



**Working as an airline captain in co-operation with multicultural  
cabin crew in Finnair aircraft**

Yrjö Rantamäki

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences  
Aviation Business, Business Administration  
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## Abstract

<b>Author</b> Yrjö Rantamäki
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<p>An increasing number of Finnair's long-haul cabin crew members are non-Finnish, Regional Cabin Crew Members, RCCMs. Communicating within a crew consisting of many different linguistic backgrounds can be challenging at times, simply because English, which is usually used as the working language in such work communities, is not necessarily a native language for everyone. Also, the behaviour patterns and expectations brought by different cultural backgrounds bring more challenges to create a smooth and effective co-operation environment, where all members of the working community feel natural and safe to work.</p> <p>As author works as a wide-body aircraft captain in Finnair, he felt it necessary to address this topic. The most natural way to deal with the subject was a thesis in a form of a diary, in which case the challenges brought by daily work tasks and their solutions, combined with the theoretical background, would create a realistic picture of working in the above-mentioned work community. The natural goals for the thesis were to improve communication and cultural sensitivity and awareness when working with a multicultural cabin crew.</p> <p>The work was carried out in a form of diary entries during eight different work shifts, and in terms of time, the thesis took place within the period of September 2024 - January 2025. Due to partial sensitivity of the subject and the restrictions imposed by the employer, the exact information about the dates of the flights and the names of personnel have been left out, and times of the work shifts have only been announced with an accuracy of a month. In addition, the exact company-specific procedures and more detailed information about possible exceptional situations were left unaddressed.</p> <p>Since no actual theoretical material related to the topic (pilot/cabin crew multicultural cooperation) was found, materials dealing with the work of multicultural flightdeck crew, as well as materials dealing with different nationalities and their cultural and linguistic differences, were used as a knowledge base.</p> <p>As a result of the thesis, the author feels that his communication in a multicultural work community has clearly improved, and at the same time he has understood the importance of communicating clearly and simultaneously preserving his own personality. In addition, his understanding of the effects and opportunities that different cultural backgrounds bring to the work community in his work environment, has improved.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Communication, multiculturalism, co-operation.

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## 1 Introduction

Today, the staff of more and more airlines, including the national ones, is made up of representatives of several nationalities. In the same way, the phenomenon has been happening to an ever-expanding extent at Finnair as well, where I work as a captain on wide-body aircraft.

Unfortunately, within a work group representing several different nationalities, misunderstandings can easily arise due to cultural differences and simply because English, which is usually used as the working language in such work communities, is not necessarily a native language for everyone. At its worst, this can even lead to situations that endanger operations, which is not desirable in any form in a safety-critical work environment such as a passenger plane. For this reason, I chose the theme "Working as an airline captain in co-operation with multicultural cabin crew on Finnair aircraft" as the subject of my thesis.

Since my job is not regular five-day-a-week work, I return the previous week's report and weekly analysis to Wihri two days after the end of the respective work shift. Also, because of the irregularity of my work, it is impossible to prepare a realistic weekly plan for the progress of the work. Anyhow, the estimate for my work to be ready for assessment is by the end of February.

The airline I work for is Finnair. The company's main field of business is passenger air traffic and belly cargo transportation. At the moment, it has no actual cargo operations. The size of Finnair's fleet is currently about eighty aircraft, out of which twenty-five are Airbus 350/330 wide-body aircraft. The company operates domestic, European, and long-haul flights, with the focus on long-haul flights and European traffic feeding it, while Finnair's subsidiary Norra operates most of the domestic traffic. Because Finnish is the language requirement for Finnair's pilots, most of the flightdeck members are Finnish, including a few Estonians. Instead, in addition to Finns, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Singaporean, Indian and citizens of many different European countries work in the cabin. The flight crew on long-haul flights consists of two to four pilots and eight to ten cabin crew members.

Out of the total of almost 26 years in Finnair, I have been working in my current position, long-haul captain, for the last 14 years. The work of an airline captain includes a wide range of responsibilities to ensure the safety, efficiency, and smooth operation of a flight. Most of the work is done in collaboration with other flightdeck crew and the cabin crew, keeping in mind the fact that the final responsibility for the decisions made always rests on the shoulders of the captain.

The skills needed for the job naturally include planning and operating flights safely and economically between different destinations as precisely as possible, following the schedule. On

the other hand, one important part of the captain's work includes the personnel management of the other flightdeck crew and cabin crew during the flight in co-operation with the flight purser. Also, the ability of correct use of the Crew Resource Management (CRM) is essential for captain, to ensure the smooth and safe implementation of workload. With the help of the CRM, the captain distributes the workload to other crew members so that all necessary tasks and procedures are completed efficiently, on time and safely. Meanwhile, as there is no room for misunderstandings or interpretations in safety related matters in aviation, a clear and unambiguous communication skills are vital for captain. Therefore, when it comes to teamwork in an airplane, duty related communication must always be accurate and understandable.

Since an increasingly large part of the cabin crew is of a nationality other than Finns, understanding the ways of behaving and communicating in different cultures will be of increasing importance when working in co-operation with them. At times, linguistic and cultural differences have caused challenges in my work in terms of mutual understanding. Because of this, during the review period, I would hope to learn to communicate better in our common working language, English, and to better understand the factors affecting the communication of people from different cultural backgrounds. If the goals are realized, my work with flight attendants from different cultural backgrounds will probably become significantly smoother. In addition, it is interesting to get to know and learn to understand the cultural identity of my colleagues of different nationalities.

Due to all the factors mentioned above, I choose Effective communication and Cultural sensitivity and awareness as the development themes for my thesis. As a result, my goal is to develop as a leader in these specific areas. For this reason, I will exclude all other aspects of co-operation during a flight and focus on dealing with potential problems in working with multicultural cabin crew.

The key professional concepts discussed in the thesis are presented below:

- ATC: Air Traffic Control, coordinates air traffic at the airport and during the flight
- CA: cabin attendant.
- CRM: Crew Resource Management, optimal use of personnel resources and capabilities
- Flight Dispatch: takes care of the preflight planning.
- Gate Agents: boarding, passenger handling on ground.
- Ground Handling: responsible for aircraft ground handling procedures.
- HCC: Hub Control Centre, Helsinki based operations control, change management in co-operation with OCC.
- Inflight: in-flight activity of flight operation.
- MCC: Maintenance Control Centre, coordinates maintenance of aircraft in case of failure

- OCC: Operations Control Centre, operational control, overall change management of company's operational traffic.
- PF: Pilot flying, steers the aircraft during flight operation.
- PM: Pilot Monitoring, monitors the flight operation, manages radio communication while PF flies the aircraft.
- Postflight: postflight activity of flight operation.
- Preflight: preflight activity of flight operation.
- RCCM: Regional Cabin Crew Member, other than Helsinki based CA.

The in-text connections between the substantive cohesiveness of the work can be found from the overlay matrix presented in Figure 1.

Own professional development objective	Theoretical framework	Observation week	Results of own professional development
Effective communication	3.1-3.4	September-November	3.1-3.4 and 4.
Cultural sensitivity and awareness	3.5-3.8	November-January	3.5-3.8 and 4.

Figure 1. Overlay matrix of the in-text connection

In the proofreading phase of the text, I used artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) to check the spelling and grammar of the text with the command "Check the spelling and grammar errors of the following text".

## **2 Description of the initial situation**

In the next chapter, I will give a brief description of the initial situation, and analyse my current work tasks, related stakeholders, and interaction situations in my workplace.

### **2.1 Analysis of my current work**

My role as a Finnair captain includes responsibilities that align with general aviation duties, but also involves specific aspects related to Finnair's operations and standards. The tasks in my job can be divided roughly in four segments: preflight duties, inflight duties, safety and compliance during flight and postflight duties.

Preflight duties start with the review and analyse of the pre-prepared flight planning package, made by flight dispatch. The package includes the flight plan, weather conditions, NOTAM's, company specific information about route, passengers and aircraft in use and pre-calculated minimum fuel needed for the flight. After the evaluation of the delivered data (with the whole flightdeck crew), captain decides the final fuel amount needed based on several factors found from briefing package. Next, it is time for cabin crew briefing, covering the flight time, potential weather issues, and any special instructions or operational considerations specific to Finnair. Then, it is time to start the actual flight preparations in cockpit, review maintenance logs to ensure that any required inspections or repairs are completed and perform the external aircraft walk around inspection.

The actual inflight operations start with ground operations. These include, for example, engine startup and taxi to take-off position. Take-off part starts the initial flight portion of the operation. Take-off, as well as landing, is made by pilot flying, PF, which can be either captain or co-pilot. The PF shifts are usually divided somewhat evenly, weather permitting, so sometimes as captain I act either in the PF role or in the pilot monitoring, PM, role. During the cruise phase of the flight, the flightdeck crew monitors the aircraft's systems, performance, and fuel consumption throughout the flight. At the same time, the adjustments for the flight plan are made, if needed, based on weather, air traffic, or other factors, while the communication with ATC is maintained to ensure that the flight remains on course and within safe parameters. Additionally, the occasional passenger addresses are made to provide updates or essential information, maintaining professionalism, and ensuring a positive experience.

During the whole operation, it is solely the captain's responsibility to ensure the strict adherence to aviation laws and regulations, as well as Finnair's safety protocols and operational standards. This includes coordinating with ATC and making real-time decisions to address any issues and reporting any discrepancies or safety event. Anyhow, the whole crew must be prepared to manage

any emergencies that may arise, following Finnair's emergency protocols and ensuring the safety of passengers and crew.

Post-flight duties start with aircraft securing. After the flight, it must be ensured that the aircraft is properly secured and prepared for its next flight, including verifying that all systems are shut down correctly and any maintenance issues are reported. Also, the crew must complete required paperwork, including flight reports, maintenance logs, and any incident reports, as necessary. One important part of post-flight duties is debriefing. Captain and the purser of the flight will conduct a short post-flight debrief with the crew to discuss any issues or concerns that arose during the flight, and to review performance and ensure all necessary reports are completed.

The role of a Finnair captain, like any airline captain, requires a high level of skill, experience, and dedication to ensure safety, economic flying and service excellence. To successfully act as a Finnair captain, a pilot needs a blend of technical knowledge, practical skills, and personal attributes.

The technical knowledge includes in-depth knowledge of the specific aircraft types operated, including their systems, performance characteristics and emergency procedures, for safe and economic operation. Also, a thorough understanding of aviation regulations, both international and local, as well as expertise in analysing flight plans, understanding meteorological information, and using navigation systems and tools, is essential for successful operations. Additionally, a comprehensive knowledge of safety protocols and emergency procedures, including handling in-flight emergencies and conducting evacuations, if necessary, are vital to maintain overall safety of the flight operations.

Practical skills needed for safe flight operation include proficiency in handling the aircraft in different weather scenarios, system malfunctions and other in-flight challenges at all phases of the flight. Also, strong decision-making skills, particularly under pressure, will give the captain an ability to make quick, informed decisions to ensure safety and operational efficiency of the flight. Equally, excellent communication skills for interacting with crew members and passengers, which includes clear and effective communication and the ability to provide updates and instructions, are needed for safe and efficient flight operations. And finally, effective leadership and teamwork skills are an integral part of the practical skills needed to guide and motivate a team to ensure smooth operations and adherence to procedures.

Two most important personal attributes for captain are an ability to gain high level of attention to detail, to ensure all aspects of flight operation are thoroughly checked and managed, and situational awareness: ability to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the aircraft's position,

performance, and environment at all times. Also, a good stress management, a capacity to remain calm and focused on high-pressure situations, such as emergencies or unexpected changes, is an essential personal skill for captain.

The skills needed in my work I have acquired through continuous training during my career and annual verification of the required skills in simulator inspections. Since my work in aviation has already lasted almost a total of 38 years, and I have progressed in my career from fighter pilot to become the captain of a wide-body aircraft, I feel that I am a skilled performer in my work. However, since the life is about a continuous learning, I would still like to improve my communication capabilities, especially with my colleagues from different cultures.

## **2.2 Stakeholders**

Of course, the most important stakeholders during the final operation, the actual flight from point to point, are my colleagues in the cockpit and the cabin crew. However, before this stage, the seamless cooperation of several different organizations is needed so that the flight can be launched safely and on time.

The background planning phase of the flight is already done well before the departure of the flight. OCC and HCC work in close cooperation when thinking about the individual aircraft to be used, the scheduling of onward passengers and possible irregularity situations. If the aircraft breaks down, the MCC plays an important role in restoring the plane so that operations run as precisely as possible according to the schedules. At the same time, dispatch takes care of the pre-planning of the flight and takes care of filing the actual flight plan.

Furthermore, the gate agents handle the boarding of passengers and help connecting passengers to make it to connecting flights on time. Before this, the cleaning, loading, catering, and refuelling of the aircraft is carried out by the ground handling companies and according to the OCC and HCC instructions.

In conclusion, all the participating actors have the same goal, to get the flight moving safely on time, and are of equal importance to reach that goal. Indeed, if the operation of any sub-part of the operation fails to act as planned, it is impossible to start the flight smoothly according to the schedule. Due to this, all stakeholders' interests are equal and equally important for the success of the operation. Figure 2. shows the different stakeholders in a flight operation.

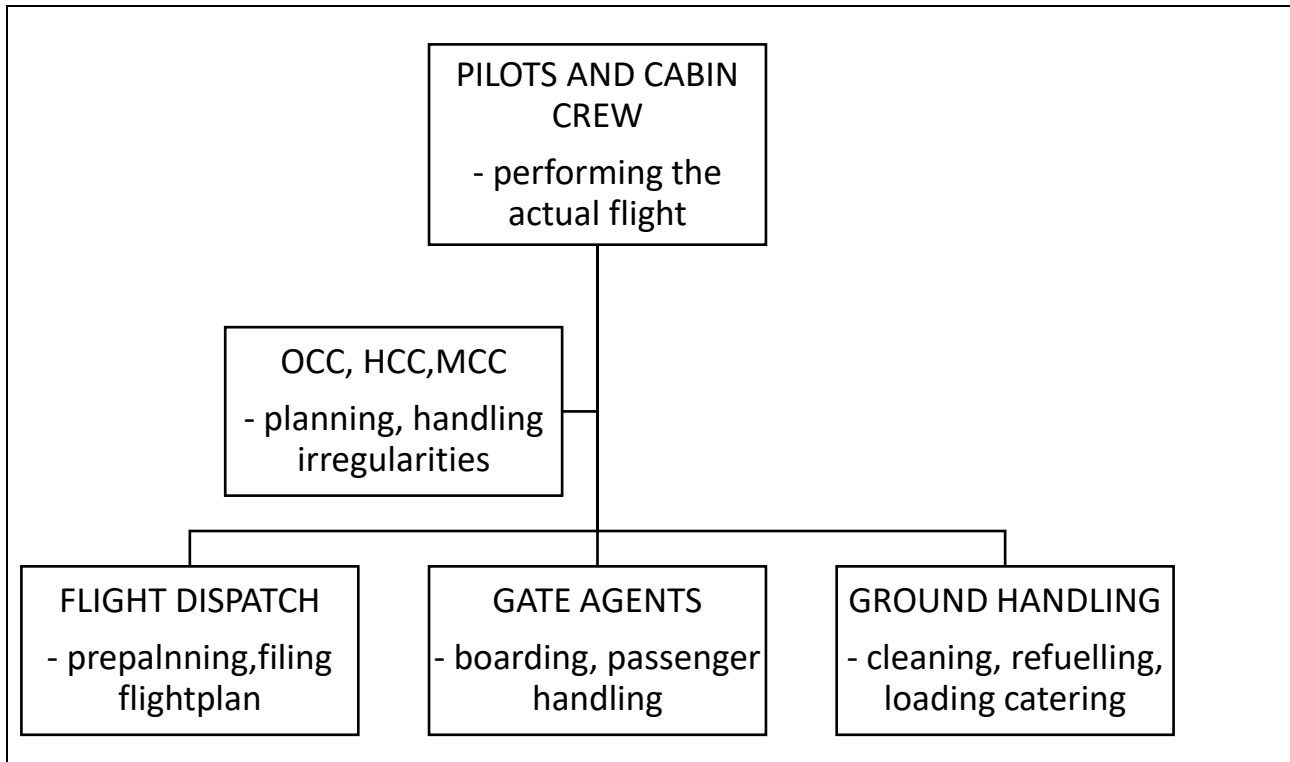


Figure 2. Stakeholders for flight operation

### 2.3 Interaction situations

At their work, pilots interact with various stakeholders in different situations. These interactions are crucial for ensuring the smooth operation of flights and maintaining safety and customer satisfaction.

Firstly, perhaps my most important co-operation takes place with the co-pilots and cabin crew. The safe and efficient execution of a flight requires constant communication with all parties, concerning things like flight planning, reading checklists, pre- and postflight briefings, in-flight coordination and handling of possible emergency and abnormal procedures.

Secondly, during the irregularity situations, the most important contact points are OCC, HCC and MCC. These parties are particularly important when handling deviations related to the flight schedule, loading, connecting passengers and the technical condition of the aircraft.

Thirdly, the ground crew performing the final walkarounds checks and pushback of the aircraft, are usually the last party with whom pilots speak before starting the flight.

Finally, since the beginning of the flight, the ATC is the main contact point during the flight, giving clearances for taxi, take-off, and landing. During the flight, regular communication with ATC is

essential to receive route adjustments and coordinating for safe navigation and managing air traffic.

Also, an important part of interaction happens with passengers, by providing updates about flight status, weather, and estimated arrival times.

The biggest challenges in these interaction situations relate, again, to the clarity of communication. Developing clear and unambiguous communication is one of the most important goals, especially when dealing with my working language, English.

### 3 Diary entries

The Lingua Franca of aviation is English. This standard may give pilots in some parts of the world an advantage over others. However, everyone is required to use English as the standard language in international aviation. (Maurino, 168) Also, as stated by D'Oliveira (2010), The multiculturalism in company can only be achieved through organizational processes and groups relations designed and implemented in a way that maintain and preserve diversity and, a characteristics that ultimately challenges the highly prescriptive nature of the industry.

With the increase in the use of foreign cabin crew at Finnair, this has become increasingly true in my work for me as well. In the following subsections can be found my reporting of the follow-up period with weekly analyses, in which I deal with the problems caused by communication and multiculturalism when working with a multicultural cabin crew. During the first four weeks, I will focus on problems caused by communication, and during the next four weeks on cultural sensitivity and awareness.

#### 3.1 Observation week 1, September 2024

Before the start of each flight, after the pilots have gone through their own flight planning phase, it is the captain's duty to brief the cabin crew about in-flight events, in-flight weather phenomena that affect their operations and possible Finnair specific issues. Similarly, the purpose is to keep the cabin aware of the things related to the flow of the flight that affect their operations. The goal of the first review period is to clarify my cabin briefing in such a way that it would be as clear as possible and surely understood by everyone.

My first work shift related to the review period was directed to Japan, Osaka. The purpose was to operate the flight between Helsinki and Osaka according to normal procedures. The cabin crew consisted of four Finnish and four Japanese CAs.

The flight planning phase between the pilots went according to normal procedures. Then, together with all the pilots, we went to greet and introduce ourselves to the cabin. Next, I started my own flight-related briefing to the cabin. I went through the flight time, the flight route in general, and how the flight would seem to be going according to the schedule. After that, I explained the special features related to the weather, i.e. the turbulence areas that fall along the flight path, which affect, among other things, the flow of the cabin service. At this time, an additional spice to the weather at the destination was brought by a powerful typhoon that landed on the coast of Japan and headed towards Osaka. In fact, the Japanese ca's were particularly interested in this as it would potentially affect their journey to home in Osaka using public transport. During the briefing, I tried to use as

exact English as possible and to leave out pilot slang. Finally, I asked if anyone had any questions related to the topics, after which we moved to the cockpit with the other pilots to make our own preparations.

Once we arrived in cockpit, we noticed that there was a technical fault in the plane, which prevented the flight from starting. Therefore, the maintenance staff was already on site handling the matter, and at the same time we received information that the flight would be significantly delayed due to the repair of the fault.

As a result, this information also caused me a lot of work and communication with OCC and HCC. Additionally, I also actively communicated with the purser about the schedule and the nature of the fault, and from time to time I also went to the cabin to tell the other cabin crew about the progress of things. The delay caused concern especially among the Japanese ca's, as they feared that being late would make it even harder for them to get home. Because of this, I investigated the course of the typhoon more deeply and kept them closely informed about its schedule and route. Since the communication with them was in English, I had difficulties at times to find the right words to express specific things related to the weather phenomenon.

Finally, the fault was fixed, and we were able to start the flight. During the route, I informed, as usually, the cabin about the weather and turbulence on the route and told the Japanese Ca's some special information about the progress of the typhoon.

In summary, I think the goals I set for the working day were fulfilled well. Firstly, the initial briefing was perhaps more serious than usual, as I tried to use the language as precisely as possible. Secondly, during the technical failure, in my opinion, communication with the purser was sufficient, but I could have spent more time paying attention to the other CAs as well, especially the Japanese CAs.

Afterwards, the return flight Osaka-Helsinki was quite routine, and at the beginning of the flight I held a normal briefing with the cabin crew. As there was nothing special to inform about the weather on the flight route, I kept it quite short. However, since the return flight was headed via the North Pole, I promised to inform in advance the Japanese CA about the arrival schedule to North Pole and as well if we see any Northern Lights, as they are usually extremely interested in these matters.

Subsequently, when one of them arrived in cockpit during the passage of the North Pole, we had a long and interesting conversation about the special features of communication with the Finnish flight crew. She said, for example, that at the beginning she was surprised by how openly and naturally the pilots interacted with her, both older and younger pilots. At the same time, the English

language of the flight crew is generally quite understandable, of course there are always some exceptions. In the end, the conversation turned to very general topics, but at the same time it was a good practical exercise of using the English language.

Actually, during this working day there was not much that was significant in terms of communication, but I had an enlightening conversation with the Japanese CA, which somewhat opened their views on Finnish pilots and working with them.

In conclusion, during this pairing, some problems emerged that required a solution. The first major problem was related to a technical fault that delayed the flight. This caused challenges not only in the execution of the flight, but also in informing the cabin crew. Another significant challenge was the language barrier and communication problems with the Japanese cabin crew members in connection with informing about the effects of the typhoon. These problems were solved through active communication and careful use of the English language.

The pairing offered an opportunity to deepen skills in managing communication and teamwork. The communication practices used during the technical failure strengthened my ability to communicate effectively under pressure. Also, the use of English in situations where the vocabulary was challenging developed language skills and the courage to use English even in challenging situations. I also understand better how important it is to consider the cabin crew's concerns and answer them clearly.

There are several references to good operating models. For instance, communicating effectively and clearly under pressure is essential. To ensure clarity, it is important to use language that is simple, direct, and polite. Also, one should avoid using idioms, sarcasm, or humour that may not be universally understood. Additionally, repeating or rephrasing key points and verifying that your message has been correctly understood should be checked through feedback. (LinkedIn n.d.)

It is also crucial to limit the amount of information shared at one time and use familiar phrasing and sequence when possible. To achieve this, it is advised to keep communications simple, clear, and aimed at the essentials. Clarity can be enhanced by standardizing and limiting vocabulary, issuing short messages, and incorporating various communication types, such as visual and auditory clues. Additionally, maintaining a steady speaking pace, rather than speeding up under stress, can further improve clarity. (CAA 2016, 139.)

Also, regularly updating the cabin crew on the situation's progress and addressing their questions are essential practices that help keep the team united and informed. Clear and effective communication is vital both within the cabin crew and between the cabin and flight deck crews. (CAA 2016, 163). As stated by Chute (1995, 13), the study results highlight the importance for

airlines to allocate time—perhaps during check-in or boarding procedures—for crews to get acquainted, discuss mutual expectations for the flight, and especially review any unusual circumstances specific to that flight. This same allocation of time should also be considered for both in-flight and post-flight communications

As a result, what could have been done differently? Apparently, I could have focused more on personal communication with all the cabin crew members, especially with the Japanese Cas. Even if the information was sufficient, personal presence and communication could have eased their worries. In addition, studying special vocabulary, especially in relation to rarer weather phenomena, helps to inform the cabin crew in exceptional situations even more effectively.

### **3.2 Observation week 2, September 2024**

In short, the goal set for this week was to further improve the clarity of my communication, considering the improvement needs of the previous work week. In particular, my goal was to increase, if possible, communication with each individual cabin crew member.

My second work shift related to the review period was directed to Hong Kong. The cabin crew consisted of nine ca's from Hong Kong. Because I fly this route quite often, I saw some already familiar faces in crew, so it was especially nice to start this shift together with them.

As usually, after flight crew has introduced themselves, I started my briefing of the flight to come, trying to be as precise and accurate with my words. Since no questions aroused among them, we went to cockpit and started our preparations for flight.

Then, after a while, the purser of the flight came to cockpit and asked if I could have a word with him. We went to forward galley for a chat, and he asked me if everything is okay between us. I was a bit confused and wondered why he was asking me that. He told me that I had been somehow stiffer and more formal than when we normally met, so he had wanted to ask me about it. After a short, confused moment, I told him what it was all about, and he seemed relieved. Indeed, since we had already gotten to know each other quite well during the previous flights, our communication had been much more relaxed and spiced up with humour. Therefore, a lesson number one learned during this flight: although being an effective communicator, be sure to maintain your personality in communication. Everyone, especially those who know you better, will notice if you behave uncharacteristically.

Ater that, the flight started normally, and at the beginning of my rest shifts, I went to chat with the cabin crew if their work situation allowed. Although the conversations were small talk in nature,

they opened the atmosphere and helped to get to know the cabin staff better as individuals. All in all, a nice experience.

About halfway through the flight, the purser came into the cockpit with a bundle of documents. The passenger on our flight had a service dog, with which this person had left Hong Kong, toured Europe and was now returning to Hong Kong. Without going into further details, the Hong Kong authorities required certain information and proof from the captain of the flight about the stages of the dog's and the person's journey before they would be allowed to re-enter the country. The situation was completely new to me, and there were no instructions on how to handle the matter in our own manuals.

In fact, the documents being partly in English and partly in Chinese caused additional challenges to solve the problem. Because of this, I urged the purser to ask the person in question additional questions related to the matter. Some of the answers seemed illogical, perhaps due to the wording of the questions I asked, when translated into Chinese for the passenger. Thus, for a few questions and related answers, I had to ask for clarification for three times, expressing myself in different words every time, before the answers felt right. Quite a job to take care of, and required a lot of communication, clarification and making sure things with and through the purser, but the result was happy: the dog got back to the country with its owner. The rest of the flight went without major incidents, and the final briefing with the cabin went in a rather relaxed atmosphere, and we parted with a few new acquaintances richer. All in all, quite a pleasant flight!

To conclude, the goal of my working day was to further clarify my communication and pay more attention to the individual people in the cabin. In my opinion, the goals were realized quite well, and with the help of the discussions with the individual cabin crew members, a rather nice picture of the cooperation was left, presumably for both parties.

During the return flight, we switched tasks with the other captain who was on the flight, so that his recency requirements would be met. Due to this, the main communication related to the operational events of the flight was transferred to his responsibility. This made it possible for me to focus more on one-on-one conversations with the cabin crew rather than on operational discussions.

In short, I discussed with them how they experienced the overall communication with the Finnish cockpit crew. Some of them said that Finns, in their opinion, are speaking English clearly and directly, which they appreciated for its simplicity and easiness to understand. On the other hand, it could also sometimes be seen as blunt or overly direct compared to the more indirect communication style favoured by many Chinese, as Chinese people often prefer an indirect

communication style that values politeness, context, and "reading between the lines." From their perspective, this can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, especially if the Chinese person involved is used to more nuanced or face-saving communication. By comparison, one thing that especially caught my attention when talking to the Hong Kong cabin crew was the quality of pronunciation. Those who had been born and lived their lives in Hong Kong spoke almost flawless English, while those originally from mainland China had a clearly worse level of pronunciation. All in all, however, I found the conversations I had with them to be really meaningful and interesting. For some reason, I even feel that our sense of humour is very similar, and the conversations flow naturally.

Since communicating with the cabin crew who speak different language was the goal of this flight, I think the goal was fulfilled well. At the same time, the discussions opened new views on how they experience communication with Finns. Indeed, one of the biggest benefits of this pairing was the personal communication with individual cabin crew members. Also, the handling of documents related to an unclear and new situation (support dog case), gave valuable experience on how to communicate effectively in complex and exceptional situations with cabin crew who speak different language. The operating model I used, i.e. asking clarifying questions and clarifying the situation in cooperation with the purser and the passenger, was in my opinion the best way to solve the situation.

It is clear that everyone is unique. All individuals often behave and perform in ways that differ from one another. While some of these differences are due to the situations people encounter rather than inherent personal traits, there are still, undeniably, stable and lasting distinctions among individuals. (CAA, 2016, 117.) During this pairing, it came clear how important it is to maintain one's own personality in communication, even if one strives for as precise and unambiguous communication as possible. The clarity of communication does not mean that you must compromise on personality, since people, especially those who know you somehow well, may find rigidity out of your behaviour, which can lead to uncertainty in the work environment.

According to Hörmann (n.d.), communication barriers can easily emerge when briefings are conducted in a second language or if the cultural differences are mishandled, possibly due to a lack of awareness, tolerance, or competence. As a clear and unambiguous communication is key to any successful collaboration, it can be especially challenging when you are working with colleagues from diverse cultures and different linguistic backgrounds. For clear communication, it is important to use language that is simple, direct, and polite. Also, be sure to repeat or rephrase key points and verify understanding through feedback. (LinkedIn n.d.) Anyhow, by fostering empathy between cockpit and cabin crew members you can have a significant impact in the

working atmosphere. It is also essential to encourage team members to spend time in each other's workspaces to better understand the unique challenges and demands of each role. This firsthand experience can lead to more thoughtful and tailored communication, finally enhancing the completion of the entire flight operation. (LinkedIn n.d.) Indeed, effective communication in teamwork, especially between pilots and cabin crew, requires not only clarity and consistency, but also empathy and situational awareness. As a result, communication must consider both linguistic and cultural challenges, and it should be tailored according to the situation and the recipient, to consider the personalities of individuals and the dynamic relationships of the team. Also, due to possible language barriers, clarifying the questions raised during communication and actively listening is important. Therefore, if the first answer is not always understandable enough, it is important to keep asking questions until the matter is completely clear.

As a conclusion, the most important lesson learned from this work shift, and the development target for the next work shift, is therefore to preserve one's own personality in communication, even if otherwise making communication more efficient. Since the other challenges related to communication that arose during the pairing were resolved reasonably smoothly, I would probably act the same way in similar situations in the future.

### **3.3 Observation week 3, September 2024**

Based on the experiences of the previous working week, I set the goal of this week to preserve my personality in communication, while at the same time striving for as clear and unambiguous communication as possible. Actually, this was made a little bit easier because I worked as second in command in this shift, so handling the actual operational matters is mainly the responsibility of the commander of the flight and I could concentrate also to more informal matters.

The work shift of my third period of observation was directed to Bangkok. The cabin crew consisted of four Finnish and four Thai flight attendants. Briefly, after the crew introduction, the commander of the flight held a normal cabin briefing and we were soon able to start the flight preparations in cockpit.

Indeed, being second in command and not solely in charge of operational matters allowed me to focus more on personal discussions with the Thai cabin crew. Also, since this position is somehow less official, I could approach them a little less formally and as myself, which was also the development target of this review period.

Later, during the flight to Bangkok and also on flight back to Helsinki, I therefore used some of my rest periods to chat with the Thai cabin crew members. First, I told them a little about the

background, why I was interested in these things, and said that the discussions would be confidential. As a result, I was once again able to have good discussions.

In summary, some of them mentioned that communication of Finnish pilots tends to be more direct and to the point, and they think that Finnish pilots seem to expect clear and straightforward communication. In fact, I also recognized all of this in my own behaviour. Although during the cabin crew training, they had been encouraged to bring operational matters up boldly, they still felt that there are some situations, like when talking with commander of the flight, where they are a bit hesitant to raise concerns or clarify misunderstandings, if any. Also, they said that because in Thai culture there is a strong sense of hierarchy and respect for authority, in the beginning of their career in Finnair it was somehow hard to question instructions given by pilots, even if something was unclear. Anyhow, they say that later on they have tried to learn to speak up and take more initiative if things are unclear.

In addition, they said that in the beginning the way how Finnish pilots tend to speak, in a calm, and measured tone and often with minimal body language, made them feel that pilots were somehow cold or disinterested of them. Due to all the factors mentioned above, during our discussions I tried to remove their preconceived notions and also bring the more relaxed side of Finnish pilots to their attention. Finally, I turned the conversations in a slightly more personal direction regarding my own and their families, and I also brought in some humour. As a result, the conversations became quite relaxed, and it was nice to get to know them more on a personal level. Great new connections achieved!

Since I was acting as second in command on this shift, and the pairing also went without any particular difficulties, this time I had no major problems to solve. As the goal of this week was to preserve my personality and still communicating clearly, my personal conversations with the Thai cabin crew supported this objective quite well. In fact, it was also very relaxing for me to get to know them in a quite personal way, without the need to tie the conversation to work matters.

According to LinkedIn (N.d.), the first step to be able to work effectively with colleagues from diverse cultures is to start with respecting their differences and avoiding making assumptions or judgments based on stereotypes. That's why it's important to learn about their cultural values, norms, preferences and behaviours and be aware that they may differ from your own. You should also be open-minded and curious and ask questions to clear up any misunderstandings or confusion. In fact, even these short conversations I had with the Thai crew during my shift, brought a somewhat new perspective to the kind of people, not just the cabin crew, I work with.

In Thai society, seniority is highly valued, which can make working and interacting with people from diverse cultures more complex. (Higher Education Studies n.d., 88). To tackle this problem, it is important to try to lower the threshold brought by hierarchy when working with Thai cabin crew. One way to implement this is, for example, personal conversations with them, in which case the flight commander can also present himself as a person instead of just a leader. On the other hand, it is also important to respect and consider the fact that, depending on the individual, this can be reasonably difficult and therefore "pressuring" the individual to behave more freely should not be the goal itself.

Most Thai cabin crew focus primarily on ensuring smooth interactions with passengers, while only a few consider both passengers and colleagues. However, understanding and appreciating colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds can offer significant advantages in the workplace. When cabin crew first learn to collaborate effectively with their teammates, they will feel more confident and prepared to handle and assist passengers seamlessly. (Higher Education Studies n.d., 90-91.) In the same way, the previous can also be well connected to the work of pilots: pilots often focus only on working among the cockpit crew, while paying less attention to the cabin crew. Indeed, the personal conversations I've had during my last shifts have opened my eyes significantly in this particular area, and it is likely that this will make my work with them much easier in the future. Thanks to the conversations I've had, I think the threshold for bringing up even the most difficult issues with me will probably be lowered, and thus also improve the safety of the flight.

To conclude, this pairing gave me some new insights about working with Thai cabin crew. A certain way of working based on cultural hierarchy will definitely always be present when working with them, but with open communication it is possible to lower this threshold. By doing this, the most accurate and timely information flow is also possible, even in possible exceptional situations.

Based on the positive experiences of this shift, I will set the development target for the next work shift to further expand the personal communication with individual cabin crew members, when time permitting.

### **3.4 Observation week 4, November-December 2024**

During October I spent my last days of summer vacation and in early November I had my semi-annual simulator refresher training, medical check-up, and a long stan-by duty. Because of this, there is a long break in my diary entries.

Therefore, at the turn of November and December, it was time to start my next flight shift towards South Korea and the city of Seoul. The cabin crew consisted of four Finnish and four Korean flight attendants. Since the entire crew was already at the departure gate well in advance, after

introducing myself, I did my part in the flight briefing for the cabin at the departure gate before boarding the plane. As the flight route was quite routine and the weather phenomena along it were not significant, the briefing went quickly, and we were able to board to the plane to start the actual flight preparations.

Next, after we started the flight and the cabin crew had finished the first food service of the flight, I went to the back galley during my rest period to talk with the Korean flight attendants. Since telling the background of my thesis, we started talking about how they feel working with the Finnish pilots. One of them had previously worked for a Korean airline, and soon she pointed out a significant difference when comparing working with Korean and Finnish flight crew.

Briefly, according to her, communicating with Finnish pilots is easier, because in the Korean airline there is a quite clear hierarchy depending on the job, and especially between the cockpit crew and the flight attendants. At first, it had even seemed strange that the pilots and especially the captains talked to the flight attendants quite informally, and that they had been instructed to contact the cockpit themselves at a low threshold, if necessary, if something was bothering them during the flight.

However, although they all agreed that this approach made working much more pleasant, they considered it important that the instructions they received regarding their work, including from the flight crew, were sufficiently clear. Since English is not the native language of either party, it would be important that the instructions, especially regarding work tasks, were clear and unambiguous. Instead, they say that they are happy to discuss non-work-related matters as well, and in general said that they were positively surprised by how interested the pilots were in talking with them. Once again, I was able to have good and clarifying discussions about how Korean RCCMs experience and what they expect from working with Finnish pilots.

The return flight to Finland began with four new Korean RCCMs. The initial briefing went normally, and since the route once again passed through the North Pole, they were particularly interested in when we would be "at the top of the world".

Soon, after we had started taxiing, the nature of the routine flight changed radically. While we were standing in the de-icing area, the flight purser called and said that one of the Korean CAs had received information that there was a coup in the country, martial law had been imposed, and the borders would possibly be closed. Naturally, this information caused a very strong reaction among our local RCCMs.

Undoubtedly, due to the information received, we had to immediately start analysing the situation and its effect on the safe execution of our flight. Unfortunately, due to the company's safety and

security policy, I cannot go through the procedures and methods we used at that moment in more detail. In addition, the time pressure to make decisions was increased by the fact that we were standing in the de-icing area with the engines running, which meant that the fuel reserved for the flight was constantly being consumed more than planned. Also, considering the mental stress of the Korean RCCMs caused by the situation was one of the factors to be considered.

However, we finally made it safely to start the journey towards Helsinki. As soon as I had turned off the seatbelt sign, I asked the flight purser to call all the Korean CAs to the front galley. There I held a briefing for them, where I told them all the information I had received about the situation at that time. At the same time, I asked their feelings, and we had a long and free conversation about the matter. In the end, I promised to keep them updated about the situation as soon as I get new information.

Later, as the flight progressed, I received additional information about the situation in Korea from the OCC. I went several times to pass on information personally to each RCCM during my rest shifts, and at the same time we had discussions about their feelings on the matter. Additionally, I also kept the flight's Finnish purser up to date and asked her to pass on information about the situation to the other Finnish flight attendants as well. After we landed, I also held a comprehensive de-briefing and discussion session for the entire crew, and since the situation in Korea had fortunately calmed down during the flight, I was happy to let the crew get some well-deserved rest.

Actually, despite the seriousness of the situation, especially from the RCCMs' perspective, this return flight was a very good exercise in crisis management and communication in a foreign language with personnel of a different nationality. The next day after the flight, I also received an email from the Korean flight attendants, in which they said that the situation in Korea had normalized and that their return flight would take place as planned and thanked for the good communication and care during the flight.

Indeed, every now and then, a routine work shift can escalate into an exceptional situation rather quickly. According to Hallahan and Haruta, executing an effective crisis response is a challenging task, as available information is often limited, and airline employees must manage various operational disruptions while under stress. For international carriers, crisis management becomes even more complex since incidents may occur in remote locations or foreign countries with differing cultural norms. Additionally, airlines cater to a diverse clientele with varying languages, beliefs, values, rituals, and traditions, further complicating response efforts. (Hallahan, K, Haruta A 2003, 122-123.)

Additionally, as noted by Airwayindia, strong communication skills are crucial during crises or emergencies to facilitate swift and coordinated responses. Effectively conveying instructions, delegating tasks, and remaining calm under pressure can significantly impact the successful resolution of emergencies. Moreover, when working with a multicultural crew, communication skills should also include cultural sensitivity to promote teamwork and prevent misunderstandings. (Airwayindia, 2023.)

To summarize, everything described above fits well in my work environment, and especially for the return flight of this particular pairing. A part of the operations sometimes takes place in very exotic countries, where getting up-to-date, accurate information can sometimes be challenging. When the linguistic and cultural differences with part of the cabin crew are added to this equation, the importance of precise and unambiguous communication is emphasized when passing on information related to exceptional situations. In a word, this flight was indeed a very educational situation!

### **3.5 Observation week 5, December 2024**

In the remaining entries of my diary, I will focus more on the cultural differences in my work community.

My next shift was headed to Delhi, India. The cabin crew consisted of four female and five male CAs. As this was my fourth flight to Delhi this year, some of them had already become familiar to me earlier, so the briefing took place in a fairly relaxed manner. Since the flight to Delhi is quite short and there is a lot to do in the cabin, especially with the Indian passengers, I asked the purser to let me know when they have time for a little chat. Fortunately, despite the rather hectic flight, we still managed to have some nice conversations, during both the outbound and return flight.

When I asked them to describe their experiences communicating with Finnish pilots, quite similar observations emerged as in previous discussions with other RCCMs from other countries. Indeed, the most obvious point that appeared was the Finnish pilots' way of communicating: directness and avoiding unnecessary verbosity, and communicating in a concise, straightforward manner, focusing on the essentials without small talk. According to them, getting used to it had been a bit difficult at first, because they themselves tend to use indirect communication, especially when addressing sensitive issues, to avoid confrontation, and non-verbal cues, tone, and context play are also a part of their messaging. On the other hand, they also said they had learned to somehow appreciate it, especially in discussions related to work, because then there are hardly any ambiguities.

In addition, they brought up the point, that Finland, in general, seems to be a highly egalitarian society. As they see, also Finnish pilots prefer a collaborative approach to teamwork. According to them, pilots seem to respect expertise over hierarchy, and they have encouraged CAs for open dialogue as it comes to cabin related matters, and seem to value input from all team members, including junior staff. This is something quite different from what they are used to since they are used to deference to authority and seniority in Indian culture. Therefore, as there is a clear acknowledgment of roles, in their culture the junior staff might be hesitant to challenge or question authority. As a result, the above-mentioned issues have indeed caused some uncertainty among them, even though open communication between the cockpit and cabin crew has already been emphasized during their basic training at Finnair.

Also, one thing that has become very clear to me already during previous flights, and which I think is worth mentioning in this context, is the strong sense of nationality and pride of the Indians in their culture. Especially, when the conversation turns to the conflicts between India and Pakistan, there has sometimes been very strong comments from the other side about the matter. When I asked the purser on one flight, what this strong emotional concentration on national identity is due to, the answer was quite extensive. According to him, India's rich history, which includes ancient civilizations such as the Indus Valley Civilization, has strengthened their pride in their national past. Thus, even though India is an extremely diverse country with hundreds of languages, different religions, and cultures, according to him, they feel a sense of togetherness through the concept of "India", which symbolizes precisely their cultural and historical unity. In addition, conflicts, and external pressures, such as disputes in Pakistan and other geopolitical challenges, have often united the nation against a common enemy. So, in my opinion, this strong national pride of Indians is quite a factor to be considered when having conversations with them. Actually, without remembering the colourful and long history of the country, one can unintentionally offend the other party by only addressing the current problems of the country. Also, in my conversations with Indian RCCMs during these flights, my own eyes have been opened to how big and diverse a country India is. For example, the pictures shown by a CA from her beautiful home region of Kashmir did not correspond at all to the image I had of India before.

The idea of an effective communicator is subjective and differs across cultures. Therefore, maintaining an open mind in cross-cultural communication is essential. Being willing to adapt and understand the norms, contexts, and expectations of different cultures is also important. (Saarinen Chavez 2024.) According to Kumar & Kumar Sethi, it's important to understand that when an Indian employee says "no," it may not always reflect their final or definitive opinion. A Western manager must be sensitive to this nuance to avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, recognizing and appreciating the different ways of living and working in Indian culture is essential. While

Western managers often have a pragmatic mindset, Indians tend to be more nationalistic and ideological. Indians take great pride in their country, so a Western expatriate who approaches their role with a positive attitude and appreciation for India will have a strong foundation for building successful relationships with Indian employees. (Kumar & Kumar Sethi 2005, 111-114.)

In general, Indians take great pride in the uniqueness and diversity of their culture. The concept of an "Indian identity" has continuously evolved throughout history, shaped by changes in political and religious institutions both within the country and beyond. (Scroope, Chara, 2018.) To avoid misunderstandings and maintain a good working atmosphere, this national pride in its own history and culture is good to keep in mind in conversations with Indians.

### **3.6 Observation week 6, January 2025**

After a short Christmas break, it was time to start a new year with new challenges. My first work assignment in 2025 was a flight to and from Singapore. The flight's cabin crew consisted of nine flight attendants, five of whom were female and four were male. In fact, I was already familiar with the flight's purser, so I thought I would have some interesting conversations with her.

The flight route with weather phenomena was quite routine, so the crew briefing went smoothly, and we were able to start flight preparations quickly. After this, I had a separate conversation with the purser and expressed my wish for a conversation session with her and the other crew members, at an appropriate time.

Indeed, the main message, which came out from the discussions during the flights, once again, was quite similar as with other cabin crew of Asian origin. Accordingly, the communication style that Finnish pilots tend to use is mainly felt being direct, where they speak plainly and avoid unnecessary formalities, while in contrast, Singaporeans are used to take an indirect approach, emphasizing politeness, harmony, and subtlety in communication. Because of this, at first, they perceived Finns as blunt, but over time they have also somehow learned to appreciate this directness especially in work-related matters.

Since all of the above already sounded quite familiar, I turned the conversations to deal with cultural issues among Singapore RCCMs. Through the discussions, I came perhaps even a little surprised by how complex and diverse a cultural entity the nation of Singapore is. The texts below summarize some of the observations that came up during the discussions.

In fact, of the regional cabin crews used on Finnair flights, Singaporean crews are the most ethnically diverse. Singapore's cabin crew very often consists of different ethnic backgrounds,

including Chinese, Malay, Indian, and other communities. Although English is the official working language in aircraft (and as the language of administration and instruction in Singapore), the crew members are more comfortable speaking their native languages (e.g., Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) in small groups from same background. This has sometimes caused communication challenges or misunderstandings between crewmembers from different ethnic and linguistic party.

Likewise, underlying cultural sensitivities have sometimes surfaced among cabin crew, especially when crew members of different ethnicities are required to work together closely. Differences in customs, norms and expectations regarding behaviours or respect for authority have caused minor tension or misunderstandings, and cultural norms about personal space and how to address superiors or colleagues also vary. Additionally, while punctuality is generally important across all cultural groups in Singapore, there may be subtle differences in how crew members perceive time management. For example, Chinese crew may view punctuality as a sign of professionalism and respect, while Malay or Indian crew may have a slightly more relaxed approach, particularly when dealing with social obligations.

Furthermore, different ethnic groups seem to have varying expectations of service delivery. For example, Singapore's Chinese crew members tend to prioritize efficiency and practicality in delivering service, while Malay or Indian crew members might instead place more emphasis on passenger comfort and ensuring that passengers are comfortable.

As a result, even though the above-mentioned behaviours are not visible to the flight crew in normal operation, it is good to be aware of these differences in the ways of working of different ethnic groups. At worst, different views may cause a schism between different groups, in which case it is good to know the background of why an ethnic group acts in a certain way in order to be able to solve the possible situation. Indeed, very valuable information gained during this pairing!

It is always important to keep in mind that everyone is unique. Even the individuals from the same place do not necessarily share the same understanding of cultural norms and their implications. (Higher Education Studies 2022,4.) Conflicts are unavoidable in any team, but to resolving them when working with colleagues from diverse cultures may cause greater difficulties. These conflicts may stem from varying communication styles, values, beliefs, interests, or goals, and can impact the team's performance, morale, and relationships. To manage these conflicts effectively requires identification of the source and nature of the issue and addressing it promptly. It is also important to actively listen and empathise your colleagues' perspectives and emotions. (LinkedIn n.d.)

“Singapore is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural society, primarily comprised of citizens of Chinese, Malay, and Indian descent, with foreigners accounting for nearly 30% of the total

residential population” (CIEE n.d.). Maintaining racial and religious harmony remains an ongoing effort as Singapore's social fabric evolves and belief systems become increasingly diverse with the arrival of new immigrants. (A Singapore Government Agency Website n.d.).

Working on multiculturalism in Singapore is like navigating a fascinating maze of diverse cultures and their endless combinations and interactions. However, it also means entering a complex, challenging, and sometimes conflicted landscape. While working in such landscape, you can easily find yourself in the middle of a jungle of misunderstandings, which at worst can cause uncertainty and even anxiety. (Eng, L n.d.) “In school, while we have multi-racial friends, when students flock into their cliques, they’re usually not as multi-racial as I would like. Kids still stuck to their own races. Sometimes, they deliberately spoke in their mother tongue instead of English so that the other wouldn’t understand what they’re saying.” (Boch n.d.) Thus, it can be assumed, that despite the efforts of the Singaporean government for ethnic and religious equality in the country, racial and linguistic differentiation still exists to some extent. This might also be in some extent reflected in the work of Singaporean RCCMs and is therefore an important factor to consider when thinking about the well-being of the working community on a Finnair aircraft. Awareness of this potential conflict helps to prevent and, if necessary, to resolve potential disagreements among Singaporean flight attendants of different ethnic backgrounds. Once again, an essential piece of information was found that may be useful in my future work tasks.

### **3.7 Observation weeks 7 and 8, January 2025**

My next duty shift was the so-called "Qantas operation". Finnair flies Qantas flights on a wet lease basis between Singapore and Sydney and Bangkok and Sydney. The flights between Sin-Syd and Bkk-Syd are operated by Finnair Airbus 330 aircraft and Finnair crews. The flight crew is purely Finnish, and the cabin crew consists of Thai RCCMs. The shift starts with either a flight from Helsinki to Singapore or Bangkok, continuing from the destination to Sydney after a short rest required by aviation regulations. After flight to Sydney, it is again time to spend a rest period in accordance with official regulations before it is time to return along the same route in the opposite direction.

Indeed, the work shifts in question are quite heavy, because most of the flight times fall on Finnish nighttime, and the time differences in the destinations compared to Finnish time are large, for example in Sydney, the time is nine hours ahead of Finnish time.

In short, this time it was my turn to take a route through Bangkok. The cabin crew consisted of four Finnish flight attendants and four Thai RCCMs. The initial briefing with the cabin crew went normally without any need to go into detail regarding the weather conditions on the route, etc. We

already knew at the departure gate that the flight would be delayed because we had to wait for a rather large group of connecting passengers and their bags, as their flight arrived late in Helsinki. However, together with the purser of the flight, we decided to start boarding at the normal time, so that when the connecting passengers would arrive, we would be ready to start our journey as soon as possible.

Then, as the flight had started and after the initial serving calmed down, I asked if we could have a little conversation together with the flight's Finnish purser and one of the Thai flight attendants. After telling the background about my thesis, I turned the conversation to the possible challenges brought by different cultural backgrounds in the work of the cabin crew. Overall, the conversation was quite open and multi-dimensional, but the main thing that stuck in my mind was mutual appreciation for the other employee. According to the Finnish purser, Thai flight attendants are very professional in their work and equipped with a great service attitude, and bring valuable help when there is a need to communicate with customers who do not necessarily know English but only Thai. On the other hand, according to the Thai RCCM, they appreciate the leadership style of the Finnish pursers and captains, and value the clear and direct instructions. Although the Finns' outspokenness had initially seemed a bit intimidating, uncomfortable, and even disrespectful to her, she had later learned to appreciate the open and constructive feedback that the pursers and captains give after every flight. In this way, she felt she was receiving unfiltered and valuable information about her successes and development needs to become better at her job. Indeed, quite an admirable attitude that she seems to have, and what came up in the discussion was once again remarkably similar to what I have written before.

Anyway, after a short layover, it was time to continue my work shift with a new cabin crew on the flight to Sydney. This time the cabin crew consisted of nine Thai RCCMs, four males and five females. This time, a strong thunderstorm front was developing near Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, I went through the route and the schedule of weather phenomena hitting the route in more detail than usual. In this way, the cabin crew could better schedule the flight service. As the weather posed some challenges for carrying out the service, we also agreed on a way in which we could anticipate the development of the situation so that the service could still be carried out as well as possible.

The flight from Bangkok to Sydney is even normally extremely demanding on the cabin due to the relatively short flight time, the large number of passengers and the extent of the service. Since this time the interruptions caused by the weather delayed the service even more, I did not have the opportunity to have more extensive conversations during the trip, but only normal work-related

conversations. In any case, the flight, and the catering service during it were carried out normally, and we were able to deliver a full load of satisfied passengers safely to their destination.

Since both, the cabin crew and us pilots, were on a layover somewhere other than our homebase, I managed to arrange with some of the cabin crew to have dinner together in the evening, which also gave me the opportunity to discuss topics related to my thesis.

The meal and the evening went quite well. Instead of focusing on discussing the differences between our cultures, I tried to get more detailed information about the behaviour and norms of Thai culture. During the evening, I learned a few very practical phrases that I will definitely use in the future when greeting Thai cabin crew. For example, "hello" or "goodbye" in Thai for a man is "Sawatdee khrap", pronounced sa-wat-dee-kap, meanwhile the same phrase used by a woman is "Sawatdee kha", and pronounced slightly differently, sa-wat-dee-kaa. If there is a need to say thank you, it is "Khawp khun khrap" as a man says it in Thai, and pronounced kap-kun-kap, while as a woman uses "Khawp khun khrap, pronounced kap-kun-kaa".

During the evening, I also received a brief introduction to the Wai greeting, which Westerners also often use by joining the palms together below the face and bowing. During the discussion, it became clear that this is not just a greeting, but a very nuanced behaviour pattern that, in addition to the greeting, also shows respect for the other party and their hierarchical position. The position of the hands in relation to the face, the depth of the bow, who greets first, etc. strongly depends on the age and social status of the counterparties. There are also situations where it is not appropriate to use the Wai greeting. All this is clearly reflecting the very hierarchical culture that still exists in Thailand.

When I asked how it would ever be possible to learn all the nuances required by this greeting, they told me to use a polite nod and smile instead. This way, I wouldn't accidentally offend or embarrass the recipient of the greeting or myself by misusing the greeting. Quite good advice, which is probably also worth following in order to avoid causing conflicts with the Thais!

Overall, the evening was really nice and again broadened my view of what things should be considered when working with RCCMs of Thai origin. A few new acquaintances were also made during the evening, and the future work shifts with them will probably go well in a good atmosphere.

On the return flight from Sydney to Bangkok, the same problems related to the short flight time and serving a large number of passengers meant that I was not able to have deeper conversations with the new Thai RCCM crew. Instead, the Thai greetings and thanks that I used in the initial briefings were happily received. However, I left out the Wai greeting...

The flight from Bangkok to Helsinki was also quite routine, and as the really long pairing was ending, the fatigue also started to be noticeable. Therefore, I decided to skip deeper discussions with cabin crew and focus on sleeping during my rest periods, which means that I don't have anything special to report from this flight either.

Working in a multicultural work community is a constant learning and adaptation, but at the same time a very rewarding and life-enhancing event. Willingness to learn from your colleagues and share your own knowledge with them and acceptance of diversity can be an asset and a source of competitive advantage in the aviation industry. (LinkedIn n.d.) As each of the cultures has its own way of living a life, when going to work, deal, or even live with those who are not from the exact same cultural background, you must have sufficient understanding and knowledge of the differences related to the cultural background of your colleagues. (Higher Education Studies 2022, 5.)

In the airline industry, where the cabin crew are the employees who interact directly with passengers, they belong to a workforce that often faces numerous challenges on their job. In addition to their duties of ensuring flight safety, one major source of stress for cabin crew can be serving the passengers from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Higher Education Studies 2022, 1.) According to Pierobon (2018), using a multicultural workforce on aircraft can offer many advantages. For instance, it allows you to serve passengers in their native language and enhances problem-solving by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives. Therefore, with the help of the RCCM crews used on Finnair flights, it is also possible to achieve a qualitatively better, passenger-friendly service and at the same time improve the safety of the flight by avoiding communication problems and possible linguistic misunderstandings between passengers and cabin crew. An important thing to remember and value by us pilots too and also give us an extra boost to understand and appreciate the benefits their different cultural backgrounds bring to Finnair flights and our work environment.

## 4 Discussion

“Research has consistently shown that diverse teams produce better results, provided they are well led. The ability to bring together people from different backgrounds, disciplines, cultures and generations and leverage all they have to offer, therefore, is a must-have for leaders.” (Ibarra and Hansen 2011,71.) Intercultural understanding is an essential part of living with others in the diverse world of the twenty-first century. The key ideas for Intercultural Understanding are organised into three interrelated elements in the learning continuum, as shown below. (Australian Curriculum n.d.)

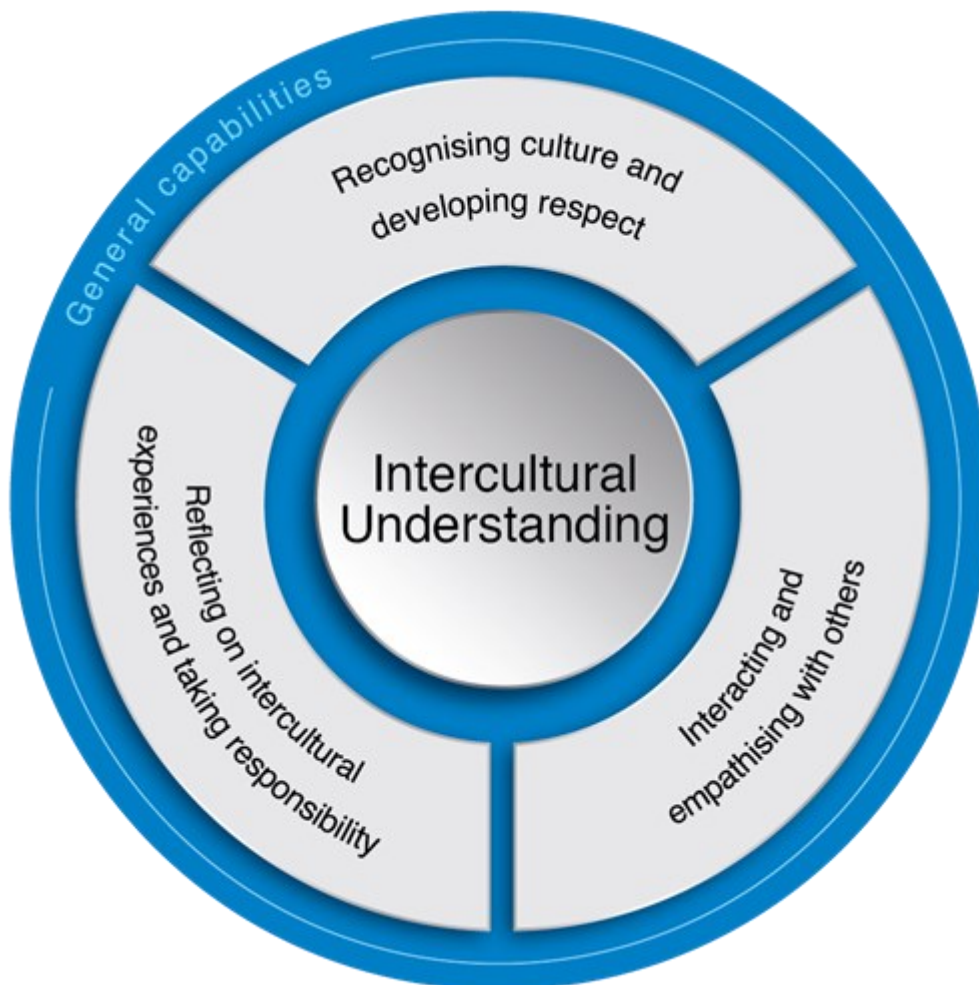


Figure 3. Organising elements for Intercultural Understanding (Australian Curriculum n.d.)

When I started writing this thesis, in section 2.1, "Analysis of my current work", I described myself that I am a skilled performer in my work. Fortunately, however, I left the goal of developing myself in communication and understanding cultural differences among my colleagues from different

cultures open as a back door, because that's exactly what this journey to writing the thesis has been at its best.

Actually, writing a thesis in the form of a diary and thereby examining my own everyday work brought insights into how, for example, my own communication could be made more effective. Since I am a systematic and forward-thinking person, the process of a thesis in the form of a diary seemed natural to me. However, the work required strict adherence to schedules, so writing a diary was also a tedious task in addition to my own work. On the other hand, one of the biggest challenges during the writing process was finding relevant theory-based material. I could not find any material that was actually related to communication between pilots and cabin crew in a foreign language, so I had to apply articles that were related to the challenges of communicating with pilots from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds.

Already at an early stage in the writing process, I noticed how superficial my communication with the cabin crew had been. Of course, I had also previously briefed them on the most important aspects affecting the flight and especially the work of the cabin crew, but the event had been, at its worst, very superficial and had not considered the special needs of my colleagues with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Although some sources emphasized to communicate clearly, using simple, direct, and polite language, and avoiding idioms, sarcasm, or humour, I realized early on that changing your own persona in a communication situation is not necessarily a good thing. Indeed, communication that is factual and still contains all the necessary information can also be practiced by maintaining your own personal style, and most of the time the result is even better than when you try to present something other than you are. In any case, in exceptional situations, communication must be completely unambiguous and focus only on the necessary facts. Backgrounding the situation and sharing more extensive information in these situations should be left to the time after the acute situation and in connection with the de-briefing.

During the thesis process, I believe I have succeeded in developing to deepen skills in managing communication and teamwork with my colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. Personal conversations with cabin crew from different linguistic backgrounds have also developed my language skills, understanding of the behaviour models of different cultures, and have certainly improved the cohesion and team spirit of my work community.

Perhaps the most important new solution to the communication problems occurring in my work, which are caused by working in a foreign language, English, has been to use as unambiguous an expression as possible, and to have a better control of work-related vocabulary. On the other hand,

in more free-form conversations, I have still dared to use more of my own personality and sense of humour, which, even somewhat surprisingly, has also worked quite well.

Also, focusing communication more on individuals on a personal level than on everyone in general has perhaps helped to clarify mutual understanding of things. In this way, an individual has a better opportunity to ask clarifying questions if something remains unclear. This also helps to strengthen the cohesion of the work community, as most, if not all, crew members are certainly aware of the situation at the same level. However, using this operating model is time-consuming, so applying it to all flights is not possible, due to the limited time available and the number of cabin crew tasks.

One of the biggest realizations while writing the diary has been how I have had the privilege of working with a staff with a wide and diverse cultural background. The realization of how uniformly RCCMs from other cultures and ethnic backgrounds seem to see a Finnish pilot has been downright startling. How grey and one-sided we must seem in their eyes! At the same time, my own perspective and understanding of different cultures and their ways of behaving has grown considerably. Something worth appreciating!

Writing the thesis in the form of a diary was also a very educational experience. Even though writing a diary after a long day at work was sometimes a little challenging, since the diary format requires regular writing, it helped me to improve my time management and self-management. Additionally, as each entry serves as a kind of progress report it helped me to visualize the big picture. The diary format also encouraged me to continuous self-assessment, as my own actions, decisions, and progress in writing affected the final result.

Indeed, keeping a diary also offered a more in-depth opportunity to identify problems and develop solutions in real time. Analysing events during and after the work shift, writing them down and thinking about alternative action models and how theories apply to practice, have helped me to improve my decision-making ability, which is very valuable in handling future events at my job.

Also, writing a diary and its gradual progress through the thesis process have taught me to value not only the end result but also the small intermediate steps and their significance in terms of the whole.

Overall, the process I went through during this thesis to promote communication and understanding the needs of colleagues from different cultural backgrounds has been a great and educational experience. Although my work experience in my field and as a captain is already quite long, through this process I have found new dimensions in my work. The importance of clarity of communication has become even more clear, and at the same time, on the other hand, personal conversations with RCCMs have been a very pleasant and positive experience, opening the

possibility to better understand the members of my work community. During the conversations along the way, I have also made good new acquaintances, if not even friendships.

To conclude, in order to promote a more cooperative and harmonious team dynamic, it is important to encourage all crew members to have an open dialogue about cultural differences and to respect and learn from each other's backgrounds. As a captain, it is also important and useful to learn to understand the importance of small nuances resulting from different cultural backgrounds in potential conflict situations between members of my work community. If necessary, understanding these details can decisively facilitate the resolution of the situation, so that the final result is as acceptable and fair as possible.

The importance of clear and unambiguous communication cannot be overemphasized either, because in a safety-critical field such as aviation, the significance of even a small misstatement can become critical at worst. However, maintaining your own personality when communicating is important, because when you speak naturally, you are more likely to get your message across than when you pretend to be someone other than who you are.

From now on, I intend to continue the same operating model that I started in the field of having personal conversations, whenever it is possible in terms of time. To be able to navigate the complex ethnic and cultural dynamics within the multicultural cabin crew, I will even more focus on understanding differences in communication styles, work habits, religious practices, and gender expectations.

Finally, I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all my unnamed colleagues with whom I have had the opportunity to have very fruitful discussions about my thesis during this writing process. Your help in completing the work has been immeasurably valuable!

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