p. 234). As shown, culture in general and language in particular shape our perception of the world. Even visual or acoustical information that we interpret to be neutral messages in reality provoke different mental pictures in people of different cultural backgrounds and thus a wide range of possible misunderstandings.

All the before mentioned aspects have a deep impact on the cooperation between employees with overall operations responsibilities and staff in internationally situated operation sites. One major contributor to conflict in this field is a deviating concept of

how to deal with errors. Conflicting interests like detecting, analyzing and solving errors on one side and fear of admitting and dealing with errors on the other side are deeply influenced by culture. A group-wide standardized error management is therefore considered to be a suitable example topic for the analyzation of cultural influences in the associated corporation-internal communication.

In error management, the degree of trust felt by the people involved influences the degree of their proactive attitude. Lewis explains that people in linear-active cultures tend to trust in institutions. They tend to rely on scientific truth and consistency and experience trust when people really do what they say they would do. The trust of persons with a multi-active cultural background, on the other hand, is rather based on closeness and compassion, on the experience that others will not exploit one's weaknesses, but instead show their own ones openly. In reactive cultures finally, trust is based on reciprocal attention and the protection of the other's face that comes with it. These fine demands in building trust are also the reason why it is more difficult to be created in virtual teams, as e.g. both competence and integrity are more difficult to be conveyed (Lewis, 2018, p. 124).

In the context of establishing trust there is an additional interesting aspect. In his book *The Culture Code – The Secretes of Highly Successful Groups*, Daniel Coyle explains that people erroneously belief that they can only show their vulnerability or weaknesses respectively in a climate of trust. However, according to Coyle, it is the other way round. Showing vulnerability creates trust. This is the reason why he invites his readers to overcome the natural tendency of trying to hide weaknesses and demonstrate one's own fallibility instead (Coyle, 2018, p. 76).

It is likely that MNEs with international operation sites will have error management processes that are standardized for all of them. If the success in prevention and rapidity in detection are to be increased by the development of trust, it is important to be aware of the a.m. deviations in culturally diverse people involved. However, with appropriate sensitivity and adaptation to deviating needs it is possible to develop a common feeling of trust, a common open error culture for all of them. Shaules explains that "cultural processes are highly plastic – that they change and develop over time, and are highly responsible to their environment" (Shaules, 2015, p. 6). It can therefore be assumed that an appropriate error culture can be established all over a corporation's national units.

In the following, there is closer information about this chosen example topic of MNE-internal communication and cooperation. There are subtleties and nuances in the use of the term error that make it difficult to define. It is "often used interchangeably with mistake" (error. n.d.-a), which is defined by The Cambridge Dictionary as "an action, decision, or judgment that produces an unwanted or unintentional result" (mistake. n.d.-a). As error can be defined as "something done or written by accident that is not correct, not accurate, or does not give the right result" (error. n.d.-b), this interchangeable use of the terms mistake and error is indeed possible in certain contexts.

However, there is an additional aspect to it. A mistake is a particular kind of error, this means one that is "caused by poor reasoning, carelessness, insufficient knowledge, etc." (mistake. n.d.-b). So the person committing a mistake has a personal influence on the occurrence or avoidance of the unwanted result. An error, on the contrary, can be more complex. In this additional sense it is to a certain degree outside a person's influence. It can e.g. be based in a system. This is why error management is much more

than providing additional information to people involved. And it is furthermore the reason why blaming people involved in the occurrence of an error is out of place and counterproductive.

In software contexts error is defined as the deviation between actual and expected output (error. n.d.-c). Similarly van Dyck and her co-authors define error as unintended deviations from plans or goals. Accordingly, they furthermore distinguish between action errors and inefficiencies, as what is inefficient requires unnecessarily much more time or other input, however, does reach the actual goal (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Connentag, 2005, P. 1228).

The term violation is one to be avoided as synonym of error. Violations are carried out consciously while errors occur unintentionally (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Connentag, 2005). The definition of accident as something bad happening unintentionally and unexpectedly (accident. n.d.) does overlap with error. Compared to the general expression error the term accident is mainly used in contexts, in which unintentional damages and injuries occurred. So for the MNE with international operation sites in the sector of public transport chosen for this study, successfully avoiding errors means successfully avoiding accidents and is accordingly of high importance.

Summarized it can be said, that in contrast to violations errors occur unintentionally, they are often more complex than mistakes and tend to be outside of a single person's sphere of influence. While there are many errors without any wide-ranging consequences they can as well be a threatening risk for a corporation when they e.g. occur in form of an accident with high damage to material and life. As a consequence, it is recommendable to take measures against such potential negative consequences. This is where error management, at best accompanied by the establishment

of an appropriate open error culture, comes in, a task that requires different approaches in different cultures.

Some authors argue that a mental openness towards errors in organizations leads to increased creativity. In such a case the term open error culture is used to express the goal to explicitly allow and even foster errors in order to learn from them, gain new insights and become more innovative on the long-term (Kemmer & Zahn, 2018). When it comes to environments where safety is important, the term error culture is of course something totally different. Here it is about creating a climate in which errors or potential sources of errors can be openly identified, pointed out to, analyzed and prevented or solved.

One major aspect in this context is the acceptance that people, even highly qualified and competent ones, can fail. In his book *Fallibility at Work : Rethinking Excellence and Error in Organizations* the Norwegian philosopher and associate professor in Leadership and Organizational Management Øyvind Kvalnes explains that the increase of safety in aviation that could be achieved over time was highly based on the insights that pilots are fallible no matter how experienced they are and that skilled people can be "blind to aspects of their work environment" and this without being aware of such blindness (Kvalnes, 2017, p. 76).

Also other authors emphasize that errors are unavoidable (Harteis et al., 2005). Therefore it is important to develop an appropriate attitude towards them. In *Organizational Error Management Culture and Its Impact on Performance: A Two-Study Replication* the authors explain that there is a much better awareness and understanding for negative consequences of errors than for the potential of positive ones (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005, p. 1228). They refer to Sitkin (1996) in order to get

support for the argument that positive effects like learning, resilience and innovation are less noticeable (p. 1228).

In contexts in which safety is at risk, errors should at best not occur at all. Achieving a goal like zero errors is, however, unrealistic. Human errors are ubiquitous (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005, p. 1229) and can never completely be prevented (p. 1228). Fortunately, it is possible to create circumstances in which errors can be prevented or detected soon enough to limit negative consequences or avoid further damage. Van Dyck and her co-authors give the example of "error trapping" during the crosschecking procedures in airplane cockpits by which an error is caught "before its negative consequences can unfold" (p. 1229). Such an official proceeding is particularly useful in a national or organizational culture in which junior staff or minorities would not dare to point out problems they noticed to superiors.

It is unavoidable to involve the people concerned in active avoidance as well as successful detection and troubleshooting. In *Failing to Learn and Learning to Fail (Intelligently). How Great Organizations Put Failure to Work to Innovate and Improve* the authors Cannon and Edmondson explain that organizations are such complex systems that it is important to train people in a way that they develop an understanding for the fact that small errors can have large negative consequences (Cannon & Edmondson, 2004, p. 313). The identification of small deviations having large consequences can be "enabled by effective information systems that facilitate collection and analysis of otherwise dispersed experiences" (p. 313).

It is not only necessary to consider the qualification of staff involved but recommended to also consider human nature in general and communication patterns in particular. Well-defined processes in a system can supports staff (checks according to

protocol), however, too much prescription can be counterproductive. Using the potential of people is a very important next step. Identifying a potential error is only helpful when the identifier dares to speak up. For young or unexperienced persons there is a psychological barrier to point out potential errors when superiors are involved. In aviation a signal word was introduced that allows everybody noticing an occurring problem to be heard. However, the person must be trained to be confident using this word, because it obviously places the speaker in the center of attention. Airlines are categorized as “High Reliability Organizations (HRO)” and many have standardized “Human Factors” trainings about how to cope with special human demands in the cooperation with colleagues and superiors. In general, airlines have exemplarily well-developed standards e.g. in aspects like an unequivocal phraseology for crew-internal communication across hierarchical levels or anonym and non-punitive error reporting systems (Rascher & Schröder, 2017, p. 195f).

Developing the self-esteem to be confident enough to speak up (training, awareness that even experienced people can act erroneous), assisting in overcoming anxiety to speak up, help people perceive themselves as a team/a system are demanding tasks. It can be assumed that the prevailing cultural conditions in particular locations have an influence on how easy or difficult it will be to achieve such a goal. One aspect is the before mentioned dimension of power distance. In cultures with low power distance “leaders have limited power and have to be resourceful democrats” and people tend to “talk or fight conflicts out” (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002, p. 100). On the other hand, in high power distance cultures people are restrained and formal in their behavior and communication and furthermore expect that blame for problems will be shifted downward (Hofstede, Pedersen, Hofstede, 2002, p. 98). It is likely that the

communication required in training employees to speak up will impose different demands in cultural contexts deviating like this.

Despite the demands of adapting communication patterns appropriately to different cultural settings, the effort is worth it. Learning how to communicate errors openly and to share knowledge gained provides learning effects to a wide range of people and improves error prevention (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005, P. 1230).

Van Dyck and her co-authors analyzed two studies carried out in two different European countries. They got confirmed that an organizational culture allowing and supporting to manage errors successfully "was positively related to firm performance" (p. 1228) and suggest "that high-error management culture translates into high-firm performance" (p. 1229). Besides work procedures also product and service quality are improved (p. 1230). Communicating with operation staff in a way that they understand the need for a functioning open error culture and that they develop trust that they will not be blamed does accordingly have a measureable effect.

It can be assumed that also getting across the importance of sharing knowledge and of aiming at a continuous improvement will be more or less difficult in the different local cultures of operation sites involved. In cultures with a cyclic understanding of time, which is typical for many Eastern countries, people for example tend to think that similar situations with comparable opportunities but also similar risks and dangers are going to occur and reoccur in a cyclic way (Lewis, 2018, p. 47). Such a condition of mind supports the natural compulsion to reflect what had happened and to learn from it in order to be prepared for mastering reoccurring situations better the next time. On the other hand, in cultures with a linear concept of time there is a tendency that just the completing of the

actual task is valued and the next one is started right away in a linear way of working through the tasks at hand.

The advantages of a reflective, learning approach to problem solving are not the only aspects worth mentioning in the context of dealing with errors, which was chosen as an example of internal cross-cultural communication. It is also interesting to know, that already in the 1990s "research in a medical setting revealed that highly performing teams reported more errors" (van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005, p. 1231). The researches Amy Edmondson and Mark Cannon had besides others analyzed the "barriers to learning from failure" and found out that groups with a learning-oriented belief about failure performed better on the long-term than groups covering up failure because in such an open climate problems can be addressed and discussed directly, feedback is given and listened to and problems can be handled productively (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001, p. 169). However, the reality in organizational settings seems to be that failures are frequently covered up (Frese and Keith 2015, p. 668).

In this context of error management, cultures can also clash in another way. People conditioned to using indirect communication are likely "to hint and hope instead of addressing an issue in more direct manner" (Kvalnes, p. 70). According to the philosopher and associate professor at the Department of Leadership and Organizational Behaviour of the BI Norwegian School of Management, Øyvind Kvalnes, it is understandable that people do this as "vague and indirect communication can protect both the sender and the receiver from unpleasantness" (Kvalnes, p. 70).

Indirectness accordingly tends to occur particularly in situations of disagreement, when a decision is to be discussed or a conflict to be solved. This is especially true in high-context cultures where communicators feel a desire to avoid offensiveness and an

urge to save face. According to Hooker, persons of Western cultures on the other side tend to expect that disagreeing parties state their views openly. They furthermore have a tendency to take it for granted that the strongest argument wins and accordingly support theirs with data they regard as objective, like calculations. Their unquestioned expectation in this context is that the "losers" "subjugate their personal feelings" to the objective criteria. Hooker points to the fact, that "in much of the world, however, there is no such faith in objectivity". For long-term working relationships with indirect communicators he points out to the importance of avoiding being offensive and to "preserve harmony through deference, courtesy, and indirection (Hooker, 2008, n.p.).

Under whatever cultural preconditions an error management system is to be established or maintained, it is necessary to credibly communicate its non-punitive approach. As best practice examples show, it is important that structure and culture are well aligned. This means that policies and procedures as aspects of structure support desired behavior like openly communicating errors while at the same time it is clear that this is not only stated on paper but "actively promoted and valued by the senior management, middle management and employees among each other" (AFM, 2017, p. 13). So, developing the handling of errors from a mere performance of duty into a desire to improve is an example of developing the organizational culture.

In *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* Cameron and Quinn provide some fuel for thought about the reasons for organizational success. They first summarize Porters criteria for company success and then list example companies which are highly successful even though they did not have such competitive advantages at their side (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). The criteria for company success defined by Porter in 1980 were high barriers for new competitors to enter the particular market, providing products

that cannot be substituted, having a large market share, low levels of bargaining power of both customers and suppliers as well as rivalry amongst the competitors (Porter, 1980).

Cameron and Quinn emphasize that most of the successful US firms in the 20 years before their book was published had not had such competitive advantages. The authors highlight that on the contrary, the five financially most successful US firms (Southwest Airlines, Wal-Mart, Tyson Foods, Circuit City and Plenum Publishing) had been extraordinarily successful under conditions that would have been considered as highly disadvantaged when applying Porter's criteria (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 3f).

They furthermore explain that "the sustained success of these firms has had less to do with market forces than with company values, less to do with competitive positioning than with personal beliefs, and less to do with resource advantages than with vision" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 4). Leading firms tend to have a noticeably distinctive culture. Whether such a particular organizational culture is based on the founder her- or himself, emerges over time while members of an organization are identifying ways to overcome challenges in the environment or are developed consciously and systematically by an enterprise's management, "successful companies have developed something special that supersedes corporate strategy, market presence, and technological advantages" (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 4f).

Cameron and Quinn do not deny the relevance of Porter's classical factors but highlight the additional impact of developing a unique corporate culture. They refer to Trice & Beyer when they state that besides a common vision the basis for strong cultures lies in the ability to "reduce collective uncertainties" as well as to "create social order", "continuity" and a "collective identity and commitment" (Trice & Beyer, 1993, as cited in Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 4f).

As has been shown, there are many cultural aspects influencing a person's perception, communication patterns and behavior. People deviate highly from each other according to how they have been conditioned by their national, organizational and professional cultures. For MNEs, in which single sites work closely together, this means that not only the communication with external parties, but also the one within the multi-national group is subject to problems typical for cross-cultural communication. This literature review accordingly provided a multifaceted answer to the research question about the role that "cultural differences play in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for multinational enterprises (MNEs)".

Methodology

The research question about the role of cultural differences in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for MNEs made it advisable to not only consider literature available on cross-cultural topics but to additionally analyze input of cross-culturally experienced MNE employees who, as practitioners, could (hopefully) provide insights enriching the framework built upon information available in literature. The basis for the discussion and conclusion parts was accordingly a combination of a literature review with expert interviews. The holistic approach was considered the most appropriate method to analyze a topic as many-faceted as culture and cross-cultural communication.

A quantitative approach was intentionally excluded. With a questionnaire-based survey, it would have been difficult to meet the goal to consider the input of people with various cultural backgrounds. The argument against a quantitative research was the risk of obtaining culturally biased answers by culturally diverse respondents who might interpret standardized questions in different ways.

As a consequence to this, the decision was made in favor of a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews. In order to obtain valuable insights that would meet the goal to enrich the framework provided in the literature review, the decision was made to not consider convenience sampling. The participants of the study were instead selected on the basis of pre-defined criteria with the aim to identify cross-culturally experienced practitioners this way. The motivation for this was that interviews with persons corresponding to these criteria could be expected to provide input that allowed coming to interesting conclusions in an inductive way. This approach of inductive reasoning was intentionally chosen for this work as culture can be considered a far too multilayered topic to find general truths applicable to everyone. The goal of this work accordingly is inducing people to reflect over the information provided in literature and the input of the study participants based on their practical experiences on the topic and develop their own increasingly sophisticated understanding of the different categories of culture and their impact on, perception, communication patterns and behavior.

Participants

In order to avoid the risk that valuable insights gathered in “practical” cross-cultural work contexts remain unnoticed and undocumented, persons like consultants, professors, trainers, authors or others specialized in cross-cultural topics were consciously excluded from the sampling of interview candidates. They were searched amongst the employees of a multinational enterprise (MNE) instead.

The idea behind this decision was that many MNE employees are confronted with challenges in cross-cultural communication and cooperation while their actual expertise lies in other fields. Their everyday working lives oblige them to learn from their personal

experiences and to develop their own approaches to coping with the challenges. It was therefore assumed that MNE employees regularly involved in cross-cultural communication situations would be the optimum interview candidates to enrich the existing literature on the topic.

In accordance with this, an Austrian MNE was pre-defined for the search of candidates. The corporation's name remains undisclosed, though. The main selection criterion for the study candidates was cross-cultural experience. One main focus group was locals who had already gained cross-cultural experiences abroad. The other was employees who were born, brought up and culturally conditioned in other countries than Austria and who had started working for the chosen Austrian MNE after having finished their professional and academic educations only. Other demographic characteristics like age and gender were not considered. The potential candidates identified were contacted by e-mail, using their company e-mail-accounts, and asked whether they would be prepared to be interviewed for a Master thesis. The first seven respondents were chosen as the sample for the study.

The participants were born between 1977 and 1992. Five were male, two female. The overrepresentation of male candidates might be due to the disproportionate low amount of female employees in the MNE chosen for this study. Four respondents were employees of the MNE's Headquarters office and three of a second company of the corporation, both situated in Austria. The seven participants were born and brought up in the following different nations. In alphabetical order these were:

- Austria,

- Germany,

- India,

- Kazakhstan or Russia respectively as well as

- South Africa.

Apart from Kazakhstan, these countries of origin will partly be referred to in their two-letter country code abbreviations according to ISO-3166-1 ALPHA. These are AT for Austria, DE for Germany, IN for India, RU for Russia and ZA for South Africa (Nationsonline, n.d.).

Accordingly, for six of seven participants English was a foreign language. (Please note: the expression “second” language could be considered inappropriate in this context, as some participants had learned English as a third or fourth language.)

The actual positions of the conversation partners in the chronological order of the interviews were:

- Assistant Project Manager,

- Controls Technician,

- Software Engineer,

- Head of Engineering,

- Operations Services Engineer,

- Sales Manager and

- Area Manager Middle East.

All had academic backgrounds with bachelor’s or master’s degrees. One had two master’s degrees. In this thesis, only personal data is revealed that was relevant for the discussion. The participants were anonymized by attributing each of them an ascending number in accordance to the chronological order of the interview dates.

The German, Indian, Russian and South African participants moved to Austria in order to work for the pre-selected MNE. For them, cross-cultural communication is to be found in their everyday internal communication processes. The Austrian participants are experienced in cross-cultural communication that takes place with external parties of different professional backgrounds all over the world. With all their internal and external experiences the group of participants is accordingly able to contribute valuable information on the research question about the role of cultural differences in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for MNEs.

Please note: In this work, the participants are also referred to as candidates, interview candidates, interviewees and respondents. This is done intentionally to increase the readability of the text and no sign of inconsistency in terminology.

Participant / Interview candidate # 1

The first candidate interviewed was female and born in 1982 in Kazakhstan, which was a member of the Soviet Union back than as the so-called Kazakh Soviet Republic. She lived there until the age of 14 when her family moved to Russia. She spent about 15 years in Russia, mainly on higher education and first work experience. She got two master's degrees, one in Tomsk in the Asian part of Russia, one in Saint Petersburg in the European part of it. She moved to Austria in 2010 and has been working for a member company of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since 2016. Her current position is that of an Assistant Project Manager. She is Russian native speaker and fluent in English and German.

It is likely that there are cultural deviations to be found between the regions of the geographically huge area of the USSR or Russia respectively she had lived in. They are

thousands of miles apart from each other and situated on both the European and Asian parts of the Eurasian continent. Nevertheless, she is a few times simplified referred to as "the Russian (Candidate)" in this work. This is also due to the fact that the country scores in the dimensions of national culture available at the Hofstede Center do provide scores for Russia as one.

Participant / Interview candidate # 2

The second candidate interviewed was male. He was born in 1981 in South Africa and raised there. He moved to Austria in 2019 at the age of 37 and has been working there for the Headquarters of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since then. His current position is that of a controls technician. Even though he had been to different countries for business trips, he had never lived in another country but his native one until he moved to Austria.

He had completed his education with an electrical focus at a Technical College and passed a so-called Trade Test with a Red Seal Certificate, a well-regarded certificate in South Africa. He is the only English native speaker of this study sample and intensely learning German as a second language, the local language in his chosen country of residence Austria. He is referred to as the "South African (Candidate)" in this work.

Participant / Interview candidate # 3

The third candidate interviewed was male. He was born in 1988 in India and raised there. He moved to Austria in January 2019 and has been working there for the Headquarters of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since then as a software engineer. Before that he had lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates for

about three years. After that he had studied in Germany for two and a half years and finished his studies with a MSc in Electrical Engineering. He accordingly already had a good command of the local language German when he moved to Austria. He is native speaker of the Indian language Marathi and learned to speak several other Indian languages. He is furthermore fluent in spoken and written German and English and referred to as the "Indian (Candidate)" in this work.

Participant / Interview candidate # 4

The fourth candidate interviewed was male. He was born in 1977 in Austria and raised there. Besides business trips to various countries like e.g. to GB he gathered cross-cultural experiences while working in the US for about a year in total as well as Russia and Qatar for several months each. He achieved his MSc degree in Austria. Currently he is in the position of Head of Engineering and has been working for a member company of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since 2009. He is German native speaker and fluent in English.

Participant / Interview candidate # 5

The fifth candidate interviewed was female and born in 1992 in Germany. She moved to Austria in 2018 and has been working there for a member company of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since then as operations services engineer. She studied in Germany, Spain and the USA and achieved a double MSc degree (USA and Germany). She is German native speaker and fluent in English and Spanish. She is referred to as the "German (Candidate)" in this work.

Participant / Interview candidate # 6

The sixth candidate interviewed was male and born in 1992 in Austria. He has been working there for a member company of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since 2017 as Sales Manager. He achieved his BSc in Industrial Engineering in Austria. He has not lived in other countries but Austria, but is cross-culturally experienced due to business trips to countries like the USA, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, Madagascar and Ghana. He is German native speaker and fluent in English. He is referred to as "one of the Sales Managers" in this work.

Participant / Interview candidate # 7

The seventh candidate interviewed was male and born in 1987 in Austria. He has been working there for the Headquarters of the MNE chosen for this study situated in Austria since 2007. He achieved his BA in International Business in Austria and spent half a year studying International Business in Istanbul, Turkey. Furthermore, he has been gaining cross-cultural experiences during regular business trips to countries like the USA, Canada, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates or Egypt. He is German native speaker, fluent in English and has a basic knowledge of Turkish. He is referred to as "one of the Sales Managers" in this work.

Procedures and Instrument

The candidates chosen were interviewed within two working weeks. The language used for the interviews was English; this means a foreign language for six of seven candidates as well as the interviewer. Of the seven in-depth interviews five were recorded. For this, a mobile mp4-recording app was used and a digital voice recorder

served as back-up. The audio-files were transcribed afterwards. For the transcription of the first interview a transcription app was used. This turned out to have limits in quality. Therefore the other conversations were transcribed personally by the author. Two consecutive candidates answered the questions whether it was OK to record the interview with no. Even though, this question had been considered to be a rhetorical one, simply a friendly way of informing that there would be an audio file of the interview, the author respected this wish to not record the conversation. In order to comply with the unexpected answer, these two interviews were accordingly typed completely directly during the conversation. This was only possible, because the interviewees replied in an attentive manner to pre-prepared questions available and present in writing.

Each interview started with an open part. This was based on guiding questions and requests to talk about personal experiences; however, every conversation was personalized by omitting or modifying questions or changing their order depending on the course of the particular conversation. The next part consisted of twenty-one prepared statements. In this part, the candidates were asked to comment on them by choosing one of the pre-defined options:

- strongly agree,

- agree,

- undecided,

- disagree or

-strongly disagree.

The first interviewee, the Russian candidate, gave feedback after the interview that resulted in a slight modification of three statements. As her answers were accordingly not given to exactly the same wording in these three cases, only the answers of the six other interviewees were considered in the analysis of these. A table of answers to the statements are to be found in the Appendices after the interview guide.

In a last part personal data was gathered about the participants' cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds in order to allow for a sensitive interpretation of their comments, declarations and statements in the context of the research question about the role of cultural differences in creating (internal and/or external) communication problems for MNEs. These pieces of personal background information are to be found in the presentation of each participant / interview candidate in the chapter "Participants".

Findings

The focus of this work lies on analyzing the role that cultural differences play in cross-cultural communication and how this affects (internal and/or external) communication of employees working in multinational enterprises (MNEs). It is assumed that the many aspects typical in such contexts like language problems, different communication styles or unconscious deviations in the perception and use of time are likely to be challenging for everybody involved. The goal is to provide information that

helps the reader to become aware of unnoticed cultural deviations, because such awareness is considered to help developing an appropriate sensitivity for the potential of conflicts and the skill to successfully overcome such challenges.

The interviews carried out in this study were intended to provide additional input on the topics analyzed in the literature review. An additional intention was to discover personal experiences made by cross-culturally experienced practitioners. It is assumed that readers will get a chance to profit from the candidates' lessons learned and their personal strategies developed to overcome obstacles in cross-cultural communication. While there already were informative answers to the pre-defined aspects in the context of (internal and/or external) cross-cultural communication and cooperation, the interviews additionally revealed further insights that will be presented in the following as well.

Planned goals were to learn about the impact of language in cross-cultural communication as well as to get a better understanding about the contribution of two chosen dimensions of national culture: power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Further topics explicitly aimed at getting answers to their role in cross-cultural communication for MNE employees were the impact of negotiation partners' deviating time-concepts and their preference of task- or relationship-orientation. The contribution of different styles like addressing things in a more direct or a rather indirect way were a planned outcome as well. The statements in this section were simultaneously aiming at getting information about the participants' tendency towards high-context or low-context behavior and communication.

Whether people bring up negative topics openly or - if at all - only with hints, is very important to know in the context of topics like error management. The categories indirect/direct and low-context/high-context were accordingly foreseen to provide

information on this pre-defined example topic of internal cross-cultural communication. The literature review had revealed the importance of trust in such sensitive contexts like establishing or managing a corporation-wide standardized error management. Therefore, the decision was made to explicitly include the topic trust in the interview guideline.

Another block of statements was planned to get an idea about reasons for misunderstandings in general, because it is assumed that becoming aware of them is a condition to overcome them. A consequential assumption is that reducing misunderstandings increase success in communication. In the open part of the interview the main goal was to get personal lessons learned and learn about the corresponding strategies developed by the participants.

As mentioned before there were unintended results as well. Some are worth mentioning:

- Being aware of a cultural difference seems to increase the readiness to be indulgent with the other side;
- the conditions on a local work market seem to have an impact on the degree of trust amongst colleagues and foster either destructive or supportive styles of cooperation;
- there are differences between experiences made during cross-cultural business trip and those made while living and working in another cultural area;
- the fact to culturally deviate from the main culture can be the common ground for people who have deviating cultural backgrounds and bring them together;
- persons experienced with deviating national cultures seem to have an awareness for differences in professional cultures as well.

It is recommended to investigate to more detail these unintended results that came up as side aspects during the interviews with the cross-culturally experienced MNE-employees.

Due to the fine distinctions between single categories analyzed some of the participants' comments in the open part of the interviews might be allocated to several of them. In such cases the decision for one category was made by the author and double-entries were intentionally avoided.

A first block of statements was foreseen to learn how the candidates perceived misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication settings and about the risk of misinterpreting behavior that does not correspond to their culturally conditioned expectations.

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
1	misunderstanding	When I cooperate with people of other cultural backgrounds than my own, the risk that I am misunderstood during conversations is higher than in conversations with people of my own background.
2	misunderstanding	When I cooperate with people of other cultural backgrounds than my own, the risk that I misunderstand them during conversations is higher than in conversations with people of my own background.
3	misunderstanding	It is dissatisfying or even exhausting to correct problems that arose from misunderstandings.
4	misunderstanding	Communicators who are able to sense uncertainties in their conversation partners are more likely to avoid misunderstandings or other problems than others.
6	misinterpretation	A person who does not contribute to a discussion is either disinterested or shy.

Table 10 Misunderstandings and misinterpretation in cross-cultural contexts

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
1	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
2	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
3	Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree
4	-	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Agree
6	Agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Agree

Table 11 Misunderstandings and misinterpretation - participant answers

Besides the answers to these pre-defined statements there were additionally some comments in the context of misunderstandings in the open part of the interviews worth mentioning. In order to avoid double entries, they are included in the parts “language issues” and “body language and behavior”.

Language Issues

All interviewees were fluent in English. As only one was an English native speaker though, the interviews were conducted in a foreign language for 6 of 7 participants.

In the part of the interview consisting of open questions, the participants brought up several language issues in addition to those already mentioned in the context of misunderstandings.

One solution approach showed the value of well-defined instructions in overcoming misunderstandings: “And if somebody tells me something and I have not fully understood it I can still go and look on the document or in the particular project that I have been given an instruction for and I can find the information I need from there.” (Candidate 2, South Africa).

Some comments were made in the context of language skills and the languages used in cross-cultural communication:

“Difficulties have always been there, because I am not a native speaker of the language.” (Candidate 3, India).

“In our language if you ask someone ‘How are you?’ you really want to know. In the US, however, this is just another form of saying ‘Hi’.” (Candidate 4, Germany).

The only English native speaker in the sample noticed that speaking another language can also have an influence on one’s native language: “Ahm, my English is not so good at the moment; I’m trying to speak German as much as possible.” (Candidate 2, South Africa).

There were various comments on English as negotiation language:

“I would say that one of the biggest challenges in our business is the difference in the English language between the US and the UK. You know, some sayings which are commonly used in one of the two countries can offend people in the other.” (Candidate 4, Austria).

“In our international projects everyone talks English and I feel fine with that.” (Candidate 4, Austria)

"I found it much more difficult to talk with people that speak English as a mother tongue because they use more vocabulary that we are – that I am – used to compared to other colleagues or business partners whose English abilities are also limited, which eases the conversation on both ends." (Candidate 7, Austria)

"…on the Philippines it's quite easy to speak to them in English, because everyone there can speak English. But in other countries, like mentioned before: Vietnam, Thailand or also China, it's very difficult to speak to them. Then it is very important either to know in advance if they can speak English, otherwise maybe bring a translator with you…" (Candidate 7, Austria).

"It is also important to keep everything simple. Your expressions, your sentences (pause). ... If you ask a question just use simple words – and therefore I think it's also easier for them to understand you and to get your point." (Candidate 7, Austria)

"But sometimes it is very difficult to stay calm, because the opponent tries to make you upset by using offensive terms which are not appropriate." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"I experienced communication problems, because, ahm, if you are talking to someone in a language that is not your mother tongue – sometimes you just cannot express all the little details that you would like to. It's also that - well furthermore, the answers to questions do not come so fast as in a conversation that is held in my mother tongue." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"Furthermore, sometimes I feel that I lose patience when I have the feeling that the other person is not getting me." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"It was not so very difficult for me, because I generally listen a lot than communicating with other people. Because, as I said, it is not so easy for me to understand what everybody says. So this is why I felt that it's better that I listen, I understand what they are trying to say and then I come up with an answer." (Candidate 3, India).

"Sometimes it is very amusing to see the other one struggling by not using e.g. special terms like calling an Austrian a German." (Candidate 4, Austria).

Body language and behavior

Further references were made to body language, expected behavior or behavior interpreted to be expected as well as no-gos in cross-cultural communication settings:

"Another challenge is the body language." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"He turned his head a little left and right and I did not know is it is a yes or is it a no." (Candidate 6, Austria, referring to a conversation with an Indian).

"In my opinion, communication problems are not solely based on 'lost in translation' issues but also on the cultural differences. Ahm, for example, in the UK you need to be very polite and you need to make sure that no one gets offended." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"In Russia it's different, I mean there, a complete different behavior is expected." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"When you have discussions or negotiations with people from the US you are faced with completely different challenges. They expect everyone to be like them in thinking, behavior, etc. If you have a different opinion and you are not willing to give in

you need to be very strong, because negotiations become very difficult and time-consuming." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"Another example in India is, for example, that if you are white man or a woman it is not allowed for you to open the door for someone else, especially for a lower employee working in the company you have the meeting there." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"I am a vegetarian, but it would be quite rude to tell them that you would like to eat just rice and vegetables and not eat the meat and so never told them and just ate everything, because anything else would not be really polite." (Candidate 6, Austria).

Power Distance

Three statements were focusing on the analyzation of the participants' degrees of power distance. These are the statements and the answers:

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
8	Power distance	I feel valued when I am consulted for important decisions.
9	Power distance	A high-status person deserves it to be treated with particular good manners.
12	Power distance (/uncertainty avoidanc)	I would like to get clearer instructions by my superior about how to carry out my tasks.

Table 12 Power distance

The participant answers to the statements analyzing the degree of power distance were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
8	Agree	Strongly agree	Undecided	Undecided	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
9	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Undecided	Strongly disagree	Agree	Undecided	Undecided
12	Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree

Table 13 Power distance - participant answers

The intention was to analyze the participant's personal degrees of power distance and develop an understanding for this dimension's impact on internal and/or external cross-cultural communication. There was an additional finding, though:

The responsible positions of most candidates at a very young age go confirm with the low power distance score in Austria.

In the part of the interview consisting of open questions, the participants brought up some issues that can be allocated to deviations in power distance as well, e.g.:

"I think, the professor did just not know how university life works in Europe. He was not aware that we learn how to organize and structure ourselves during our studies and do not need a professor telling us what to do as homework like in school." (Candidate 5, Germany, referring to her studies in the USA).

"We work with our colleague from India. And, ah, he was very ambitious, and very – …he really wanted to get a lot done. He had the problem – like at the beginning it was good, that he was so interested, but in the end it turned out, that he did a bit too much, you know. It was difficult for him to see what needs to be done and what can be done maybe later and to, to find out what is necessary to focus on at this point. This is a thing of different culture like how to prioritize things to be done." (Candidate 7, Austria).

Uncertainty avoidance

Two of the statements were focusing on the analyzation of the participants' degrees of uncertainty avoidance. These are the statements and the answers:

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
10	Uncertainty avoidance	Whatever the future may bring I am confident to make the best of it.
11	Uncertainty avoidance	If I had to move to a totally different cultural area for some time I would look forward to the experience.

Table 14 Uncertainty avoidance

The participant answers to the statements analyzing the degree of uncertainty avoidance were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
10	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree
11	Agree	Agree	Agree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree

Table 15 Uncertainty avoidance - participant answers

Despite the differing national scores in this dimension in their countries of origin, all the participants turned out to be open to new situations and positively looking ahead into the future, It would be worth investigating to more detail which personal, educational, economic, political or other factors are contributing to such confidence.

Time-concepts and relationship-/task-orientation

There were several standardized statements planned to identify the participants' understanding and use of time, i.e. their tendency towards monochronism or polychronism, as well as their preference of task- or relationship-orientation:

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
17	Time concepts and Task- / relationship-orientation	Immediately starting to work through a time schedule without having a chance to become familiar with new partners/contacts is bad manners.
18		Finishing a meeting with scheduled items still undiscussed is unprofessional.
19		It is best to work through one agenda item after the other.
20		An agenda is just a guideline.

Table 16 Time concepts and task-/relationship-orientation

The participant answers to the statements analyzing time concepts and task- or relationship-orientation were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
17	Undecided	Undecided	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Undecided	Undecided
18	Undecided	Undecided	Undecided	Undecided	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
19	Agree	Agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
20	-	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree

Table 17 Time concepts and task-/relationship-orientation - participant answers

Besides answers to the pre-defined statements intended to get answers on the influence of deviating time concepts there were several comments on this topic in the open part of the interviews already.

Some comments were about the perception and use of time:

"Especially the, let's say, the feeling or the interpretation of time is totally different in every country. We form like Austria or like the German-speaking countries, we see time very clearly. When we say that something is going to be finished within the next few days then we take this for granted or with only a small delay. In some other countries, I noticed, that time is totally different. When someone is telling you 'Yeah. We gonna be finished in one week', this means in one month or if they say 'next month' it means maybe never." (Candidate 7, Austria).

"…what I learned from my experience … is that it's better to have already an expectation – like if you have an experience with a … country or a culture and you know that they will never tell you like the truth in regard of time periods, then I just I add already something – and I know this from the beginning – and this helps me to don't get angry all the time when someone is not keeping his word." (Candidate 7, Austria).

"I think, …the people … in the Middle East countries, they are just more relaxed about the time issues. Or they do not have such a negative feeling about it." (Candidate 7, Austria).

Some comments focused on respect:

"If we are aware that there are differences and we do our best to respect them, it will be easy to get along with each other. If worse comes to worst, it doesn't hurt to apologize if we crossed some borders." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"As mentioned earlier, respect is the key to a good relationship." (Candidate 4, Austria).

Some comments reflected relationship- or task-orientation:

"…if we keep our discussions on a professional level the cultural background doesn't matter." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"If I do not have the feeling that the other person got what I want to a 100%, this results in extra work for me, because then I need to double-check the outcome of the work, ahm, check it more in depth and make adjustments." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"What went wrong in such conversations is that I was not able to transmit all the information needed. … I feel unsatisfied and frustrated, because I would like the outcome of the work to be perfect." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"If a topic is very complex, I try to structure the conversation before on a piece of paper. This helps me to then lead the conversation in a more efficient way and not to lose focus." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"For someone from one country maybe it is important to be on time for a meeting. For the person form the other country the style or, ahm, politeness of the conversation is more important." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"I had one <= a particularly good business relationship>, but unluckily that one is in Iran and right now it is not possible to have business with them." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"For example in the United States you think you might have a very good relationship but in the end it could be completely different." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"In addition I think I am an open-minded person. It is not very difficult for me to have or to build a good relationship." (Candidate 6, Austria).

High-context/low-context and direct/indirect communication

Whether a person is used to get a lot of information out of the context or needs explicitly communicated information has an impact on the way how tasks can successfully be described and explained to employees in different locations scattered over the world and correspondingly situated in different cultural areas. It is similarly important to reflect upon how people are conditioned by their surrounding cultures to either transfer an unpleasant message with polite hints only, to not dare say anything or to speak up openly. These factors of high-/low-context communication and the degree of directness in communicating were considered important parts for the chosen example topic of MNE-internal communication, which is a corporation-wide standardized error management.

There were accordingly several standardized statements planned to identify the participants' cultural conditioning in this context:

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
13	High-/low-context	It makes me nervous when people do not clearly tell me what they want from me.
14	High-/low-context	It is rude to tell someone in the face that he or she is wrong.
15	High-/low-context	When I make a mistake I expect my superior to not mention it in public.
16	Direct/indirect	I would never tell my superior that I think he or she made a mistake or is about to make a mistake.

Table 18 High-/low context and direct/indirect communication

The participant answers to the statements analyzing high-/low-context and direct/indirect communication were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
13	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
14	Undecided	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
15	Agree	Agree	Undecided	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree	Undecided
16	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree

Table 19 High-/low context and direct/indirect communication - participant answers

Respect and trust

Two statements were about respect and trust. They got such a general support by all the candidates, that they might be interpreted as general truths:

State. No.	Category analyzed	Statement
5	-	Showing the other side respect for their view of a situation increases the satisfaction experienced during cooperation.
21	Task- / relationship-orientation	Mutual trust supports the success in long-term work relationships.

Table 20 Respect and trust

The participant answers to the statements analyzing respect and trust were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
5	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
21	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree

Table 21 Respect and trust - participant answers

In addition to these statements of the second, structured part of the interviews, there were comments about trustful relationships and about respect already in the open part of the interviews:

"For example in the United States you think you might have a very good relationship but in the end it could be completely different. So that's also depending on the country." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"That creates a very, very confrontational work environment where someone will go whisper to your boss about something that you've done incorrectly and really a lot of kind of back-stabbing things, which always create personal conflicts. … Whereas here – ok, perhaps it happens more quietly or whatever, I'm not sure – but in general everybody here respects each other very, very well. Respects their knowledge levels, and –ahm – basically gets their work done." (Candidate 2, South Africa, comparing the work climate he experienced in South Africa with the one in the Austrian MNE he is working for currently).

Uncategorized statements

Besides the before mentioned statement No. 5 “Showing the other side respect for their view of a situation increases the satisfaction experienced during cooperation” there was a second one that was not allocated to any of the before-mentioned categories.

State. No.	Statement
5	Showing the other side respect for their view of a situation increases the satisfaction experienced during cooperation.
7	Treating a person as incompetent just for limited verbal skills in a foreign language has a negative impact on the conversation and its outcome.

Table 22 Uncategorized statements

The participant answers to the uncategorized statements were:

State. No.	Int. No. 1 (RU)	Int. No. 2 (ZA)	Int. No. 3 (IN)	Int. No. 4 (AT)	Int. No. 5 (DE)	Int. No. 6 (AT)	Int. No. 7 (AT)
5	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
7	-	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Agree

Table 23 Uncategorized statements - participant answers

Personal strategies of candidates

The interview candidates have developed personal approaches to the obstacles in cross-cultural communication and strategies foreseen to improve success in the corresponding situations they experience regularly. Here are some of their lessons learned and personal solutions:

"…it is difficult for them to understand you as a person from a different culture. So, maybe, what you think is normal for you, is not normal for them. The same goes the other way around also. What I feel is not normal for me is very normal for the others. (Candidate 3, India, referring to the sensitivity required in irritating cross-cultural situations).

"And I always try to take a bit the pressure away from them by saying it's not their fault, you know, that there are, like, outside circumstances they are not in control of and they affect the date. Then often I get a range instead of an exact time, which helps. (Candidate 7, Austria, in the context of managing time concepts deviating from his).

"It is also important to keep everything simple. Your expressions, your sentences (pause). It's very important to keep everything very simple. If you ask a question just use simple words." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"If a topic is very complex, I try to structure the conversation before on a piece of paper. This helps me to then lead the conversation in a more efficient way and not to lose focus." (Candidate 5, Germany).

"I would say, the most important thing is to ask a lot of questions. By asking the same question again and again by using other words the opponent is forced to think about his language and at the same time you make sure the negotiations lead to the target you are pointing at." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"People are really afraid to lose their face and therefore they will not ask a question or say anything about it that they would like to have a translation to their language. So they prefer to do not understand anything instead of asking the question to translate it to their language. <…> … everyone had different questions, and the meeting was quite successful after we did it in the local language." (Candidate 6, Austria).

"…maybe bring a translator with you …" (Candidate 6, Austria).

"By ignoring cultural differences, you offend people … Well, ahm, just an example: in Russia you show respect by greeting a man by using the first name, the father's first name and then the last name… By not ignoring little things like that people are more open and willing to forgive other mistakes, because you show respect by just trying to make it right." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"It is more important to respect that we grew up in different places and all of us were taught to solve problems differently." (Candidate 4, Austria).

"That's something that should happen in private, so that you can learn from it. Nobody learns when they feel embarrassed in public." (Candidate 2, South Africa, commenting on statement 15 about mentioning mistakes in public).

"So you shouldn't normally get angry because of a cultural misunderstanding." (Candidate 1, Russia).

"…it's better that I listen, I understand what they are trying to say and then I come up with an answer." (Candidate 3, India, referring to cross-cultural communication in a foreign language).

Concluding this findings part it can be said that the interviews with cross-culturally experienced practitioners, all employees of a chosen MNE headquartered in Austria, provided a lot of information about the role that cultural differences play in cross-cultural communication, no matter whether it is about external communication with third parties or internal communication between employees of different cultural backgrounds in the same or different locations.

Please note: All statements and the answers are provided additionally in an overview table in the appendices.

Discussion

Without a doubt, cultural differences play a role in creating communication problems. As has been shown, this also affects (internal and/or external) communication of employees working in multinational enterprises (MNEs). The literature review informed about the many cultural aspects that shape perception, behavior and communication patterns, like for example various national cultural dimensions, deviating time concepts or working styles that differ in their degrees of task- or relationship-orientation.

This discussion part is mainly based on the interviews with practitioners experienced in (internal and/or external) cross-cultural communication. They build the framework of this part, while the cross-references to the literature review mainly serve to validate the interpretation of single messages and declarations made by the participants.

In the part of the interview consisting of open questions, the participants had the chance to talk about misunderstandings, problems or even disagreements and conflicts in cross-cultural communication. Similarly, they talked about positive experiences, their personal lessons learned and strategies for successful cooperation. The interviewees openly brought up many different aspects. On the one hand, many were about language issues like English as a foreign language, deviations between British and American English or an intentionally provocative choice of words. Others were about body language, like difficult to interpret gesturing. Still other topics were expected behavior or no-goes in other countries or the impact of different education levels or deviating

professional or personal backgrounds. In a lot of what the interview candidates said they proved a well-developed sensitivity for cultural deviations and an understanding for the potential for misunderstandings or conflicts in cross-cultural communication situations.

When openly talking about internal disagreements in cross-cultural communication settings the candidates having moved to Austria in their 20s or 30s, interestingly saw the reasons for them rather in the different professional and personal backgrounds than in deviating national cultures. One candidate for instance explained them to be rather specialist issues with the differences in opinion simply based on different approaches to a solution (Candidate 3, India). Another one similarly referred to educational levels and personal organization (Candidate 1, Russia). The next interviewee explained to have experienced not a single disagreement with a colleague or superior since working in Austria that could be interpreted as based on cultural misunderstandings (Candidate 2, South Africa). Yet another respondent explained that she had only experienced disagreements that would have been the same with people from the same cultural background than her own (Candidate 5, Germany).

It is worth mentioning that not only these participants who had moved to Austria as adult professionals but also the Austrian natives held positions that required a profound education and a high degree of autonomous working. Several of them had multifaceted responsibilities in their 20s already and tasks like negotiating sales contracts in countries all over the world. This confirms what Hofstede mentions as one of several criteria characterizing a society with a low power distance index like Austria. He describes that in such societies the business executives are younger than in societies with a high power distance index. In the latter societies, people attribute real power to persons with certain positions. Their mental picture of an executive is the one of a seasoned and prestigious

professional who has reached a certain age already. Even though such a mismatch of expectation and reality might be the reason for communication problems, the interviewees who had done business in countries with high-power distance as a societal trait did not report any such impact.

While not mentioning problems that might be interpreted to be based on a deviation in power distance in such external communication situations, there were some in the context of internal communication. Another aspect in this dimension mentioned by Hofstede is that in countries that score low in power distance, people tend to expect that hierarchies do rather exist for administrative reasons than represent real power. As a logical consequence of this, the subordinates expect a high degree of autonomy at work. This is particularly important to note because people conditioned in cultures that score high in power distance do on the contrary tend to expect being told what to do. If employees from high power distance countries, who are likely to expect clear instructions by their superiors, are expected to adapt to a local low power distance culture, it is therefore recommendable to support them on their way to the expected proactivity and autonomy in order to avoid misunderstandings or feelings of frustration that might negatively impact internal cross-cultural communication.

One respondent e.g. described an Indian colleague to be very ambitious and eager to prove that he was good, but not being able to focus on what was important, i.e. to prioritize tasks appropriately. The candidate interpreted this not as a personal characteristic but a cultural deviation to the local working style. While this example is taken out of the part with open-ended questions, there were answers supporting the argument in the part with pre-defined statements as well. With the exception of one Austrian candidate, it were exactly those with the high power distance backgrounds

(Russia with 93 and India with 77) that agreed or strongly agreed to the statement: “I would like to get clearer instructions by my superior about how to carry out my tasks”. The fact that the one mentioned Austrian candidate agreed to this statement despite having been conditioned in the low power distance country par excellence might be based on his personal situation as a highly responsible international Sales Manager at a very young age already.

Another aspect that is very influential for cross-cultural communication and cooperation is whether people can tolerate uncertainties or fear them and therefore try to avoid them. This is what Hofstede and his co-authors refer to as “uncertainty avoidance”. They explain that the more societies are characterized by avoiding uncertainties the more its members fear unsure and new situations. Accordingly, they are afraid of what is deviating from their interpretation of normal. On the other hand, in societies in which uncertainty is accepted as something normal, people tend to be tolerant and curious about what is different rather than being afraid of it. Differing degrees of accepting or avoiding uncertainties do not only have an impact on personal lifestyles but on work and cooperation as well.

All the participants turned out to be open to new situations and positively looking ahead into the future. However, it must be considered that they were not a random sample but a group of candidates pre-selected in accordance with criteria like professionals with cross-culturally experience. The statement that got the second highest agreement of all the twenty-one was “Whatever the future may bring I am confident to make the best of it.” (2x agree, 5x strongly agree). As five of the candidates are from cultures that are categorized as very high or high uncertainty avoiders (Russia, Austria, Germany), it is interesting to see that all of them stated to be confident to make the best of their futures

nevertheless. They additionally confirmed that they would look forward to the experience, if they had to move to a totally different cultural area for some time. This statement might, however, have been more appropriate to analyze the influence of the personal, educational and professional backgrounds of persons than their national culture. The three Austrian candidates e.g. answered with “undecided”, “agree” and “strongly agree”.

It might also be that the wording of these two statements was too general or unintentionally induced the participants to answer like this. The positive attitude towards an unknown future and the appreciative approach to living in another cultural area might as well be based on the fact that all of the interviewees were rather young, internationally experienced, highly educated, successful and in secure positions.

It would be worth investigating to further detail how stable conditions on a job market decrease people’s uncertainties and help them develop confidence in the future. The South-African candidate even explicitly mentioned the positive working conditions in his adopted home country Austria. He described the South-African working conditions as very competitive. This would not only lead to personal conflicts, but also to disadvantages for the companies, because “when people are not working for watching their back all the time they can’t actually get anything done” (Candidate 2, South African).

Besides those two exemplarily analyzed dimensions of national culture according to Hofstede (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) there are also other cultural aspects that have a potential for creating misunderstandings or other problems in MNE internal or external cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

As the literature review showed, there are deviating time concepts prevailing in different cultures. This means that their members perceive and use time in ways deviating

from each other. Those who prefer to do one thing after the other are referred to as monochronic. As they furthermore tend to carry out these single steps in a sequence they perceive as logical they are also called linear-active. On the other hand, there are people who tend to be polychronic and multi-active. What they interpret to be normal is modifying the order of steps towards a goal as well as carrying out various tasks simultaneously. A pre-defined and structured order of tasks that is the perfect example of professional work for one can accordingly be seen as an illogically rigid and limiting way of working for the other.

Besides linear-active and multi-active persons, there are furthermore people with a cyclic understanding of time. For them it is likely that over time they will experience similar situations again and again. They tend to be reflective and aim at learning from errors or misunderstandings and hope for the chance to make it better the next time. Accordingly, they tend to aim at developing wisdom. They might perceive pre-defined and fixed procedures that cannot be adapted in an optimizing way to a particular context as irritating or unprofessional, because they tend to be used to aiming at continuously improving processes. According to Lewis, there is furthermore a potential for conflicts based on a discrepancy between strict schedules organizing future steps, as typical for linear-active persons, and an inner conviction that the future is something that cannot be planned, as typical for people with a cyclic understanding of time.

One of the Austrian interviewees with about 10 years of international sales experiences amongst others in countries of the Middle East referred to the deviating time concepts explicitly. In their use and understanding of time Austrians are similarly linear-active and monochronic as Germans. It could be noticed in his words, that this Austrian candidate was aware that his allocating importance to time in general and adherence to

schedules in particular was based on the cultural conditioning he had undergone in Austria.

According to his experience this focus of timing and scheduling is not to be found in the countries of the Middle East and Africa he had had project meetings in. What, however, is more interesting than the fact that he had experienced and become aware of these differences is that he used expressions like “if someone is not keeping his word” (Candidate 7, Austrian) when talking about delays caused by his Arab or African business partners.

On the one hand, this confirms Lewis’ argument in the literature review that for someone of a linear-active culture, like this Austrian candidate, feelings of trust are linked to experiencing that people reliably do what they say they would do. On the other hand, the candidate’s awareness of different time concepts has helped him to manage them increasingly well by adapting to different styles and finding appropriate solutions for the respective situations. Nevertheless, the choice of expressions like “not keeping one’s word” implies that the other side’s not meeting deadlines is more for him than just a delay in time. This wording used several times during the interview allows the interpretation that he unconsciously perceives such delays as a breach of trust. It must be admitted, however, that English is a second language for this particular interviewee. As far as the deviating time concepts are concerned he sees himself as an interpreter between the cultures. One of his strategies to cope with the problem is that he adapts his communication in the context of time scheduling to the differing expectations of the various internal or external parties involved.

This example about deviating time concepts was taken out of the open part of the interview. In addition to this unplanned input on initiative of the particular candidate,

there were also several pre-defined statements in the second part of the interview, which were foreseen to identify the participants' understanding and use of time. These standardized statements were intended to find out whether the respondents deviating backgrounds (Austria, Germany, India, Russia, South Africa) manifested in aspects like a tendency towards a monochronic or polychronic use of time.

Interestingly, besides one undecided Austrian all the other participants agreed or strongly agreed it would be "best to work through one agenda item after the other". It might have been expected, that this classical monochronic approach was not confirmed by candidates with supposed polychronic time concepts like the Russian or Indian. That they as well agreed to the statement might be based on their professional backgrounds like software engineering. In their "competing values framework model" Cameron and Quinn explain that the tasks at hand in different professions and fields of responsibility lead to different subcultures in organizations. Accordingly, positions that e.g. require stability and structure tend to attract persons that correspond to this and whose working styles fit into this subculture. Furthermore the Russian and Indian participants' cross-cultural communication is to a high degree MNE-internal. When staff is rather homogeneous in their national cultural backgrounds, like in the Austrian Headquarters location of the MNE chosen for this study, this majority also tends to shape the organizational culture while the minorities tend to adapt to it.

When it came to the statement it would be unprofessional to finish "a meeting with scheduled items still undiscussed" they were mainly undecided. What, however, is interesting in this context, is that the only German participant in the sample was also the only one to agree to this statement. Additionally, she was the only one to disagree to the statement an agenda would just be a guideline. This can be seen as an indicator, that she

was conditioned in the monochronic way that is considered to be typical German. The fact that the Austrian candidates were undecided in these points or answered contrary to the German might be seen as a confirmation what has been stated before, i.e. that the common language German does not make Austrians, Germans and Swiss-Germans a culturally homogenous cluster.

When parties in a cross-cultural communication situation are conditioned by a deviating perception and use of time they risk misinterpreting each other. In international business this is mainly seen in different degrees of attributing importance to a strict adherence to schedules. Deviating expectations in such contexts are likely to create conflict. This is mainly true when the depth of cultural conditioning in the context of time remains completely unnoticed and unconsidered. Differences in attributing importance to the adherence to schedules are just one example on the surface of a cultural trait that goes much deeper. Deviating time concepts can have manifold impact on internal and external communication processes. An increasing degree of awareness is likely to be accompanied with an increasing understanding and respect for the other side's expectations. This in turn is a basis for taking measures that reduce or eliminate the negative impact on cooperation for both the persons and the businesses involved.

Besides people's deviating time concepts and the two dimensions of national culture according to Hofstede already analyzed (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) there are still further other cultural aspects that influence MNE internal or external cross-cultural communication and cooperation. Both national and professional cultures are also shaped by deviating degrees of task-orientation or relationship-orientation. On the national level, this is considered in Hofstede's cultural dimension "collectivism vs. individualism" where societies categorized as collectivist are described

as rather relationship-oriented and individualist ones as rather focused on their tasks. On organizational or professional levels there is the a.m. deviation in subcultures according to Cameron and Quinn's "competing values framework model". An informative example of theirs is how e.g. the tasks at hand in accounts departments create a so-called "control" culture. By nature, the corresponding conditions foster task-orientation. It goes without saying that sales staff on the other hand generally displays a higher degree of relationship-orientation in their work than accountants. It should, however, also be considered that sales teams deviate from culture to culture in their degree of relationship-orientation and that in general there are furthermore always deviations on a personal level.

The interviewees had professional backgrounds and positions that ranged from jobs considered to be task-oriented like in software engineering to such interpreted to require a high relationship-orientation like working Middle East markets as a Sales Manager. Accordingly, it is very interesting that all of them confirmed the statement that "mutual trust supports the success in long-term work relationships", which was originally supposed to be an indicator for relationship-orientation. Six respondents strongly agreed to this. The seventh used the words "Indeed. I agree." This choice of words allows the assumption that he as well wanted to strongly confirm this statement and just did not consider using the exact wording of "strongly agree". This statement was one out of twenty-one and was the only one with such an intense support of all the participants.

There was a similar, just slightly less strong support (with four strong agrees and three agrees) for the statement "Showing the other side respect for their view of a situation increases the satisfaction experienced during cooperation". In retrospect, it can be criticized that both arguments are formulated in a way that induces a supportive answer as it is not likely that many people would say that trust or respect for each other

are bad. Nevertheless, it is important to see how intensely the interviewees emphasized the value of trust and respect. It is true, though, that in both cases there should have been a counter-argument available. It would have been a more scientific solution to give the participants a chance to choose between options considered to be opposing poles. They should e.g. have had the chance to express what they consider to contribute more to project success: a watertight contract or a trusting relationship.

Despite these potential deficiencies in the second, standardized part of the interviews, there were meaningful comments already in the first part in which the participants were only slightly guided by questions and openly talked about their cross-cultural experiences. One of the Sales Mangers e.g. mentioned a deviating degree of reliability in relationships. As an example he explained that when having the feeling to have a good relationship with an Iranian, then it would indeed be good while in the "United States you think you might have a very good relationship but in the end it could be completely different" (Candidate 6, Austrian).

After having gained some understanding about the influence of people's deviating time concepts or other cultural traits, it is time to analyze the topic of misunderstandings based on people's deviating cultural conditioning and their consequently different use of language and body language, their differing behavior or diverse working and communication styles. Two statements were foreseen to understand whether the participants saw the risk of misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Indeed five agreed and two strongly agreed to both statements in this context. These were "When I cooperate with people of other cultural backgrounds than my own, the risk that I am misunderstood during conversations is higher than in conversations with people of my own background" as well as its inverted version "…that I misunderstand them….".

The seven respondents with cross-cultural experience were brought up and culturally conditioned on three different continents and all agreed or even strongly agreed that cross-cultural communication is prone to misunderstandings. It should be taken into consideration that these two statements were too much common-place declarations to induce a broader range of answers. However, it can be interpreted as well, that these statements are indeed truths of general value, at least amongst cross-culturally experienced and sensitized people. The only person who did not immediately agree to the statement that "there is a risk that I am misunderstood", but took his time to answer, was the only English-native speaker amongst the interviewees (Candidate 2, South Africa).

While working in a German-speaking country and accordingly being confronted with second-language topics, he nevertheless did not refer to problems in second-language use when asked about misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. He instead described the risk for linguistic misunderstandings in his job as minor as he could rely on – as mentioned before –sufficient instructions, clearly defined project tasks and personal support in the office. It was nevertheless expected from him to improve his German language skills and he mentioned his luck to have found someone to practice German in an Indian colleague. An interesting side aspect in this context was that the South African candidate interpreted the perceived closeness to the Indian being based on the shared cultural background, i.e. originating from Commonwealth countries the two of them. He also mentioned the common interest in cricket as a bond, which is not well known in Austria (Candidate 2, South Africa).

The Indian candidate of the sample explained he would focus on listening well with the aim to first understand and then come up with an answer (Candidate 3, India). This is understandable as both English as the language used in cross-cultural contexts and

German as the local language in his adopted country Austria are foreign languages for him.

One of the sales managers explained that it would be easier for him to talk English with other non-native speakers than with English native speakers (Candidate 7, Austria). The other reported that he had made the experience that in countries like Thailand it was better to automatically bring a translator to meetings than expecting everybody to be fluent in English. When asking locals whether they needed such kind of a help, they would not dare to say yes. He experienced that they would rather accept not understand anything before asking for a translation themselves (Candidate 6, Austria). This goes confirm with the so-called loss of face and its consequences for the behavior of people fearing it described in the literature.

There had been some statements in the standardized part of the interview that aimed at analyzing the participants' sensitivity for language issues. All of the participants jointly agreed or strongly agreed that it had a negative impact on a conversation and its outcome when participants with limited verbal skills in a foreign language were treated as incompetent. With a similar agreement all of them confirmed that "communicators who are able to sense uncertainties in their conversation partners are more likely to avoid misunderstandings or other problems than others".

Besides limited skills in the conversation language there can be additional linguistic problems in cross-cultural communication. One of the two sales managers of the sample e. g. reported he had learned that people on the Philippines spoke very good English. Accordingly, there was no obvious linguistic obstacle in his negotiations there. Nevertheless, his communication partner in this example setting and he experienced

problems in understanding each other. He described the other as having “had a completely other mind” of what he was trying to convey (Candidate 6, Austria).

As has been shown there are linguistic problems like not speaking the negotiation language on a sufficient level or in fact understanding the words of the other party but nevertheless not getting their message. Another candidate brought up an additional aspect: He suspected some of his cross-cultural conversation partners to have provoked him intentionally by the use of offensive and inappropriate terms with the aim to weaken his negotiating power. He had also experienced situations in which he suspected the other side to willingly embarrass him (Candidate 4, Austria).

As has been shown language is a factor with a wide-ranged potential for problems in cross-cultural communication. Just analyzing skills in applying a second language or aspects like the wording would, however, not be enough. Many cultural traits manifest in the way how people use language. Communication behavior can be misinterpreted as shown in the example provided by the PhD in intercultural communication Joseph Shaules in the literature review. He explained how American students spending time studying in Japan often interpreted the Japanese students’ silent listening in the classroom as shyness, while they were in reality just behaving in accordance to the attentive listening style they had been culturally conditioned to. When people unconsciously project their own culturally shaped view of a behavior on others they risk attributing the wrong reasons to behavior they observe in others.

One of the statements was accordingly foreseen to identify whether even the culturally experienced and sensitive interviewees ran into the danger to misinterpret the behavior of others in accordance with their own conditioning. This might indeed be the case, because all but two agreed or even strongly agreed to the statement “A person who

does not contribute to a discussion is either disinterested or shy". One Austrian participant even commented this statement with the words: "This person is part of the problem" (Candidate 4, Austria). Only the Indian candidate explained to be undecided and did so only after some reflection over the sentence.

Interestingly, the only person disagreeing to the interpretation that a person not contributing to a discussion is shy or disinterested was also Austrian. Accordingly, the two answers in the set that were the most deviating cannot be based on their common national culture. Or said in other words: It is likely that this deviation is based on some other reason, i.e. the two interviewees' personal situation. The one strongly agreeing to the statement was Head of Engineering with a pure technical background. The one disagreeing and accordingly not interpreting calm and restrained communication partners as shy or disinterested was Manager Middle East. Richard D. Lewis describes Arab societies to show traits of reactive cultures. In such cultures it is normal to listen attentively, and interrupting a speaker is considered to be unfriendly. As explained before, a person like the mentioned Head of Engineering might due to his national and professional cultural backgrounds expect a communication partner to show interest by posing questions or to signal approval by spoken remarks. When someone is not showing the signs of interest he personally is expecting and unconsciously interpreting to be normal, he might accordingly risk misinterpreting a conversation partner's silence in a meeting as disinterest.

The work activity of the Manager Middle East, on the other hand, has provided him a wide range of opportunities to negotiate and cooperate with people from countries like Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi-Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. Besides the mentioned reactive tendency with behavior like attentive listening, the Arab cultures also tend to be

multi-active. The multi-active side also described by Lewis is accompanied by a relaxed way of timing both private and business lives. Accordingly, the interviewee active in these countries has to cope with particular conditions: a mixture of ease in timing and a reserved way of communicating in business settings. Interesting in this context is, that Lewis e.g. described the Iranians as not being idle chatters and listening attentively particularly in situations they consider worth it. So not interrupting the a.m. Sales Manager can be seen rather as a compliment than disinterest. The fact that he was the only respondent who disagreed to the statement that persons not participating actively in a discussion were shy or disinterested might be based on positive personal experiences in Arab countries and a perception of attentive and appreciative listening rather than a lack of interest.

This example of silence and the various options of interpreting it makes obvious that there is more to communication than an explicit message transmitted in the written or spoken word. One of the international Sales Managers additionally brought in body language. He explained that Indians would say “yes” to everything (Candidate 6, Austria). It seems that he as a person from a low-context culture expected a spoken “yes” to automatically be a sign of agreement. In accordance with Hooker’s explanation in the literature review, this is not necessarily the case in high-context cultures; and the Indian societies are interpreted to be high-context. This example story accordingly is a model example of a classical misinterpretation in a low-context/high-context-constellation of business partners. The Sales Manager’s personal solution for the problem was to focus on reading his Indian partners’ faces instead. This, however, turned out to be complicated for him as well, because he had difficulties in interpreting correctly the head movements of the Indians, not being sure whether it was “a yes or a no” (Candidate 6, Austria). In this context he used the words he did not know whether they were “telling the truth or not”

(Candidate 6, Austria). As in the example provided before in which another candidate had used the expression “not keeping one’s word” for a non-adherence to schedule, this wording here implies that there is more to it than a mere difficulty in understanding. What the Sales Manager perceives as a discrepancy between the spoken word and the accompanying body language is irritating for him and even unconsciously interpreted as untruth. In accordance with the a.m. explanation of Tarjani Sheth it can be considered normal that a mismatch between nonverbal signals and the message conveyed in speech result in confusion, tension and mistrust. Furthermore, this personal experience confirms Dr. Joseph Shaules’ a.m. comment that we tend to unconsciously interpret whatever we perceive in a way that is corresponding to our own cultural conditioning. The Sales Manager is likely to be conditioned to interpret a perceived mismatch between facial expressions or gestures with spoken words as untrue without being aware that this interpretation of his is a learned reaction.

Similarly, unintended wrong messages can also be transmitted by behavior that is seen as normal in one cultural context but considered to be wrong in another one. The before-mentioned Sales Manager also referred to expected behavior and no-gos. In his culture of origin e.g. both men and women open the door for others without any regard to status or gender. This is normal or even expected behavior in Austria, while according to this candidate’s cross-cultural experience, it was not allowed for a white man or a woman to open the door for someone else in India, especially not for a lower employee (Candidate 6, Austria). He did not dare to brake what he considered a local unwritten rule. The same was true in his example of business lunches in Iran, where he did not dare to explain that he was vegetarian and instead joined the local hosts in eating meat in order to not disregard their attentive hospitality (Candidate 6, Austria).

One of the other participants as well shared his experiences and lessons learned about different behavior expected in deviating cultures. He explained that e.g. the British and Russians expected different behavior. In the UK it would be very important “to make sure that no one gets offended” (Candidate 4, Austria). When referring to contacts with US-Americans he even used the expression “challenges”. In his opinion, they “expect everyone to be like them, in thinking, behavior, etc.” (Candidate 4, Austria). Based on this, he described negotiations with US-Americans as “very difficult and time-consuming” (Candidate 4, Austria). Another candidate brought in an example of her studies in the USA. She criticized an American professor for having expected a rule-based studying style with “homework like in school” while she was used to study very autonomously (Candidate 5, Germany). These are confirmations of the argument in the literature review, that putting countries like the USA and those of Central or Western Europe in some kind of common category called “Westeners” or similar – as opposed to Asians – can be inappropriate.

This Austrian candidate also pointed out to the fact that the wrong way of greeting or mixing up British and American English could be a problem. He also mentioned that he noticed when the business partner on the other side struggled to avoid referring to Austrian business partners as Germans (Candidate 4, Austria). As can be seen, this candidate did not only be aware of parts of his own adaptation to others but also noticed the respective other sides trying to cope with the challenges of cross-cultural communication.

Despite these participants’ examples of recommendable adaptation to the local cultures of business partners, one candidate brought in an additional view. She recommended being open-minded, however, without giving up too much of what is

important to oneself based on one's cultural or personal education. She explained that neglecting one's own needs lead to frustration and finally health problems (Candidate 5, German). This consideration of one's own needs compared to the tendency to accept and adapt to the expectations of others in the group might be based on the fact that this candidate's country of origin, i.e. Germany, is the culture with the highest score in individualism according to Hofstede's national cultural dimension "collectivism vs. individualism" amongst the interviewees' original national cultures.

In general, the candidates displayed a high sensitivity for the importance to respect the particularities of their partners in cross-cultural communication and cooperation settings. They valued good work relationships and trust. All of them supported the a.m. statements that "showing the other side respect for their view of a situation" increased "the satisfaction experienced during cooperation" and that "mutual trust supported the success in long-term work relationships". However, already in the open interview part preceding the statement section several participants referred to the importance of topics like trust, respect or relationship-building and were prepared to invest in this.

The Manager for the Middle East who experienced that in some countries much less importance was attributed to the adherence of time schedules than in Austria e.g. explained he would "always try to take a bit the pressure away from them" (Candidate 7, Austria). He explained to unsolicitedly mention that a delay was probably caused by outside circumstances and was therefore out of their control. The other Sales Manager in the sample had developed the strategy to keep it simple and let his negotiation partners in Asian countries repeat some argument of his in their own words to find out whether they understood instead of bringing them in situation they might lose their faces in by e.g. telling them openly that they had not understood what he had wanted to say (Candidate 7,

Austria). Another candidate explained that showing respect in little things and "just trying to make it right" would already make people "more open and willing to forgive other mistakes" (Candidate 4, Austria). He also emphasized the importance to accept that people who "grew up in different places" were "taught to solve problems differently" (Candidate 4, Austria).

Trust and respect do, however, not only improve cross-cultural work relationships with external parties. As indicated before, the South African candidate had perceived the work environment in his country of origin as competitive, a climate in which colleagues would rather use a mistake of yours behind your back to their own advantage than openly talk to you about it. On the contrary to this, he said about his actual work environment in his adopted country Austria that in general everybody would respect each other and their knowledge very well (Candidate 2, South Africa). It would accordingly be worth investigating to more detail whether competitiveness on a job market negatively impacts cooperation amongst employees or the other way round whether stable conditions on a work market have a positive influence on the emergence of a respectful style of collaboration.

Such a climate can be considered a good precondition in the context of the topic chosen as an example of cross-cultural internal communication: group-wide standardized error management. In all processes of preventing, detecting, avoiding and solving operation errors there are persons involved who might have contributed or been perceived as having contributed to a problem. Accordingly, trust is a very important aspect of a successful error management.

In general, it can be said that no cultural dimension, concept or trait can completely be seen separately. They are by nature interwoven and the various influencing

factors overlap. In the chosen example topic of error management this manifoldness becomes obvious. This one single topic is a compound of influencing factors and rich of potential misunderstandings and conflicts. While one person considers it as necessary and appropriate to put the task first and openly talk about errors, others are deeply afraid to lose their faces when doing so; varying degrees of power distance are accompanied by different degrees in the sense of responsibility amongst non-managerial staff; a manager might personally experience problems to be solved as motivating challenges and misinterpret a reluctance amongst some members of staff to proactively tackle them as laziness or disinterest, while in reality a restrained behavior might just be driven by uncertainties, a conviction of not being responsible or even a sign of respect for the position and status of a superior.

Such deviations are likely to manifest particularly in contexts that suggest proceeding in a group-wide standardized way like in error management. When everybody worldwide is expected to follow the same procedures, the deviations between what is stipulated and how it would be done locally become more obvious and thus a source of conflict. If a standardized procedure is implemented all over an MNE's business locations, it is probable that this standardized way will be shaped by the culture of the MNE's headquarters location. As people with different cultural backgrounds deviate in their perception and interpretation of things and situations, and furthermore behave differently and have different communication patterns, communication problems between MNEs and their host-country offices are unavoidable.

Errors and their group-wide successful management are accordingly a very sensitive topic, which is highly influenced by the people involved. It is less their ability to technically identify errors or to find solutions for them. It is more about the unconscious

attitudes towards errors. It is about feelings of responsibility or personal degrees of proactivity which determine whether error management systems run more or less smoothly all over an MNE. This is the reason why this topic was also considered in the interviewees. The intention here was to provide additional information deriving directly from persons and not only from theoretical concepts.

Besides the Russian interviewee, who was undecided, all the other participants disagreed to the statement that it would be “rude to tell someone in the face that he or she is wrong”. This means they would indeed tell someone else that he or she was wrong. The South African candidate argued that after all he himself would prefer being informed openly by a colleague about a mistake of his. In his country of origin it would on the contrary be popular to go behind one’s back and directly tell the boss about it. He furthermore explained, that the job market in South Africa would be so competitive and additionally the workforce so culturally diverse that the work environment would be very confrontational with everybody trying to keep their jobs (Candidate 2, South Africa).

The candidates generally accepted the bringing up of errors occurred, however, it is interesting to see that four of the participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that they expected their superior not to mention a mistake of theirs in public. One argued that this “should happen in private, so that you can learn from it. Nobody learns when they feel embarrassed in public” (Candidate 2, South African). The only one who disagreed to the statement and with this revealed to accept being pointed out to a mistake by a superior in public was the only German candidate in the sample. It can be assumed that her cultural background allows her to attribute more importance to the task of solving a problem at hand over her personal sentiment.

In the context of errors and how to communicate them there was also another statement: “I would never tell my superior that I think he or she made a mistake or is about to make a mistake.” Four participants strongly disagreed and three disagreed. This statement was foreseen to identify whether persons of different cultural backgrounds would be more or less direct in communicating such a topic to persons on higher hierarchical levels. While the answers of all participants showed that they would talk to their superior in such a context, it is interesting to notice, that the four participants from German-speaking countries all did so with greater vehemence by going for the option “strongly disagree”. One Austrian candidate even emphasized that he was “known to be frank with everyone” (Candidate 4, Austria). The answers of the Indian, Russian and South African candidates were mere “agree”s.

There was another statement in which the interviewees of the German-speaking countries answered differently, this time even to the contrary of the rest. They either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “It is dissatisfying or even exhausting to correct problems that arose from misunderstandings”. On the other hand, the Indian candidate was undecided here and the South African and Russian disagreed. The Russian candidate commented her choice with the words “I wouldn’t say it’s a problem” (Candidate 1, Russia) and advised to not get angry for what had happened due to a cultural misunderstanding. In another part of the interview she had described herself as “a person who always tries to avoid any kind of conflict” (Candidate 1, Russia). This urge for avoiding conflict can have different reasons, like aiming at harmonious relationships or a certain degree of flexibility or pragmatism, which Hofstede in his dimensions of organizational culture describes to be the opposite of rigid or normative.

In the same context of giving one's opinion to the statement it would be dissatisfying or even exhausting to correct problems that arose from misunderstandings, the South African commented his choice with the words "I disagree, because the possible misunderstandings are generally quite minor and a correction isn't a huge deal" (Candidate 2, South Africa). His answer might be based on his profession and actual position. As a (mainly internal) controls technician he is likely to work according to well-defined procedures known to his colleagues and himself. His cross-cultural experiences are thus mainly with experts in the same field. These are conditions that are likely to be untypical for other candidates, like those active in international sales. This assumption is supported by the respondent's explanation in another part of the interview where he said that in his department there were "quite a lot of instructions", "clear and distinct project parts" as well as a good support (Candidate 2, South Africa).

The answers of the Russian and South African candidates imply that both the personal / cultural conditioning and the type of profession with its particular work tasks have an influence on the emotions involved in correcting problems that arose in cross-cultural work situations. The Russian's acceptation of differences might be a solution that takes out the emotional pressure. Another option is making sure that everybody involved knows what to do. This seems to be easier in fields where the people concerned have professions that are similar in different countries, i.e. when the persons cooperating are a rather homogenous group in their professional cultures despite having different national backgrounds.

As could be shown, the interviews provided additional information and insights about the role that cultural differences play in creating problems in (internal and/or external) communication for employees working in multinational enterprises (MNEs).

The fact that the interviews were carried out in a language foreign to all persons involved but one could be seen as a limitation of the study. However, a certain degree of uneasiness, questions of comprehension, the search for appropriate words, minor mistakes in Grammar or vocabulary, different accents and similar can likewise be seen as example aspects in cross-cultural communication that employees of MNEs are subject to in their everyday working lives. Accordingly, the occurrence of minor linguistic obstacles during the interviews indeed supported the informative value of this work instead of weakening it.

It must be admitted, that there were nevertheless some limitations in the interview part of this work that could be avoided in a replication: One example is the above mentioned explanation, that statements 5 and 21 about respect and mutual trust were worded in a way that they might have induced supportive answers. This accordingly reduced their informative value. Additionally, there should probably have been more questions and accordingly more guidance and moderation in the open part of the interviews. It might be worth reflecting over the question whether interviews held in another but the participants' mother tongue are accompanied by additional requirements that exceed the superficially perceivable degree of language mastery. The degree of moderation required might be higher when people do not only reflect about how to answer a question content-wise but are simultaneously forced to wonder how to express themselves semantically correct.

Conclusion

Both the literature review and the interviews with experienced practitioners of the MNE chosen for this study showed that cultural differences play indeed a role in creating cross-cultural communication problems. Their impact on perception, behavior and communication patterns is of particular importance for MNEs and their external and internal communication processes. The literature review sensitized for many cultural aspects, like e.g. national cultural dimensions, deviations in time concepts and working styles that differ in their degrees of task- or relationship-orientation. The interview candidates provided interesting additional insights on the topic of cross-cultural communication. Both parts hopefully help the reader developing a better understanding about what role cultural differences play in creating internal and external communication problems for MNEs and their host-country offices worldwide.

The participants were born and brought up on the three continents Africa, Asia and Europe in five different nations (Austria, Germany, India, Russia and South Africa). Despite their different national and professional backgrounds they all showed a high confidence in the future and a low degree of uncertainty avoidance. As indicated before, it would accordingly be worth investigating to further detail how stable conditions on a job market like the Austrian one decrease people's uncertainties and help them develop confidence in the future.

The same is true for the respondents' high sensitivity for culture and language issues that could be noticed during all of the interviews. It would be worth investigating how learning a second language to a fluent level increases not only the language skills but furthermore develops sensitivity for potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

References

Accident (n.d.). In *Cambridge online dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accident

AFM (2017). *Case study - Learning from errors; towards an error management culture. Insights based on a study in the capital markets.* Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://www.afm.nl/en/nieuws/2017/okt/onderzoek-open-foutencultuur

Boas, F. (1938). Language. In F. Boas (Ed.), *General anthropology* (pp.124-145). Boston: D.C. Heath and Company.

Bridge Business College. (2018). *Types of organizational culture.* Retrieved October 25, 2019, from https://www.bridgebc.edu.au/types-of-organisational-culture/

Businessmate (2009). *5 cultural dimensions.* Retrieved October 20, 2019, from http://www.businessmate.org/Article.php?ArtikelId=4

Cameron, K. S.; Quinn, R. E. (2006). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture: Based on the competing values framework*. Revised edition. San Francisco: The Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series. A Wiley Imprint.

Cannon, M. D. & Edmondson, A. C. (2001). Confronting failure: Antecedents and consequences of shared beliefs about failure in organizational work groups. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *22*(2). 161–177. doi: 10.1002/job.85

Cannon, M. D. & Edmonson, A. C. (2005). Failing to learn and learning to fail (intelligently). How great organizations put failure to work to innovate and improve. *Long Range Planning, 38*(3). 299-319. doi: 10.1016/j.lrp.2005.04.005

Cassell, J. Pelachaud, C, Badler, N. Steedman, M., Achorn, B, Becker, T, Prevost, S. (1994). Animated conversation: Rule-based generation of facial expressions, gestures & spoken information for multiple conversational agents. Technical Reports (CIS).

CIE Purdue (2016). *Direct and indirect communication*. [Video file]. Retrieved November 03, 2019 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4QdDQryAOc

Conuntrymeters (2019. *Liechtenstein*. Retrieved November 10, 2019, from https://countrymeters.info/de/Liechtenstein

Culture (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster online dictionary.* Retrieved October 19, 2019, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture

Deutscher, Guy (2010). *Through the language glass: Why the world looks different in other languages.* New York: Henry Holt And Company.

Error (n.d.-a). In *Business online dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/error.htm.

Error (n.d.-b). In *Cambridge online dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/error

Error (n.d.-c). In *Softwaretestingtimes*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://softwaretestingtimes.com/2010/04/fault-error-failure.html

European Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC

Frese, M., & Keith, N. (2015). Action errors, error management, and learning in organizations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 66*(1), 2015.

Gregersen, T. S. (2007). Language learning beyond words: Incorporating body language into classroom activities. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, 6*(1), 51-64. Retrieved November 05, 2019 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252225970_Language_learning_beyond_words_Incorporating_body_language_into_classroom_activities

Gutterman, A. (2015). *Organizational culture: A guide for growth-oriented entrepreneurs.* Retrieved October 31, 2019, from https://alangutterman.typepad.com/files/goe-organizational-culture-guide-toc-2015-1.pdf

Gutterman, A. (2017). *Organizational culture: A global survey of theory and research.* doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.24392.21760

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Doubleday.

Hall, E. T., Reed Hall, M. (1983). *Understanding cultural differences: Germans, French, and Americans.* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Harteis, C., Bauer, J., Festner, D., Gruber, H., & Heid, H. (2005). *Learning from mistakes. An interview-study in German enterprises.* University of Regensburg.

Hofstede, G. (n.d.-a). 6 dimensions of organizational culture. Retrieved October 19, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6-dimensions-organizational-culture/

Hofstede, G. (n.d.-b). The 6-D model of national cultures. Retrieved February, 04, 2020, from https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/

Hofstede, G., Peterson, M. (2000). Culture: National values and organizational practices. In: Ashkansy, N., Wilderom, C. & Peterson, M. (Eds.). *Handbook of organizational culture & climate* (pp. 401-415). Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications

Hofstede, G. J., Pedersen, P., Hofstede, G. (2002) *Exploring Culture: Exercises, stories and synthetic cultures.* London: Intercultural Press.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M. (2005). Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, *2*(1). doi: 10.9707/2307-0919.1014

Hofstede, G. (2014a). Individualism-collectivism in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 19, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hofstede, G. (2014b). Masculinity femininity in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hofstede, G. (2014c). Power distance in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hofstede, G (2015). Dimension-data-matrix. Retrieved October 22, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/research-and-vsm/dimension-data-matrix/

Hofstede, G. (2015a). Indulgence vs restraint in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 19, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hofstede, G. (2015b). Long-Short term orientation in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hofstede, G. (2015c). Uncertainty avoidance in 10 minutes. Retrieved October 23, 2019, from https://geerthofstede.com/training-consulting/online-lectures/

Hooker, J. (2008). *Cultural differences in business communication*. 389-407

Jacobson, R. O. (1959a). Boas's view of grammatical meaning. *American anthropologist*, *61*, 139-145.

Jacobson, R. O. (1959b). On linguistic aspects of translation. In: R. A. Brower (Ed.), *On translation* (pp. 232-239). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Joyce, C. (2012). The impact of direct and indirect communication. *Independent Voice, 11*.

Kaizen (n.d.). In *Cambridge online dictionary*. Retrieved December 30, 2019, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/kaizen

Kemmer, R., Zahn, C. (2018). Bewusste Fehlerkultur als Erfolgsfaktor für Unternehmen. In H. R. Fortmann & B. Kolocek (Eds.), *Arbeitswelt der Zukunft. Trends – Arbeitsraum – Menschen - Kompetenzen*. Wiesebaden: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-3-658-20969-8_8

Kvalnes, Ø. (2017). Fallibility at work: Rethinking excellence and error in organizations. Oslo: Palgrave Macmillan

Lewis, R. D. (2018, 4th edition). *When cultures collide. Leading across cultures*. London, Boston: Nocholas Brealey Publishing.

Monochronic and Polychronic countries (2003). A multi-country study of the adoption of ERP systems. Retrieved January 14, 2020, from https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Monochronic-and-Polychronic-countries-with-their-characteristics_tbl2_4781353

Mistake (n.d.-a). In *Cambridge online dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mistake

Mistake (n.d.-b). In *Dictionary*. Retrieved October 16, 2019, from https://www.dictionary.com/browse/mistake

Nationsonline (n. d.). Country Codes List. Retrieved February 09, 2020, from https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/country_code_list.htm

Nisbett, R. E.; Masuda, T. (2003). Culture and point of view. Retrieved October 4, 2019, from https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1934527100

Our world in data (2014). *The value of global exports.* Retrieved February 03, 2020 from https://ourworldindata.org/trade-and-globalization

Porter, M. (1980). *Competitive strategy*. New York: Free Press.

Rascher, S., Schröder, R. (2017). Die Gestaltung einer konstruktiven Fehlerkultur als Führungsaufgabe in High Reliability Organizations (HRO) am Beispiel der zivilen Luftfahrt. In C. von Au (Ed.), *Struktur und Kultur einer Leadership-Organisation.* Wiesbaden: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-3-658-12554-7_10

Rosinski, P. (2003). *Coaching across cultures: New tools for leveraging national, corporate and professional differences*. London, Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing

Schmidt, W. V., Conaway, R. N., Easton, S. S. & Wardrope, W. J. (2007). *Communicating globally: Intercultural communication and international business.* Los Angeles (CA): Sage Publications.

Shaules, J. (2015). *The intercultural mind: Connecting culture, cognition and global living.* Boston (MA): Intercultural Press.

Sheth, T. (2017). Nonverbal communication: A significant aspect of proficient occupation. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), 22*(11), 69-72. doi: 10.9790/0837-2211066972

Statista (2019b). Globalization Index by country. Retrieved February 03, 2020 from https://www.statista.com/statistics/268168/globalization-index-by-country/

Statista (2019a). Trends in global export volume of trade in goods from 1950 to 2018. Retrieved February 04, 2020, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/264682/worldwide-export-volume-in-the-trade-since-1950/

Subbiondo, J. L. (2015). Whorf, Benjamin Lee (1897-1941). *International encyclopedia of the social & the behavioral sciences*. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.61305-3

van Dyck, C., Frese, M., Baer, M. & Sonnentag, P. (2005). Organizational error management culture and its impact on performance: A two-study replication. *The Journal of Applied Psychology,* 90, 1228-1240. doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.6.1228

Appendices

Interview guide

The interview guide consisted of three main parts. The first one was foreseen to motivate the candidates to openly share personal experiences. This part was intentionally moderated in a reserved way only. There were several preprepared contingency questions as well, that were partly not used at all during the actual interviews. Some questions were not prepared but came up during the conversations themselves.

The second one consisted of pre-formulated statements about pre-defined categories to be analyzed. The numbering from 1 to 21 corresponds the presentation there. The categories are defined and allocated to the statements to detail in the chapter "findings". The candidates were invited to answer with "strongly agree", "agree", "undecided", "disagree" or "strongly disagree". A third and last part was foreseen to gather data about the candidates' personal background (origin, languages, cross-cultural experiences, education, and profession).

Part 1 Free / open sharing of experiences

To start with I would like to give you a chance to share with me some personal experiences without limiting you too much with detailed questions.

So please tell me one or the other example story about experiences you made when communicating with people of other countries than your own.

In the following questions please generally consider experiences with persons from other countries than your own. I will just not mention this again and again with

every single question. OK? Have you experienced any communication problems in such contexts? And which?

How satisfied – or dissatisfied – were you with that exemplary conversation/ these exemplary conversations?

What had – in your eyes – gone wrong in this conversation?

How did you feel in this situation?

What do you think were the emotions of the other person in this situation?

What do you think were the emotions of the other person in this situation?

Have you developed any strategies to communicate more effectively?

Have you applied any strategies to improve such communication situations?

Now, please openly tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a supervisor or a subordinate respectively who had a different cultural background than yours.

Did anything lead you to think the other person's culture played a role in the disagreement?

Have you experienced some disagreement with a colleague (with a different cultural background than yours) who was on the same hierarchical level than you?

Given your personal experience would you say that people of different cultural backgrounds tend to get irritated (or perhaps even angry) for different reasons?

Have you, on the other hand, ever experienced a cross-cultural work-relationship that in your eyes went particularly well? What do you think were the factors that contributed to this? Please tell me.

Do you think you have learned something out of the situations described and do you have any recommendations in the context of cross-cultural communication and cooperation?

Contingency questions

How did you know that the other person did not understand you clearly?

Why do you think they were upset?

Have you ever noticed different approaches to working through a list of open items that you consider to be based on cultural differences?

Have you ever had the impression that parties of different cultural backgrounds attributed more or less importance to a punctual compliance with contract positions?

Part 2 Pre-formulated statements (to analyze the degree of approval)

I will now present you some statements. Please tell me for each of them whether you strongly agree, whether you agree, whether you feel undecided, whether you disagree or whether you strongly disagree.

1) When I cooperate with people of other cultural backgrounds than my own, the risk that I am misunderstood during conversations is higher than in conversations with people of my own background.

2) When I cooperate with people of other cultural backgrounds than my own, the risk that I misunderstand them during conversations is higher than in conversations with people of my own background.

3) It is dissatisfying / exhausting to correct problems that arose from misunderstandings.

4) Communicators who are able to sense uncertainties in their conversation partners are

more likely to avoid misunderstandings than others.

5) Showing the other side respect for their view of a situation increases the satisfaction experienced during cooperation.

6) A person who does not contribute to a discussion is either disinterested or shy or both.

7) Treating a person as incompetent just for limited verbal skills in a foreign language has a negative impact on the conversation and its outcome.

8) I feel valued when I am consulted for important decisions.

9) A high-status person deserves it to be treated with particular good manners.

10) Whatever the future may bring I am confident to make the best of it.

11) If I had to move to a totally different cultural area for some time I would look forward to the experience.

12) I would like to get clearer instructions by my superior about how to carry out my tasks.

13) It makes me nervous when people do not clearly tell me what they want from me.

14) It is rude to tell someone in the face that he or she is wrong.

15) When I make a mistake I expect my superior to not mention it in public.

16) I would never tell my superior that I think he or she made a mistake or is about to make a mistake.

17) Immediately starting to work through a time schedule without having a chance to become familiar with new partners/contacts is bad manners.

18) Finishing a meeting with scheduled items still undiscussed is unprofessional.

19) It is best to work through one agenda item after the other.

20) An agenda is just a guideline.

21) Mutual trust supports the success in long-term work relationships.

Part 3 Questions on participants' personal background

When and where were you born?

<If you do not live in your country of birth:> At which age did you move to the country you are actually living in?

In which countries other than your country of birth have you lived/worked or studied and for how much time?

What is your highest education degree and in which country did you achieve it?

What is your actual profession and position?

Which is your native language?

Are you fluent in the language you use in your daily work?

Were/are you fluent in the language you use(d) when communicating with people of cultural backgrounds deviating from yours?

Please note: Answers to the questions and statements are presented to detail in the chapters "findings" and "discussions". The participants' personal data gathered in the third part of the interviews are to be found in form of brief biographies in the chapter "methodology", subchapter "participants".

Results of part 2 (List of answers to pre-formulated statements)

Abbreviations used for the degree of agreement

sd	d	u	a	sa
strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree

Key of interview candidates

Participant No.	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Nationality	Russia	South Africa	India	Austria	German	Austria	Austria

Statement	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1	a	a	a	a	a	sa	sa
2	a	a	a	a	a	sa	sa
3	d	d	u	a	sa	a	a
4		sa	a	sa	a	u	a
5	a	sa	a	sa	sa	a	sa
6	a	a	u	sa	a	sa	d
7		sa	a	sa	sa	a	a
8	a	sa	u	u	sa	a	sa
9	sd	sa	u	sd	a	u	u
10	a	sa	sa	sa	sa	sa	a
11	a	a	a	u	a	sa	a
12	a	d	sa	d	d	a	d

Statement	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
13	d	d	a	d	a	u	d
14	u	d	d	d	d	d	d
15	a	a	u	sa	d	a	u
16	d	d	d	sd	sd	sd	sd
17	u	u	sa	a	a	u	u
18	u	u	u	u	a	sd	d
19	a	a	a	u	sa	a	a
20		a	a	a	d	sa	a
21	sa	sa	sa	a	sa	sa	sa