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TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization is one of the thesis commissioner's main strategic goals. Thus, the organization's workforce is expected to become increasingly multicultural. The purpose of the study was to find ways to develop a work environment that supports internationality and multiculturalism. The study aimed to identify factors in the work environment that support or hinder internationality and multiculturalism and, based on them, provide recommendations for the commissioner.

The study focused on the viewpoint of international (non-Finnish) staff: their needs, ideas, and development suggestions. In addition, Finnish staff members from human resource (HR), sustainability, and supervisory positions were interviewed of the organization's prevailing practices, prerequisites for developing the work environment, and main challenges.

The primary method used to conduct the study was basic qualitative research. The sample for the study consisted of five international and four Finnish staff members, who were selected utilizing purposive sampling methods. Research data was collected with personal semi-structured interviews via video conferencing software.

The study showed that work community, language, culture, and the employer organization and its practices contribute to creating a work environment that supports internationality and multiculturalism. Based on these findings, the main recommendations for the commissioner were recruiting more international staff, providing all staff with equal access to information, increasing intercultural and language competence of staff, and communicating and adopting the organization's practices more effectively.

Keywords: internationality, multiculturalism, work environment, university of applied sciences

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, a general introduction to the study will be presented. First, a brief description of the thesis commissioner is provided alongside the background and scope of the study. Second, the utilized research methods are elaborated on with justifications, and finally, the limitations and framework of the study are defined.

1.1 Background and case organization

This study was commissioned by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, later referred to as Xamk, where the author works as a full-time RDI (Research, Development & Innovation) Coordinator. Xamk is a multidisciplinary higher education and research institution in South-Eastern Finland, centralized in technology, wellbeing, and creative industries (Xamk 2024). The organization was established in 2017 when the Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences and the Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences merged (Gullman & Alvesalo 2024). Xamk's campuses are located in four cities: Mikkeli, Savonlinna, Kotka, and Kouvola. (Xamk 2024). Xamk has over 900 employees and over 11,500 students, the largest share of both in Mikkeli (Key facts and figures 2024). Xamk provides two Master's degree and eight Bachelor's degree programs in English and has 450 international students (International Xamk 2024). The number of international (non-Finnish) staff members at Xamk has doubled in the past five years (April 2019–April 2024) from 11 to 22. Yet, their share of the total staff is still relatively small: 2,3 %. (Henkilöstötilastot: Kv-henkilöstö 2024.)

The study aimed to find ways to develop a work environment that supports internationality and multiculturalism, particularly from the international staff's point of view. There are several reasons why the topic is relevant and essential both for the commissioner and on a larger scale. First, internationalization is one of the main goals of Xamk's strategy for 2020–2024. It is stated in the strategy that Xamk seeks to attract international staff and further enforce international cooperation (Strategy 2024). In addition, as a part of the organization's social responsibility and sustainability program, Xamk has an equality and non-

discrimination policy that emphasizes the importance of tolerance, non-discrimination, and training in the increasingly multicultural work community (Social responsibility... 2020, 5; Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023, 8). One of the goals of the policy is to increase staff diversity by developing the recruitment process accordingly (Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023, 12). Hence, the number of international staff members is expected to increase, making it crucial to have a work environment that supports an international and multicultural workforce.

Xamk organizes an equality and non-discrimination survey for its staff every other year. Although the most recent survey from 2023 revealed that 87,6 % of the respondents agreed or partly agreed that equality is achieved well at Xamk, there is still room for improvement potentially made with the help of this study. Approximately 13 % of the respondents had experienced inequality or discrimination. In the open answers to the survey, the staff members had wished that the supervisors develop their management skills in order to achieve an equal work community and that general guidelines on equality and non-discrimination would be provided. (Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023, 10–11.)

Besides organizational level, this study has implications at a global level. Xamk has been a member of the UN Global Compact initiative since November 2020 as the first Finnish university of applied sciences. By being a part of the initiative, Xamk commits to complying with the UN's objectives, declarations, agreements, and the ten principles of the Global Compact. The principles providing a broader framework for this study are "Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and", "Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses", and "Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation". (Social responsibility... 2024; Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023, 2; The power of principles 2024.) Xamk is also a member of the European University INGENIUM network, which consists of eight European higher education institutions and is co-funded by the European Commission. One of the forms of cooperation in

INGENIUM is staff mobility. Thus, the flow of international staff is expected to increase in the future. (European University INGENIUM 2024.)

1.2 Development settings

As Xamk strives to internationalize, the organization's workforce is likely to become increasingly multicultural. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that Xamk has a work environment that promotes internationality and multiculturalism. Such a work environment can help both attract and retain the international workforce. Hence, the objective of this study was to identify factors in the work environment that support or hinder internationality and multiculturalism and, based on them, provide development suggestions for Xamk. The development suggestions were constructed by answering the research question:

- How to create a work environment at Xamk that supports internationality and multiculturalism?

and the following sub-questions:

- What are the main challenges and areas for development in supporting internationality and multiculturalism at Xamk?
- Which of Xamk's current practices are perceived to reinforce internationality and multiculturalism, if any?

The answer to the research question was formed by interviewing Xamk's staff. The study focused on the viewpoint of the five international staff members that were interviewed: their needs, ideas, and development suggestions. In addition, four Finnish staff members: a human resource (HR) representative, a sustainability representative/equality and non-discrimination contact person, and two supervisors from units with international staff, were interviewed to gain an understanding of the measures already taken to support multiculturalism at Xamk, the prerequisites for developing the work environment, and the challenges that may have occurred.

1.3 Research methods

The research method chosen for this study was qualitative research, as answering the research question required descriptive data rather than numeric

generalizations. The two approaches selected were basic qualitative research and qualitative case study. The primary data collection method was a semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted via video conferencing software over a period of four weeks. After the interviews, the author analyzed the collected data utilizing coding and by comparing the results to previous research.

The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling methods. The interviewees were chosen based on the assumption that they can provide information that helps answer the research questions. The sample of the international interviewees was determined based on the interviewees available, which refers to convenience sampling. The Finnish interviewees were selected, to a certain extent, using maximum variation as they represented staff members, who cooperate with international staff, from different positions. The research process is further elaborated on in Chapter 5.

1.4 Framework and limitations of the study

In terms of culture, this study focused on national culture. Thus, multiculturalism at Xamk was perceived as the variety of different nationalities. Other forms of culture or sub-culture, such as those based on age or gender, were excluded. The study's main focus was on the viewpoint of Xamk's international staff members. Therefore, only a few Finnish staff members were interviewed to gain an understanding of the existing practices aimed at supporting multiculturalism at Xamk.

The theoretical framework of the study focuses first on defining the key concepts of the study. Then, cultural differences, according to key researchers and studies, are elaborated on. Multiculturalism in the workplace is looked into by exploring the benefits and challenges of promoting it, as well as the strategies to use to manage a multicultural workforce. Also, the formation of intercultural competence is explored, followed by a comparison of national and organizational cultures. Finally, an overview of multiculturalism in Finnish higher education institutes is provided. A visualization of the framework is provided in Figure 1.

Definition of key concepts	Cultural differences	Multiculturalism in the workplace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National culture • Multicultural, -ism • Work environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hofstede's dimensions of culture • Trompenaars' dimensions of culture • High context vs. low context communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of multicultural work environment • Challenges of multicultural work environment • Diversity management strategies • Intercultural competence • Organizational vs. national culture • Multicultural staff in Finnish higher education institutions

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of thesis

2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this chapter, the key concepts of the study will be defined through central researchers on the topic and various sources of information. First, the concept of culture is elaborated on with its sub-concepts national culture and multicultural, -ism. Second, the term work environment and its different aspects are explained in detail.

2.1 Culture

The word culture is of both Latin and French origin and was first used in the Middle English Period from 1150 to 1500 (Culture, N. 2024). Culture is derived from the same origin as the verb to cultivate, which connects culture closely with nature (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 30). The majority of Western languages narrowly consider culture a “civilization” that consists of knowledge and different forms of art (Hofstede et al. 2010, 5).

According to Thomas and Peterson (2015, 22), culture has three main features: it is structured, conveyed from one generation to another, and mutual for a certain

group. Similarly, Comfort and Franklin (2014, 15) bind culture with a specific group of people as a factor that guides its actions and provides its members with a sense of belonging. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020, 27–28) also connect culture to joint meanings and perceptions in a group. Guirdham (2011 18–23) points out that depending on the theoretical orientation in question, the foundation of culture can be formed either on values, communication, shared meanings, or cultural or social identity.

Hofstede et al. refer to culture as “the software of the mind”, meaning that culture is composed of different models of reasoning, sensing, and operating, which a person constantly adopts and modifies. These models are influenced by the person’s surroundings and past events. Hence, culture is always learned, not something one is born with. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 4–6.)

Browaeys and Price divide culture into three layers. The first external layer contains the aspects of culture one can observe, such as language, clothing, food, and architectural style. The middle layer consists of the rules and morals of culture that, combined, form the national traits of a culture. The third and most internal layer includes the presumptions of culture that are often challenging to justify or rationalize. (Browaeys & Price 2015, 4, 13.) This three-layered view on culture is supported by several researchers, such as Schein and Schein (2017, 17–27; 2019, 49–60), Hollensen (2020, 236–237), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020, 7, 28–31) who compare culture to an onion with multiple layers to unpeel.

Guirdham (2011, 18) points out that while culture has an influence on virtually every human interaction, an individual is usually not aware of their culture. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020, 31) have made a similar point, stating that culture is not often discussed as most people are not conscious of it, even though culture forms the basis for operating. Along the same lines, Hofstede et al. (2010, 11) note that values, the core of culture, are often subliminal and cannot be disclosed nor externally detected by other people, only assumed.

According to Guirdham, any group that has existed for a while and has certain requirements and meaning for its members can have its own culture, which is why a person can belong to several cultural groups simultaneously. These groups can be nationality- or organization-based, for example. Groups within a nation are sometimes referred to as co-cultures or subcultures, and can be founded on age, gender, or religion, inter alia. (Guirdham 2011, 23, 26–27.)

2.1.1 National culture

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020, 8) suggest that culture appears on several levels, the highest of which is the national culture. Hollensen (2020, 673) portrays national culture as a lifestyle that is characteristic of the citizens of a particular country. National culture consists of, for example, the rules and values of the citizens, national regulations, educational programs, and the state of the economy (Harvey & Griffith 2002 cited in Hollensen 2020, 673).

Hofstede et al. state that nationality is usually the only practical attribute for categorizing cultures. In most cases, there are various factors that support unity within a nation, such as one main language and a mutual educational, political, and defense system. However, distinct groups according to one's religion, ethnicity, and language can exist within a national culture. Therefore, national cultural differences refer to the generalized person types of nationalities. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 21.) Mor Barak (2022, 215) points out that diversity within national cultures is increasing due to the immigration of people and companies, as immigrant cultures blend with the country's national culture and slowly shape it. Therefore, overgeneralizing national cultures should be avoided, Mor Barak continues.

Tayeb identifies several factors that help establish a national culture, the broadest of which are the nation's history and physical surroundings. On an institutional level, family, education, religion, media, and MNCs (multinational companies) influence the formation of national culture. Family is the primary connection a child has to the surrounding national culture before attending school. Then, the prevailing culture is both reflected and affected by the

educational system through the subjects being taught and the teaching style. Religion has a substantial impact on one's perspective on life, and through it, on the shaping of culture. Mass media, on the other hand, provides people a platform to share their preferences and connotations and, hence, culture. MNCs shape the national culture by guiding people's actions with their products and services and the jobs they provide. (Tayeb 2003 cited in Browaeys & Price 2015, 17–18.)

2.1.2 Multicultural, -ism

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word multicultural was first used in 1935. It is related to a community that includes various cultural groups that have preserved their unique cultural characteristics. (Multicultural, Adj. 2024b.) Cambridge Dictionary (Multicultural, Adj. 2024a) defines multicultural as an organization or geographical area, for example, that consists of people who have various distinct traditions and views. An individual can also be characterized as multicultural, when one identifies with, has knowledge about, and has internalized more than one culture (Fitzsimmons et al. 2019).

The word multiculturalism was first used in 1957 to describe the composition of Switzerland, as the country had several spoken languages and religions. Later, in the 1970s, multiculturalism started to depict a multicultural country with a high number of immigrants and respect towards all cultures. (Kucheryavaya et al. 2020.) Cambridge Dictionary (Multiculturalism, N. 2024) describes multiculturalism as a perspective of valuing all cultures included in a society. Similarly, Moawad and El Shoura (2017, 802–803, 805) view multiculturalism as recognizing and respecting the (e.g. cultural and religious) diversity within a society and providing nondiscriminatory opportunities for all, which results in the elimination of racism. Browaeys and Price (2015, 55) on the other hand, define multiculturalism simply as ethnic diversity. According to Kucheryavaya et al. (2020, 61), ethnic or cultural variety is a common definition of multiculturalism in sociology. Berry (2016, 414) argues that cultural diversity does not in itself define multiculturalism but also requires equal participation of all cultures that are present.

According to Berry, multiculturalism appears in three forms: as demographic diversity, as policy, and as ideology. Multiculturalism as demographic diversity refers to, for example, cultural and linguistic diversity within a society.

Multiculturalism policies are designed to manage, foster, and promote diversity and equal participation of all cultural groups, and should be consistently executed. (Berry 2016, 417–418.) Multiculturalism ideology, on the other hand, is present when an individual values cultural differences and equality (Berry et al. 1977 cited in Berry 2016, 420; Guimond et al. 2014 cited in Berry 2016, 421).

The European Commission's definition of multiculturalism closely resembles the one of Berry's (2016, 418) multiculturalism policy making it, thus, rather narrow. However, the Commission recognizes that there is no universal definition of multiculturalism, and, besides policy, it can advert to, for example, values or demography. (Multiculturalism 2024.)

2.2 Work environment

The Centre for Occupational Safety in Finland states that the work environment consists of physical, virtual, and psychosocial dimensions. The physical dimension includes working premises and furnishing, as well as lighting, acoustics, and indoor air quality at the workplace. In addition, ergonomics and accessibility are parts of the physical work environment. The virtual dimension contains all the software, technology, and other digital solutions that are utilized in the organization. The psychosocial dimension incorporates communication, cooperation, and interaction at the workplace, management and organization practices, and individual behavior of the employees. Several factors affect the psychosocial work environment, such as work atmosphere, values, organizational culture, and content of work. (Psykososiaalinen... 2024; Rauramo 2021.)

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), work environment combines the observable elements of a job that make up the working conditions. These elements include physical and social circumstances at the workplace, characteristics of the work and the organization,

as well as the advancement opportunities, remuneration principles, and other such practices. The quality of the work environment can be measured most reliably by focusing on individual staff members and their views on the environment instead of only assessing the organization's practices objectively. This way, it is possible to detect potential inequalities between different staff groups regarding the work environment. (OECD Guidelines... 2017, 13, 92.)

3 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Working in and managing a multicultural work environment requires understanding the differences that commonly exist between different cultural groups. Various scholars have studied the differences between national cultures, further explored in this chapter. A widely acknowledged theory is the dimensions of culture by Geert Hofstede. Later, Fons Trompenaars developed a similar model, but with more dimensions. Cultural differences also appear in the context of communication, as suggested by Edward T. Hall.

3.1 Hofstede's dimensions of culture

Likely the most well-established model for measuring national cultural differences is the one developed by Geert Hofstede: dimensions of culture, presented in Figure 2. Originally, the model included only four dimensions: power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance, but has later been complemented with two more dimensions: long-term vs. short-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 31, 37–38, 44–45.)

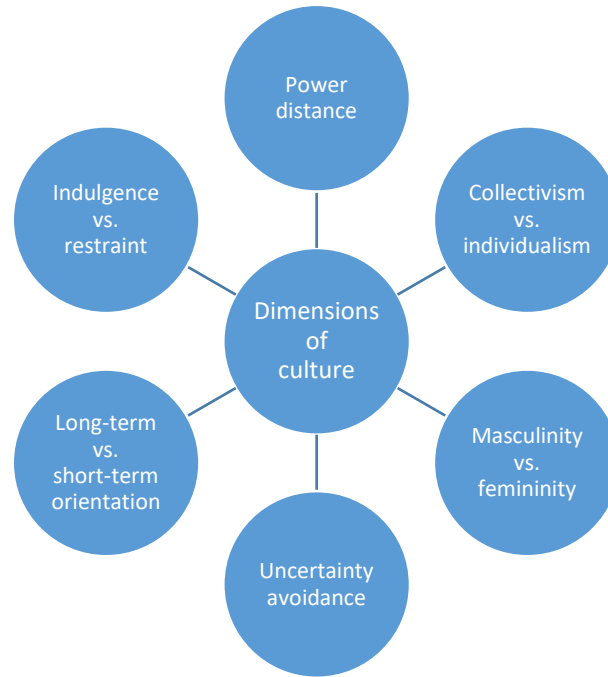


Figure 2. Six dimensions of culture (Hofstede 2010)

Power distance refers to the way different nationalities manage and accept inequality regarding the division of power. In a work context, organizations in high power distance countries are hierarchical and grant managers great authority. Therefore, employees mostly expect their supervisors to tell them what to do. In smaller power distance countries, the structure of organizations is flat with more equality between employees and their managers. Thus, employees expect to have a say on issues regarding their work. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 55, 61, 74.)

The majority of nationalities are collectivist, which means that the group and its aspirations are more important than the individual. People belong to solid in-groups towards which they have unfaltering loyalty. This applies also to the workplace, where the employer and employees often have a family-like relationship. Direct feedback is expected to be given to a work group, not a single employee. Individualism, on the other hand, emphasizes the personal interests, opinions, and responsibilities of an individual. Promotions and feedback at the workplace are mostly given according to the employer's rules and objectives and based on personal performance. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 91–92, 120, 124.)

In masculine societies, there is a clear distinction between gender roles. Men are presumed to be confident, strong, and aspired to succeed, while women should come across as humble, affectionate, and relationship-oriented. Men are usually expected to have a career and “live to work”. Work-life in general is very competitive with a straight-forward management style. In feminine societies, the gender roles are more mixed: men can be affectionate, and women can have careers, for example. It is more common for people to “work to live” and appreciate free time over work than the opposite. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 140, 168, 170.)

The level of uncertainty avoidance indicates the extent to which the members of a nationality tolerate ambiguity and unexpected events. In countries, where uncertainty avoidance is high, people tend to perceive uncertainty as a threat that must be resisted. Feelings of stress and anxiety are also common. In work life, employees seek reassurance from the rules of the workplace and are hesitant to change employers. Nationalities that have a low uncertainty avoidance level, accept ambiguity and uncertainty as ordinary factors of life and are curious towards unfamiliar things. People also operate more comfortably in workplaces and societies that do not have detailed and rigorous rules. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 188–189, 203, 217.)

Long-term orientation is striving towards the future and emphasizing attributes that support this, such as resilience and economic skills. People expect to see the results of their work over time, not immediately. On the contrary, short-term orientation is focused on the past and present and places a high value on traditions. People often want fast reactions and results to their actions. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 239, 243.)

National cultures that are indulgent, appreciate having a fun and enjoyable life with enough free time. People tend to have a rather positive, optimistic, and extroverted attitude and they accept foreign entertainment, like music, well. Members of restrained cultures appreciate order and rules and are usually more disciplined and pessimistic than those of indulgent cultures. In addition, they are

less tolerant of imported entertainment. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 281, 291–292, 297.)

The degree to which these cultural dimensions apply to different countries is displayed on a scale of 0 to 100. When reviewing the country profile of Finland, the lowest scores are gained from masculinity (26), power distance (33), and long-term orientation (38). In other words, Finland is a feminine country with small power distance and rather short-term oriented people. The highest scores, on the other hand, are obtained from individuality (63), uncertainty avoidance (59), and indulgence (57), meaning that Finnish people are individualistic, and want to indulge themselves with enjoyable activities, but do not tolerate uncertainty well. (Hofstede 2015.)

3.2 Trompenaars' dimensions of culture

Complementing Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions is the one of Fons Trompenaars'. According to Trompenaars, national cultures differ in the way they choose to solve problems. These problems can be divided into three categories: interpersonal relationships, approach towards time, and approach towards nature. Under these categories, a total of seven dimensions of culture can be identified based on the solutions different cultures utilize to solve problems. The five dimensions under interpersonal relationships are universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. communitarianism, neutral vs. emotional, specific vs. diffuse, and achievement vs. ascription. Approach towards time and approach towards nature are considered their own dimensions. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 9–12.)

The first dimension, universalism vs. particularism, determines how different cultures evaluate the actions of other people. Universalism refers to a rule-based culture, where everyone is expected to follow the rules on every occasion. Conversely, particularist cultures act according to personal relationships and the unique circumstances of a situation regardless of the rules. In a work context, particularists usually take time to get to know their counterparts before discussing business, whereas universalists prefer a more straight-to-the-point approach and

rely on detailed legal contracts. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 41–42, 51, 61.)

Individualism vs. communitarianism resembles Hofstede's individualism vs. collectivism discussed in Chapter 3.1 and indicates whether the culture prioritizes the needs and objectives of the individual or the group. Individualism has some confluences with universalism in regard to emphasizing business and predetermined contracts over relationships. Collectivism is the opposite and, thus, has similarities with particularism. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 63–66, 82.)

Cultural differences are also apparent in the extent to which people show emotions. Members of neutral cultures tend to restrict the expression of emotions and act in a controlled way. In addition, they do not expose their true thoughts easily. As a result, they can be perceived as cold and apathetic. On the contrary, people from affective cultures express their emotions and thoughts freely and transparently, both verbally and non-verbally. Neutrally-oriented people can mistakenly consider this behavior unprofessional and uncontrollable. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 83, 91, 93.)

The dimension "specific vs. diffuse" implies whether people from a certain culture involve others in specific or multiple parts of their lives and personalities. Specific cultures, for example, separate work and personal life. Therefore, the role or status they have at work does not extend to personal encounters. In diffuse cultures, on the other hand, different parts of a person's life and personality often blend with one another. Diffuse cultures can also be referred to as high-context and specific cultures as low-context, further discussed in Chapter 3.3. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 95, 103–104.)

The last relationship-related dimension is achievement vs. ascription, which indicates how a person's status is acquired. Achieving cultures appoint status based on a person's actions. Ascribing cultures place a high value on certain attributes, such as age, gender, or social network, which determine a person's

position. At the workplace, ascribing cultures reward employees on the basis of seniority, while achieving cultures value performance. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 117, 126, 134.)

The dimension “approach towards time” has similarities with Hofstede’s long-term vs. short-term orientation (Chapter 3.1) and separates cultures based on their orientation to past, present, and future and their way of organizing activities either sequentially or synchronically. Sequentially oriented cultures view time as a straight line that consists of consecutive occurrences. People prefer working on one task at a time and following strict deadlines. Synchronically oriented cultures consider time as a series of periodical and recurrent events that combine past, present, and future. People are used to managing multiple assignments simultaneously and view deadlines as relative and approximate. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 135, 138, 158.)

The last dimension “approach towards nature” separates cultures based on their relations to nature. Inner-directed cultures consider nature as something that needs to be controlled by humans, whereas outer-directed cultures think that one should live in harmony with nature. These separate views apply also in business. Organizations in outer-directed cultures are flexible and more willing to adapt to external needs and demands, such as those of customers and other stakeholders. Conversely, organizations in inner-directed cultures are more aggressive and committed to following their own predefined business strategy in trying to beat the competitors. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 159, 166.)

3.3 High context vs. low context communication

Cultural differences are also evident in communication style. Edward T. Hall was the first to distinguish cultures based on the context of communication. Context refers to the situation and conditions of the communication transaction as well as the culture of the communicator. Hall divided cultural communication styles into high-context communication and low-context communication. (Hall 1976 cited in Browaeys & Price 2015, 156, 339.)

High-context communication is indirect and ambiguous. People usually imply what they want to say rather than saying it directly in order to remain polite and avoid conflicts. The meaning of the message conveyed should be interpreted utilizing the context in which the communication takes place. (Comfort & Franklin 2014, 32–33.) Non-verbal communication is also frequently used (Guirdham 2011, 57). Furthermore, people communicate in a way that is presumed of their role in the situation, making, for example, work encounters very official and ceremonial (Okabe 1983 cited in Guirdham 2011, 58). High-context communication is common in collectivist cultures (Hofstede et al. 2010, 109).

Low-context communication is more direct and precise than high-context communication. People commonly say what they mean and rely solely on words to convey the message. Expressing contrasting views and information is not avoided but perceived as a way to form the truth about something. (Comfort & Franklin 2014, 32–34.) Low-context communication usually takes place in individualist cultures (Hofstede et al. 2010, 109). Therefore, people tend to communicate according to their personal style instead of the style expected of their role or status (Okabe 1983 cited in Guirdham 2011, 58). Different communication styles can also create challenges in intercultural communication, as elaborated on later in Chapter 4.2.

4 MULTICULTURALISM IN THE WORKPLACE

This chapter explores multiculturalism in the workplace by considering the benefits of a multicultural work environment as well as the challenges that may occur due to multiculturalism. In addition, diversity management strategies for organizations are explored. The definition of intercultural competence is provided, as well as a brief comparison between organizational and national culture. Finally, an overview of multicultural staff in Finnish higher education institutions is presented.

4.1 Benefits of multicultural work environment

Cultural diversity within an organization can promote the overall performance of its staff in many ways (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 172). Adler (2002 cited in Browaeys & Price 2015, 303) mentions that multicultural organizations are often adaptable, open to innovations, and have a better ability to renew themselves. According to Leung et al. (2008, 177), being engaged in a multicultural situation increases creativity, especially when a person is open to learning about and adapting to different cultures. Similarly, Comfort and Franklin (2014, 150) acknowledge that a multicultural workforce can examine different issues from a novel and creative point of view, which leads to new results, functions, and prospects in the organization. The enhanced creativeness and ingenuity achieved through a multicultural workforce can increase team spirit and companionship, which inspires further cooperation among employees (Schindler 2019).

Cultural diversity management affects six factors of an organization's efficiency: creativeness, problem-solving ability, flexibility, appeal, marketing outcomes, and expenses. Thus, multicultural staff can give the organization a competitive advantage if led properly, which requires the supervisors to gain intercultural competence. (Ganapathy & Kaliyaperumal 2022, 4, 14.) Similarly, according to a study by Dixon-Fyle et al. (2023, 11–12, 47–48), organizations with high ethnic and cultural diversity succeed better financially than organizations with low levels of diversity. However, the organizational culture must be adjusted to enable the culturally diverse staff to perform their duties as productively as possible (Ganapathy & Kaliyaperumal 2022, 4).

4.2 Challenges of multicultural work environment

According to Browaeys and Price (2015, 303), challenges in multicultural organizations often occur, when staff is expected to operate and think alike, leaving no room for divergent opinions, which only increases obscurity and perplexity within the organization. On the other hand, differing views of multicultural employees can cause discrepancies and hamper the organization's

operation. This, in turn, can lead to increased negativity and dissatisfaction among the staff and expand the conflict even further. (Comfort & Franklin 2014, 150.) Karjalainen (2020, 255) reminds that it is problematic to consider multicultural staff as a uniform group as there are people with distinct qualities and challenges among these employees.

Ethnocentrism is common in all cultures and can cause issues in the workplace. Ethnocentrism refers to considering one's own culture better than other cultures and own cultural customs as the only correct way of operating. Therefore, people biasedly evaluate the representatives of other cultures through the criteria set in their own culture. They also tend to prefer interacting with people who share the same culture. (Guirdham 2011, 150–151; Hofstede et al. 2010, 387; Triandis 1994 cited in Thomas & Peterson 2015, 40). Ethnocentrism also affects job satisfaction. A study by Hauret and Williams revealed that increased diversity of nationalities within an organization lowered job satisfaction among staff members, as people usually perceive the characteristics of their own nationality more positively than the ones of other nationalities. In addition, it is common for people to cooperate with individuals that have similar qualities as them. However, after diversity reached a certain threshold, the job satisfaction of minority staff members increased, potentially, because there were enough similar staff members to identify with or the understanding towards other nationalities had grown. (Hauret & Williams 2020, 431, 434–435.)

Discrimination, especially of minority staff, is another problem of multicultural organizations. Discrimination takes place in any occasion in which a person or group is treated unfairly or differently due to irrational reasons caused by prejudice. (Guirdham 2011, 190.) Exclusion is a form of discrimination. Exclusion can indicate poor advancement and influencing opportunities at the workplace or being left out of organizational networks and teams. (Mor Barak 2022, 60, 173–174.) Maximova-Enzoni and Egeland discovered that in Nordic higher education institutions, non-native staff members were sometimes perceived as “outsiders”, which led to discrimination, as they were treated differently than native, majority staff. Minority staff members were considered primarily as representatives of

certain cultures rather than experts in their field, which undermined their competence and achievements. As a result, the minority staff had to constantly prove their expertise and authority at the workplace. This presents a challenge for diversity management in determining the extent to which a person's cultural background should be acknowledged in relation to individual proficiency. (Maximova-Enzoni & Egeland 2019, 9, 11, 13–14, 19.) Romani et al. argue that diversity management practices can also be a form of “benevolent” discrimination. Sometimes the perception behind these well-meant practices is that minority staff members are subordinates and need help, which is awarded with the assumption that they comply with the prevailing hierarchy. Benevolent discrimination is an imperceptible form of discrimination that its executors are often unaware of. (Romani et al. 2019, 371, 375.)

Communication is a common source of problems and misunderstandings in multicultural organizations. Browaeys and Price (2015, 356–358) mention that non-verbal communication, such as body language or the use of silence in a conversation, can have different meanings in distinct cultures. Thus, it is important for an individual not to presume that the behavior of a person from a different culture has the same denotations as in their own culture, Browaeys and Price continue. Along the same lines, Mor Barak (2022, 219) points out that in cross-cultural communication, the meaning of a message conveyed to the recipient is often different from the one originally intended by the transmitter due to cultural barriers, as presented in Figure 3. Cultural barriers can be both verbal, such as vocabulary or accent, and nonverbal, for example, body language or clothing.

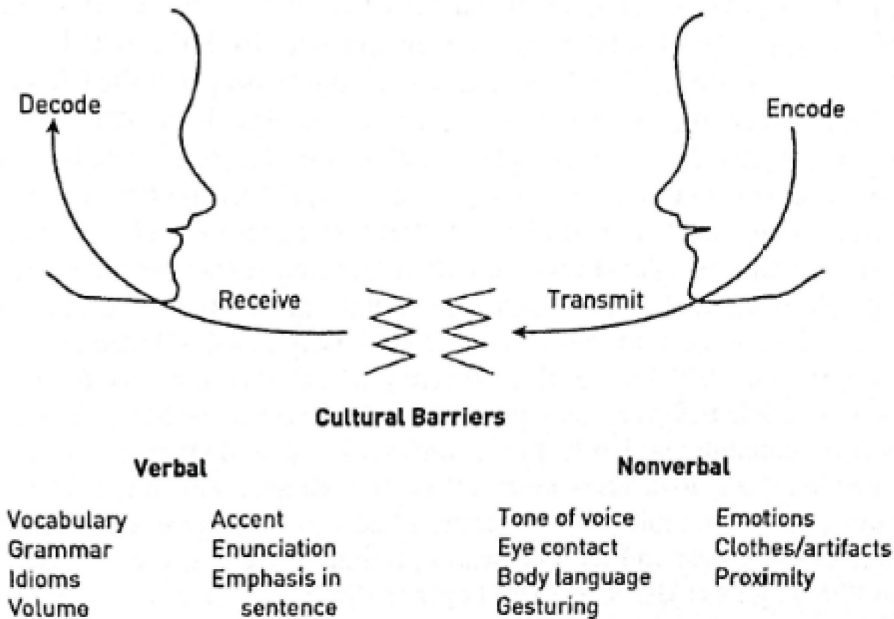


Figure 3. Barriers to effective cross-cultural communication (Mor Barak 2022, 219)

The diversity of languages used at the workplace can cause problems for both the employee and the management side and be an obstacle to effective communication. When a person is not as fluent in the language used as in their native language, there is a great chance of misinterpretation and miscommunication. (Mor Barak 2022, 219, 221.)

4.3 Diversity management strategies

Mor Barak (2006 cited in Mor Barak 2022, 252) defines diversity management as the organization's voluntary and intentional practices aimed at including staff with different characteristics and backgrounds in both the official and casual organizational constructions. Furthermore, the purpose of diversity management is to provide equal employment and advancement opportunities and build an accessible work environment for all groups. The fundamental requirement for diversity management is having a diverse staff. Otherwise, the organization should concentrate on recruitment first. (Mor Barak 2022, 251, 257.) According to Seliverstova and Pierog, executing diversity management practices has many benefits for an organization, such as improved innovation, resilience, and efficiency. Moreover, diversity management facilitates entering new markets, increases contentment and engagement among employees, improves the

organization's image and social responsibility, and, hence, helps recruit and retain workforce. (Seliverstova & Pierog 2021, 121.)

Over thirty years ago, Taylor Cox Jr. developed a model for assessing the level of diversity management within an organization, still cited in recent research and literature (e.g. Mor Barak 2022, 262–263). The model includes three types of organizations: monolithic, plural, and multicultural. Monolithic organizations are largely homogeneous and do not prioritize the integration of culturally minority staff. Therefore, discrimination and prejudice frequently take place. Although plural organizations apply practices that are intended to increase inclusivity, institutional discrimination exists in them. They also have a more heterogeneous workforce and a further structural integration of minority staff members than monolithic organizations. However, plural organizations still aim for acculturation rather than fostering cultural differences. Multicultural organizations on the other hand, truly value diversity and have risen above the deficiencies of the plural organizations. The main characteristics of a multicultural organization are pluralism, a complete informal network and structural integration, lack of prejudice and discrimination, only few intergroup conflicts, and every employee identifying as a member of the organization regardless of the employee's cultural group. Ideally, diversity management practices should seek to make organizations the multicultural type. (Cox 1991, 37–39.)

The most common strategies for managing diversity in organizations are the multicultural strategy and the colorblind strategy. Multicultural strategy highlights and promotes the differences among staff members, whereas colorblind strategy emphasizes the similarities and downplays the differences. (Gündemir et al. 2017, 34; Kirby et al. 2020, 1144.) There are pros and cons to both approaches. People usually consider multicultural strategy more equitable towards the minority than colorblind strategy (Gündemir & Galinsky 2017 cited in Gündemir et al. 2017, 35). Multicultural strategy can also enhance work satisfaction among people in the racial minority of the organization. However, it tends to increase stereotyping and create pressure for the strongly identified minority staff members to act according to the stereotypes other people have of them. (Kirby et

al. 2020, 1144.) Stereotypes are formed of overly simplified conceptions a person has of a specific group of people, such as representatives of a certain culture. Stereotypes are derived from restricted knowledge, and often reinforce a person's biases that are not based on genuine experiences. (Browaeys & Price 2015, 365; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 76.) Conversely, though applying the colorblind strategy can reduce stereotyping (Gündemir et al. 2017, 35), it can also push people of racial minorities to act more like the majority members of the organization (Kirby et al. 2020, 1144). In addition, Gündemir et al. (2017, 35) question the efficacy of the colorblind strategy as its advantages are mostly short-term, which tend to revoke and lead to increasing prejudice in the long term.

In addition to multicultural and colorblind strategies, Gündemir et al. mention a more recent diversity management strategy for organizations, value-in-merit, which promotes equal treatment and rewarding solely based on proficiency without considering the person's background. However, like the other two strategies, value-in-merit has some deficiencies: it tends to overlook the obstacles and discrimination minority employees face in organizations and promote their exclusion in the workplace. To tackle the shortcomings of these individual strategies, Gündemir et al. suggest an approach that combines the diversity-appreciating aspects of multiculturalism and the promotion of equality in value-in-merit: the multicultural meritocracy. Their study revealed that multicultural meritocracy has more overall benefits than either of its components separately. It enhanced the experience of inclusion and engagement for both minority and majority members of the organization and decreased adverse stereotyping and invalidation of discrimination performed by the majority. Thus, the authors conclude that multicultural meritocracy is a more successful diversity management strategy than multiculturalism or value-in-merit individually. (Gündemir et al. 2017, 34–35, 39–40.)

Jansen et al. introduced a version of multicultural strategy labeled all-inclusive multicultural (AIM) approach, which, besides minority employees, includes also majority staff members in the organization's diversity efforts. Their study concluded that implementing the AIM approach resulted in the majority staff

members feeling more included in the organization compared to applying the “traditional” multicultural strategy. This, in return, led to a more supportive attitude towards the organization’s diversity practices and internationalization among the majority staff members. In conclusion, Jansen et al. argue that the AIM approach is more effective than the multicultural strategy, as the support of the majority staff members is crucial for implementing diversity management successfully. (Jansen et al. 2015, 817, 819, 826.)

4.4 Intercultural competence

Functioning in a multicultural and international environment successfully requires comprehending, endorsing, and adjusting to diverse cultures, and the ability to react to cultural differences accordingly. These attributes together form the basis of intercultural competence. (Matveev 2017, 5.) According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, intercultural competence consists of four components presented in Figure 4: recognition, respect, reconciliation, and realization. Recognition indicates the ability to recognize the characteristics of distinct cultures and the way these characteristics influence a person’s notion of the world. Respect refers to accepting and respecting cultural differences, and thus, treating people the same regardless of their cultural background. Reconciliation is the competence of harmonizing and combining different, often contradicting, cultural values and assumptions to allow people from different cultures to cooperate. Reconciliation can occur on all seven of Trompenaars’ dimensions of culture discussed in Chapter 3.2. Finally, realization is recognizing and implementing practices that help reconcile cultural differences and, as a result, operate more successfully in a multicultural environment. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 180–182, 186–191.)

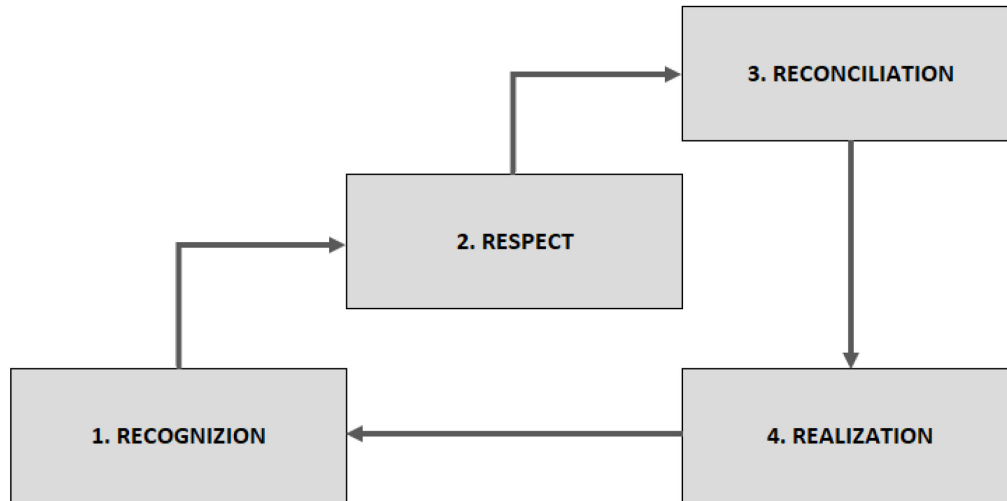


Figure 4. Components of intercultural competence (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2020, 181, adapted)

Medkova studied the formation and development of intercultural competence among the staff of a Finnish university of applied sciences. According to the study, intercultural competence is composed of four factors: attitude, knowledge, skills, and behavior, and is affected by several elements, such as willingness, openness, curiosity, motivation, empathy, communication, support, commitment, and experience. Motivation and support can also be the cause of challenges when a person is not motivated to develop personal intercultural competence or when there are not enough time and resources to provide intercultural competence training in an organization. Medkova suggests that the organization should provide both organizational and individual or group support during the process of improving staff's intercultural competence, as well as incorporate an intercultural competence aspect into the organization's internal and external quality audits. (Medkova 2015, 78–81.)

4.5 Organizational vs. national culture

Hofstede et al. (2010, 344–345) define organizational culture as “the collective programming of the mind” among the members and, unlike in national culture, other stakeholders, of an organization that separates them from the ones of other organizations. Schein and Schein (2017, 53) point out that the three-layered view on culture, discussed earlier in Chapter 2.1, can be used to portray any type of

culture, including organizational culture. The first, outermost, layer includes the organization's visible elements, for example, the office buildings, the dress code of the employees, the products being sold, and the language used. The middle layer consists of the values, objectives, and visions of the organization that are communicated outwards. Finally, the third layer contains the core assumptions and morals that are rooted in the organization by its founders, which are often subconscious. (Schein & Schein 2019, 50–55, 59.) According to Schein (2009 cited in Browaeys & Price 2015, 206), organizational culture has three key prerequisites, as it must persist in its external surroundings, consider the national culture of its country of operations, and incorporate human features, such as mutual language and interaction.

The main distinction between organizational and national culture stems from their contrasting combination of values and practices, as presented in Figure 5. National culture includes the majority of a person's values that are obtained from family, school, and overall living environment during the first years of life. Organizational culture, on the other hand, is usually adopted as an adult when entering a new workplace. It contains mostly the organization's practices, as, at this point, a person has already internalized most of their basic values. (Hofstede et al. 2010, 346.)

Level

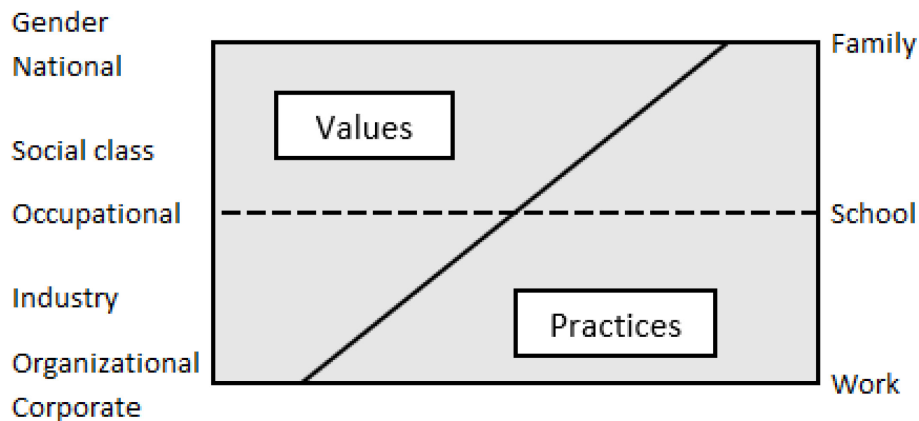


Figure 5. The balance of values and practices for various levels of culture (Hofstede 2010, 347, adapted)

Thomas and Peterson share a similar view with Hofstede et al., as they state that the key differences between organizational and national culture are found in their composition, as well as the manner and time in which the cultures are entered and disseminated. Furthermore, they suggest a person is engaged in organizational culture only to a limited degree, compared to being completely and unconditionally embedded in national culture. Despite these differences, organizational culture should be viewed through the characteristics of national culture to understand the reasons behind the way people conduct themselves in the organization. (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 36–37.) Organizational culture is often dictated by the dominant nationality of the staff or the management (Castaneda & Bateh 2013, 44). National culture affects the organizational structure, the management style, the existing protocols, and the mutually agreed standards within the organization (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 190–191, 197). Examples of how different types of national cultures influence organizations and work life in general are found in Chapter 3.

The benefit of an organizational culture is that it gives the organization a distinguishable identity and its members a direction to operate in accordance with the organization's objectives. However, a strong organizational culture can also hamper the implementation of change and generate friction between distinct organizational subcultures, especially in the case of a merger or an acquisition. (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 194, 197.)

4.6 Multicultural staff in Finnish higher education institutions

As part of the global framework, the essential objectives of higher education institutions are the creation of new knowledge, the development of global wellbeing, and the education of international experts. In Finland, increasing the internationalization of higher education institutes is a nationwide goal. It is stated in the Finnish higher education and research internationalization policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture that by 2025, Finland should be globally known for its advanced higher education and research, have an established position in global information and proficiency networks and value chains, and be easily accessed by the foreign workforce. To reach these goals, the policy emphasizes

the importance of increasing international mobility and RDI and creating a truly international and multicultural environment in the higher education community by, for example, developing the intercultural and language competence of staff and students. According to the policy, the recruiting and HR practices of higher education institutes should also support internationalization by focusing on the recruitment of international staff and developing services to facilitate the integration process. (Yhteistyössä maailman parasta... 2017, 17–21, 26–28, 30–31, 33.)

In the past 10 years, the share of non-Finnish residents in Finland has increased from 3,8 % to 6,7 % (Väestö äidinkielen ja kansalaisuuden mukaan 2024). Likewise, the share of international staff has increased in Finnish higher education institutions. In 2023, 2,3 % of staff in Finnish universities of applied sciences (UAS) and 20,1 % of staff in Finnish universities were non-Finnish, while in 2013 the percentages were 1,3 for the UAS and 11,6 for the universities. These statistics show that Finnish UAS are still far behind Finnish universities in terms of staff internationality and the gap between them has not diminished in recent years. (Korkeakoulujen henkilöstö 2024.)

From 2021 to 2022, the KOTAMO project studied the perception of equality, non-discrimination, and diversity among the staff in Finnish higher education institutions and the ways the institutions have promoted these three factors. The study centered on gender equality and ethnic diversity, which was considered to include a variety of aspects, such as nationality, religion, and appearance. The results revealed the many challenges ethnic minority members face in the higher education community. Nearly half of them had experienced discrimination at the workplace especially when not fluent in Finnish. The forms of discrimination included being excluded from work-related networks and conversations and having significantly worse career advancement and job retention opportunities than the ethnic majority, Finns. The ethnic minority members also sensed that they could not be fully themselves or express their conflicting thoughts at the workplace without facing adverse consequences. The ethnic minority respondents from the UAS stated that the prevailing work environment and

workplace wellbeing were the main reasons they wanted to leave their academic career. They also felt the UAS did not strive to increase internationalization and workplace diversity enough. To tackle these challenges, the KOTAMO project suggests several corrective measures for higher education institutions, such as communicating their equality and non-discrimination policies more effectively, organizing non-discrimination and inclusion training for staff, and creating and communicating rules for an inclusive work culture. (Jousilahti et al. 2022, 8, 27, 31–36, 55, 64, 91–92.)

5 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the data collection and analysis process of this study is presented both in theory and in practice. First, selecting the appropriate research method is explained, followed by a description of the data collection methods. Lastly, the data analysis is explained in more detail.

5.1 Research process

When starting a study, one must decide the research method most appropriate for its objective. The method can be quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both. The type of information the study is aiming for determines the most suitable method. (Vilkkä 2021, 53–55, 58.)

The purpose of quantitative research is to make generalizations, which requires knowing the phenomenon being studied well. The generalization goal of the study is a sufficient argument for choosing a quantitative research method. (Kananen 2019, 25–26.) The objective of a quantitative study is usually in the form of a new hypothesis that needs to be tested. In quantitative research, the assumption is that the subject of research is not dependent on the researcher or theory. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 73.) The data gained from quantitative research is usually presented in a numeric form. Therefore, the method is appropriate when the research material can be transformed into a testable and measurable format. Data collection methods used in quantitative research are surveys, systematic

observation, and using available registers and statistics. (Vilkka 2021, 55, 76.) The most common quantitative method is a survey (Kananen 2019, 30).

The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is in the nature of the research material and the objective of the study. Instead of numbers, qualitative research uses words to describe the data obtained. Also, the objective of the study is often descriptive. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 73.) Qualitative research has four key features. It seeks to create notions and presumptions rather than test the existing ones, produces highly descriptive outputs, focuses on understanding the meanings people give to different experiences, and utilizes the researcher as the main medium in the research process. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 35–37.) Similarly, Puusa and Juuti (2020, 73–74) state that the emphasis of qualitative research is on the researcher's interaction with a single observation and the perspective of the participants of the study. Kananen (2019, 26) argues that often, the only necessary justification for choosing a qualitative research method is the need to understand a certain phenomenon.

There are various approaches to conducting a qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell introduce the six most common ones: basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, ethnography, and qualitative case study. A basic qualitative study is, as its name suggests, a customary qualitative study without further aspects. The main objective of a basic qualitative study is to discover and understand the different connotations people address to certain experiences. Phenomenology focuses on comprehending the essence of a specific phenomenon, often a strong human emotion such as love or hate. The grounded theory approach strives to form a new theory, and narrative inquiry utilizes stories as data. Ethnography studies the culture of a specific group, with the researcher most commonly staying on-site for a long period of time to observe the group. A qualitative case study is a thorough breakdown of a delimited unit: the case. The case can be a variety of things: a person, a team, a course, or an organization, as long as the unit being studied has boundaries. The finiteness of the unit can be determined by evaluating whether the number of

potential people to interview or the time available for making perceptions is limited. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 40–56.)

The objective of this study followed the one of a basic qualitative study: to understand the needs and viewpoints of Xamk's international, multicultural staff regarding the work environment. To a certain extent, the study also resembled a qualitative case study, as the focus was on a specific organization and its staff. Hence, the number of possible participants was limited. In addition, not only were the international staff members interviewed but also representatives from supervisory, HR, and sustainability positions at Xamk, which supports the idea of gaining an in-depth understanding of the situation. A complete case study would have likely required acquiring insights on multiculturalism even more broadly in the organization by utilizing additional sources of information besides interviews, for example, observations. Although ethnography studies culture, the approach did not apply to this study as the focus was not on a particular culture but on multiculturalism composed of various cultures.

According to Carr and Kemmis (1995 cited in Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 29), there are three forms of research: interpretive, positivist, and critical. A study can include either one or more of these orientations. The form of research most frequently used in qualitative research is the interpretive orientation, sometimes referred to as constructivism. The basic idea of this orientation is that there are several realities or understandings of the same occurrence. Hence, one's personal interpretation is incorporated into every experience. On the contrary, the positivist orientation claims that there is only one reality that can be measured and monitored. The critical perspective suggests that the distribution of power influences how one experiences reality in social, cultural, and political instances. The goals of the critical orientation are to challenge current social structures, make a change, and empower the people who experience injustice. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 29–34.)

The form of research applied in this study was mostly interpretive, as the study focused on the experiences and viewpoints of Xamk's international staff. It was

not assumed nor expected that the participants could give only right or wrong answers. To some extent, a critical perspective was also utilized as the study aimed to develop Xamk's current work environment to become equally supportive of staff members of all nationalities.

5.2 Data collection

The majority of qualitative studies use nonprobability sampling to select the sample that is being analyzed. The most common form of this sampling method is purposive sampling, which means that the sampled units are chosen based on their ability to provide information on the phenomenon being studied and their compliance with the predefined criteria set by the researcher. The criteria should be derived from the objective of the study. There are various types of purposive sampling, such as typical, unique, and convenience sampling, as well as maximum variation. Typical sampling refers to constructing a sample that best represents the standard and regular individuals or situations of the studied subject. Conversely, unique sampling uses rare and unusual representatives of a certain phenomenon to compose a sample. Convenience sampling is selecting a sample that is the easiest to compound on the basis of, for example, available time and resources. Maximum variation strives to select a sample that is as comprehensive and diverse as possible. The optimal size of a sample is difficult to determine as it depends on the study in question and its purpose. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985 cited in Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 101), the size of a sample is sufficient when the saturation point is reached, meaning that new data stops emerging from the most recent additions to the sample. In interviews, the saturation point is reached when the answers to the interview questions start repeating themselves with new interviewees. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 98–99, 101.)

The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling. The interviewees were chosen based on the assumption that they can provide information that helps answer the research questions. To a certain extent, the Finnish interviewees were selected using maximum variation as they all work in different positions and are from different units. The Finnish participants included

one HR representative, one sustainability representative, and two supervisors from units that had international staff members. To select the supervisors for the sample, the author received a list of units with at least one non-Finnish staff member from Xamk's HR department. The author contacted the Finnish participants directly via e-mail, requesting participation in the study. The e-mail included a short description of the study and the reason the person was selected for the interview. The research information sheet and privacy notice -documents were also attached. Four of the five persons contacted were willing to participate in the study. One supervisor who was contacted did not react to the e-mail. The sample of the Finnish interviewees was kept small intentionally, as the focus of the study was intended to be on the international participants.

There were some challenges in selecting the sample of international staff members, as the HR department of Xamk was not allowed to reveal the nationalities of its employees. Thus, the author could not contact the non-Finnish interviewees directly. The e-mail request for participation with the research information sheet and privacy notice -documents were sent by the HR in May 2024 to all Xamk's non-Finnish staff members, asking the volunteers to contact the author within 10 days. As Xamk had only 22 non-Finnish staff members at the time of the sampling, the number of potential interviewees was very limited. The willingness to participate strongly affected the final size of the sample. Five persons volunteered to participate in the study. Therefore, there were not enough interviewees to reach the saturation point, and the sample was selected based on the interviewees available, representing convenience sampling. The international staff members are a heterogeneous group that consists of various nationalities; there is no "typical" representative of the group. Hence, utilizing typical or unique sampling would not have been optimal.

The data collection method most frequently used in qualitative research is interviewing. Interviews can be divided into three categories according to their level of structure: highly structured or standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured or informal. In highly structured interviews, the questions and their order are the same for every interviewee. This type of interview often resembles

a survey commonly utilized in quantitative research in a written form. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher can more freely alter the wording of the questions and change the order in which they are asked for different interviewees. Semi-structured interviews can also include more structured segments. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 106–108.) Pitkäranta (2014, 92) uses the term theme interview interchangeably with, and Eskola et al. (2018, 25) instead of, semi-structured interview. Puusa (2020, 106–107), however, critiques this view and separates the two types, clarifying that, in semi-structured interviews, the questions are predefined, but in theme interviews, only the interview themes, which makes them more flexible than semi-structured interviews. The most informal types of interviews, the unstructured ones, are practical when the researcher does not know enough about the topic being studied and, thus, cannot predetermine the interview questions (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 108).

This study used personal semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method as this interview type allows the researcher to ask for clarifications, if needed, and alter the order of the questions according to the course of the interview. Had the interview been too structured, some unexpected and potentially important information might have been excluded. In addition, as the author had conducted a thorough literature review to gain an understanding of the topic, it was unnecessary to utilize unstructured interviews. At the beginning of the interview, the purpose of the study and the course of the interview were iterated for the participants, and their potential questions were answered. The participants were told they were not obligated to answer any of the questions they were uncomfortable with. They were also reassured that their identities would not be revealed in the Thesis report and the interview recordings and transcriptions would be destroyed once they were no longer needed. The author had prepared 15 open-ended questions for the international interviewees (Appendix 1) and 13 for the other, Finnish, interviewees (Appendix 2). Some of the questions were the same for both international and Finnish interviewees, although the international participants were interviewed in English and the Finnish participants in Finnish. Some clarifying questions were also asked during the interviews if needed. The predefined questions were sometimes asked in a

different order than initially intended if it better suited the issues the interviewee was discussing to avoid disturbing the flow and course of the interview. The participants received the interview questions beforehand to be able to prepare and feel as comfortable as possible to participate in the interview. The consent to personal data processing and research participation document was also sent to the participants before the interviews. They were given the opportunity to either sign the document or give their consent verbally at the beginning of the interview. The interviews were conducted during a period of four weeks in May and June 2024.

There are three common ways of collecting information from interviews. The most frequently used way is recording the interview either with an audio recorder or a video camera. This method allows the researcher to capture everything that is being said. Recorded interviews should be transcribed either by the researcher or by suitable software. The second way of collecting data is taking notes simultaneously with the interview, which inevitably leaves some information not being collected. The third, and least recommended, way of gathering information is making notes after the interview. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 126–127.)

The interviews for this study were conducted via video conferencing software because of the possibility of recording and transcribing the interviews automatically, which allowed the author to focus on the interview. After the persons contacted expressed their interest in participating in the study, the author scheduled the interviews and sent links for the meetings to the participants' personal work e-mails. Most participants had their video camera on during the interview; two participated only with audio. After the interviews, the author compared the automatic transcriptions to the recordings and revised and corrected the transcriptions accordingly. Altogether, the interviews resulted in 458 minutes of recording and 135 pages of transcription.

5.3 Data analysis

Data analysis aims to answer the research question by understanding and interpreting the gathered data and is ideally done alongside data collection. The

first step of data analysis in qualitative research is identifying units of data that help answer the research question. These units can be words or larger ensembles. The next step is coding, which means making notes next to relevant units of data and forming categories by combining similar notes. The categories are revised and redefined until the final set of categories is formed and named. Then, there are three levels at which data can be analyzed. The simplest level is arranging the data in chronological order and presenting it in a descriptive form. The next level utilizes notions to both describe and interpret the data. The third and most abstract level is making conclusions and creating theories from the data. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 185–196.)

The data analysis for this study was performed according to the basic analysis process of qualitative research described above. The analysis started by highlighting parts of the transcriptions that were relevant in answering the research question. Then, the author narrowed the highlighted sections down to short codes and combined similar codes in a separate document to form categories. Some categories with similar codes were merged, and some codes were transferred from one category to another, which continued until the five main categories that provided the foundation for the results were formed. The results were analyzed by comparing them to the theoretical framework of the thesis and identifying similarities and differences between them. The conclusions were drawn based on this comparison and the author's inference. The purpose in this case was not to create new theories.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

After a thorough analysis of the data of the study, five main categories that could help answer the research question were identified: work community, language, culture, organization and other development suggestions and wishes. Each category is presented in a separate subsection in order of relevance. The order was determined based on the frequency with which each topic was mentioned in the interviews. Also, the emphasis and importance that the interviewees placed on the different topics were considered. The order of the categories was the same when taken into account only the international (intl.) staff members'

interviews and when combining the results from both the intl. and the Finnish staff members. The interviewees are purposely referred to with gender-neutral pronouns to ensure their anonymity.

6.1 Work community

Matters related to the work community were mentioned most frequently by the interviewees. It became apparent in the interviews that the people who make up the work community have a significant impact on creating the work environment. The issues placed in this category can be divided into two themes: about half of the comments referred to the general interaction with colleagues, and the other half to the importance of having international people and international cooperation within the work community.

Each of the five intl. interviewees discussed the positive experiences they had had with their colleagues at Xamk. It was evident from the interviews that good colleagues were one of the main factors that facilitated the integration into the work community and helped the intl. staff members adopt Xamk's practices. The interviewees valued the support, friendliness and respect that were present in the work community, as narrated in the quotes below:

"I could say only positive things about my integration experience. Everywhere, I have got a lot of help from different departments [...] Everybody is ready to help. So I can't say any negative things at all." – Intl. staff member

"From the human perspective, people are really friendly. At the same time, really open-minded also. People are open to listen to your ideas. People are open to welcome your ideas. Not only listen, but welcome and also consider and apply your ideas. I think that is one of the biggest examples of inclusiveness." – Intl. staff member

"Everything is, everybody is supported, whatever they need, whatever they have to do. Although we are so terribly busy, it doesn't feel like that because we have our... the community is very supportive. [...] I believe, it is so important what we do there and how we respect each other, how we work together. We work wonderfully together." – Intl. staff member

One interviewee further elaborated on the importance of respect towards colleagues at the workplace, especially when there are disagreements. The interviewee stated that these differences of opinion may not always be due to cultural issues but personal views. Nonetheless, they suggested that even in the

case of extremely contrasting cultural viewpoints, you would have to be able to discuss them respectfully. The interviewee explained:

“I mean, we don't have to be friends with everybody, but you have to treat everybody respectfully in a work environment since, of course, we do not get to choose who we work with, but it's our duty as employees to respect enough colleagues that we can function together.” – Intl. staff member

Most of the intl. interviewees discussed the significance of being part of the work community and having a welcoming atmosphere to enable it. Likewise, the sustainability representative who was interviewed suggested that having a welcoming and accepting atmosphere could become a competitive edge for Xamk and help attract more international staff, provided that the organization continues working for it and actively promotes this image outward. Two intl. interviewees mentioned that the reason they initially wanted to work at Xamk and continue working there was that they felt very welcomed from the start. One interviewee described the ease of fitting into the work community and being accepted as oneself:

“[...] it's extremely easy to be yourself and to speak about your views. [...] it's really, really comfortable to be just yourself. And it's not hard to fit in. You can just be yourself and still you are able to fit in and there is a very nice culture of welcoming individual personalities.” – Intl. staff member

When asked how Xamk as an employer should acknowledge a minority staff member's cultural or national background, one interviewee reminded that highlighting one's background excessively can, in fact, hinder the integration into the work community:

“There is always these two points to this: you want to be integrated, you don't want to be assimilated, you want to be part of the community. [...] Not acknowledging like with something special, but just showing that you respect who they are, where they come from. Not really anything that would make them then even more bitter if they feel that ‘OK, now I get too much attention’.” – Intl. staff member

One intl. interviewee suggested that Xamk arranged more networking meetings for staff members to make getting to know people and facilities outside of one's unit easier. They further elaborated on how crucial it is for staff to network in a university setting, as inter-collaboration of teaching and research is often encouraged and promoted. The nature and content of the networking events

could be formed based on the needs and wishes of the staff, as the interviewee explained:

“There will be one day networking event and there could be a survey form and people can provide their ideas through the survey form, and based on that, the nature of the networking event would be formed, so that people who have similar interests work-wise or hobby-wise could be one part of a small group maybe and then it would be easier to know people.” – Intl. staff member

On the contrary, another intl. interviewee raised the question of how much of the integration should be Xamk’s and how much the staff member’s responsibility and emphasized the intl. staff’s own commitment in making friends and integrating into the work community. The interviewee stated that intl. staff members themselves should be active in inviting colleagues over and demonstrating their culture to others to facilitate the integration process and the formation of relationships.

One of the interviewed supervisors complemented the views of the intl. staff by explaining the importance workplace communality has in helping intl. staff integrate and stated that remote work has made it challenging. The supervisor continued to argue that it would be beneficial if the colleagues of a new intl. staff member spent some free time socializing with the new team member to make them feel welcome and enable them to discuss work-related issues in a more relaxed setting. The supervisor also suggested that Xamk provide a small monetary contribution for the staff members’ joint free-time activities.

The importance of colleagues was also reflected in the intl. interviewees’ various examples of their support. The colleagues often made sure that their intl. coworkers got all the important information and announcements on time, which were not always provided in English, as stated by these two interviewees:

“I have colleagues that for sure will tell if something important is coming up, and it's like, ‘Hey, you know this?’ [...] So I have been fortunate to have good colleagues.” – Intl. staff member

“[...] my colleagues, they have been awesome [...] they do support us a lot. And when we do have some kind of problems, they help us all the time to translate something from Finnish to English and backwards.” – Intl. staff member

One intl. interviewee mentioned that their colleagues had helped with many employment-related issues, such as using internal information systems, which, in their opinion, should have been their supervisor's responsibility. One of the interviewed supervisors wished they had more time for the actual supervisor work, as the teams are often large, and the supervisors' responsibilities include various other tasks as well. The intl. interviewee stated:

“For example, when I just started, I had the problem, and actually my colleague, not my supervisor, helped me because all the hours collecting systems, and all these things, I have never used those, and I had no idea how to use those. So my colleague explained me everything, but I feel that it was something that should be on the table of my supervisor. [...] All the details about the employment, I just heard those from my colleagues who decided to step in and help.” – Intl. staff member

Although most of the comments regarding colleagues at Xamk were positive, two intl. interviewees had also experienced some negativity in the work community. One of the interviewees felt that some Finnish colleagues had a petty attitude towards intl. staff, and purposely tried to make a point that no special arrangements should be made for them, such as using English at the workplace. The other interviewee discussed an incident during a staff webinar, where the organizer had asked whether any of the participants wanted to hear the matters discussed in English, and one Finnish participant made it clear that it should not be done:

“But then one of our colleagues, Finnish colleague, said: ‘Maassa maan tavalla (When in Rome, do as the Romans do)’ and this was so disturbing me. This was so insulting. [...] And these types of attitudes are probably something that could also influence this trying us to get to the point where we could say that we are multicultural.” – Intl. staff member

The interviewee continued to say that they agreed with the comment to a certain point, as in Finland, one should follow the rules of Finnish society, but they found the way and the situation in which the comment was made offensive.

Most of the interviewees, both intl. and Finnish, considered having people with intl. background at the workplace and collaborating with intl. partners as essential factors in creating an international and multicultural work environment. These comments were mainly concerned with the composition of the work community

rather than culture and were, thus, placed in this category instead of the culture category. There was variation in whether the interviewees considered Xamk's current work environment international and multicultural. Some interviewees felt it had not yet been achieved, as they had had so few intl. contacts at work, and some, on the other hand, pointed out various reasons why they viewed Xamk's work environment as international and multicultural:

"To tell the truth, I don't know anybody who is an international person in --- (my campus). [...] I don't know for sure, but I think that if there are, there are very few international workers." – Intl. staff member

"Not really. I don't think so. Maybe just because I didn't meet these people, although I think I know a lot of people, but I never met anyone international, at least in --- (my campus)." – Intl. staff member

"I think Xamk has multicultural and international work environment. There are several aspects. Firstly, what I see from my perspective, that we are having a lot of international collaborations and cooperations with universities in Europe, outside Europe also, so there is... would not say a lot of exchanges, but a few exchange of teachers is happening. So that brings one aspect of internationalization." – Intl. staff member

The latter interviewee continued their argument by mentioning the intl. degree programs Xamk has and the intl. students that are involved, which increase the internationalization and multiculturalism of the organization. On the contrary, another intl. interviewee was disappointed in the decreased number of exchange students and the few intl. degree programs on their campus, which, in their opinion, contributed to Xamk not having a fully international and multicultural work environment. The interviewee speculated that the opportunity to study remotely has made it less motivating for new intl. students to come study at Xamk as the Finnish students tend to utilize remote studies and not interact with the exchange students:

"I had these exchange students. All Finnish students were online. In the class I saw only these exchange students. Of course, for them, it is not interesting. They would like to be mixed with the students, but Finnish students are online. [...], These exchange students are coming here and they are working or communicating with each other. [...] Why should they go to Finland?" – Intl. staff member

One intl. staff member and one supervisor also brought up the idea of utilizing intl. interns as a way to increase multiculturalism and internationality at Xamk. The supervisor recommended that Xamk systematically starts hiring intl. interns

for projects, for example, which could act as a positive example for the organization's stakeholders. The intl. staff member considered internships a good way for intl. students to acquire permanent employment at Xamk, and stated:

"I know that Xamk is open to hire interns and it gives some kind of working places for international students for their practical training, so I think it's something that for sure promotes and increases the chances to get more international people on board." – Intl. staff member

Besides hiring intl. staff, a few of the interviewees mentioned the challenge of retaining the existing staff. As a solution to this challenge, one intl. interviewee suggested that Xamk granted new intl. staff members a longer, perhaps permanent, work contract:

"And probably we have to think to increase our multicultural environment with retaining these talents that come. [...] Very often they might feel not wanted if they don't have the full support or full guarantee that they will have a bit of longer contract." – Intl. staff member

One supervisor predicted that Xamk must rely more on hiring intl. staff in the future, as the availability of the Finnish workforce declines, and insisted that the organization should proactively start preparing for this change and focusing on hiring and retaining the intl. talents:

"Siinä vaiheessa, kun meidän tilanne työvoiman saatavuudessa heikkenee, niin varmasti joudutaan vielä enemmän miettimään sitä, että miten me voitaisiin tukea sitä rekrytointiprosessia ja sitä, että me tunnistetaan niissä kansainvälisissä osaajissa niitä potentiaaleja, joita me voidaan käyttää."
When our situation in terms of labor availability deteriorates, we will definitely have to think even more about how we could support the recruitment process and how we recognize the potential among the international talents that we can utilize. – Supervisor

One of the supervisors reminded that Xamk currently has no intl. supervisors and argued that hiring the first one could be a major step in transforming the management towards a more inclusive direction. The sustainability representative revealed that to recruit more (culturally and otherwise) diverse staff, Xamk is planning a diversity clause to be used in recruiting ads, which invites people from diverse backgrounds to be a part of the work community. The interviewee also mentioned that the plan is to use as diverse interview teams as possible in future job interviews.

One of the intl. interviewees added, that Xamk also has staff with Finnish dual citizenships, who are not native Finns and are not counted as intl. staff in the statistics. The interviewee argued that they have a different cultural background than native Finns, and thus suggested that the number of intl. staff is higher than on paper.

6.2 Language

Language was another key theme the interviewees discussed that contributed to creating the work environment, with almost as many references as the work community. The issues mentioned concerned access to information, communication and related challenges, and language learning and requirements. None of the intl. staff members thought they had the same access to information at Xamk as the Finnish staff members, and the experience of exclusion was mentioned several times. The English information in the organization's intranet was found insufficient compared to the amount of information available in Finnish. Some interviewees understood Finnish to the extent that they could cope with the available Finnish information, and some had asked a colleague for help or tried to translate the necessary information themselves. The struggles with the lack of information are described by these three interviewees:

"For sure not, it is not available at Xamk to the level that it should be. It has never been and I cherish the day when it will come. It has been promised since, I don't know... since the start of my employment that things will come up in English." – Intl. staff member

"And sometimes it's coming like...the deadline is over, but the information in English is appearing. So it means that I need to translate it via Google Translate for the important information or maybe ask my colleagues what should I do in order to be in line with everybody and not to be late." – Intl. staff member

"I don't usually try to access anymore anything in English." – Intl. staff member

Two intl. interviewees expressed that they could access all necessary information regarding their specific work in English, but besides that, they felt that there was some information that was lacking, as this interviewee explained:

"If I think only about my specific work, which is related with ---, then I have all the information in English, but some extra information, which is related to, for example, what happened in the board meeting discussion of Xamk, maybe that type of information is not available in English." – Intl. staff member

The type of information, the interviewees mentioned, that was missing in English included documents related to employment, internal course/training material, internal webinars, and internal news, for example. One intl. interviewee suggested adding English subtitles to recordings of internal webinars and info sessions for intl. staff to access them afterwards. All the Finnish interviewees agreed with the intl. staff and admitted that the level of English information was not adequate yet. The HR representative mentioned that to support the intl. staff better, the HR department had recently started doing induction sessions in English with the opportunity to ask questions. One supervisor pointed out that access to information is a significant factor in making the intl. staff feel welcome and respected at the workplace and equal to the Finnish staff. The other supervisor made a valid point in stating that one's working language does not contribute to the amount of information they need:

“Jos vaikka verrataan meidän intraa, niin suomenkielisessä intrassa on vaikka vallon ja mitä tietoa ja englanninkielisessä intrassa on sitten paljon vähemmän sitä sisältöä. Mutta eihän se niin mene, että jos työskentelykielesi on muu kuin suomi, niin sinä tarvitsisit jotenkin vähemmän sitä tietoa.”
If you compare our intranet, the Finnish intranet has all this information, and the English intranet has much less of that content. But it doesn't work that way, that if your working language is other than Finnish, you would somehow need less information. – Supervisor

The same supervisor and the sustainability representative both reminded that at Xamk, every employee can publish content in the organization's intranet, which makes the language issue challenging as not everyone remembers to or is capable of preparing the content in both languages:

”Toki siinä on sitten haasteita, että meillä jokainen työntekijä pystyy tekemään niitä uutisia meidän intranettiin, niin siinä on sitten aina...se on siitä vähän tekijästä kiinni, että muistavatko aina tehdä sitten molemmilla kielillä.”
Of course, there are challenges because every employee is able to publish news in our intranet, so there is always...it depends a bit on the author, whether they always remember to do it in both languages. – Sustainability representative

The experiences regarding verbal communication at the workplace varied between the intl. interviewees. In some units, the internal meetings were held in Finnish and in other units in English. A few interviewees mentioned that there was the possibility to speak in either language, and the supervisor would then

translate, if necessary. One interviewee articulated their disappointment in having the meetings in Finnish as they could not understand anything that was being discussed:

“These meetings, they were in Finnish. And I was sitting there for one hour and maybe someone asked me one question in English, but then they continued to talk in Finnish. [...] Maybe to consider who you invite and why you invite them, and if you invite someone who doesn't speak Finnish, maybe it makes sense to speak English.” – Intl. staff member

Most of the intl. interviewees mentioned that the people in their unit or at least their immediate colleagues use English when communicating with them, which made it easy to participate in conversations with colleagues. One interviewee acknowledged the excellent English skills of Xamk's staff:

“Staff, they are so communicative. So everybody's speaking English, everybody everywhere. I can't say that I have met sometimes a person who was not speaking English. Everybody, including cleaners, everybody (speaks English).” – Intl. staff member

Some interviewees mentioned that they understood Finnish a little and could hold a conversation with a Finnish-speaking person but preferred to answer in English when asked a question in Finnish. Two intl. interviewees felt that some Finnish staff members were reluctant to communicate in English, which had led to less interaction with them, as this interviewee described:

“We have this our break room there. When we go there, we have one colleague who always gets out if there is ---, --- (colleagues) and I. We usually speak English with each other. And when she enters and sees that we are there speaking English, she immediately leaves.” – Intl. staff member

One interviewee described humor, especially black humor, as the most challenging part in understanding Finnish and wished that it could be restrained a little at the workplace when there is a non-Finnish speaking person around as it can easily make one feel excluded when everyone else is laughing and having fun:

“You have to maybe tone down the black humor. Say that if there will be a lot of Finns and one foreigner and a lot of the jokes and so on would be ongoing in Finnish and people are laughing, having a great time, but the non-Finnish speaking person is around and they don't get it at all. You should definitely look into not doing that on a on a large scale simply because it is very easy as well to be or to get the feeling of being left out.” – Intl. staff member

Each of the intl. interviewees used English as their working language. Two of them mentioned that they had never studied Finnish as it was not required to acquire their current position. One interviewee stated that when they initially applied for a job at Xamk, there were not many opportunities available for non-Finnish speaking people, and continued:

“I have been very lucky in the way that there has not been the demand of speaking Finnish. Of course, there has been issues with the language, since I have never really studied Finnish.” – Intl. staff member

The HR representative declared that Xamk’s recruitment ads are published in English if the position does not require Finnish language skills and mentioned that they have often been distributed on an international job search site. One supervisor challenged reconsidering the level of Finnish skills required from a person applicable for a position at Xamk, as the standards are often high, and asked the organization to question whether Finnish is necessarily a requirement for certain positions. They also suggested that the language awareness of supervisors should be improved to better evaluate the language skills of a job applicant. The supervisor stated:

”[...] mikä se toleranssi on sen ihmisten tai työhön hakevien henkilöiden kielitaidon suhteen käytännössä, että minkä verran täytyy vähintään osata suomea, että voi tulla sitten meille töihin eri tehtäviin, niin siinä on varmasti vielä tekemistä, että rimat ovat aika korkealla. [...] ehkä hieman karsastetaan sitä, että ihminen on suomen oppija.”
[...] what is the tolerance in terms of language skills of people or people applying for a job in practice, how much Finnish do you have to know in order to be able to come work for us for different positions, so there is certainly still work to be done, the bars are pretty high.
[...] perhaps there are some reservations about the person being a Finnish learner. – Supervisor

Three of the intl. interviewees considered Finnish language courses and learning Finnish an important aspect of integration. One of them reminded that learning Finnish is important not only because of the work community at Xamk but also because of the Finnish stakeholders one might cooperate with. When asked to describe a work environment that is supportive and inclusive towards staff with diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities, the same interviewee included practicing Finnish in their narrative:

“But I also feel that it’s needed sometimes to understand that to hear the Finnish language, to understand that it is important because it is important. It would be a work environment where you can freely speak to everyone in English, but sometimes you can practice Finnish with Finnish natives.” – Intl. staff member

The HR representative pointed out that Xamk provides the intl. staff members an opportunity to study Finnish, and likewise, it is possible for the staff to study English. One of the supervisors viewed the systematic language training of staff as one of the major ways Xamk has promoted a multicultural and international work environment. The same supervisor mentioned having heard some Finnish colleagues express their concern regarding whether their English skills are sufficient to cope with the increasingly international community at Xamk.

6.3 Culture

Cultural issues were the third most common theme covered in the interviews. Gaining intercultural competence and understanding cultural differences was deemed important by the interviewees. Both the intl. and the Finnish staff members mentioned several ways in which the intercultural competence of Xamk’s staff could be developed. Four intl. staff members considered cultural studies and courses a good way to learn about different cultures. One of them suggested that Xamk organize an intercultural communication and competence course that every staff member should complete:

“Maybe that would be some cultural awareness studies going on and that would be part of when staff is being hired and are working at Xamk that there would be a course of internal intercultural communication and competence ongoing that people should go through.” – Intl. staff member

The interviewee continued to illustrate an idea of a “study bank” in which staff could find key information about different countries and cultures they could study, especially before a work trip abroad:

“I think that it would be very good to create maybe a study bank that if, for example, somebody is going to travel to, say, China, that there will be a quick do’s and don’ts thingy if people are interested in it and that would be promoted that staff members could study these mini courses or look into the information material.” – Intl. staff member

Despite their costs, one intl. interviewee mentioned trips abroad as a way to gain intercultural competence. Three intl. interviewees found cultural events valuable in learning about the customs and characteristics of other cultures. They suggested different activities that could take place in these events, such as food tasting, celebrating cultural holidays and inviting representatives of different cultures to speak at the events. Two of the interviewees stated:

“You can also celebrate other holidays from other cultures and people from that culture can explain what this holiday is about and why they do certain things and I think it’s something that is first of all interesting to participate. You don’t feel really mandatory. You can have fun and you can learn in the process.” – Intl. staff member

“It might help to learn about different cultures, so it will be beneficial from Xamk’s perspective also and it will be beneficial for the person who is working at Xamk to promote their culture.” – Intl. staff member

The HR representative revealed that a cultural day was planned for the current year. In addition, a workshop, where participants could learn about cultures through different dramatized situations, was being organized, according to one of the interviewees. The sustainability representative explained the importance of ensuring every staff event Xamk organizes is inclusive of all cultures. They provided an example of a previous staff event that included a meditative activity in which representatives of some religions could not participate. The sustainability representative commented:

*”Sitten Xamk oppi virheistään ja aina pitää tarjota joko vaihtoehtoista tai sitten tarkastella sitä toimintaa sillä lailla, että siellä ei olisi mitään sellaista, mihin joku ei voisi osallistua.”
Then Xamk learned from its mistakes, and you always have to either offer an alternative or plan the activity in a way that there is nothing that someone could not participate in. – Sustainability representative*

Learning about Finnish culture was also considered crucial by all the intl. interviewees to facilitate the integration. They suggested organizing Finnish cultural courses and events to support the process. One of them believed that Finnish staff could also learn more about their home country from these events:

“I think it will also be important to do a cultural event of Finland, so that international staff member could learn more about Finland. [...] Also maybe people of Finland might also learn from that, because there is so much that diversity inside the country also.” – Intl. staff member

Some of the intl. interviewees felt very strongly about having personal responsibility in integrating into Finland and a Finnish workplace. They wanted to emphasize the fact that they had decided to move there and did not expect the employer to make excessive special arrangements to accommodate them and their culture:

“It has been my choice to move to Finland and it's been up to me to make sure that I am capable of living in a Finnish society, not to create my own society and not to demand fully inclusiveness.” – Intl. staff member

“I think that the main thing that if you want to work in a Finnish university, it's your job to follow the rules.” – Intl. staff member

“But you just need to understand the rules of the community you're joining. And in this case, you just need to understand how Finnish people think and what matters to them more: the results, the time orientation, and the fact that you're a better worker when your supervisor doesn't really need to supervise you.”– Intl. staff member

Cultural differences between Finnish people and the nationalities the interviewees represented were also pointed out by most of the intl. interviewees, as mentioned in the comment above. One of the interviewees suggested organizing a workshop in which Hofstede's cultural dimensions could be used as a foundation to learn about cultural differences and similarities. Issues in which the cultural differences were found to be most evident were communication style, time orientation, rule orientation, hierarchy, and level of individualism. One interviewee described the Finns' attention to rules:

“They (Finns) talk about rules too much all the time. And I believe that rules are rules, but if you talk too much about them, they start getting something boring that you can't really accept. But I believe that, yeah, there are a lot of differences. This communication, for example.” – Intl. staff member

One supervisor reminded that the justice system in some countries differs from Finland's, and that corruption, for example, might be more common there. They considered it essential to discuss these types of issues in an intl. work community to define what is acceptable in Finland.

Cultural differences were also considered an asset to Xamk. The Finnish interviewees were asked about the benefits that intl. and multicultural staff bring to the workplace, and they named numerous of them. One supervisor felt that the

advantages outweigh the extra work that comes with hiring intl. staff. Many of the benefits mentioned were related to versatile innovation and ideas stemming from the diverse backgrounds and expertise of staff. One supervisor stated that the argumentation power and success rate of decisions are significantly higher in an international team. The HR representative commented that working in an intl. and multicultural work community expands the intercultural and language competence of staff. The sustainability representative reminded that having a diverse staff is also an image benefit that can help attract more intl. staff and students to Xamk. One intl. interviewee commented on the topic and said that multicultural staff could enhance the work environment and make the workdays more enjoyable. Some of the advantages of intl. and multicultural staff are described in the comments below:

"[...] sitten kun on monia erilaisia ihmisiä keskustelemassa pöydän ääressä, niin on erilaisia näkökulmia, erilaisia ajatusmalleja, erilainen oppimis-, koulutustausta. Niin sitten voi syntyä sellaisia innovaatioita ja ajatuksia, mitä sellaisessa kovin homogeenisessa ryhmässä ei olisi välttämättä syntynyt. Se on usein tällainen innovatiivisuuteen ja kehitysmielisyyteen liittyvä rikkaus."

"[...] when there are many different people discussing at the table, there are different perspectives, different thought patterns, different learning and educational backgrounds. That way, these innovations and ideas can arise that would not necessarily have arisen in a very homogeneous group. It is often this kind of richness related to innovation and development. – Sustainability representative

"All these people, who are actually... They could bring something, they could enrich our environment, they could bring something to like, even more fun being in the organization." – Intl. staff member

None of the intl. interviewees said that they had experienced discrimination or inequality due to their cultural or national background at Xamk, nor had they witnessed it happening to someone else. The challenges and experiences of exclusion were mostly related to language, as described in Chapter 6.2. One Finnish interviewee had noticed some negative change in the treatment of Russian staff in the work community when Russia's war on Ukraine started in 2022 but felt it had since settled. One intl. interviewee described an incident where a colleague had approached them with a stereotype of people from their home country but said it had been the only time someone highlighted their nationality. Two intl. interviewees mentioned that it was difficult sometimes to determine whether the conflicts at work were due to cultural differences or personality. One of them added that they did not consider the people at Xamk

discriminative, and disliking a person usually has nothing to do with their culture. The experiences of three intl. interviewees are quoted below:

“I have not experienced racism or anything like that personally here at Xamk at all. [...] It's unfortunate that the language barrier is a conflict issue, but it's not cultural, it's just language.” – Intl. staff member

“I have not faced any such or experienced any such discrimination or inequality related things at Xamk.” – Intl. staff member

“[...] all of the challenges, they were more personal than cultural, because it's always really hard to draw a line if it's a very cultural thing or just person that behaves like that.” – Intl. staff member

6.4 General remarks about organization

The interviewees made some general remarks about the current state of Xamk, which are presented in this subchapter. One topic that recurred in the interviews was the organization's development in inclusiveness and multiculturalism. Most of the intl. and Finnish interviewees stated that effort was being made and practices to support multiculturalism and inclusiveness were emerging, although there was still room for development. When asked to describe a supportive and inclusive work environment for staff with diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities, four intl. interviewees referred to the current environment at Xamk. Three interviewees described the situation as follows:

“I think Xamk is on the right way and the more they do, the more inclusiveness with information in English, the better they are suited to host and handle non-native employees.” – Intl. staff member

“Even though the number of international staff is less, I think the capacity is there to be highly multicultural at least in paperwork, or in concepts, or in principles, or in philosophies, how people think. It's a very open institute, I feel, in this way.” – Intl. staff member

“We have these practices they are emerging lately. I would say probably in the last 1-2 years but not earlier. Then there are a lot of things that are more inclusive like now the students, the staff. But I still believe there is some thresholds that has to be overcome before we could say that, ‘OK, we have all the regular practices, and we should be now considering ourselves multicultural’.” – Intl. staff member

Another issue that most of the intl. and Finnish interviewees mentioned was the divergence within the organization. The interviewees felt that it depends a lot on the units and the campuses, whether the work environment is international and multicultural, or did not know the situation outside their unit or campus. Three intl.

interviewees assessed the multiculturalism and internationality of the work environment through the presence of intl. staff members. One intl. interviewee commented that the cultures in Kymenlaakso and South Savo campuses are still different despite the merger taking place a long time ago, and one interviewee pointed out that after the merger, a lot of the material that was in English in Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences disappeared because Xamk adopted the Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences' documentation standards. The internal differences are described by these two interviewees:

"I would say that it's scattered between the units of where there are non-native Finns working. And also depending on the campuses, but definitely into the units." – Intl. staff member

"[...] although we have been together for so long, our cultures are still different." – Intl. staff member

Both supervisors admitted that internationality and multiculturalism have not yet been adopted organization-wide and speculated that it might feel like an irrelevant issue to some staff members who do not work in intl. and multicultural situations regularly. One of the supervisors emphasized the importance of informing and educating staff of the different forms of internationality to make it a natural part of everyone's day-to-day work:

"Kansainvälisyydestä pitäisi vielä enemmän tehdä sitä arkipäivää myös niille henkilöille, jotka eivät tähän mennessä ole työskennelleet kansainvälisten toimintojen äärellä. Meidän talossa on kansainvälinen kv-yksikkö tai on henkilöitä, joiden työnkuvaan kuuluu kansainvälisyys. Se on tavallaan hyvä asia, mutta tavallaan se ehkä tukee sitä sellaista siiloutumista, ikään kuin kansainvälisyys ei olisi kaikkien juttu." Internationality should be made more common also for those persons who have not yet worked in international operations. In our organization, there is the international unit or there are people whose job includes internationality. On one hand, that is a good thing, but on the other hand it might support that kind of siloing, as if internationality is not everyone's issue. – Supervisor

Three intl. interviewees mentioned they did not know whether Xamk had any guidelines to support multiculturalism and inclusiveness and considered defining them essential to facilitate the process. One of the interviewees argued that the process should start from the management's commitment and that Xamk should appoint a working group to define clear steps for becoming multicultural and

inclusive and start systematically educating its staff to achieve it. Two interviewees commented on the issue:

“Whether there is sort of guidelines set down that now we have to be multicultural and we have to create an inclusive work environment, right? I actually doubt that there is anything like that.” – Intl. staff member

“We have some target in 2035 for example, our environment will be multicultural, inclusive multiculturally, and that's our target and that's what we do. We start now educating the people. What does it mean? Does it hurt? Is it good? Is it bad? And so on.”– Intl. staff member

The sustainability representative elaborated on the practices and guidelines Xamk had already introduced to support internationality, multiculturalism, and inclusiveness, such as the responsibility and sustainability program, the equality and non-discrimination policy, the ethical principles, the safe space principles, providing vegetarian options at the campus restaurants, providing quiet spaces that can be used for praying, and conducting an equality and non-discrimination survey every two years. In addition, they mentioned that Xamk has a responsibility development working group to oversee the responsibility work in the organization. The interviewee also reminded that inclusiveness, in general, is difficult to determine, as it is subjective and experienced individually by each person.

The sustainability representative also commented on the location of the campus cities and concluded that larger growth centers might attract intl. staff better than the smaller cities in which Xamk's campuses are located. In their opinion, this meant that the organization's positive, multicultural image is even more important to appear inviting to potential intl. staff.

6.5 Other development suggestions and wishes

The interviewees expressed some individual development suggestions and wishes that were not frequent enough to form a separate category or could not be placed in any of the former categories. Four intl. interviewees referred to the administrative issues they had gone through at the start of their employment, such as getting the tax card or residence permit and acquiring the educational

qualifications required of teachers. Two of them wished that Xamk provided more information and help on these administrative issues:

“Maybe if it's some kind of permanent contract, it would be nice to get help about the residence permit things, or Vero (Tax) or something like that. I feel that it might be something useful.” – Intl. staff member

“I think that wider information related to Finnish employment laws and et cetera. That information is also actually available in English. Maybe providing link to those web pages or websites might help, because whenever we try to find information, firstly it comes in Finnish.” – Intl. staff member

The HR representative confirmed that the bureaucracy of hiring intl. staff is a challenge and takes time, especially when the staff member is from a non-EU/EEA country. The interviewee explained that the HR department currently helps the intl. staff members and their supervisors with different administrative issues and revealed that they are planning to provide a list of essential links to new intl. staff members, from which they could find information they might need about the Finnish society and other employment-related issues.

One intl. interviewee and one supervisor suggested that Xamk provided or helped intl. staff members with accommodation at the start of the employment. The supervisor felt it would facilitate the immigration process and lower the bar to accept the position. The intl. interviewee described their struggle of finding permanent accommodation while staying in different hotels and apartments and commented:

“Of course it is not a necessity, but it would be nice if Xamk will help with this kind of accommodation.” – Intl. staff member

Balancing work and personal life was considered important by two intl. interviewees. The other interviewee wished that the intl. staff had the possibility of working remotely from abroad, from their home country, as their personal life might often be there, and reminded that Xamk's staff must stay in Finland while doing remote work. The interviewee commented:

“Let's say a person has 30 days of holiday, but another 30 days of the year is remote work, but this person cannot go out of Finland. Maybe for international staff, this could be a bit flexible, because in this way, they will be able to manage the balance between their

working life and their personal life, which might be in their home country.” – Intl. staff member

The importance of equal treatment at the workplace was emphasized by three intl. interviewees. One of them felt that since the working time at Xamk is flexible, intl. staff members should be allowed to schedule their annual leave during their own national holidays if the mandatory work duties allow it, but that it should similarly apply to Finnish staff if they wish to attend some personal events. The interviewee continued to explain that limiting the employer’s flexibility and providing special treatment only to intl. staff or minorities can have harmful consequences, and stated:

“So the flexibility, I think, in general goes a very long way, but without having to go and say that we have to accommodate specifically because this person is a minority. I think that is very dangerous grounds to move into. And to sort of become too woke and too inclusive and you can’t do anything because you might offend somebody.” – Intl. staff member

The concept of equality was also present in one intl. interviewee’s description of the ideal work environment, where they stated that staff should be valued because of their competence rather than their background. One of the supervisors complemented this view and noted that the potential of intl. staff is easily wasted if the employer is more interested in the “internationality” of the person than their expertise and how to utilize it. The intl. interviewee concluded their description by declaring:

“An environment, where logic and expertise is respected more than national and cultural background, and people are welcomed in that sense for the work, for the professionalism.” – Intl. staff member

The HR representative commented on the topic and highlighted that the organization’s internal instructions apply to every staff member, which is an indication of equal treatment:

*”Meillä kohdellaan kaikkia yhdenvertaisesti. Meillä on samat ohjeet kaikille, ja ne koskevat kaikkia.”
We treat everyone equally. We have the same guidelines for everyone, and they apply to everyone. – HR representative*

6.6 Analyzing results

The interview questions were primarily developed based on the theoretical framework of the thesis covered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, meaning that a lot of the themes discussed in the theory were included in the questions, such as language/communication, discrimination, inclusion/exclusion, intercultural competence, and the challenges and benefits of a multicultural work environment. After completing the interviews and analyzing the results, the author reflected on the questions and considered whether the questions were too specific. To some extent, it might have been better if the interviews had been more open, allowing the interviewees to direct the discussion more. On the other hand, since the author had explored the thesis topic thoroughly, the careful consideration and focus of the interview questions indicated expertise. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016, 108) state, unstructured interviews are mostly appropriate when the researcher has little knowledge of the topic.

According to the definition of The Centre for Occupational Safety in Finland (Psykososiaalinen... 2024), the issues mentioned in the interviews were mostly related to the psychosocial work environment, with some references made to the virtual work environment and only a few to the physical work environment. Regarding the psychosocial environment, the individual behavior of the staff members is evident in the work community, language, and culture, which all influence the communication and interaction processes at the workplace. In addition, the organizational practices that were mentioned are included in the psychosocial work environment. Some interviewees described issues related to the virtual work environment, such as the availability of information in English on different work-related software and web pages. The few individual mentions concerning the physical work environment were the location of the campuses, the location from which remote work can be performed and the quiet spaces provided at the workplace.

The reason why most of the issues concerned the psychosocial work environment might be that internationality and multiculturalism were considered mostly intangible features by the interviewees, although according to several

researchers (e.g. Browaeyns & Price 2015), culture can have visible elements as well. The language issue was also included in the interview questions, which explains the frequency of related comments. In addition, as the discussion took place in the context of a workplace, the interviewees seem to have reflected internationality and multiculturalism through their influence on the interaction between staff members, above all. This conclusion is supported by Comfort and Franklin (2014, 15), as they state that culture guides people's actions.

The main categories derived from the interview data (work community, language, culture, and organization) are all linked to one another. Language is a part of culture, as stated by Browaeyns and Price (2015, 13). As national culture influences organizational culture (Castaneda & Bateh 2013, 44; Schein 2009 cited in Browaeyns & Price 2015, 206; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 36–37), Finnish culture affects the culture of Xamk, and thus, the organization's practices and management. The organization's practices and management can shape the staff members' attitudes towards foreign languages and different cultures, which, as a result, affects the work community and the experiences the intl. staff have of the interactions within the community.

Since Xamk is a higher education and research institution, the interviewees viewed students and other stakeholders as part of the work environment in addition to staff and considered intl. cooperation and intl. degree programs to increase the internationality and multiculturalism of the work environment. Therefore, development suggestions regarding Xamk's work environment should not be limited solely to staff-related issues. Many interviewees felt that the internationality and multiculturalism of the work environment were focused on the units that had intl. staff or students. As mentioned in Chapter 1, their share was relatively small at Xamk. Due to Xamk being a large organization with campuses in four cities, many interviewees said they did not know the situation outside their unit or campus, which made it even more critical that all the intl. interviewees and all the Finnish interviewees represented different units to gain a comprehensive picture of the current work environment.

The divergence within Xamk can also be a sign of internationality and multiculturalism not being embedded strongly enough into the organizational culture. As Hofstede et al. (2010, 346) demonstrate, organization's practices form the core of organizational culture. Even though internationalization is one of Xamk's main strategic goals, it has not been adopted and implemented broadly enough in the organization's practices and the day-to-day work of the staff, which both interviewed supervisors identified. Additionally, as national culture shapes organizational culture (Castaneda & Bateh 2013, 44; Schein 2009 cited in Browaeys & Price 2015, 206; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 36–37), it might be that Finnish culture dominates Xamk's organizational culture to the extent where it hampers the internationalization efforts of the organization. Also, one intl. interviewee stated that the cultures in the Kymenlaakso and South Savo campuses are different due to the merger that combined two universities of applied sciences in 2017, when Xamk was established. These distinct organizational cultures can still hinder the adoption of a mutual culture in Xamk, especially if the cultures were strong before the merger, as Thomas and Peterson (2015, 197) argue.

Having good colleagues and integrating into the work community was deemed necessary by the intl. interviewees. For the most part, the intl. interviewees had had positive experiences with colleagues at Xamk. The negative experiences were related to the reluctance of Finnish staff to make any accommodations for intl. staff, and, similar to the results of the KOTAMO project (Jousilahti et al. 2022), being excluded from conversations. Although none of the intl. staff members said they had experienced discrimination or inequality due to their cultural or national background at Xamk, exclusion is a form of discrimination, as stated by Mor Barak (2022, 174). Additionally, being excluded from information was another issue mentioned by the interviewees. Perhaps the interviewees considered discrimination a more direct hostile act towards someone and did not perceive exclusion as one, since it is a rather indirect form of discrimination: leaving a person out of something. In addition, as one intl. interviewee viewed the experience of exclusion to be only linguistic, not cultural, the other interviewees might have had the same perception: language-related issues were not counted

as a part of culture or nationality. One reason why some staff members at Xamk were perceived to have a negative attitude towards intl. staff could be found in Hauret and Williams' (2020, 431) argument that people view the qualities of their nationality in a more favorable manner than the qualities of other nationalities and prefer to socialize with people with similar qualities as themselves.

Language was the mutual source of challenges for all intl. interviewees. The majority of the comments were related to the lack of material in English and the use of Finnish in meetings and conversations. All the Finnish interviewees identified the challenge as well. There can be various reasons why the same information is not available in English as in Finnish. Potentially, there is a lack of time and resources to translate the material, as one interviewee pointed out that the English translation often comes late. Also, since two interviewees mentioned that every employee can publish material on the organization's intranet, it can be a matter of remembering or skills. Plenty of material is published and updated daily, making it challenging to oversee that every publication is made in both languages. Language is a part of communication, and communication challenges are typical of multicultural organizations (Browaeyns & Price 2015, 356–358; Mor Barak 2022, 219).

The interviewees also mentioned communication style as one of the aspects in which cultural differences were most evident at Xamk. Some interviewees noted that in Finland, people communicate more directly without small talk and can give feedback even to supervisors. This is characteristic of low context communication common in individualist countries, according to Edward T. Hall (1976 cited in e.g. Browaeyns & Price 2015). When comparing Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010) to the features in which the intl. interviewees had noticed cultural differences between Finns and their home country members, there were many similarities. Small power distance and individualism were mentioned, which are attributes of Finnish culture, according to Hofstede (2015). On the contrary, some interviewees felt Finns are very rule-oriented and punctual, typical of restrained cultures, not indulgent ones, which is how Hofstede (2015) classified Finland. The benefits multicultural and international staff bring to Xamk,

according to the Finnish interviewees, were similar to what Comfort and Franklin (2014, 150) described, such as the emergence of innovative ideas.

The interviewees considered acquiring intercultural competence necessary. Similarly, Matveev (2017, 5) suggests that such competence is required to work successfully in a multicultural and international environment. In the interviews, the most frequently recommended methods for gaining intercultural competence were studies and courses. However, learning about different cultures in theory is not sufficient. As Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2020, 190) explain, recognizing cultural differences is only one part of intercultural competence, which also requires implementing learnt skills in practice.

The support of colleagues was mentioned more frequently by the intl. interviewees than the support received from supervisors, which raises the question of whether the supervisors at Xamk have adequate intercultural competence and know how to support the intl. staff the best, especially in units with few or no intl. staff members yet. Although the HR department helps supervisors with different administrative issues related to hiring foreign staff, there should be additional cultural training. Furthermore, as one of the supervisors mentioned, there was not enough time for the actual supervisory work on top of all their other duties, which could also explain why the staff relied more on the help of colleagues. A similar issue was raised by the respondents of Xamk's most recent equality and non-discrimination survey, as they requested that supervisors develop their management skills in order to create a more equal work community (Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023, 11).

Most interviewees discussed the improvement and progress Xamk had made in inclusiveness and multiculturalism. However, none of them mentioned any of the practices or principles the sustainability representative described that had already been introduced to support inclusiveness and multiculturalism. This result resembles what was stated by the respondents of Xamk's equality and non-discrimination survey, as they wished that general guidelines on equality and non-discrimination would be provided (Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuus... 2023,

11). One of the explanations could be that these practices or principles had not been communicated internally effectively enough. Also, if the principles have remained at theory level without actively putting them into practice organization-wide in each unit, staff can easily forget the existence of such principles.

When comparing Xamk's current state to Taylor Cox Jr.'s (1991) three-stage model of diversity management, Xamk seems to have the most in common with a plural organization. Xamk has a culturally fairly homogenous staff, characteristic of monolithic organizations. However, the organization has practices aimed at increasing inclusiveness, much like in plural organizations. Yet, staff members belonging to cultural and national minorities are unequal to majority staff members in some respects, such as access to information. In order to become a multicultural organization, discrimination and prejudice should be eliminated, and there should be no gap between majority and minority staff members. In conclusion, effort remains to be made before Xamk becomes a truly multicultural organization.

The equal treatment of Finnish and non-Finnish staff at the workplace was also an issue brought up by some intl. interviewees. None of the interviewees wanted or expected the employer to acknowledge their cultural or national background in any excessive way. Mainly, they wished for flexibility, when possible, which included taking time off to celebrate national holidays, or suggested organizing cultural events where employees of different backgrounds could demonstrate their culture. Some interviewees insisted on having personal responsibility in integrating into the workplace and the country, as they stated that moving abroad has been their personal choice. Another viewpoint could be the wish not to be subject to "benevolent" discrimination, where minority staff members are exclusively seen as recipients of help, as defined by Romani et al. (2019). These points above present a similar challenge to diversity management that Maximova-Enzoni and Egeland (2019, 14) described, where the organization must determine the extent to which a staff member's cultural background should be noted compared to their personal competence.

Finally, the individual development suggestions the intl. interviewees made mostly included practical issues that could facilitate the immigration and integration process, such as help with accommodation and residence permits. It is apparent, that moving to a new country is a major event and involves a lot of bureaucracy and practical matters that need to be taken care of before the start of the employment, and intl. staff require support from the employer in these issues.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This conclusive chapter presents an answer to the research question and based on that, recommendations to the commissioner, Xamk. The study's reliability and validity are also discussed in detail, and lastly, ideas for future research are proposed.

7.1 Key results and findings

When summarizing the main findings of this study, it became clear that work community, language, culture, and the employer organization and its practices significantly influence the work environment at Xamk. Forming the answer to the research question *How to create a work environment at Xamk that supports internationality and multiculturalism?* should start by first answering the two sub-questions *What are the main challenges and areas for development in supporting internationality and multiculturalism at Xamk?* and *Which of Xamk's current practices are perceived to reinforce internationality and multiculturalism, if any?*

The results of this study showed that the main challenges in supporting internationality and multiculturalism at Xamk were the small number of intl. staff or intl. contacts in general, language-related challenges, such as unequal access to information and conversations for non-Finnish speaking staff, the divergence within the organization in adopting internationality and multiculturalism, and the lack of communication, and thus, knowledge of Xamk's internal guidelines. There were also a few comments regarding the negative attitude of some staff members towards intl. staff. To some extent, the results indicated that the intercultural

competence of Xamk's staff, including supervisors, should be improved and the information and support for intl. staff on different administrative and practical issues increased.

Out of Xamk's current practices, language courses, and cultural courses and events, in addition to international cooperation in general, were perceived to reinforce internationality and multiculturalism. The opportunity to work in English was also seen as a way to make the work environment more international and multicultural. Furthermore, Xamk's progress in supporting inclusiveness and multiculturalism was noted by the interviewees. The welcoming atmosphere at Xamk and the good, supportive colleagues were considered a crucial contribution to the work environment that facilitated the integration into the workplace.

In conclusion, creating a work environment at Xamk that supports internationality and multiculturalism requires recruiting more intl. staff and students, and increasing intl. cooperation in general. English should be adopted more broadly in the organization, and all staff members should have equal access to information, meaning that the same information should be available in Finnish and English. The intercultural and language competence of Xamk's staff should be improved with training, courses, and events. Xamk's internal guidelines regarding internationality, multiculturalism and inclusiveness should be communicated more effectively and adopted in each unit and individually by each staff member. Xamk, as an employer, should help intl. staff with immigration and integration while understanding that they also have some personal responsibility in the process. More detailed suggestions on how to achieve these goals at Xamk are provided in the next subchapter.

7.2 Managerial implications

Based on the results of this study, several development suggestions can be provided to Xamk. It should be noted that most of the following recommendations comply directly with the Finnish higher education and research internationalization policy (Yhteistyössä maailman parasta... 2017). The first step in making the work environment more international and multicultural would be

putting more effort into recruiting intl. staff and students. The recruitment of intl. staff should be contemplated from the viewpoint of acquiring new expertise for Xamk and expanding the organization's whole competence area instead of solely focusing on "internationality" per se. Re-evaluating the Finnish language proficiency required for the open positions and being open to the possibility of hiring non-Finnish speaking job applicants could be a way to grow the share of intl. staff at Xamk, as suggested by one of the interviewed supervisors. In addition, being at the receiving end of staff and student exchange is a way to temporarily gain more intl. people into the work community. Xamk's staff and students should also be motivated to participate in exchange periods abroad, as it is a practical way to gain intercultural and language competence. Intl. projects provide an opportunity to take part in diverse intl. partnerships that provide new opportunities for internationalization, which is why more staff should be encouraged to participate in planning and implementing these projects. The engagement should start with a small input that can be increased over time, as based on the author's personal experience in project work, many staff members still question their abilities to participate in intl. projects because they are considered too challenging.

After the share of intl. staff has started to increase, Xamk should focus on diversity management. As Mor Barak (2022, 257) states, having a diverse staff is a necessity for diversity management, and in other case, the organization should focus on recruitment first. The two diversity management strategies Xamk could benefit from are multicultural meritocracy (Gündemir et al. 2017) and all-inclusive multicultural (AIM) approach (Jansen et al. 2015). The importance of equal treatment, and thus, recognition of expertise over background, arose from the interviews, making multicultural meritocracy a suitable approach as it combines both the promotion of equality and the appreciation of diversity. In addition, as this study showed, internationality and multiculturalism were not adopted organization-wide at Xamk, which could be improved by implementing the AIM approach. This approach would involve both Xamk's minority (intl.) and majority (Finnish) staff members in the organization's diversity endeavors, potentially triggering a more positive attitude towards diversity and internationalization

among the majority staff members. Furthermore, with the increase of intl. staff, a demand for an integration coordinator will likely arise. A designated person who helps intl. staff with all the administrative and practical issues concerned with immigration and integration would facilitate the start of the employment and make it a more positive experience, which could help retain and attract more intl. staff. As a side note, Xamk has already hired integration coordinators to support intl. students.

The results of the study indicated that the guidelines to support inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and internationality at Xamk were not communicated and adopted well enough. If the guidelines remained on a theory level, they might seem irrelevant for many staff members who do not regularly work with intl. or otherwise minority staff members. In order to transform these guidelines from theory to practice, they should systematically be discussed in each unit to inspire every staff member to think of practical ways to implement the guidelines in their day-to-day work.

As this study showed, having a welcoming atmosphere at Xamk had a significant impact on integrating the intl. staff into the work community. However, international staff, and internationality and multiculturalism in general, were perceived to focus on particular units. To further acquaint intl. and Finnish staff of different units, the suggestion of one of the intl. interviewees of arranging networking events or establishing networking channels should be implemented. This way, staff with similar interests, regarding hobbies, for example, could be brought together regardless of their position or unit, and relationships outside of work could form, which in return, would contribute to the integration of intl. staff.

Providing all Xamk's staff members with equal access to information is one major aspect of making the organization more inclusive. Publishing the same information in both Finnish and English on Xamk's communication channels should be made mandatory unless the information concerns only a small group of Finnish- or English-speaking staff. Holding meetings and conversations in English when a non-Finnish speaking person is involved should be a standard

practice organization-wide to guarantee an equal opportunity for every staff member to participate. To ensure Xamk's staff members have sufficient skills to communicate in and translate information into English, the organization should continue providing English language training for its staff. This training should be made part of everyone's work by providing unit-specific language training more broadly in the organization, which would also help in adopting appropriate vocabulary regarding one's work. Given that not all staff members have adequate language skills yet, nominating persons who help staff translate the information would be advisable. It is also essential that Xamk continues to organize Finnish language courses for intl. staff, since the study showed that they were considered to facilitate the integration process.

Similar to language training, intercultural competence studies should also be implemented more broadly at Xamk, preferably in each unit, to ensure every staff member participates in the training. To support the development of competence and facilitate the adoption of the learnt skills in practice, staff should be provided with situations in which they could practice these intercultural skills, such as workshops and events. It would be beneficial to organize additional training for the supervisors to provide them with better prerequisites for managing multicultural staff.

7.3 Reliability discussion

Determining the reliability and validity of a qualitative study is challenging, as there are no established criteria as in quantitative research. (Kananen 2017, 173). Qualitative research can have different forms, as described in Chapter 5, which means there are various ways to assure validity and reliability. Internal validity refers to the extent to which the research results comply with reality and whether the matters being examined adhere to what the researcher believes they are examining. Internal validity can be supported by several methods: triangulation, member checks, reflexivity, peer review, and sufficient participation in data collection. Triangulation is a strategy of utilizing various research methods, data sources, researchers, or theories to certify the research results. Member checks are a method of having some of the interviewees go through the

initial findings of the study to assure the researcher has interpreted their comments accurately. Reflexivity means that the researcher should indicate how their presumptions and attitudes may have impacted the research. Peer review is conducted by having a colleague examine the data collected during the study and evaluate if the researcher's discoveries are credible. Finally, sufficient participation in data collection is achieved when the researcher reaches the saturation point, meaning that no new matters emerge when continuing the data collection. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 216–222.)

Reliability indicates whether the research results can be reproduced if the research were to be executed again. However, in qualitative research, the concept of reliability is complex, as the research is based on personal experiences and conceptions, which are constantly changing. For this reason, reliability in qualitative research is a matter of consistency. In other words, do external reviewers agree that the research findings are coherent with the collected data. The different methods for confirming reliability are largely the same as for internal validity: triangulation, reflexivity, peer review, and in addition, audit trail. An audit trail is a thorough description of the data collection and analysis methods utilized in the study with the purpose of helping outsiders understand how the researcher came to their conclusions from the research data. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 223–226.)

External validity alludes to the general applicability of the study, such as how well the research results can be utilized in other circumstances. External validity in qualitative research can be ensured by using maximum variation and highly illustrative descriptions. Maximum variation is a sampling method, already mentioned in Chapter 5.2, where a sample as diverse as possible is selected to demonstrate a broader transferability of the study. Providing a detailed description of the research framework and results allows outsiders to compare them to their own settings and assess whether the results can be applied accordingly. Often, the description is complemented with citations from the research interviews or other utilized sources. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 226–231.)

Several methods were utilized to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. The sample for the research interviews consisted of nine Xamk staff members, each representing a different source of data, which refers to triangulation. The sample included five intl. participants, and four Finnish participants: two supervisors, one HR representative and one sustainability representative. The intl. participants all represented different nationalities and came from different units with both teaching, and expert and support staff. In addition, they had had different lengths of employment at Xamk. The Finnish participants also represented different units. Considering these factors, although the sample was small in numbers, it can also be regarded as diverse and comprehensive, resembling maximum diversity.

To facilitate the evaluation of the study and its applicability and reliability from an external perspective, an audit trail of the research and analysis process was provided in Chapters 5 and 6, from which one can also determine the circumstances under which the study took place. In addition, background information on the commissioner was depicted in Chapter 1. Chapter 6 also included an illustrated description of the results with quotes from the interviewees. The backgrounds of the individual interviewees were not elaborated on to protect their anonymity. As the study focused on the work environment of one organization, the results cannot be generalized without reservation. The development suggestions provided in this study can be utilized in other higher education institutions in Finland, as the circumstances might be similar there. However, when comparing the results of this study to the results of the KOTAMO project (Jousilahti et al. 2022), there were similarities and differences. The experience of exclusion was a similarity, and the differences were found in the overall experience of the work environment, which was more positive in this study. It should be noted that the research settings were different in these two studies, as this study focused on national diversity and the KOTAMO project on ethnic diversity, which includes other features in addition to nationality.

Regarding internal validity, the research question was answered based on the results of the study, suggesting that the author studied what she intended. In

addition, since the study collected data through personal interviews, it complies with the OECD's (OECD Guidelines... 2017, 92) recommendation of measuring the quality of the work environment by concentrating on individual staff members and their perspectives on the matter. The issue of whether the research findings comply with reality should also be considered from the standpoint of how comfortable the interviewees were with sharing their true feelings and reflections with the interviewer. Even though the interviewees were aware that their identities would not be revealed in the thesis report, they were not anonymous to the author, who also works in the same organization as them. However, since all the intl. interviewees volunteered to take part in the study and contacted the author themselves, it was likely that they had the intention of sharing their thoughts openly. Another issue concerning the internal validity of the study is the fact that the Finnish interviewees were interviewed in their native language, whereas the intl. interviewees were all interviewed in English. Also, the author speaks Finnish as her native language, and although being fluent in English, it is not on the level of a native speaker. As Mor Barak (2022, 219) points out, miscommunication and misinterpretation can easily take place when a person communicates in a language that is not their primary one. Nonetheless, the author did not perceive that the intl. interviewees had trouble expressing themselves in English since it is their working language. Neither did the author have difficulties in understanding the interviewees and the points they were trying to make. Indeed, there were some minor grammatical errors on both sides that did not hamper understanding.

As the author had worked for the commissioner for several years, there were inevitably some preconceptions of the organization and its situation compared to having an outsider conduct the study. To minimize the impact of the author's presumptions and to provide as objectively analyzed results as possible, previous literature on the subject was utilized in both forming the interview questions and analyzing the results. During the interview, the author tried to stay neutral and not show her feelings or opinions on the issues the interviewees discussed, which was facilitated by the predefined interview questions. The author had assumed that language would be the most discussed issue during the interviews and was slightly concerned whether any other points would come up. Language was, in

fact, one of the most referred to topics in the interviews, besides several other issues that arose. During the research process, the author occasionally questioned whether she, as a majority representative, should conduct such a study, as she had not experienced living abroad as an international person and belonging to a minority. The author also did not want to form the interview questions with the assumption that the intl. staff members would have automatically had challenges or needed support at the workplace. For example, instead of asking what kind of challenges they had had, the question was whether they had had any. In hindsight, the formation of some of the other questions could have been different as well, such as not asking how Xamk should acknowledge a (minority) staff member's cultural or national background but should Xamk acknowledge it in the first place. Still, as the purpose of doing research is to learn and generate new information, the process was a great learning experience for the author and provided new perspectives on the topic.

7.4 Future development

The sample for this study was limited, as the number of intl. staff members at Xamk was small to start with, and the final number of the intl. interviewees was determined based on the volunteers that contacted the author themselves. In addition, the author did not want the sample of the Finnish interviewees to be larger than that of the intl. interviewees, as the focus of the study was not on them. To gain a larger sample, a similar study could be conducted using an anonymous, electronic question form sent to all Xamk's intl. staff members, as well as the staff members with Finnish dual citizenship. One of the intl. interviewees mentioned that despite being counted as Finns, staff with Finnish dual citizenship have a different cultural background than native Finns with only Finnish citizenship. Also, as the interviews would not be conducted face-to-face with the researcher but through an anonymous question form, the identities of the participants would not be revealed to the researcher, which could make the participation more comfortable for some of the participants.

It would also be beneficial to study how the Finnish staff members at Xamk view the increasing internationality and multiculturalism in the work environment. As

this study revealed, work community and the people included in it have a major impact on the work environment. One of the concepts of the study could be intercultural competence, as in whether the Finnish staff members feel they have sufficient competence to operate in a multicultural environment and in which issues they want to develop their competence. This type of study would be essential, particularly if the organization adopted the AIM approach to diversity management. Moreover, as the results of this study showed, students are perceived as a part of the work community besides staff since Xamk is a higher education institution. A study to discover the students' conceptions of internationality and multiculturalism in the study environment at Xamk could be executed, and the results compared to the results of this study to identify potential similarities and differences that could help develop Xamk's work environment further.

Finally, in order to recruit more intl. staff to Xamk, it would be helpful to study the image of Xamk from the potential job applicants' point of view to identify what qualities make Xamk an appealing or an unappealing employer. Potentially, the international job search sites on which Xamk has published its recruiting ads could be utilized for this type of study. Also, some recently hired intl. staff members could provide insight into why they sought to work at Xamk.

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Interview questions for international staff

1. Can you first introduce yourself and tell something about your background?
2. Can you briefly discuss your work history at Xamk?
3. What were the reasons you wanted to work at Xamk?
4. Do you think Xamk currently has a multicultural and international work environment? Why/why not?
5. In your opinion, does Xamk have practices that promote an international and multicultural work environment? If so, have the practices been appropriate and sufficient?
6. As Xamk seeks to recruit more international staff in the future, do you have suggestions on what kind of services Xamk should provide to facilitate the integration process?
7. What is your working language at Xamk? Can you access all necessary information regarding your employment and work in this language? Can you participate in both official and unofficial conversations at the workplace?
8. Do you consider Xamk an inclusive workplace? Why/why not? How could Xamk's inclusiveness be developed?
9. How should Xamk acknowledge a (minority) staff member's cultural/national background as an employer?
10. Have you had any challenges related to your cultural/national background while working at Xamk? If so, what kind of challenges? How should these challenges be addressed?
11. Have you experienced discrimination or inequality related to your cultural/national background while working at Xamk? Have you noticed another staff member has? If so, can you give examples. Do you have suggestions on how could this be eliminated?
12. Do you feel you can be yourself and be accepted at Xamk or have you struggled to fit in the work community? Can you give examples.
13. Can you come up with other issues or shortcomings that hinder the promotion of an international and multicultural work environment at Xamk?
14. Can you describe a work environment that is supportive and inclusive towards staff with diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities? How could this be achieved at Xamk?
15. How could the intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to work and communicate with people from different cultures) of Xamk's staff be developed?

Interview questions for Finnish staff (translated from Finnish to English)

1. Can you first introduce yourself and tell something about your work at Xamk?
2. How is your work related to international staff?
3. Do you think Xamk currently has a multicultural and international work environment? Why/why not?
4. What benefits does multicultural/international staff bring to Xamk?
5. How is multiculturalism/internationality promoted at Xamk or how do you promote it in your own work? How could this be developed?
6. How is multiculturalism and internationality of the work community promoted in recruiting? How could this be developed?
7. Do you consider Xamk an inclusive workplace? Why/why not?
8. Supervisors: Does every staff member in your unit speak the same language? Do you as a supervisor promote the use of common language in both official and casual situations? If so, how?
Others: How has Xamk as an employer acknowledged staff members who speak other than Finnish as their native language?
9. What kind of multiculturalism/internationality related challenges have you noticed in your work or been informed by staff members?
10. Have you noticed that multiculturalism/internationality of the work community has led to discrimination or inequality at Xamk?
11. How do you think Xamk should respond to these challenges (9. and 10.)?
12. How should the intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to operate and communicate with different cultures) of Xamk's staff be developed?
13. What kind of prerequisites does Xamk currently have to create a work environment that truly supports multiculturalism and internationality?