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EFFICIENT CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION  
BETWEEN SOUTH KOREA AND FINLAND:  
FINNISH EMPLOYEE IN KOREAN WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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# EFFICIENT CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SOUTH KOREA AND FINLAND: FINNISH EMPLOYEE IN A KOREAN WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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The purpose of this thesis was to understand cross-cultural working life communication between Finland and South Korea. The objectives of the thesis were to understand both countries' cultures and communication styles and by comparison find ways to reduce possible challenges a Finnish employee could face in a Korean working environment.

The theoretical section includes comparison of working life values according to Hofstede's five dimensions and communication styles according to Hall's high and low context model. In the communication style comparison section there are also practical examples of both verbal and nonverbal communication from both countries. The information for theoretical part was mostly based on literary on culture studies of Finland and Korea. The theoretical section reveals that even though there are several cultural differences like hierarchical and collectivistic issues there are still various similarities in the communication styles; silence is used as part of communication and capability to read situations is crucial.

The empirical part is done from Finnish employees' perspectives and focuses on the similarities and differences on cross-cultural working life communication between Finland and Korea. It consists of research findings, conclusion and recommendations parts. The information for empirical section was gathered through three interviews of Finns with experience of working and living in Korea. The interviews confirmed that the hierarchical factors were the most challenging aspects for a Finn working in Korea and revealed that the lack of logical and rational thinking can cause a lot of frustration among Finns. Recommendations for Finnish employees working in South Korea included respecting the elders, studying the culture and maintaining harmony among colleagues in every situation.

# TEHOKAS KULTTUURIENVÄLINEN VIESTINTÄ SUOMEN JA ETELÄ-KOREAN VÄLILLÄ: SUOMALAINEN TYÖNTEKIJÄ KOREALAISESSA TYÖYMPÄRISTÖSSÄ

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on ymmärtää kulttuurienvälistä viestintää työympäristössä, suomalaisten ja eteläkorealaisten työntekijöiden välillä. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on ymmärtää kyseisten maiden kulttuureja ja viestintätylejä ja niitä vertailemalla vähentää mahdollisia haasteita, joita suomalainen työntekijä voi kohdata korealaisessa työympäristössä.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettisessa osassa vertaillaan ensin työelämänarvoja Hofsteden viittä ulottuvuutta mukaillen, jonka jälkeen tarkastellaan kyseisten kulttuurien viestintätylejä, perustuen Hallin matalan ja korkean kontekstin malliin. Teoreettisen osan viestintätyleli osiossa tarjotaan myös paljon käytännön esimerkkejä, niin verballisesta kuin non-verballisestakin viestinnästä molemmissa kulttuureissa. Lähteinä teoreettisessa osassa käytettiin pääosin kirjallisuutta liittyen Suomen sekä Etelä-Korean kulttuureihin. Teoreettisessa osassa huomataan, että vaikka Korean ja Suomen välillä on useita kulttuurillisia eroja, joista suurimmat olivat hierarkiaan ja kollektiivisuuteen liittyviä, silti heidän viestintätyleissä on useita yhtäläisyyksiä, kuten hiljaisuuden käyttäminen kommunikoinnissa sekä tilannetajun tärkeys.

Empiriaosuus keskittyy löytämään yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia Suomen ja Eteläkorean kulttuureissa ja viestintätyleissä. Vertailua tehdään suomalaisen työntekijän näkökulmasta, keskittyen korealaiseen työelämäkulttuuriin. Kyseinen osuus koostuu tutkimus löydöksistä, yhteenvedosta sekä suosituksista. Lähteenä empiriaosuudelle toimi kolme haastattelua suomalaisilta, joilla on pitkä kokemus Koreassa elämisestä ja työskentelystä. Kyseiset haastattelut vahvistivat, että vahva hierarkia on haastavimpia asioita suomalaiselle korealaisessa työympäristössä ja paljastivat myös, että loogisen ja rationaalisen ajattelun puuttuminen voi aiheuttaa suomalaisille turhautumisen tunteita. Suositukset suomalaisille työntekijöille korealaisessa työympäristössä sisältävät mm. korkea-arvoisempien kunnioittamisen, kulttuurin opiskelun sekä hyvän ilmapiirin ylläpitämisen kollegoiden kanssa, tilanteesta riippumatta.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	6
2	PROBLEM SETTING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE.....	8
	2.1 Purpose and objectives.....	8
	2.2 Conceptual framework.....	9
	2.3 Delimitation of research.....	10
3	METHODOLOGY.....	11
	3.1 Research design.....	11
	3.2 Research method.....	12
	3.3 Data collection and analysis.....	12
	3.4 Making the interview questions.....	13
	3.5 Validity and reliability.....	14
4	COMPARISON OF FINNISH AND KOREAN WORKING LIFE VALUES.....	15
	4.1 Power Distance.....	15
	4.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism.....	19
	4.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity.....	23
	4.4 Uncertainty avoidance.....	27
	4.5 Long-term vs. short-term orientation.....	29
	4.6 National Values.....	34
	4.6.1 Persistence.....	34
	4.6.2 Ethnocentricity.....	35
	4.6.3 Concepts of space and time.....	36
5	COMPARISON OF FINNISH AND KOREAN COMMUNICATION STYLES....	38
	5.1 High and low context communication.....	39
	5.2 Verbal communication.....	42
	5.3 Nonverbal communication.....	44
	5.4 Language barriers.....	47
6	RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	49
	6.1 Finnish view of Korean working life culture.....	49
	6.1.1 Hierarchy.....	50
	6.1.2 Collectivism.....	53
	6.1.3 Lack of logical and rational thinking.....	56
	6.1.4 Instructions and efficiency at work.....	58
	6.1.5 Attitudes towards women and foreigners.....	60
	6.2 Finnish view of the communication in Korean working environment.....	62
	6.2.1 Indirect way of communication.....	62
	6.2.2 Verbal and nonverbal communication.....	64
	6.2.3 Language barrier.....	66

6.3 Ways to decrease challenges in cross-cultural communication.....	68
7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	70
8 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	72
8.1 Suggestions for further research .....	74
REFERENCES.....	75
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX 1	
APPENDIX 2	

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2013 South-Korea and Finland celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations. At first cooperation among the two countries remained quite limited for several years. However, after the Asian financial crisis (1997), when Korea was forced to open its doors for foreign investments, Finland started to increase its interest and investments to the country. Since then the amount of Finnish and Korean workers, students and companies working together has kept growing. In 2010 there were around 150 Finnish companies represented in South-Korea of which Nokia, Ahlstrom, FiboX, Cargotec and Wärtsilä were the biggest ones (Antell & Vierimaa 2010, 22).

The huge Korean conglomerates like Samsung, Hyundai, LG and Daewoo led the economic miracle in South-Korea and enabled the country to become one of the economic superpowers of the world. With growing interest from foreigners Koreans started to send their youth to study abroad allowing today's Korean business world to have a large number of workers with experience on communicating smoothly with foreigners. Nevertheless, the powerful Confucian principles are still part of the everyday culture affecting Korean's behavior and communication. These principles are emphasized in a Korean working environment where hierarchy and harmony among workers are of utmost importance and can cause many challenges on foreigner workers. (De Mente 2008, 19-21.)

My own interest to Korea started to grow through learning about the culture and language. I was captivated by this different culture with such contrasting beliefs and customs compared to the ones I was used to. My interest led me to spend an exchange year in Korea where I was fascinated to see in firsthand how the traditional Confucian principles were merged in the westernized atmosphere of Seoul.

During the last months of my stay in Korea I started to prepare this thesis. Since I am hoping to work and live in Korea I started to wonder what could be the main challenges a Finn could face in Korean working environment and how these challenges could be handled. In this thesis I focused on Finnish employees working in South-Korea and more specifically in a Korean working environment. Hence, when later on

Korea or Koreans are mentioned it refers specifically to South-Korea and the society of South-Korea.

During my exchange year I had already experienced some challenges a Finn and a Korean could encounter when communicating with one another. Especially the importance of respecting elders and seniors became very clear when my Korean friends guided my behavior when elders were present. Also, I experienced the collectivism of Korean society during group projects where my Korean team members insisted us on doing the whole project together from beginning till the end when I would have preferred to divide the project in smaller, individual parts. My Korean friends also told me the experiences of their friends and relatives who were working in Korean companies. I was very surprised by the long working hours, the ultimate power of the bosses and hoesik (회식), a compulsory dinner and drinking night with your boss and colleagues, sometimes even several times a week.

Despite the differences I also saw many unexpected similarities. I noticed that I felt more comfortable with calm and subtle Koreans than with extroverted and loud exchange students from other parts of Europe. I started to see more and more similarities among the Finnish and Korean culture; the way we are modest, how we take other people's feelings into consideration and how we were not bothered by silent gaps in our conversations.

With these experiences in mind the thesis topic started to form. This thesis compares the two cultures and ways of communication finding similarities and differences. Through the comparison I will detect possible challenges for a Finn in a Korean working environment and offer suggestions on how to overcome these challenges.

The thesis is formed from theoretical and empirical parts. The theoretical part is focused on the comparison of the working life values and communication styles between Finnish and Koreans. Through the comparison the differences among the two cultures are found and the main challenges are discovered. The empirical part is carried out through qualitative interviews of three Finnish employees who are working in Korea. This part offers some firsthand examples of challenges they have faced as

well as offers suggestions how a Finn could be successful in Korean working environment.

## 2 PROBLEM SETTING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

### 2.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to ease the communication among Finnish and Korean colleagues. To achieve this I formed the following research questions:

- What are the Finnish and Korean cultural values like when compared to each other?
- What are the Finnish and Korean communication cultures and styles like when compared to each other?
- How can cultural differences affect on the working life?
- What challenges are most likely to appear for a Finnish employee in a Korean working environment?
- How to decrease the challenges and make the communication more efficient?

The comparison questions are emphasized in this thesis because through comparison the similarities and differences are easily found and the main challenges detected. Throughout the comparison I will also provide hands-on examples of how the cultural differences can be seen in working life. After the comparison the possible challenges can be found and I will be suggesting ways to overcome these challenges.

The research questions lead to the following objectives for the thesis:

- To understand Finnish and Korean cultural values and communication styles.
- To compare Finnish and Korean communication styles in working life communication.



- To find the possible challenges in cross-cultural communication between Finnish and Korean workers.
- To suggest ways to avoid misunderstanding and gain smooth communication.

The overall purpose of this project is to explain the values and communication styles which are the main part of the Finnish and Korean cultures and also find ways to decrease misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication in working life from Finnish workers' perspective.

The end result will be a manual to understand the differences in values and communication styles and to learn how to obtain smooth communication between the colleagues from Finland and Korea.

## 2.2 Conceptual framework

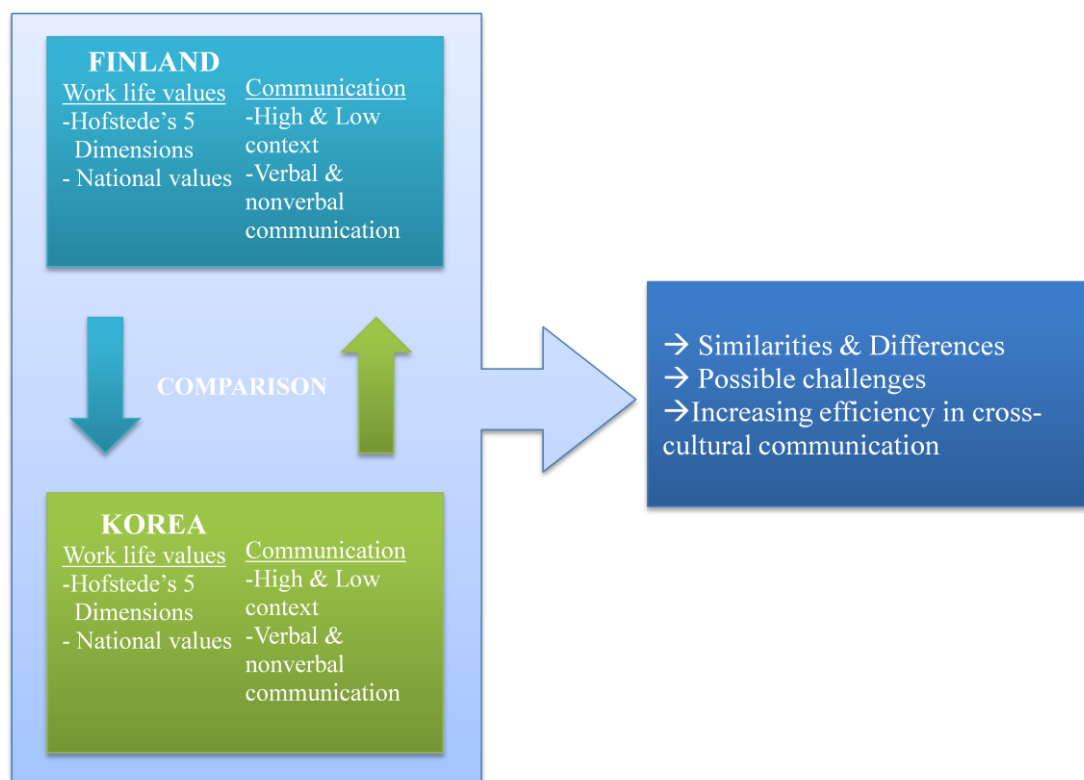


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the thesis

The conceptual framework was formed to support the objectives of the thesis. As can be seen from figure 1 the first part of the thesis will be a comparison between Fin-

land and Korea. The comparison will be done on working life values and communication between Finland and Korea.

The comparison of working life values includes Hofstede's five dimensions model and some additional national values. The Hofstede's five dimensions which will be used as base to the working life values comparison are: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term vs. short-term orientation. The topics compared in the national values part include persistence, ethnocentricity and concepts of space and time.

The main topics discussed in the communication style comparison will be high and low context communication, verbal- and nonverbal communication and language barriers. Especially the nonverbal communication part will include many hands-on examples on the cultural differences in gestures and body language.

The comparison will reveal the similarities and differences in the culture and communication styles and from the found differences possible challenges can be discovered. The main purpose of the last part of the thesis is to explain the main challenges and find ways to ease the cross-cultural communication among Finnish and Korea workers. There will also be recommendations on what a Finn should do in a Korean working environment.

### 2.3 Delimitation of research

The cross-cultural working life communication between Finland and Korea can be seen as a wide subject but it has been narrowed down to be from Finnish perspective with focus on the efficiency of communication in working life.

Even though the goal is to understand the values in both countries and how they can affect the working life the histories, religions and philosophies behind these values will not be explained in depth. The thesis is predominantly made on working life, with only few clarifying examples from other areas like example of PR to represent

the Finnish honesty and economy of words and few examples of B2B communication especially related to negotiation techniques.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

Exploratory study is a research design where the importance is on defining a problem and investigating the problem more precisely to find new problems. In such studies the main goal is to discover ideas and insights instead of hard facts. The exploratory study is quite flexible since research problems can transform as the research goes on affecting also the research methods. (Kothari 2004, 35-36.)

The research design of this study is exploratory due to its features of being flexible and lacking the clearly defined problems from the start. The main goal of this thesis is to provide recommendations and solutions to the possible challenges in communication but these challenges were not known from the beginning of the research. During the research the challenges become clearer giving opportunity to proceed into study of the solutions and recommendations. (Sachdeva 2009, 14-15.)

The other exploratory features of this research are that it will be providing insight into the communication among Finnish and Korean colleagues and explain why and how possible challenges emerge instead of offering calculated and scientific facts. Important part of the research will be the secondary research where information is found by analyzing and comparing available literature giving basis to the qualitative research where semi-structured interviews will be performed. (Sachdeva 2009, 14-15.)

### 3.2 Research method

Qualitative research method's main purpose is to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and reasons behind it. This is why often smaller, carefully selected samples are needed and data collection is often performed with observation and interviews. With these data collection methods the researcher can reach a better insight to the culture's or a person's motivations and behavior. (Glenn 2010, 95-97.)

This thesis is based on qualitative research method, meaning it will concentrate on understanding of behavior, values, opinions and impressions. As mentioned above the research is exploratory and generates hypotheses and problems as it goes on. The emphasis on the research is on questions "how" and "why" and during the interview, both interviewees' answers and behavior will be monitored and analyzed. Only small sample of three Finnish employees living and working in Korea are interviewed and these interviewees are chosen carefully according to their experiences and knowledge.

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

The data in this thesis refers to behavioral information including attitudes, opinions, values, knowledge, practice etc. This data is collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will be covering the empirical part of the research and secondary sources will cover the theoretical part. (Krishnaswami 2010, 85.)

Primary sources will be the semi-structured interviews of Finns with experience in communicating and working with Koreans. The selection of interviewees will consist of three Finns who have more than one year work experience in Korea. The interview style will be a semi-structured interview where the interviewees will have possibility to openly tell about their experiences even outside the interview questions. (Krishnaswami 2010, 105.) They will also receive the questions beforehand to give them time to think and prepare comprehensive answers.

The interviewees were asked to participate in the research in November and the interviews were performed in December 2013 and January 2014 via Skype. The interviews were done in Finnish because it is the native language of all the interviewees and this way it will be ensured that they can express their opinions and feelings more precisely. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed.

The secondary sources are the existing literature. The secondary sources were gathered between July and December 2013 mostly from Konkuk University Sanghuh Memorial Library located in Seoul, South Korea and from The Satakunta University's Library from Kanali Campus located in Rauma, Finland. The used literatures are written in both English and Finnish language and the information is gathered from reliable books, e-books, internet articles and official websites. All literature used in this thesis can be found from the reference list. Most of the websites and internet articles were used during the writing process to add depth to the information found from the books.

### 3.4 Making the interview questions

When using qualitative research method interview is the primary data collection technique. In semi-structured interview the interviewer starts with specific questions and then lets the interviewee talk about the given topic openly. This interview method relies on developing a dialogue between the interviewer and the participant. This demands some creativity from the interviewer to achieve greater clarity and variety of data through the interview. (Sachdeva 2009, 168.)

Interview questions were formed to follow research questions, objectives and conceptual framework. They are semi-structured and are prepared for the conversation to expand outside the prepared interview questions. Also the key findings of the theoretical part are being tested and linked to the interviews. The questions are in logical order following the conceptual framework and during the interview additional questions might be asked if interviewee brings up and interesting or important topics outside the existing questions.

### 3.5 Validity and reliability

The validity of research comes from measuring what the research is intended to measure. In general researches have theory and empirical parts. These parts tend to differ since the theory part tells what we and the existing literature think about the researched matter and empirical part tells about what actually is happening in the world. Often the theory part is an idea of what the situation is ideally so when applied to real world it might not be as simple and implicit as thought in theory. The validity in research can be gained with planning a proper methodology where the idea of the research is described in series of operations and procedures. Only this way the method to bring the theory to the real world can be discovered and implemented. (Sachdeva 2009, 55.)

The validity in this thesis comes from the correctly used methods. The information found in theoretical part will be tested in empirical part and interviewees are also given chance to speak up of any topic that might have not come up in the theoretical part. Throughout the thesis there is a linear connection of question-methods-truth which has been kept as the main frame for the research (Glenn 2010, 145). This way collected data gives up-to-date and real life insight to the situations, as well as describes the historical and previously studied cultural aspects affecting the situation.

Reliable in general means “dependable” or “trustworthy” but in research the term “reliability” is related to “repeatability” or “consistency”. A research is considered to be reliable if it would give the same result over and over again. (Sachdeva 2009, 69.)

Good reliability also includes trustworthy methods of data collection. The reliability in a collection of primary data can be improved with properly constructing measurement instruments, preparing question and reducing distractions when doing observation or interview (Sachdeva 2009, 61). The reliability of secondary data can be ensured by using reliable, published literature and official websites and internet articles with reliable authors.

The reliability of this thesis comes from reliable data collection. The used secondary sources are carefully chosen to be up-to-date and from reliable sources; only official

websites, internet articles with authors and published books are used. The primary data is collected in a best available context which will be via Skype. To make the data collection reliable I will be assuring beforehand that internet connection, recording program and microphone works without problems and this way remove possible distractions. The interviews are also recorded and analyzed later on.

## 4 COMPARISON OF FINNISH AND KOREAN WORKING LIFE VALUES

Professor Geert Hofstede conducted a large study on how values in the workplace are influenced by national culture. In this study he divided the values into five clusters and named them Hofstede dimensions of national culture. (Website of the Hofstede Centre.)

This section compares Finnish and Korean values according to Hofstede's dimensions and shows how these values can be seen in working life. Each section includes a summarizing table gathered during the research. The tables also include a score according to Hofstede's research showing the intensity of each dimension in both countries. The last part of this section describes the values and customs in the designated countries related to persistence, space, time and ethnocentricity.

### 4.1 Power Distance

Power distance describes the mental distance separating subordinates from their superiors (Hofstede 2010, 55). Hofstede (2010, 61) described power distance as follows:

*“The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”*

Table 1. Power distance in Korea and Finland

<b>Korea (60)</b>	<b>Finland (33)</b>
Hierarchy (from Confucianism)	Egalitarianism (from Christianity)
Top-down limited communication	Two-way open communication
Superior more like commander or father	Superior more like supervisor
Subordinates expect to be told what to do	Subordinates expect to be consulted
The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or a “good father”	The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat
Strict behavioral patterns	Relaxed atmosphere preferred

When it comes to power distance Finnish and Korean working life cultures are seemingly different. Finnish working life culture does not contain a strong hierarchy and subordinates are free to express their views openly (Snyder 2003, 35). In contrast Korean working life culture has authoritarian features where older people and superiors have final say in all matters (Choi 2007, 21).

What makes Koreans so class-conscious is Confucianism, a philosophical system introduced to Korea by the Chinese over 2,000 years ago. Confucianism brought the “father culture” to Korea where fathers and father figures had absolute authority over the other members of the society (De Mente 2004, 16). Today Korea is starting to be more westernized and the strictest forms of Confucian teachings are starting to disappear but still the high importance of age and superiority takes place on both work and free time (Choi 2011, 145).

Finland on the other hand has developed its culture under the influence of Christianity and Lutheranism which emphasizes social equality. For Finns egalitarianism is very important and their welfare state’s goal is to bring same chances to all. (Lewis 2005, 56; Keinonen 1999, 13.)



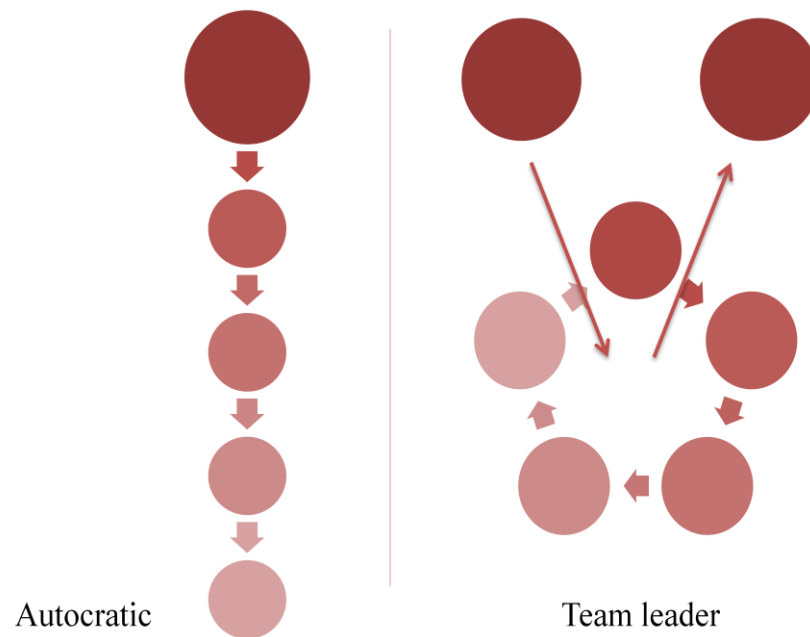


Figure 2. Leadership styles in Korea and Finland (Lewis 2005, 90 & 93)

The figure 2 illustrates the leadership and communication styles at work in Korea and in Finland. In a Korean organization the communication style is usually top-down and leadership style is autocratic meaning the power and the authority is in the hands of CEO and upper management (Lewis 2005, 90). It is normal for middle management and for the employees under them not to express their opinions or give initiatives to their superiors (Choi 2007, 21). In fact in a conservative Korean organization that kind of behavior would be considered as inappropriate and could have bad effect on the subordinate's career. Subordinates are meant only to follow orders given by their superiors. In return superiors will take the responsibility and have a concern of their subordinates similar to a father's concern to his child. (De Mente 2004, 46.)

The communication in Finnish organizations is more open and often team leaders and management are working more as supervisors than managers. The two-way communication ensures that everyone's ideas are noticed and subordinates can easily access most management levels, including CEO. Open expression of views is encouraged and superiors do not hesitate to step down to employee level at the time of crisis. (Lewis 2005, 92, 98.) Still CEO prefers making the final decision when it comes to important, cardinal matters (Snyder 2003, 35).

A Finnish expatriate working in a Korean company described the relations to superior in the following way:

*“In Finland you can defend yourself but here, if the boss says that something is like this, then you are more like “okay” even though you don’t really agree. It is frustrating and I have always been the kind of person who states her opinion. In Finland it is appreciated but here I have found out that it’s better to keep your mouth shut and just support the ideas of the management.”* (Jouhki 2013, 11.)

These hierarchical values also affect the etiquette in meetings and negotiations. For Koreans it is important to build a mental hierarchy with new people. They need to establish order among a group because they have distinct ways for communicating with people with different status (Chaiky 2012, 101-102). For example the hierarchy has an effect on; the deepness of the bow, how you are supposed to address people, the initiator of handshake (always senior), the seating arrangements, the way of sitting, when having a dinner the pace of eating, the order of introductions and lastly, when using Korean language the grammar and vocabulary (Choi & Lim 2011, 36-37; Chaiky 2012, 129, 145-148, 157). This is why, when Koreans meet for the first time they tend to ask age, position, graduation year or even the age of children to know each other’s age and status (Chaiky 2012, 22). The following is how a Finnish expatriate describes this situation in Korea:

*“When you meet a Korean, you face a litany of questions about your age, marital status and so on. They ask you your age to find out how to categorize you, in other words situate you on a ranking scale. Although I had been warned about this sort of questions it did still surprise me in the beginning but I adapted to it pretty fast. You know, here they have different words for different hierarchical levels but when you don’t understand the language it’s hard to tell.”* (Jouhki 2013, 7.)

In negotiations, meetings and delegations Koreans also want to match both sides to be of similar status. They see that the more senior or higher position a speaker or a team has the more serious the matter. To ensure successful meeting it is important to know exactly who you will be facing and matching your team with them. According-

ly, in business negotiation it is always better to bring in negotiators who are senior in age and authority of the Korean team. (De Mente 2004, 134.)

Finnish behavior in negotiations and meetings is quite different. The titles and last names can be replaced quickly with first names and the formalities are often dropped off soon. Everyone should be treated alike and the emphasis is not on who is speaking but what is being said. All in all, Finns prefer to have meetings with relaxed atmosphere instead of strict protocols and hierarchy. (Lewis 2005, 139-140.)

#### 4.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism vs. collectivism dimension tells about the way people see themselves; as an individual or as part of a group. Here is how Hofstede (2010, 91) explained the dimension in question:

*“Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.”*

Table 2. Individualism in Korea and Finland

<b>Korea (18)</b>	<b>Finland (63)</b>
Family of utmost importance	Family is important
“We”, “our home”, “our company”	“I”, “my home”, “my company”
The employer-employee relationship is basically moral, like family link	The employer-employee relationship is a contract between parties in a labor market
Direct feedback spoils harmony	Direct feedback is accepted and even called for
Relationship prevails over task or truth	Task or truth prevails over relationship
Teamwork is done with group consensus	Teamwork is done by group of individuals
Group mentality	Do-it-yourself mentality

Again, Finland and Korea can be seen almost as each other’s opposites with Finns reputation being industrious and independent individuals when Koreans do not even have the exact word for “individualism” in their language (Snyder 2003, 35; Chaivy 2012, 64).

In Korea, family is considered to be the most important thing in life and their society is seen as the extension of the family. Koreans use words “our” or “we” frequently. For example when a Finn would say “my family” or “my house”, Korean would say “our family” or “our house” referring to all of his family members. Because society is seen as family in Korea it is normal to address non-family-members with familial titles like “uncle”, “sister” or “brother” and similar titles are also seen in working life. In companies often the CEOs are called as “grandfathers” and presidents as “fathers”. (Choi 2007, 26-28; Choi 2011, 143.)

Because the whole society is seen as extended members of family Koreans are also willing to suffer hardships for the good of the country. During the IMF crisis (1997-1998) everyone in Korea gathered money to pay the bailout. Moreover, it is not unheard of that employees return their salaries when company is suffering from financial problems. (Chaivy 2012, 52.)

Although Finns are known to enjoy solitude, value privacy and prefer minding only their own business they still share some signs of collectivism. Finns do not break laws or promises and they are paying very high taxes for the good of the society. (Lewis 2005, 37, 61.) From Finland you can also find national collectivism in a moment of crisis. After winter war (1939) over 150 000 married couples gave up their golden wedding rings to strengthen the national defense in a war against the Soviet Union. However, due to difficult circumstances during war this gold was never used to increase the amount of weaponry, as it was planned, but the money was used to take care of the nation mostly in a form of grain purchases. (Website of Säkylän talvi- ja jatkosotamuseo).

In working life Finns work well in teams which are often groups of individuals completing their own parts of the task, which when put together will achieve the wanted goal for the team (Website of World Business Culture 2012). Still more often than not Finns both prefer and tend to perform best when working alone (Lewis 2005, 88).

Koreans on the other hand are all about team work and a person focusing too much on individual accomplishments can easily cause conflict. Korean organizations often seek to achieve family-like work environment where everyone works harmoniously. (Chaiy 2012, 174.) Koreans also avoid taking individual responsibility and are really sensitive when it comes to personal failure in any form. Hence, consensus is always wanted before action, which can significantly slow down the decision making or completion of a project. (De Mente 2004, 64-65.)

The team or group (e.g. family, society, company, department at office) a Korean is part of must always have priority over individual matters and the members of the group are expected to behave in a matter which will not disturb the harmony in the group (Chaiy 2012, 173). For example one should not stand out too much by making strong individual opinions. Koreans feel that the group gives a sense of security to its members and expect faithfulness and sacrifices for the good of the group in return. (Choi 2007, 24.)

For Koreans some common ground with people around them gives them feeling of safety, trust and security. This can be seen when Korean is surrounded by people whom he or she does not know. When Koreans meet new people they start to inquire each other's hometowns, schools, universities etc. to find a common link. They will do the same with foreigners by asking the foreigners knowledge about Korea; where have you been? When have you arrived? What do you like about Korea? After a common link (e.g. foreigner has visited the Korean person's hometown) is found it is much more comfortable for the Korean to start building a relationship. (Chaiky 2012, 22.)

It is crucial for foreigner employees to build these relationships with Koreans because they do not separate personal relationships from business ones; the better the relationship the easier the business. Here is an example from the former president of the Seoul Foreign Correspondents' Club of how building a relationship for just one night can make a significant difference:

*“The Club secretary became very alarmed when the tax officials doing it (auditing) suggested that the 10 per cent service charge that we levied on food should be paid to the Club's restaurant staff. If applied retroactively, this would have bankrupted the Club. - - On advice, I went to meet the director of the Office of National Tax Administration. We supped ginseng tea for half an hour and chatted about politics without referring to our ‘little problem’. Then he called in the man who was responsible for doing the Club and berated him in front of me. From my limited Korean, it struck me that he was making a show of having discovered some error in the man's thinking, possible that this service charge thing didn't apply to non-profit organizations like ours. The man bowed and disappeared. ‘It's OK,’ the director said to me with a smile.”* (Breen 2004, 155.)

While in Korea relationships are in a key position in business life for Finns task prevails over relationships. The example above could not have happened in Finland. Laws, rules and facts are followed without a question and relationships in business are considered to be secondary. By being shy, quiet, unwilling to ask for help and having strong do-it-yourself mentality, Finns' characteristics and behavior can cause misunderstandings with Koreans who expect not only Koreans but also everyone else

to be group-oriented. An independent Finn could seem rude and uninterested on working together in the eyes of Korean who is inexperienced in cross-cultural communication. (Lewis 2005, 37.)

Although Finland has been greatly individualistic country for decades the companies are now emphasizing more and more team work and team spirit which is slowly changing the working life values to more collectivistic (Snyder 2003, 35). The opposite change is happening in Korea. The young generation is increasingly individualistic and extending the opportunities for subordinates to disagree with a group or superior (Chaiy 2012, 173). This means the cultural gap between Finland and Korea is getting smaller which makes it easier for Finnish and Korean colleagues to communicate and work together.

#### 4.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity

The third dimension tells about gender roles, relationships, equality and significance of feelings. The following is how Hofstede (2010, 140) described this dimension:

*“A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life.”*

Table 3. Masculinity in Korea and Finland

<b>Korea (39)</b>	<b>Finland (26)</b>
Careers are compulsory for men, optional for women	Careers are optional for both genders
There is a lower, but growing, share of working women in professional jobs	There is a high share of working women in professional jobs
Few women are in elected politics positions	Many women are in elected political positions
Confucianism stress the male prerogative	Christianity gives equal roles to both sexes
Relationships prevails cold facts and figures	Cold facts and figures prevails relationships

In both countries the business world and the upper management positions are often more occupied by men than women. This is more common in Korea than it is in Finland. Nevertheless, change is slowly happening and women are more and more accepted and treated as equals in the working life of both countries. In Korea, traditionally women and men lived almost in separate worlds – in their personal and work life as well. This mindset is slowly disappearing but especially conservative elder people still accept and cooperate better with male business partners and colleagues (De Mente 2004, 118-119). In Finland the separation is much smaller but still the top executives in companies are more often men. (Lewis 2005, 47).



Table 4. Women in politics, education and working life (Official statistics of Finland (OSF): Employment 2012, Statistics Korea: Women's Lives through Statistics in 2013, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): Education at Glance 2012, Inter-Parliamentary Union: Women in national parliaments 2013, Palkansaajien tutkimuslaitos: Hinnat ja palkat: Miesten ja naisten keskiansiot 2013.)

	Women in Parliament	Women attained tertiary education	Women's Labor participation rate	Women's wage out of Men's
Finland	42.5%	44 %	70%	83%
Korea	15.7%	35 %	49.9%	68%

From table 4 we can see how Korean women are still not having a strong hold in politics but already almost half of Korean women are working. Traditionally in Korea wife was supposed to stay home, take care of children and be responsible of the family's finances while men earned the living. Nowadays women's labor participation rate is increasing and husband and wife often both manage their own finance and do household chores together. (Chaiky 2012, 108.) But, as seen from table 5 below, Korean society is still not fully accepting the woman's place right next to man's in working life.

Table 5. When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women? (Website of the World Value Survey)

	Finland	Korea
Agree	10.3 %	34.4 %
Disagree	79.9 %	27.3 %
Neither	9.3 %	38.0 %
Don't know	0.5 %	0.0 %
No answer	0.1 %	0.3%

Thanks to Finnish women being the first women in the world to be granted full political rights (1906) and the Finnish laws supporting equality (Haigh, 2003, 117), wom-

en already are equally taking part to politics and their participation rate in labor is very high (Snyder 2003, 116-117). As Richard Lewis says in his book *Finland, Cultural Lone Wolf*, “it is rare to find a woman who does not work”. Table 5 also shows how Finnish are quite unanimous when asked about woman’s right to job with almost 80% thinking that women have the same right to a job as men, when in Korea this number did not even reach 30%.

Because of the egalitarian culture in Finland, including women and men being treated equally, Finnish women who are meeting with Korean men for the first time could feel offended when Korean men shake hands with one another and only nod to a woman. This behavior is consequence of tradition of Korean women not shaking hands, not meant to be offensive or rude towards women. (Jouhki 2013, 13)

Both countries are feminine in a same sense that aggressive words and behaviors are avoided and communication is kept harmonious and subtle. Modesty and humility are valued and arrogance and strong criticizing is taboo. (Haigh 2003, 118, 122; De Mente 2004, 38, 42.) These matters will be discussed in more detail in later sections related to communication styles.

One big difference in values between the two countries are that Koreans protect relationships, feelings and harmony to an extent of affecting their honesty and for them truth is considered to be situational (De Mente 2008, 86). Koreans often adjust their own behavior and truth to protect the harmony and keep the atmosphere unthreatening, relaxed, comfortable and happy (De Mente 2004, 36). In contradiction Finns value truth, honesty, facts and figures over relationships. Stating the truth, even if unpleasant, is considered to be the best way to achieve the wanted goal. Although truth is often conveyed frankly it is done politely and in a subtle manner. (Lewis 2005, 3, 56, 139.) A Finn might waste a lot of time trying to use logic and hard facts when the Korean side is seeking to develop personal relationship and harmony.

At negotiation tables a Korean can behave very differently from other places. There they have more aggressive never-give-up, never-lose mentality with extraordinary skills in debating and bargaining. They are known to be tricky negotiators and use emotions to persuade, motivate or even manipulate. They are prepared for long-

drawn-out negotiations hoping to tire the other side to make mistakes and use any other means to confuse the other side to get a profitable deal. Nevertheless, due to their “winner takes it all” -attitude, once they see their failure is imminent they are ready to give up and forget the drama (De Mente 2004, 42; De Mente 2008, 95-98).

The Korean negotiation style can indeed be confusing for punctual, agenda following and hard facts and figures loving Finns. Finnish negotiation style is often polite but very frank, importance is on accuracy and wasting time is to be avoided when possible. The pace is steady, consistent and unhurried and agenda should be followed throughout the negotiations. It is preferred to be moderate and low key without extra gush; an overt charisma is seen suspicious. It is also important that no one is interrupted during their speech. Sometimes Koreans could confuse Finns with jumping from one topic to another and then back. Finns have difficulties on concentrating on many things at the same time so frustration in those situations is possible. (Lewis 2005, 56, 139-140, 155.)

#### 4.4 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance describes the societies’ anxiety when dealing with new and unpredictable situations. Job stress, need for clearly defined rules and guidelines and job security are important parts of this dimension. Hofstede (2010, 190-191) described uncertainty avoidance as follows:

*“The extent to which, the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations.”*

Table 6. Uncertainty avoidance in Korea and Finland

<b>Korea (85)</b>	<b>Finland (59)</b>
Clear rules, roles and guideline at work place	Flexible guidelines and rules at work place
Need monitoring to perform well	Dislike being closely monitored
Change seen as threat	Change seen as opportunity
Not natural risk takers	Not natural risk takers
Motivation from job security	Motivation from self development

When it comes to anxiety in workplace Finns and Koreans are again very different. Koreans perform better under clearly structured environment when Finns work best when able to apply their own ideas and take part on planning of their own work (Sutela 2011; Chaïy 2012, 175).

According to Hofstede (2005) Koreans are one of the most uncertainty avoidant societies in the world. To work efficiently and perform well they call for clearly defined roles and guidelines and minimization of unpredictable factors. When there is a situation requiring prominent change they tend to try to reject it because of the uncertainty it could cause (Chaïy 2012, 46-47, 175). As mentioned before, they often also avoid taking individual responsibilities in a fear of failure.

Finns on the other hand dislike being closely monitored and can see it as criticism on their capabilities (Lewis 2005, 91, 104). They prefer consultative leader from strictly monitoring one and work with personal independence, original thinking and have a stubborn way of doing tasks in their own way (Haigh 2003, 116, 119).

Although manuals are often abandoned without reading, Finns are one of the most law-abiding, debt-hating and promise-keeping people in the world (Lewis 2005, 57). They also are not natural risk takers and need a lot of information before reaching a final decision (Haigh 2003, 114; Snyder 2003, 36). Finns have solid faith in law and expect it to be followed in every situation without exceptions (Uschanov 2012, 67).

Uncertainty avoidance can also be seen in what motivates the employees. Finns are motivated in their work when they have opportunities for self development like learning new, developing one's skills and having challenging tasks. Also taking part on planning own work is seen as good motivator; choosing the order and method of performing tasks and leaving space for common sense are important. (Sutela 2011.) Koreans value stable employment, satisfying their security needs, career development and desire to be as good as or better than others. Only recently the importance of self development at work has started to grow also in Korea. (Chaiy 2010, 47, 205-206).

#### 4.5 Long-term vs. short-term orientation

The last one of Hofstede five dimensions describes the societies' time orientation; if they make plans with consideration of future or past, tightly clinging onto traditions. Hofstede (2010, 237) described the fifth dimension as follows:

*“Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards – in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present – in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of “face” and fulfilling social obligations.”*

Table 7. Long-term orientation in Korea and Finland

<b>Korea (75)</b>	<b>Finland (41)</b>
Very class-conscious	Myth of “classless” Finland
Rewarded by abilities and status	Wide social and economic differences are undesirable
Managers and workers are psychologically in two camps	Managers and workers share the same aspirations
Traditions are important	Traditions are not very important
Protecting one’s face is very important	Protecting one’s face is desirable
Importance on this year’s profit	Importance of profits in future
Large savings rate	Small savings rate
Interest in religions and education	Interest in knowledge and education
Investment in lifelong personal networks	Personal loyalties vary with business needs

When it comes to uncertainty avoidance Finns and Koreans share the similar “saving face” characteristic although for Finns it is not as important as it is for Koreans. The biggest differences are that Finns see changes and future as possibilities not so much as threats as Koreans might. Furthermore, traditions and superstitions are more valued in Korea than they are in Finland. (Snyder 2003, 34; Lewis 2005, 157.)

Class-consciousness is related to short-term orientation and as seen in the first dimension, hierarchy and class-consciousness is a big part of Korean working life culture. In Korea age and status can be even seen as an obstacle to be friends and workers might have to be careful not to look too smart, or at least not smarter, than their superior (Jouhki 2013, 10). In Korean society, everyone belongs into carefully prescribed ranks. For every rank or social class there are specific rules, etiquette and form of behavior the members of the class should follow. For example for a person in the upper class should avoid direct contact with those who are two or more classes below them, to make sure his own status is not lowered. (De Mente 2004, 98.) Although this kind of Confucian traditions and class system are deeply rooted in Korean

culture, as a result of westernization and urbanization the old traditions are slowly fading away (Choi & Lim 2011, 35).

When it comes to Finland, there is strong myth of socially “classless” Finns although the distribution of wealth is increasingly unequal. Still, the importance of equal possibilities in raising one’s social status is emphasized and most Finns, even the ones with highest income, wish to reduce the differences between the social classes. Furthermore, in Finland education has the greatest effect on social mobility and during past decades as much as 70% of Finns have ended up in different social class than their parents. (Erola 2010, 238-240.)

Consideration of face, meaning the value in the eyes of others, is a characteristic for short term oriented societies. Face is considered to be important in both countries. Both Finnish and Koreans adapt their behavior not to lose own or other peoples’ face (Lewis 2005, 58). The difference is on how far the two different societies are ready to go to save everyone’s face.

In Finland, people avoid making strong opinions and forcing one’s opinion on others, since this could make the other person feel like if he is not sharing the same opinion, he is wrong and therefore, he could end up losing his face. Also self-disparagement is common; a Finn often undermines his accomplishments so that other people will not feel inferior. Communication is subtle to avoid embarrassing and uncomfortable situations but still honesty is maintained in all situations. (Lewis 2005, 62, 75.)

Koreans follow similar behavior except for the fact that they are ready to forget rationality and honesty and tailor the truth to save own and others’ faces (De Mente 2008, 87). Bluntly saying “no” is not common and even asking many questions from speaker is avoided, because it would imply the speaker is not doing good job and end up in him losing face. For Koreans saving face prevails telling the truth and being honest, which can be difficult for Finns to understand. Koreans’ ways of tailoring the truth and changing behavior to save face and maintain harmony are discussed in depth in sections 5.1 and 5.2 related to communication styles. (Woo 2011, 142.)

Other signs of Koreans short term orientation are their precise forms of behavior originating from Confucian traditions and principles. This behavior prevents them saying or doing anything that might embarrass or make others feel bad. Koreans are especially in a difficult situation when they need to be the bearer of bad news. Negative reports might be delayed on purpose, not to upset superiors and sometimes foreigner partners have not been informed about solutions Koreans have made for problems they do not want to admit exists. (De Mente 2008, 29, 84.)

Because of face saving mentality and short term orientation, Korean companies seek to make profit every year instead of looking further to the future. Breen describes in his book "The Koreans" (2004, 154-155) how Koreans have tendency to use highly irregular accounting and juggle financial figures to always show profit to save the company's and manager's face and keep investor and consumer confidence.

Breen also describes the following situation that occurred in 1997 when Coca-Cola bought several bottling companies from Korea. These companies had been part of a chaebol (재벌) - a huge Korean conglomerate.

*"It turned out that the bottling companies were laboring under heavy debts. In this they were not so different from most Korean firms. To what extent an individual company is struggling with debt has always been impossible to fathom because of the way companies keep their accounts. It is standard practice for Korean companies to keep three different sets of books, one for external reporting, one for the tax authorities, and one for internal management reporting. This last set of accounts is secret and is the basis for management decision-making."* (Breen 2004, 154.)

This example is from 1997 and the situation nowadays has changed. According to Invest Korea website (2013), Korea's accounting system was modernized to meet the international standards after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, around the time of the example. This means the juggling with financial figures and irregular accounting in companies have decreased considerably, but might still appear.



One sign of Koreans being more oriented on short term is also their pursuit of traditions and beliefs in folk religion. Shamanism has been part of Korean culture throughout its history, even when oppressed by Japanese and by Joseon dynasty (Website of the Korea Tourism Organization 2013). Today shamanism has decreased due to spread of Christianity but many people still turn to mudang (무당), a Korean shaman, for fortune telling when facing a difficult situation or before making big decisions. Some businessmen also go to mudang hoping she will make their business prosper endlessly and help their stocks to skyrocket. (Choi 2011, 100.)

Koreans also can be superstitious when it comes to numbers. Unlucky numbers are 4 and 13. The unluckiness of number 4 comes from Chinese because the pronunciation of number 4 sounds similar to word death and the unluckiness of number 13 came to Korea from the western culture. Lucky numbers are odd numbers and especially 3 and 7. Number 3 is considered to be harmonious with signifying completion and the luckiness of number 7 has also come from the western cultures. (Choi & Lim 2011, 78.)

Ancient Finns also had their own indigenous religious traditions but they have vanished to be only stories and myths from ancient times. Finns are not very religious, even when being part of the church, they do not often participate to church services and over 20% of Finns do not belong to any religion (Official Statistics of Finland: Population structure 2012; Snyder 2003, 34). Finns are also not very superstitious, they are aware of the meaning of number 7 being lucky and 13 being unlucky but do not take it very seriously.

Despite the many short-term orientation characteristics, some long-term orientation characteristics can be seen in the cultures of both countries. Koreans have the 12<sup>th</sup> highest saving rate in the world and have passionate desire for education (Choi 2011, 146; The World Bank: Gross savings (% of GDP) 2012). Finns also value high education and companies often invest significant amounts in research and development as well as training of their employees. Also the employees are often willing to learn at all stages of their career (Haigh 2003, 117).

## 4.6 National Values

In addition to the Hofstede's five dimensions, through my research I found other interesting values affecting the working life cultures. These values will be discussed in the following section more closely.

### 4.6.1 Persistence

Both Finnish and Korean societies share similar tenacity and determination although the sources for these are slightly different; *Sisu* in Finland and *Han* (한) in Korea. Both countries have history with occupation and fighting for independence against strong neighboring country and are also known for performing an economic miracle through fast processes of industrialization and urbanization.

Finnish economic miracle occurred after the war in 1960s when Finland had agreed to pay the reparations to Soviet Union in manufactured goods. This war debt to Soviet Union turned out to be very beneficial for Finns because not only it forced them to undergo a fast industrialization but also the Soviets became dependent on these Finnish products. Hence, after the debt was paid Soviet Union started to buy the same goods as they had received as reparation before, which became to be one of the most important factors of making the Finnish economic miracle. This fast industrialization was enabled by determination Finns call "*sisu*", a power that enabled Finns to push through hardships in war-torn Finland. (Lewis 2005, 39).

The economic miracle in Korea started after the Korean War in 1950s. South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world and highly dependent on foreign aid.

The economic miracle was enabled with introduction of democracy resulting in freedom from suppression; ordinary Koreans were finally allowed to express their feelings. This led to the birth of *Han* - an outburst of energy, creativity, diligence, dedication and ambition which had been suppressed for so long. When the power of *Han* was added to the new industrialization policies and growth of Korean conglomerates such as Samsung, LG, Hyundai and Daewoo the Korea's development into an economic superpower had begun. (De Mente 2008, 18-19.)

Both *Sisu* and *Han* do not have exact English word. *Sisu* has been described with words like guts, courage, toughness, stamina, stubbornness, single-mindedness, tenacity and ability to endure hardships and adversity. *Sisu* is what makes Finns persevere with a given task until finished, no matter how difficult. (Haigh 2003, 116.)

The Korean *Han* is consequence of strict oppression and frustration from Joseon Dynasty (1392-1950s) when new-Confucianism restricted society's behavior, freedom of speech and social mobility. The frustration only grew with foreign occupation and crushing poverty and after independence and freedom from oppression all repressed feelings were released, providing huge amount of energy, power and passion. Still today *Han* can be seen in the ferocity, dedication, and diligence with which Korean society works and studies to achieve better future. (De Mente 2008, 24-25.)

#### 4.6.2 Ethnocentricity

As usual, both countries are very proud of their country. Koreans have raised their extreme nationalism with the *Han* of foreign domination and Finns are very proud of the egalitarian welfare state they have built (Genzberger 1994, 137; Uschanov 2012, 87). In both countries there have been only little amount of immigration so far, which has resulted in homogenous and mono-cultural societies. However, nowadays both countries are slowly opening their doors for more foreigners and new cultures. (Haigh 2003, 113.)

Due to various invasions Korea has experienced Koreans are very sensitive when it comes to exploitation by foreigners. Sometimes they might feel they deserve better side of a deal if they feel the negotiating partner is from richer, more developed nation. Foreigners should also understand that Korean businessmen put the national interest first and their own, personal profit is secondary. This is why it is good to emphasize the benefits to the whole nation when making deals with Koreans. (Genzberger 1994, 143, 147.)

Also Finns remember how they had to survive alone in war against Soviet Union. This fact added to their isolated geography, difficult language and unique culture gives them sense of separateness from other nations. Finns are kind and can easily make friends with foreigners but they always have a feeling that Finns are a bit different from everyone else. (Lewis 2005, 58-59.)

Similarly for Koreans, foreigner is always foreigner no matter the length of stay or fluency of Korean language. They are proud of having same ethnicity and being of “one pure blood” which can make them regard the Korean culture and ethnicity as superior. (Choi 2007, 36; De Mente 2008, 45.)

Since in Korea hospitality is seen as comparable to face or image, foreigners receive high level of hospitality. Koreans love to show their country and culture to visitors and tourists. Alike, Finns love to talk about their country but because boasting is not accepted they often cover their pride behind sarcasm and humor. Finns are especially fascinated about cultural relativism and could compare Finland to other countries for hours. (De Mente 2004, 62; Lewis 2005, 59, 161.)

When visiting both countries foreigners will face the same questions of how much they know about the country, how many times have they visited and what do they think of the country. Efforts to know some facts about the country are valued and at the same time it is possible to learn what kind of topics to avoid. In Finland a foreigner should not praise Sweden too much and in Korea the same applies for Japan. Koreans can also get offended if the visitor mixes North and South Korea to one another. (Haigh 2003, 122; Chaiy 2012, 22.)

#### 4.6.3 Concepts of space and time

Personal space varies a lot in these two countries. In individualistic and sparsely populated Finland (i.e. 15 persons per square meter) a person needs a lot of both personal and mental space. Collectivistic Korea contrary has very high population density with 491 persons per square meter and there being close and bumping to each other is considered to be normal. (Website of Central Intelligence Agency.)

Finns love spacious environment and often have hatred for crowded conditions and close physical contact with strangers. They consider their personal space to be the length of their arm and get easily irritated if someone comes too close. This can be seen in busses and subways when they avoid sitting next to a stranger unless there are no other vacant seats left. If they happen to sit together with a person they do not know, they completely ignore one another. This behavior is done out of respect of one's privacy. The mental privacy means giving a Finn space to do their own decisions and not forcing opinions on them or monitoring their tasks too much. (Lewis 2005, 151-154.)

Foreigners receiving Finns for visit should also know that most Finns need to have a base. In new surroundings they need to anchor somewhere. It can be an office, a hotel room or a home but without a base Finns can become insecure and quickly irritable. (Lewis 2005, 154.)

Koreans share different views when it comes to personal space. The concept of "my space" is rare and in speech they tend to use term "our space" (Woo 2011, 168). Families are more closely knit and privacy is not as common or cherished as it is in Finland. Demonstrating affection among friends by hugging, walking hand in hand or holding arms is very common, even among same sex (De Mente 2008, 54). When talking to each other Koreans tend to sit or stand relatively close and Korean dining tables without chairs are preferred because then more people can squeeze in (Choi & Lim 2011, 42).

What also might cause confusion between the two countries is the usage of time. Koreans have sense of urgency; they are fast paced, doing various things at the same time, always in a hurry and have tendency to not think things through rationally and carefully (Chaiy 2012, 50-51). Finns could not be more different. They value unhurried deeper thinking, are punctual and follow agendas without the feeling of "time is money". Every task and topic has its place in well planned schedule and checked over in timely manner. (Snyder 2003, 35; Lewis 2005, 20, 159.)

## 5 COMPARISON OF FINNISH AND KOREAN COMMUNICATION STYLES

Korean people have quite typical Asian communication style including modesty, saving face and harmony before truth. Finns also share many similarities with Asian communication styles but Finns tend to value honesty and truth above all. In both countries the communication is very subtle and nonaggressive with consideration of other person's feelings and thoughts.

USA/West Europeans		FINNS		KOREANS/Asians
<b>VALUES</b>		<b>VALUES</b>		<b>VALUES</b>
Democracy	↔	Democracy		Hierarchies
Self-determinism	↔	Self-determinism		Fatalism
Equality for women	↔	Equality for women		Males dominate
Work ethic	↔	Work ethic	↔	Work ethic
Human Rights	↔	Human Rights		Inequality
Ecology	↔	Ecology		Exploit environment
<b>COMMUNICATION STYLE</b>		<b>COMMUNICATION STYLE</b>		<b>COMMUNICATION STYLE</b>
Extrovert		Introvert	↔	Introvert
Forceful		Modest	↔	Modest
Lively		Quiet	↔	Quiet
Think aloud		Thinks in silence	↔	Thinks in silence
Interrupts		Doesn't interrupt	↔	Doesn't interrupt
Talkative		Distrusts big talkers	↔	Distrusts big talkers
Dislikes silence		Uses silence	↔	Uses silence
Truth before diplomacy	↔	Truth before diplomacy		Diplomacy before truth
Overt body language		Little body language	↔	Little body language

Figure 3. Finnish values/communication dilemma (Lewis 2005, 68)

From the figure 3, it can be seen how Finns uniquely have similar values with other western countries but their communication style is much more Asian. Usually individualistic western countries' communication style is open and even forceful because it is seen acceptable to state ones opinions without consideration for others. Finns however are much more introverted and modest similarly to Asians. Although they

emphasize democracy, equality and individualism they do it in a modest and subtle way, opposite to other western countries. The following sections will explain and compare in depth the Finnish and Korean communication styles.

### 5.1 High and low context communication

American culture anthropologist Edward Hall developed the high and low context concepts to compare how cultures communicate. Low context cultures are very straightforward with saying what they mean, unambiguously. High context cultures on the other hand often speak vaguely and express nonverbally what they really want to say. (Muna 2010, 71.)

As was seen from Figure 3, Finns and Koreans share relatively similar communication styles. Both have similar respect for silence and condemnation of boasting and arrogance. The biggest difference is on stating one's opinion. For Finns it is normal to use "no" and reasonable negative comments are accepted and even sought after (Lewis 2005, 32). For Koreans the importance of harmony in relationships prevents them expressing their opinions or using "no" as a response in dialogue (De Mente 2008, 54). This matter will be discussed more in verbal communication section.

As described before, Koreans are highly collectivistic society where harmony in relationships and saving face are of utmost importance. Hence, Koreans avoid conflicts and value subtle body language on behalf of negative words. Through Confucianism Koreans adopted the respect for silence and delicacy which lead to value context and implicit, simple expressions. Subtle body language with ambiguous expressions became the norm and each situation and context had its own behavioral pattern. If the pattern was broken, it could have had an effect to the sensitive atmosphere. These strict norms are slowly fading away with westernization but they still are something a foreigner in Korea should bear in mind. (Chaiy 2012, 72, 180.)

Finns share some similarities with Koreans; their body language is also relatively small and silence is part of the communication, even more so than what it is in Korea. Communication in Finland can be described as frank but subtle. It is said Finns

have “winter behavior”; Finland has really cold winters and during the coldest season people cannot have long conversations in the freezing weather, only quick conversation without laughs or smiles. Maybe this is one reason why Finns are also good at summarizing and getting quickly to the point (Lewis 2005, 19, 73, 82).

The spiral communication pattern of Koreans may confuse the Finns. Since stating one's opinion or putting business before relationships is not respectful behavior, Koreans tend to go through many different topics before stating the main point, if stating it at all (Chaiy 2012, 73). Since Koreans have lived in very homogenous society, sometimes they leave the main point out and expect the listener to draw the conclusion on their own (De Mente 2004, 71).

Koreans call the sense of understanding others intentions or mood as “*nunchi*” (눈치). Although English language lacks the exact word for *nunchi*, equivalent word can be found from Finnish; “*tilannetaju*”. Both *nunchi* and *tilannetaju* include the ability to read situations from context and behave in a manner appropriate to the specific situation. Koreans often expect foreigners not to have *nunchi* and try to be more explicit and direct than normally, which can result in sounding impolite. In these situations it is important to understand that if Korean comes across blunt, it is not lack of manners. (Chaiy 2012, 175, 179.)

In a worst case scenario when both Koreans and foreigners are inexperienced in cross-cultural communication, a meeting might end up wasting lot of time and money. For example a foreigner might be making a presentation for a Korean company that has no interest in it to begin with. The Korean just does not decline directly and foreigner cannot read the subtle signs Korean tries to send to show their disinterest. (De Mente 2004, 101.) Foreigner should realize from sentences like “it would be really difficult”, “we have to think about it” or “maybe later” that the Koreans are not very interested.

“Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know” is a Chinese proverb with which Finns can easily identify with. In meetings Finns often say only what is absolutely necessary, respect others remarks with no interruptions and have decent period of silence after the speaker has stopped to form carefully considerate com-



ments. They do not think aloud and value unhurried decision making which can lead to long silent pauses in conversations or meetings. When Finn is asked “what do you think?” he starts thinking, in silence, and after awhile he responds with a well thought answer. (Lewis 2005, 69, 71.)

The reason why Finns think their answers and opinions so carefully is because for them a statement can be seen as a commitment or a promise. Finns are economical with words but not with the truth. They see excessive talkativeness suspicious and feel uncomfortable with heavy bargaining and someone forcing their opinion on them. They rarely speak to strangers and similarly to Koreans starting conversations or small talk is not very natural for them. (Haigh 2003, 114; Lewis 2005, 68-69, 83.)

When communicating both Finns and Koreans also respect modesty and humbleness. Arrogance and boasting are taboo and not approved in any situation (Haigh 2003, 114). This can be seen in their behavior when they have achieved a goal or received compliments. When Koreans achieve a goal they tend to hide their contentment and their reaction would be: “We did our best, but we could have done better” (Chaiy 2012, 181). Finland has similar mentality and a well known Finnish proverb says “The one who has happiness shall hide it”. As mentioned before, self-disparagement is one of Finns favored ways to express themselves because it takes away the possibility to offend others self-esteem, although it also may draw others praising their conduct (Lewis 2005, 75, 61). In both countries compliments should not be overused or they will be considered insincere. Both Koreans and Finns can also feel awkward when receiving compliments because both societies’ members are relatively shy and modest. (Woo 2011, 70.)

Alcohol is big part of socializing in both countries. Having a drink can be a way to build a relationship, settle disputes and negotiate details. Both Finns’ and Koreans’ shy and modest behavior changes into talkative and outgoing when they have few drinks (Haigh 2003, 120; Choi & Lim 2011, 30). Drinking heavily among males is a traditional way to get to know new people in both countries and drunkenness is easily forgiven, as long as there is no violence or aggressiveness related (Axtell 1998, 194).

Finns attach the drinking to their Sauna culture and often the evening can start with Sauna and continue to a restaurant or bar (Lewis 2005, 103). Koreans on the other hand love singing and dancing so they like to take their guests to karaoke rooms to sing, dance and drink for the night (De Mente 2008, 104). What Koreans should remember though is that a shy Finn might need quite a few encouragement drinks before agreeing to sing and dance freely. It is also considered to be polite in Korea for women to excuse herself after dinner since heavy drinking and bonding is mostly meant for the males (Gesteland 1999, 160).

## 5.2 Verbal communication

The verbal communication in both countries is calm and subtle, any loud talking or laughing is to be avoided and voice is rarely raised (Axtell 1998, 193; Haigh 2003, 117). There are also few differences that could cause misunderstandings. When Korean refrains from using “no” and unequivocal “yes”, in Finland they both are frequently used (De Mente 2008, 54). The same applies to negative news or criticizing comments.

“No” in Korea is thought to be impolite and giving negative image of the speaker. It is often replaced with expressions like “it will be difficult”, “we will think about it” or “maybe.” (De Mente 2008, 54.) In a superior-subordinate relationship “no” can be expressed even more discreetly by saying “yes” and showing reluctance only with facial expression. Koreans also answer to both negative and positive questions in a positive form. To avoid misunderstandings foreigner should avoid negative question forms for example, when a foreigner asks “Don’t you like coffee?” Korean would answer “Yes” meaning “You are right, I don’t like coffee.” (Chaiy 2012, 179, 184.)

Foreigner dealing with Koreans should also know to use specific questions. As learned before Koreans do not like criticizing and when asked for feedback they tend to give only positive comments. For example “Do you like this idea?” would not give you their real opinions but “What do you think needs improvement in this idea?” would be more helpful. (Chaiy 2012, 180.)

Since Finnish verbal communication is frank and words are used sparingly they tend not to go around the negative truths and also often summarize their opinion. This habit partly comes from Finnish language in which it is easy to express many things with just a few words. For example when Princess Grace of Monaco died in a car accident the headline in Finland was “Grace Kolarista Sairaalaan”. When the same sentence with exactly same meaning is expressed in English the sentence is much longer: “Immediately after the accident Grace was taken straight to the hospital.” (Lewis 2005, 51.)

One of the typical characteristic for Finns is also sticking to the exact truth in their verbal communication. Example of this can be found from Finnish commercials. When in America a hair shampoo commercial promises “More cleaner and healthier hair than ever before” corresponding Finnish commercial states “clean and healthy hair”. (Uschanov 2012, 47.) This can be also seen in negotiation and meeting tables when Finns offer only exactly what they can deliver (Lewis 2005, 63). It is important for Finns to keep their word and they expect others to do the same. This could cause problems with Koreans who can use unrealistic promises as negotiation strategy to get the best deal possible. (De Mente 2004, 132-134.)

Also the appreciation of silence can be seen in verbal communication of Finns. They do not use words like “really” or “I see” to agree or emphasize what other person is saying. It is not a lack of interest or not listening, quite the contrary, Finn wants to respect the other person’s remarks without interruptions and listen and process carefully what he has just heard. (Keinonen 1999, 21.)

To westerners both Finns and Koreans could appear reluctant to communicate with using words sparingly, having silence as part of social interaction and without having outstanding body language. Nevertheless, when Finns and Koreans communicate together they can understand each other much better than citizens of others countries might. (Haigh 2003, 114; Lewis 2005, 69, 71.)

### 5.3 Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication in both countries is very subtle and both Finns and Koreans can detect the meaning behind the smallest facial expressions in their own country (Haigh 2003, 11). Even if to other foreigners Finns' and Koreans' presence might seem uninterested and dull there is actually much more going on than meets the surface (Keinonen 1999, 27).

*Head and facial expressions* are maybe the gestures that reveal most clearly what the speaker wants to say. Using facial expressions like smiling, eye contact and laughing have some differences between the two countries.

Eye contact in Finland is important when introducing and shaking hands but after that direct eye contact is reduced. Finns and Koreans look other people in the eyes with sufficient attention (about half the time), during conversations and Finns usually look away when giving response (Lewis 2005, 78). In both countries intense eye contact can be interpreted as defiance and dominance. What a Finn in Korea should bear in mind is that especially subordinates should avoid strong eye contact with their superiors. (Axtell 1998, 192.)

Smiling in Korea can have dozens of meanings from apology to anger depending on the context (Woo 2011, 80). In a crowded subway after bumping to each other a shy smile might be apology, in conversation made in English it can be sign of not understanding but not wanting to admit it or after giving your seat to an elder it can be a way to express gratitude. In Finland smiles are not as common as they are in Korea, tight-lipped Finns do not smile often, especially around strangers, but when they do you can be sure that the smile is sincere. (Lewis 2005, 79.)

In both countries it is a common courtesy to cover your mouth when coughing or yawning. Especially in Korea it is considered impolite to show the inside of your mouth to other people. Hence, Korean women tend to cover their mouth every time they giggle or laugh which can be surprising for some foreigners. (Axtell 1998, 138, 193.)

Head in Finland is mainly used for two gestures; agreeing nod and negative shake. Finns might also greet people at distance with quickly lifting their chin up. (Lewis 2005, 79.) Korean use head also for expressing their disagreement; they tip their head backward and suck air in through their teeth audibly. This behavior can be read as declining or meaning that something is very difficult. (Axtell 1998, 193.)

*Upper body gestures* include one of the most common gesture in Korea; bowing. Koreans have different kinds of bows for different occasions. The deeper the bow, the more respectful is the expression. Deeper bows are often used for sincere gratitude, apologizing and for seeking favors. Koreans who are used to interact with foreigners usually shake hands instead of bow. The general rule is that junior bows first but senior offers to shake hands first. When in doubt, foreigner can always both shake hands and do a modest bow at the same time or wait for the Korean to make initiative and follow accordingly. (De Mente 2004, 106-107.)

The custom in Finland is that men, women and often even children will shake hands when meeting or introduced. As mentioned before, the difference to Korea is that Korean women generally do not extend their hands toward men but just nod slightly instead of handshake. When Korean businessmen exchange business cards and shake hands among males they might only nod or even ignore women completely. This behavior is not meant to be offending or degrading, as a Finnish woman could mistakenly take it, but just a tradition that is nowadays slowly starting to disappear. (Jouhki 2013, 13.)

Tapping back, gripping hand, hugging or any other form of touching among strangers is to be avoided in all situations in both countries. Finns are very aware of their personal space and Koreans do not like being touched by strangers. (Axtell 1998, 139, 192.)

In both countries using index finger for pointing people is impolite and exaggerated hand gestures are seen mostly negatively (De Mente 2008, 58). Especially Finns associate big gestures to over dramatization, insincerity and unreliability (Lewis 2005, 80). Finns staying in Korea also need to be cautious with their gesture for “come here”; arm and hand up towards face. This gesture in Korea is used only for calling

animals. Instead Koreans extend arm palm down and make a motion similar to scratching with their fingers. (Axtell 1998, 193.)

In Korea it is considered polite and respectful to pass objects with right hand and use the left hand to support the right forearm. This is one of the most common and fundamental gestures in Korea and should always be remembered in superior-subordinate situation at work. Also, using two hands for hand shaking is thought to emphasize the respect and friendliness. (Axtell 1998, 194.)

*Lower body gestures* include the way of sitting, posture, standing up and walking. There are numerous ways of sitting of which sitting legs-together with good posture is the most commonly accepted in both countries. This position is formal and messages correctness of attitude. More informal ways like crossing legs is appropriate in Finland but in Korea, especially in front of senior or boss, it can be considered rude. (Axtell 1998, 194.) Also when sitting on floor, e.g. in Korean restaurant, it is not proper to point anyone with feet or expose them to others (De Mente 2008, 54).

In both countries the basic rule is that you have to take shoes off before entering a house unless told otherwise. Also putting feet on a table or a chair is to be avoided and it is respectful to stand up when a person enters the room, especially in Korea with superior-subordinate relationship. (Axtell 1998, 193.) Any kind of shaking, tapping floor or flapping legs gives a feeling that the person is not comfortable in the situation so it is to be avoided in meetings or negotiations at work. In both countries aggressive gestures like stamping a foot in anger or slamming a door is also frowned upon (Lewis 2005, 81).

*At dining table*, Koreans have many norms on how to behave considering the superior-subordinate relationships. Due to Korean hoesik (dinner and drinks with boss and colleagues) it is important for a worker in Korean company to know how to behave in a restaurant. It is usual that Koreans do not expect foreigners to know all the rules but to convey a good image foreigner should know the basics. The most important things to remember are that a person should never stick chopsticks in the rice bowl to point up (done only for deceased) or decline from the first toast. Recommended manner is also to pass and receive objects with two hands, to avoid pouring your own

drink (it is usually done for you), to turn your head away from the senior when drinking alcohol and to adapt your eating so that the most senior person will start and finish eating first. (Axtell 1998, 194; Choi & Lim 2011, 36.)

Although Finns do not have similar etiquette on dining table as Koreans they share the style of not drinking or eating before the host does and leaving the table to blow their nose if necessary. What differs from Korean table manners is that Finns avoid eating anything with fingers and usually using your own used forks or spoons to eat food that is shared is thought to be unhygienic. (Axtell 1998, 138-139, 194)

#### 5.4 Language barriers

Because Korean and Finnish are included to the most difficult languages in the world to learn, the communication with foreigners is usually done in English (Website of the Effective Language Learning). When people are communicating with a language that is none of the communicators' native language there can naturally be some language barriers that lead to misunderstandings.

In Korea, English is the lingua franca when it comes to international business and upper level management can usually speak it quite fluently. Fluent English is seen as status symbol and as an obstacle for many lower level workers who might want to proceed in their career. (Genzberger 1994, 147.) Nowadays more and more Koreans are studying to be bilingual and often go study abroad to improve their English fluency. Still many times Koreans tend to use translators in meetings just to avoid possible misunderstandings. (De Mente 2004, 69.)

Finns are known of their fluency in foreign languages and especially in English (Keinonen 1999, 13). English fluency is prerequisite on university graduation and of getting a job related to international business. Still, a Finn who is not accustomed to communicate with foreigners can be shy at using English and even fluent English speakers might be concerned about their accuracy. Many times shy Finns prefer saying less in fear of making mistakes. (Lewis 2005, 65, 112.)

During business negotiations done in English, Koreans can often start private conversation in Korean. This is meant to make sure everyone has understood the content and main points of the English conversation. Although first this behavior might seem rude, since foreigner cannot understand what Koreans are speaking, there is no reason to be offended by it. (Chaiy 2012, 183.)

Lastly, a Finn working or doing business in Korea without speaking at all Korean could have significant limitations in both personal and professional contacts. Especially older generation, with the highest status, might not have fluency in English but have the last say in many matters. Hence for foreigner worker in Korea it would be beneficial to learn at least the basics of Korean. (De Mente 2004, 69.)



## 6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section will introduce the main challenges a Finn faces when working in Korea according to the information gathered from three interviews of Finnish employees living and working in Korea. Similarly to the theoretical part this section has two parts; working life culture and communication. Each part will include both negative and positive experiences of the interviewees' and reveal possible challenges they faced when adapting to Korean working life culture and communication style. The last part of this section includes the recommendations from all three interviews on how to adapt to the Korean working environment.

The three interviewees were all in different positions in their company which also gave an opportunity to observe the situation from both superior's and subordinate's viewpoint. The table below gives more the background information of the interviewees.

Table 8. Interviewees' background information

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Time in Korea</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Working language</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Ari	48	5 years	Superior	English	Finnish-Korean
Johan	24	2 years	Subordinate and superior	Korean	Korean
Lauri	25	1½ years	Subordinate	English	Korean

### 6.1 Finnish view of Korean working life culture

Following sections introduces the main themes which arose from the three interviews based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the theoretical part of this research.

### 6.1.1 Hierarchy

All three interviewees had experienced the strong hierarchy at work and it was considered to be both the biggest difference to Finnish working life culture as well as the biggest stumbling block. Interviewees also agreed that the tension from hierarchical system is ever present; resulting in weak work efficiency, lack of common sense among subordinates and undermined development of systems and ideas inside the company. One of the interviewees explained that Korea had fell six places in labor productivity levels in OECD's statistics during the time he had been working there and admitted that he had also noticed the impracticalities himself. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

On the other hand Korea also got praised because of its strong leadership and decision making, which in very equal Finland is not always so self-evident. Ari described how in Korea there is always a decision maker and decisions, bad or good ones, always come out quite quickly, whereas in Finland for example government can be so discordant that they do not manage to make any decisions. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

All of the interviewees described how hierarchy also gives a lot of power to the superiors. One of the interviewees explained that since everyone at workplace has to respect their superiors it makes it possible for the superiors to oppress their subordinates. Luckily none of the interviewees had been in a very uncomfortable situation but they had seen their Korean colleagues been shouted at, been called stupid or forced to do degrading tasks. One of the interviewees also compared the working life to military because the hierarchy is so strong and juniors are always the ones doing the odd jobs like cleaning the archives. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Although some superiors are exploiting their status, the interviewees also see a change happening in the work places. With young and more open minded superiors the traditions like waiting for boss to leave before you are allowed to leave from

work and the hoesik (회식, the dining and drinking with co-workers and boss) are starting to change. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

*“There are also bosses who exploit their status and if you are drinking they can actually say that ‘no you don’t go anywhere yet, now we will drink.’ So that kind of bosses exist but it is not that bad and it is probably changing a lot.”* (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

According to the interviewees hierarchy has also big influence in the information flow. There are strict norms like a subordinate cannot openly disagree with their boss and also talking to the CEO or other higher manager is not acceptable. Especially these manners caused some problems for the Finnish interviewees in the Korean companies. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Johan brought up an interesting example of how questioning a superior can confuse a Korean manager and showed how Finnish logical and direct communication can clash with the Korean hierarchical system. Johan had a habit of listening music through ear buds when he wanted to concentrate at work and he always made sure that no one else could hear it. At the end of his first week at the Korean company his superior told him that “in Korea it is not ok to listen to music while working”. To this Johan answered with an apology and asked if the music had bothered someone. After the superior had confirmed that it had not bothered anyone Johan asked to hear a reason why he could not listen to music, to which the superior answered with short silence and then saying, “this is Korea we do not listen to music when we work”. For Johan it was not good enough reason and he responded by saying that if the superior cannot give a good reason why he should not listen music at work, he would keep listening to it. The supervisor could not think any good reason so he ended up using the Korean circle logic and came back to the beginning with “this is Korea, we do not do this!” To that Johan just answered, as a Finn would, by saying, “ok, that does not make sense. I will do it my way”. After this the superior left and since then he has not spoken a word with Johan. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

This example shows how Korean superiors do not expect anyone to talk back to them or question their commands. They are not used to validate their arguments and there-

fore can easily get confused and annoyed by a logical Finn asking to get a proper answer. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

The information flow problems were also familiar to other interviewees and especially the social distance between workers and managers baffled all of them. To Finns who are often used to talk their mind, think all colleagues as equals and also consider CEO to be just another human being working in the company, were surprised by some of the situations that arose while working in Korean working environment. It was normal for each interviewee to see that Korean workers usually did not have dissenting opinions with their managers but they just followed whatever the manager said. Managers often also remained quite distant since they do not descend to the same level with the workers. Ari also described how there is no emotional management and bosses do not take a person as a person, as they do in Finland. In Finnish company everyone is respected, even the cleaning lady. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“Well the best example is when the CEO of our company came to visit in our old office. Couple hours before he arrived we got advisory e-mails which said that everyone has to stay at their own workstation. No-one could go out to smoke or to get coffee or anything else. To put it bluntly everyone had to pretend they were working. I thought that was so funny because I think that in Finland if you happen to meet CEO you can easily talk with him. Here you do not really see all the higher level managers and you are not allowed to talk to them. I just don’t understand that. It is a bit funny and confusing. I do not see anything miraculous in them.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Lastly, the hierarchy also affects the behavior and communication style. The behavior at work place is always very respectful and even stiff because of the hierarchical tensions. A subordinate has to always be cautious of who he can speak to and in what manner. Interviewees felt that the behavior is sometimes a bit over the top when even co-workers are bowing and speaking to each other in a very respectful way. Lauri also explained how it is not acceptable to show your emotions to your boss. For example if the boss forbids having lunch one day, subordinates are just supposed to

agree and not show their true feelings about it. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Communication style topic will be discussed in more detail in later sections, but here is still an example of how specifically hierarchy has an effect on it.

*“Losing face is really bad, especially if you are a manager. That is the reason why subordinates cannot question them, because it would be also really embarrassing situation for the subordinates if their manager would lose his face. Same way if a teacher loses his face at school. That is why no one dares to correct the teacher. If the teacher would say that ‘winter war was 1950’ then the students agree ‘ok, winter war was 1950.’ If the teacher says so, no one would raise their hand and say ‘I actually think that the winter war was then and then’ because then the teacher might lose his face. It is the exactly same thing in the working environment. So if there is a big project and everyone sees it is going to fail they will say that in a way that does not make the manager lose his face. You would never sit in the room and say ‘hey, now it seems to be a kind of situation that your decision caused us losing 50 000€.’”* (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

### 6.1.2 Collectivism

All three interviewees have had quite differing experiences when it came to collectivism which tells that instead of national culture, the company culture and the co-workers can have a great effect on it. When we talked about the atmosphere and solidarity at work places during interviews one of the interviewees praised how good it was, one told how in the beginning it was awful and how he had to always eat lunch alone but that it has gotten better now and the third also said the atmosphere was really bad in the beginning but got better after some alterations of personnel.

The interviews revealed that a good manager can have a big effect on the atmosphere at work. One of the interviewees mentioned that he has a young and open minded boss who understands that employees have also life outside the company. He also described how they have a very open atmosphere and a “leave no man behind” –

attitude among colleagues. Ari also mentioned that when he started to work in Korea there had not been a manager before him during nine months and that the personnel had huge fights among the two generations working there. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

The interviewees had noticed how collectivistic country Korea is and also how difficult it is to work and live there without connections, communities and networks. A foreigner is always considered as outsider in Korea but with good relationships to your colleagues working can get a lot easier. One interviewee described that after his colleagues had gotten to know him and his set of values the communication became much more open. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

The team spirit and good atmosphere at work place are usually build and maintained with various company organized activities like dining and drinking with co-workers (hoesik), hiking and having a sports day. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of self-developed activities to improve the atmosphere and build relationships. These activities included having a camping trip over the weekend, going to children's park with colleagues' family, having small talk during coffee breaks and also taking part to the odd jobs every now and then. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

The good atmosphere in work place results in open communication, friendliness and helpfulness among colleagues. Interviewees told that they also many times spend some free time with their colleagues. One of the interviewees also mentioned the collectivism to be one of the most positive surprises at his work place. He liked the more communal and family-like atmosphere at work, which he did not expect when arriving there. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Naturally, not all teams are close and many of them do not have a great atmosphere. Interviewees also described meeting Korean workers who never call co-workers as friends, who only come to work for work and who try to hide their negative emotions towards colleagues. Also the high level of rivalry that companies put on teams can

make it hard for them to be friendly with one another. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

*”Everyone is a bit competitor with each other and teams also compete with one another. For example Samsung has some product development project and puts three teams to do the exactly same thing and the successful team and their leader gets a proper rise in salary, like one zero more. So it is a tough game at work places all the time. I met some men from Samsung and they practically work every weekend even if they in principle have a five-day work week. And there is also this feeling, like no one ever calls their colleagues as workmates or when they have to go out with their colleagues they never call them friends.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Lack of individualism and individualistic ideas was also unpleasant for the interviewees. Since hierarchy is so strong the workers only follow their leaders’ example and often do not have their own opinions at all. Also the way of doing team projects really frustrated one of the interviewees when he had had to spend a long time preparing a team project where the Koreans wanted to write every single sentence together, instead of everyone doing a small part on their own. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Interviewees have had also different experiences when it comes to personal space. Surprising moments for male interviewees had been a male co-worker coming to rub one of the Finnish employees’ shoulders and a female Korean worker running away when one of the interviewees had tried to give her a kiss on the cheek (after he had adapted that custom while living in Peru). According to interviews touching and “*skinship*”, as Koreans call it, is normal with close friends of the same gender or among couples. Interviewees also mentioned that first they were surprised by the fact that Koreans came so close in a subway or another crowded environment, but also mentioned that this was a minor challenge and easily adaptable one. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014; Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

*“In the beginning it was a bit weird when people came so close but I have gotten used to it now. Here I think it is the culture and the fact that army lasts so long that*

*makes men spend a lot of time together. Because of that it is normal for them to go behind your co-worker and start to rub his shoulders. For me it just was very weird.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

### 6.1.3 Lack of logical and rational thinking

Lack of logical and rational presentation of results and not giving an adequate answer to questions were mentioned to be one of the most challenging aspects of working in Korea for two of the interviewees. As we learned before, in very hierarchical and collectivistic Korea the relationships to other people prevail over telling the truth or being logical. This caused some frustration among the interviewees and made them tired of hearing the same answer: “this is how we do it in Korea” instead of getting a proper answer, like we saw in the ear bud example before.

*“If I sometimes ask about something, for example related to working life culture, like why do we have to sit here when the CEO comes to visit? Koreans give the answer like ‘this is just the Korean way’ or ‘this is just the company’s style’. But I would like to have deeper understanding of these things so it brings its own challenges to the situation.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Also the lack of logical way of doing or seeing things caused some irritation. All the interviewees had seen situations which just did not make sense to them since they are used to thinking things through logically and rationally and then act accordingly. Issues related to scheduling, organizing and developing systems in Korean working environment caused some confusion and irritation among the interviewees. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

*“I don’t have problem with communication, but more with the fact that they can’t manage anything with common sense, nothing is ever logical. If they end up in a situation where they can’t talk themselves out of with ‘this is a Korean thing’ then they feel trapped. It is because they are not used to validate anything to anyone because they know that according to the hierarchy, if you are older you can say ‘the moon is red’ and even if you know it is not then it just happens to be that ‘the moon is red’. It*



*is the same with communication. If an older person tells me that 'could you do this task like this' and I see that I can do it better if I will do it the other way around, as a Finn I will say 'I'm not going to do it like that, because it is much wiser to do it like this. It will save money and time.' After that you have a huge clash. They really have room for improvement with that matter."* (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

One of the interviewees also mentioned a good example of how logical thinking and arguments do not work with Koreans. The example is Fan death. Fan death is a strong belief in Korea saying that if someone is sleeping in a room with windows and doors closed with electric fan turned on, they could die of hypothermia, suffocation, high levels of carbon dioxide or by the fan cutting up the oxygen particles. This belief also includes air conditioners and heater in homes and cars. For Finns and other westerners this of course does not make sense since they cannot find any logical or scientific explanations how the fan could actually kill a person. Still, many Koreans (even professionals like doctors) argue that fan death is true and dangerous and no scientific research or logical argument could change their minds. Same applies to other things in Korea. If Korean has some deep-rooted idea, it does not matter how logical you are or what facts you have, you cannot change their minds. (Website of Fan Death 12.2.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Interviewees also described how sometimes Koreans emotions overcome their rationality. Koreans often try to hide their feelings and keep poker face but sometimes the emotions rush to the surface and confuse the calm Finns. Interviewees explained that if there is a very difficult customer or tough negotiations Koreans emotional side can kick in but in general they are quite calm and subtle. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

*"There was one Finnish company making a joint venture contract with Koreans. The Finnish CEO told me that a Korean started to almost cry when they started to negotiate the percentages of which the whole deal depended on. So that kind of situation happened and there has also been the other way around. There was once a meeting where Koreans argued with one another so much that one of the elder men left the room with slamming the door. So their feelings always burst out like that. You prob-*

*ably also saw when you were here that for example in the parliament house they have huge fights where they punch each other.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

#### 6.1.4 Instructions and efficiency at work

Related to Hofstede’s uncertainty dimension, according to the interviewees Korean working environment is controlled by instructions and regulations much more than it is in Finland. According to interviewees the need for instructions stems from the hierarchical system that Koreans are trained to follow since they are children. Throughout their childhood and education they are being instructed and regulated all the time so when they start to work in a company they have been trained to need instructions from superiors. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

The amount of instructions varied a little. One of the interviewee described how the working environment is quite structured and regulated but when carrying out own individual projects your hand are quite free. Still, he felt that various instructions made him feel like the superiors do not trust their workers enough. Then again, the manager level interviewee explained how many Koreans want specific instructions for all their tasks and cannot work well without them. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“Yes, I have noticed that (the need for instructions), every time I have to give specific instructions. Of course the most experienced people can use their own brain, they understand things better since they have a lot of experience but there is also the second oldest worker who always wants really precise instruction like what will we do and when etc.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Also the way instructions are given and received had some differences to Finnish companies. As we learned before, superior’s instructions are not questioned or denied and also some more conservative superiors might use very strong language and shouting to instruct and give feedback to their subordinates. The manager level interviewee was also frustrated with younger workers not following or understanding the

instruction, even if they have had training for them. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

As the Korean working environment has much more instructions and regulations than Finnish one does, there are bound to be some rules that can cause some confusion or amusement as like the previous examples with the ear buds and visiting CEO. Surprising rules, instructions and norms that interviewees mentioned were: difficulty to get a statutory holiday, having all meals of the day at work, concentration periods (one and a half hour period during workday when you are not allowed to leave your workstation), procrastinating during work time is accepted and if you are waiting for your superior you are allowed to just wait and do nothing useful. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

From these examples we can easily move on to discussion about efficiency at work and work morale of Koreans. As we noticed from the previous examples, understandably, it is normal for Koreans procrastinate at work every now and then since their workdays can be up to 12 hours. Especially if a team has to wait their boss to leave from work when they have already finished their tasks, they might often just play games or even take a nap. Koreans think that if they are at the office they are working. This kind of wasting time at work can be a bit surprising for a Finn who often works hard for 8 hours at work and then relaxes on their free time. But even if wasting time every now and then is the norm in many companies, Koreans are still known for their high working morale, high quality and accuracy at work. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“Koreans are good workers because of their accuracy. You can see it in the high quality of their products that they do precise work. - - And another thing in which they are good at is, as all the shipyards say, that even if the wage of welder has only few percentages difference between Korea and Finland, still the Korean welder is better. Korean welder, if needed, works five weekends as extra just to finish the project. Finnish welder leaves when the bell rings, whatever the situation is.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Due to Koreans tendencies to waste time at work, lack rational time management and still wanting to produce high quality services and products they often end up with a huge amount of stress and rush to finish their projects and tasks. Many times their profitability also suffers from Koreans working too hard in consideration of the size of the project, trying to exceed their objectives. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Since Koreans are determined to offer accurate and high quality services they often are also accurate with time at work. Deadlines are respected and projects finished in time. Koreans are accurate with schedules when it includes clients but one of the interviewees mentioned that the starting times of meetings inside the company are not always respected. Many times people are late from meetings meant for the personnel which he thought to be a bit offensive towards everyone else who have respected the schedule. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

As we have learned from few examples before, perception of time is also affected by hierarchy, superiors have no need to be in time for appointment with their subordinates but subordinates should always be on time for their superiors. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

#### 6.1.5 Attitudes towards women and foreigners

When asked about attitudes towards women in Korean working environment interviewees described how the situation is slowly changing. One of the interviewees explained how before women's place was at home where they were responsible of taking care of the household finance and children, but nowadays many IT companies have a lot of female workers and also the president of Korea and the CEO of Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) are women.

Attitudes also varied according to industry, interviewees have different perspectives since Johan works at industry which is more employed by women and naturally there everyone is very respectful towards both genders. Lauri on the other hand works at

industry which is more male dominant and he described how the oldest managers are not used to work with women and that before they did not have any women colleagues, simply because the head of the department did not want to have women there. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

There might be some difficult situations, depending on the company and colleagues, for foreigner women who wish to work in Korea. For example male colleagues might consider themselves superior to women colleagues and especially if woman ends up criticizing a man, it can have very bad consequences. Male colleagues might also consider woman as a drag when they want to go drinking after company dinner. Ari also mentioned that Korean businessmen often shake hands with everyone else, even foreign women, but not with Korean women. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

As for being foreigner in Korean working environment, there are both positive and negative sides. Often foreigners are forgiven mistakes related to culture or language, Koreans open up to them more easily and some even consider westerners to be privileged compared to locals. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

But even if it can be easy in some ways to be foreigner in Korea, there are also several things that make it challenging. According to interviewees many westerners have felt left out at work place and had to eat lunch alone. If the foreigner does not speak Korean, Koreans also might not include the foreigner to their conversations. As the only foreign worker at his company, Johan also had many people staring at him in the beginning, before the colleagues got used to him. Ari also mentioned that he has had to make improvised speeches because as the only foreigner some Koreans expect that from him. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.))

*“Before everyone was staring like ‘wow, there he is, what is he doing?’ I could clearly see that they are staring at me and now that I have been working there for 4-*

*5 months, I just walk here among other people and they think ‘oh, it is only the Finnish guy’.*” (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

The main reason for Koreans not approaching westerners is mostly them being shy and being scared that they might have to speak English, which will be discussed more in language barrier section. One of the interviewees also mentioned some negative conceptions Koreans have towards South East Asians, especially with Filipinos. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

## 6.2 Finnish view of the communication in Korean working environment

The following section describes the communication in Korean working environment from the point of view of the three Finnish interviewees. The themes in this section comply with the theoretical part of the research.

### 6.2.1 Indirect way of communication

All of the interviewees admitted that the Korean communication style is highly indirect, with few exceptions. One of these exceptions is related to hierarchy; a superior can talk directly to his subordinates but they cannot answer directly back to their superior. Also sometimes situations arise when it is normal to talk openly but this usually includes close relationship with co-workers or a problem related to technical issues instead of personal opinions or feelings. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

*“It depends on the situation. For example if there is some big project which needs financing and they already know they are not going to do this project and not going to give the money to this customer or partner then they beat around the bushes and still try to find a solution although everyone knows that there is none and that this is just not going to happen. But then again, superiors, because of hierarchy, if they want some job done they will say very directly, ‘you are going to do this like this’.*” (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Especially Johan had broken this norm of indirect communication with the ear bud situation (see section 6.1.1 Hierarchy) and with that example we could see how confusing it was for a Korean superior to experience such a direct communication. After that situation the communication between Johan and the superior ceased entirely and they have not spoken since. This is a good example of a situation that can cause cultural clash between Finnish and Korean and one that Finns working in Korea should be aware of. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

What the interviewees seemed to emphasize was “tilannetaju”, the situational awareness. They all said that you have to learn what kinds of things are appropriate in different situations. They also said that it is important to think carefully how you will express your thoughts in a certain situation. For example in front of a big group or superior you cannot say your opinions directly. Two of the three interviewees said that this was the thing they had deliberately changed in their behavior after starting to work in Korea. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“I have changed my former way of expressing my opinions directly. Now I rather write them down and if there is a bigger problem, I will keep thinking about what I can do to fix the problem. I have noticed there is no sense of just open your mouth if you don’t have a proper solution to the problem.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Indirect communication can also be seen in how Koreans avoid using word “no”. As we learned before, if boss tells you to do something you just answer “yes, alright!” Saying “no” could make you look uncooperative and complicate the relationships at work. But of course, this again does not concern superiors. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

As stated at theory part, the indirect communication is an important part of face saving culture. Koreans are careful with their expression since they try to avoid losing their own or other people’s face. None of the interviewees had experienced a memorable situation of anyone losing their face but they admitted that it happens. Superior

losing his face is also really embarrassing situation to his subordinates, so this is also one reason why they do not question or criticize their managers. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“Yeah, it (losing face) is considered to be, well not a reason to commit a suicide but many times if they lose their face really badly, the person will remember it still after various years.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

### 6.2.2 Verbal and nonverbal communication

The strong hierarchical system is seen also in the verbal and nonverbal communication of Koreans. As one of the interviewees pointed out the tension from hierarchy is ever present and can be seen in every situation at work. All of the interviewees emphasized the importance in Korean language to speak with respectful tone to your superiors and one of the interviewees mentioned the communication gap between superior and subordinate to be one of the biggest differences when compared to Finland. One of the interviewees is also in a difficult situation, since according to his age he is subordinate to his colleagues but his status in company is superior. This situation makes many Koreans confused and not sure how they should address him. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“The difference is that in Finland you can easily go talk to all of your bosses and you can speak to them casually. Here, however, the speaking is quite stiff. You have to be so respectful that it really keeps a tension in the atmosphere. Sometimes it makes me wonder if I’m working in army or in a company.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

What also seems to be the norm in Korean companies is a large amount of gossips. It seems to be the way the workers deal with the pressures coming from their superiors and often coffee breaks are used to gossip about superiors or other workers. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)



Hiding emotions was already discussed briefly in the rational thinking section, but it is still important to review this matter from different angle. Koreans can be very unpredictable people to communicate with especially in stressful or challenging situations. They have tendency to hide all their emotions up to a point, after which they can burst out in tears or start shouting and slamming doors. Luckily this kind of situations can be quite rare to see, especially for foreigners, but it is definitely something they should be aware of. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

*“Conflicts are usually cleared up but sometimes for example if in another department someone has made some mistake and then tries to hide it or even put the blame on me, then there are people yelling to each other through phone. So when a certain line is crossed co-workers start to react but of course you would never shout at your boss. It is either on same or lower level; a subordinate never shouts to superior.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Interviewees also had noticed that, similarly to Finnish, Koreans are quite shy and they have respect for silence. In meetings there is only one person talking at a time and communication is usually done with scarce words. Koreans also lack a natural skill for small talk, just like Finns. One of the interviewees had also various experiences from USA and he compared his experiences from there to his life in Korea, which really differ from another. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“Americans are very easily approachable, you just start to talk in an elevator or when you are filling up the tank and you chat a little with a complete stranger without any intention to become friends. There is nothing like that in Korea and it is similar to Finland, no one starts to talk there with the person sitting next to them in a bus.”* (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Nonverbal communication is also quite discreet in both countries, but as mentioned in theoretical part, Koreans have several traditions related to body language. According to the interviewees Koreans usually do not expect foreigner to know or follow these traditional Korean gestures but often are pleased if they see foreigner mimicking them. Of course the most common and prominent gesture is bowing, which Ko-

reans tend to do among themselves but usually if they meet foreigner they will initiate a handshake. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

One of the interviewees also mentioned that even when Koreans speak indirectly, he could usually easily see from their face what they really wanted to say or if they were annoyed. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

Interviewees also emphasized that the most common gestures are easily embraced, without even having to think about it and that if you know basic worldwide courtesies you have nothing to worry about. Gestures like using two hands when receiving or giving objects were said to be catchy and easily learned when you are surrounded by Koreans doing them. Interviewees also said that they had no need to pay attention to small gestures, like the way of sitting. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

*“You don’t need to touch your toes when bowing or anything, as long as you are yourself and don’t pretend to know more about Korean than you actually do. - - It is also good to learn basic things like saying ”thank you“ in Korean, then they are really happy that you have bothered to learn to say it. It is same in Finland, if someone says “kippi!” (cheers) in Finnish we are so excited and if they say “hölky kölkyn!” (another way to say cheers) we are even more excited.”* (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

### 6.2.3 Language barrier

According to interviewees the language barrier is not a huge challenge when working in Korea. The interviewees mentioned that they were surprised of how many of their colleagues actually speak English well and that they have not had major problems when it comes to language. One of the interviewees also speaks fluent Korean so he had no problems with language barriers, but still has communication problems due to cultural factors. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“The language barrier doesn’t really affect my work. For sure I could get better answer to some questions or problems if I could speak Korea but still, as some of my colleagues have said, English is much better language for engineer work.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Even though many businessmen in Korea speak English quite well, some problems had occurred. The main challenges were that Koreans can be very shy and even afraid of speaking English which causes them to try to avoid contact with foreigners. This had caused some challenges for the interviewees; one of them told that his colleagues are afraid to call him and one had to eat lunch always alone, even when he spoke fluent Korean. It was also common to the two Finns who did not speak Korean to be left out of various conversations. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

*“From some things I’m unintentionally left out. Sometimes some information comes to me as surprise and everyone else is like ‘oh you didn’t know?’ but that is not really a big deal, it depends on the person, how well they speak English. With someone who can’t speak English very well there might be a language barrier but there has never been a situation that we were not able to sort things out because of language. - - Another thing is that people are too scared to call me in our company. There are situations when they call to my co-workers, even if I’m responsible of my own project and ask him to send them the drawings. One of my co-workers is actually telling them that they should call me because I’m responsible of that project. I have told my co-workers that if they feel uncomfortable calling me they can send an email in English or in Korean since I can understand Korean that much. Recently they have started to contact me more.”* (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

Surprisingly, all of the interviewees also mentioned some positive consequences that not speaking Korea could have. They had noticed that when they speak English with Korean colleagues they tend to speak more openly, since they do not have to follow the Korean norms of conversation. Interviewees also mentioned that if a person speaks fluent Korean, Koreans tend to expect much more from him and start to treat

him more like another Korean. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

*“The fact that you speak English actually solves many problems. Even now in my team I have taken a rule into our room that we only speak in English and it has solved so many problems because in English we don’t have respectful forms. - - The hierarchy is strongly based on the way of speaking you can feel it in the way a person speaks to you and how you talk back to him. It depends on the age, situation and status etc. If you however put them into a situation where there is English it breaks their norms and it can make the situation much better.”* (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

In addition the interviewee, who speaks fluent Korean, told that since he can now understand everything Koreans are saying he gets annoyed much more easily, because he can see all the cultural differences so clearly and if there are some problems he cannot blame the language barrier anymore. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

One of the interviewees also mentioned as a positive thing that he had managed to get rid of some compulsory company training, since all the material would have been in Korean. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014.)

### 6.3 Ways to decrease challenges in cross-cultural communication

#### 1. Basic courtesies are enough

You do not need to study every detail in the books about Korean culture just behave as politely as you can. Koreans see and understand that you are foreigner and easily forgive mistakes related to Korean manners. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

Sometimes you also have to be creative to find a polite way to get out of uncomfortable situation. One of the interviewees described a situation where he was at a dining table with food he did not feel comfortable eating so he apologized politely and said

he was allergic to this kind of food. Health issues are good way to avoid uncomfortable situations, since then the blame is not put on anyone. (Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014.)

## 2. Have an open mind

All of the interviewees emphasized the importance of open mind. When you arrive to a new country with significantly different culture than your own you cannot go on judging and thinking what is right and wrong. Instead you should keep an open mind and not take things too personally or seriously. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

## 3. Have interest in Korea and their culture

Naturally, interest in the country and motivation to understand it helps a lot. Interviewees mentioned this as an important aspect and described different ways on how to understand the culture and Koreans better. Asking a lot of questions from friends and colleagues, studying the culture by reading books or thesis' or even having Korean girl- or boyfriend were mentioned as good ways to learn to understand the culture better. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

## 4. Understand and accept that the local culture is very different

Just keeping in mind that you are not in Finland anymore helps. There might be many challenges on your way and sometimes things might not make any sense but with open mind, determination and curiosity you can survive. For example, as was mentioned before, Korean companies can sometimes feel like military and there is nothing else for a Finnish employee to do but to try to understand and accept it. (Lauri, personal communication on 9.1.2014; Ari, personal communication on 15.1.2014; Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

In various situations it is also important to learn to think before you act. In a new environment it is best just to observe in the beginning since maybe what you think is

the right thing to say might be the opposite when you are in Korea. One of the interviewees recommended a new employee to just sit at the office and follow carefully what is happening for the first few months. This way you can learn how Korean are doing their jobs and how are they behaving in different situations. (Johan, personal communication on 16.1.2014.)

## 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Referring to the theoretical and empirical part of the research, the following section summarizes the possible challenges, draws a conclusion from the research findings and answers to the research questions.

As we learned from the previous sections the main differences among Finnish and Korean cultures and communication styles are related to Confucian principles of hierarchy and collectivism. Strong hierarchy in Korea results in highly-structured, class-conscious and orders-following working environment which are few of the main challenges a Finn can face in a Korean working environment.

Cultural differences among Finnish and Korean can have a great effect on the working life. Various cultural differences can easily cause misunderstandings, cultural clashes and frustration at work. During the interviewees it turned out that several Finns had started working in Korea, but gave up and returned to Finland after awhile. The main reasons for return were cultural differences explained in this research and unsuccessful adaptation to the Korean working environment.

The Finnish culture values honesty and open communication, lying is not accepted and the general rule is that you have to keep your word no matter the circumstance. This contradicts completely with Korean values and can put a Finn in uncomfortable situations. In Korea, when a person is in a situation where he or she needs to give a negative response it has to be done indirectly and cover the negativity with politeness and sometimes even with white lies. When a Finn is part of a Korean working culture, the indirect and ambiguous ways of expression are part of everyday communi-

cation and he has to learn not only to understand these expressions but also to produce them himself. Because Finns have the opposite values related to speaking the truth, it can take a long time to really master the indirect way of communication.

Also the importance of status and lack of equality in Korean working life can bother a Finn. According to the interviews, often in Korean working environments the superior has the power to make decisions and give orders and subordinates has to follow them without question. For Finns these situations can be uncomfortable, because they have learned that openness and honesty are the ways to achieve best possible results. A Finn might feel the need to point out superior's mistakes to make the work more efficient. However, if a worker would open his mouth to point a mistake or give contradicting opinion with their boss, it could result in dismissal of the worker. Also, because opinions and ideas are not openly shared it can cause misunderstandings and wasting time at work, when the workers have no opportunity to discuss the most efficient ways to solve problems or prepare projects.

A strong collectivism is also in the heart of Korean culture. Group harmony is considered paramount and without personal relationships it is difficult, if not impossible, to proceed in one's career. At work place Koreans appreciate loyalty, harmony and consensus among colleagues. This puts an individualistic Finn in a tough place when he has to keep his opinions to himself and just go along with the group. Also the lack of privacy and personal space can cause frustration for a Finn who is used to have his own time and space.

With collectivism and strong hierarchy comes the need for face saving. This also links to the ambiguous expressions and not contradicting with your superior. Face saving calls for a good situation reading skills because even the smallest thing can make someone lose their face. The interviewed Finns emphasized the importance of being able to read the situation, since pointing a mistake someone has made in front of colleagues or even asking too many questions can make the other person lose his face and give an inconsiderate image of the worker. Although Finns also tend to avoid harsh criticizing or bragging they are not accustomed to change the truth or silently take the fault of a mistake that their superior did to save the bosses face.

Lastly, one of the most frustrating problems in communication is the language. According to the studied theories the main challenge for a Finn who does not speak Korean arises when there are many Koreans and only few foreigners, Koreans tend to change the conversation language in Korean, which makes it almost impossible to build a proper relationship he would need to live and work efficiently in Korea. In contradiction, the interviewed Finns actually pointed out several positive things in using only English to communication language. Korean language has an important role in the hierarchical system in Korea, therefore if communication is done in English the hierarchical tension often reduces remarkably and makes communication more open.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section gives recommendations for a Finn or any foreigner employee living and working in Korea. The information is gathered from the both theoretical and empirical parts of the research including the qualitative interviews. The following guidelines are only generalizations and give basic image on how to behave and avoid biggest cultural clashes in both professional and personal life when living and working in Korea.

*Respect your superiors* in every situation to ensure smooth communication. Give them your seat, stand up when they arrive to room, pour their drink, offer to help them in whatever they would need help with, use two hands when receiving or passing objects, do not disagree or decline their offers, do not overtake them when walking, eating or thinking solutions to a problem and always be polite and considerate. There are countless issues Koreans take into account when dealing with superiors but foreigners are not expected to know or follow all of them. When in doubt always ask your Korean colleague or friend what is appropriate for you to do and if this is not possible just do whatever you consider to be the most polite thing to do.

*Maintain the harmony* with your colleagues, even if it means lying to their face. Never put the responsibility of mistake or failure on any individual's shoulders or



give strong contradicting opinions. Always bear in mind what the other person might be thinking or feeling before telling your opinion or suggestion. If you have conflict or problems with any of your colleagues solve them in private discussion, preferably with dinner and drinks.

*Build networks* and try to build strong relationships with your colleagues and other Koreans around you. Networks are extremely important in Korea and through them working and living in Korea can get a lot easier. To build these relationships you need to sacrifice a lot of your personal time for informal dinners and lunches. To build this kind of relationship can take several months, but it is worth it. After you get a strong relationship with one of your colleagues he will start to treat you like family, by introducing you to others, helping you out and easing your adaptation to be part of the team at work.

*Forget the word “no”* and negative responses in general and learn to twist the truth to sound positive. As mentioned earlier, it is not polite to use negative forms in speech but you need to find softer ways to express your disagreement. “No” can be replaced with excuses but it is important to never put the fault on any other person. It is better to just say “it will be difficult” or “I will think about it” and usually Korean can understand what you mean by this but will not get offended.

*Using two hands* is one of the most fundamental Korean gestures when receiving or passing an item to your superior. It is a small thing to do but Koreans will notice it and see that you are making an effort on adapting their culture.

*Bowing* is another gesture you should learn to understand and use. Nowadays many Koreans use handshakes when greeting foreigners but using bow when apologizing or thanking is still a respectful thing to do in many circumstances. Just remember, the deeper the bow the more sincere the gesture.

*Study the culture.* It is of course impossible to learn a culture from the books and there is no guide to explain the behavior in every situation you will face but the more you understand the Korean culture, and especially Confucianism, the easier it is you to behave accordingly. Koreans do not expect you to know everything and they are

eager to teach and tell you more about their culture but it is good for you to have the basic knowledge and show that you really are trying to learn and adapt as well as you can.

*Learn the basics of the language* is of main importance if you are planning to work and live in Korea more than few years. Without Korean language it can be very challenging to really start to understand the culture and to build relationships and networks that are long lasting. Foreigner can easily feel left out when Koreans often change from English to Korean. Korean language has honorifics which are used when subordinate talks with superior, mistakes in these can be seen as bad as cursing in front of you boss so in the beginning it is better to use Korean only with your co-workers. Of course again foreigners are forgiven many mistakes, but it is much safer to speak English with superiors to avoid any misunderstandings.

### 8.1 Suggestions for further research

This thesis studied the main challenges Finnish could have in a Korean working environment. The research was carried out as exploratory study with secondary sources including mostly published literature of Korean and Finnish cultures and primary sources including three qualitative interviews of Finnish employees living and working in Korea.

What could be taken into consideration in any further research is deeper understanding of Confucian principles and historical events affecting the cultural values and communication of both countries. Further research about the influences and ways of westernization of Korea and its society could also bring up supplementary information relevant to the topic.

Further research could be performed with greater amount of interviewees of both genders from both countries to reach even higher reliability. Also understanding and reflecting how Korean employee would fit into Finnish working environment could raise interesting facts and ideas which are not discussed in this research.

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## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

### Background information

1. Age, education, occupation
2. What kind of and what is the nationality of the company and the working environment?
3. When and how permanently did you move to Korea?
4. Have you worked before in cross-cultural environment?
5. What is your communication language at work and at free time?
6. How were you prepared to work in Korea? Was there any big surprises? What kind?

### Hierarchy

7. What are the roles of superiors and subordinates?
  - In your experience, how do the subordinates respond to contradicting opinions with their boss?
8. How can you see the hierarchy: in speaking, in nonverbal communication and in behavior at workplace? (What is appropriate and what is not?)
9. What kind of amusing, confusing or challenging situations have you faced related to hierarchy at your workplace? How did you handle these situations?

### Collectivism

10. What is the atmosphere like at your work and how would you describe your relationships with your colleagues?
11. How do people maintain their social relationships and build their networks and how is the good atmosphere at work held up?
12. Is it possible to openly tell your opinion or suggestions at work?
13. When communicating with your colleagues, how would you describe the amount of personal space?
14. What kind of amusing, confusing or challenging situations have you faced related to collectivism? How did you handle these situations?

### Masculinity vs. Femininity

15. Would you say Koreans are more rational or emotional when it comes to communication at work? In what kind of situations have you noticed this?
16. What kind of differences have you possibly noticed among the different genders at your working environment? (communication, attitudes, behavior)

### Uncertainty avoidance

17. How structured is your working environment when it comes to rules and guidelines?
18. What kind of instructions Koreans need to perform well in their tasks?
19. What kind of experiences have you had according to the punctuality with time in working life?

### Ethnocentricity

20. What kind of differences have you noticed when Koreans communicate with foreigners in comparison to communication with another Korean?

## Communication

21. In what ways do Koreans express disagreement or negative feelings at work?
22. How directly/indirectly things are expressed?
  - Have you had any difficulties with understanding or producing indirect communication? How did you handle these situations?
23. What kind of experiences have you had of someone losing their face?
  - What happened when someone lost their face?
24. How would you describe the language barrier between you and your Korean colleagues?
25. What have you experienced to be the most challenging aspect when communicating with Koreans?
  - Are there any features that make the communication easier than expected?
26. In your experience, what kind of differences and similarities have you noticed in Korean culture when compared to Finnish one?
27. In your experience, what kind of differences and similarities have you noticed in Korean communication style when compared to Finnish one?
28. What kind of amusing, confusing or challenging situations have you faced related to communication? How did you handle these situations?
29. In what ways have you consciously changed your behavior to adapt the Korean working environment?
30. What suggestions would you give to a Finn who is starting to work in Korean working environment?
31. During your stay in Korea have you noticed any change happening in the working environment?
32. What else would you like to say about culture or communication styles in Korean working environment

Taustatiedot:

1. Ikä, koulutus, ammatti ja työtehtävät?
2. Minkälainen ja minkä maalainen yritys/työyhteisö?
3. Milloin ja kuinka pysyvästi muutit Koreaan?
4. Onko aiempaa työkokemusta monikulttuurisesta työympäristöstä?
5. Millä kielellä kommunikoit työ- ja vapaa-ajalla?
6. Kuinka valmistauduit työskentelemään Koreassa? Tuliko jokin yllätyksenä? Mikä?

Työelämän kulttuuri:

Hierarkia

7. Millaiset ovat esimiesten ja alaisten roolit työpaikalla?
  - Kokemuksesi mukaan, miten alamaiset suhtautuvat eriäviin mielipiteisiin pomonsa kanssa?
8. Kuinka hierarkia näkyy puhuttelussa, verbaalisessa ja nonverbaalisessa viestinnässä ja käytöksessä työpaikalla? (mikä sopivaa/sopimatonta?)
9. Millaisia huvittavia, hämmentäviä tai haastavia tilanteita olet kohdannut hierarkiaan liittyen? Kuinka selvisit näistä tilanteista?

Yhteisöllisyys

10. Millainen on työympäristösi ilmapiiriä ja suhteesi työkavereihin?
11. Kuinka sosiaalisia suhteita ja verkostoja luodaan ja kuinka hyvää työilmapiiriä pidetään yllä?
12. Voiko työpaikalla kertoa mielipiteensä tai ehdotuksensa avoimesti?
13. Kommunikoidessa korealaisten kanssa työympäristössä, millaiseksi koet henkilökohtaisen tilan määrän?
14. Millaisia huvittavia, hämmentäviä tai haastavia tilanteita olet kohdannut työpaikan yhteisöllisyyteen liittyen? Kuinka selvisit näistä tilanteista?

Maskuliinisuus vs. Feminiinisyys

15. Ovatko korealaiset mielestäsi enemmän rationaalisia vai tunteellisia kommunikoijia? Millaisissa tilanteissa tämä ilmenee työympäristössä?
16. Millaisia eroja olet mahdollisesti huomannut työympäristössä sukupuolten välillä? (viestintä, suhtautuminen, käyttäytyminen)

Epävarmuuden välttäminen

17. Kuinka paljon työympäristöä on ohjattu säännöin ja ohjein?
18. Millaista ohjeistusta korealaisten tarvitsevat, suoriutuakseen hyvin työtehtävistään?
19. Millaisia kokemuksia on korealaisten täsmällisyydestä ajan suhteen työelämässä?

Etnosentrisyys

20. Millaisia eroja mahdollisesti huomannut kommunikointityylissä kun korealainen kommunikoi ulkomaalaisen kanssa verrattuna kommunikointiin toisten korealaisten kanssa?



## Kommunikointi:

21. Millä tavoin erimielisyyksiä ja negatiivisia tunteita ilmaistaan työympäristössä?
22. Kuinka suorasti/epäsuorasti asiat ilmaistaan?
  - Millaisissa tilanteissa on ollut ongelmia ymmärtää tai ilmaista asioita epäsuorasti? Kuinka selvisit näistä tilanteista?
23. Millaisia kokemuksia on oman tai työkavereiden kasvojen menetyksestä työpaikalla?
  - Mitä tapahtuu kun joku menettää kasvonsa?
24. Kuinka kuvailisit kielimuuria sinun ja korealaisten työkavereidesi välillä?
25. Mikä on haastavinta kommunikoidessasi korealaisessa työympäristössä?
  - Millaiset asiat vastaavasti tekevät kommunikoinnin helpommaksi mitä alun perin oletit?
26. Millaisia yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia olet huomannut korealaisten ja suomalaisten työympäristöjen kulttuureissa?
27. Millaisia yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia olet huomannut korealaisten ja suomalaisten työympäristöjen kommunikointitavoissa?
28. Millaisia huvittavia, hämmentäviä tai haastavia kokemuksia olet kohdannut kommunikointiin liittyen? Kuinka selvisit näistä tilanteista?
29. Millä tavoin olet tietoisesti muuttanut käytöstä korealaiseen työympäristöön sopivammaksi?
30. Millaisia ohjeita antaisit suomalaisille, jotka ovat aloittamassa työskentelyn korealaisessa työympäristössä?
31. Sinä aikana kun olet ollut Koreassa, oletko huomannut jotain muutosta tapahtuvan työympäristössäsi?
32. Mitä muuta tulee mieleen korealaisen työympäristön kulttuuriin tai kommunikointiin liittyen?