



# Utilizing Cultural Knowledge into Success in International Business

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## **ABSTRACT**

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### Abstract

This thesis studies on the impact of cultural differences on communication and behavior, with a particular focus on the role of proactive actions in navigating cross-cultural interactions. Drawing on a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical data gathered through survey, the research explores how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds can prepared themselves into different social and professional scenarios.

The study identifies key cultural dimensions that influence interpersonal communication and highlights the importance of proactive strategies in overcoming misunderstandings and enhancing cooperation. Findings suggest that individuals who actively engage in cross-cultural awareness and adapt their behavior to cultural contexts are more successful in fostering positive relationships. This work contributes to the understanding of cultural diversity in both academic and practical contexts, offering insights for organizations and individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of intercultural exchange in increasingly globalized environments.

The results and conclusions of this thesis combine the theoretical knowledge and findings into practices that can be utilized to successful communication in multicultural international business.

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Key words: Cultural Knowledge, Diversity, Communication, International Business

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
IBM	International Business Management

## 1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the importance of understanding and managing of cultural differences to successful communication in an international business. The thesis will introduce and review the most relevant theory and literature related to the topic and research the status of knowledge in a studied organization. The organization is referenced from here on as “organization”.

Identifying typical behavior of a certain group or culture is sometimes necessary in business rather than focusing on the personal qualities of an individual

The objective of the thesis is to research, analyze and develop the organizations knowhow on how to utilize the multicultural aspects in international business.

The thesis will research methods and find solutions and recommendations to inspire the organization to identify and utilize the opportunities the cultural management offers.

Cultural differences play a significant role in globalization. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is essential to understand and appreciate these differences to effectively operate in the complex globalized world.

Cultural differences exists everywhere where more than one culture are present. The level of the differences can vary from very subtle hints to great and obvious. It is interesting how different cultures may have developed totally different approach or meaning to a topic, a practical example can be left or right sided traffic, which is an example of utilizing a decision into cultural norm.

In daily life general misunderstanding of the cultural differences can lead into great experience or clashes, even to wars. In business life the difference between successful and unsuccessful communication between cultures can make the difference between winning or losing deals or failing or succeeding in projects.

Successful communication and shown respect are valued in all cultures. In the personal contacts of visits, it is appreciated on both sides if persons have familiarized themselves with the general topics in advance. It communicates both appreciation and genuine interest. (Haukio, 2023)

The theoretical part of the research is the review of the published literature on the subject. The most relevant literature and tools have been identified and will be further described and analyzed within the study.

The objective of the thesis is to research, analyze and develop the target organizations knowhow on how to utilize the multicultural aspects in international business.

The thesis will research methods and find solutions and recommendations to inspire the organization to identify and utilize the opportunities the cultural management offers.

The thesis will contribute new knowledge and solution proposals to the organization. This is to be made by providing a thorough review of existing literature on the topic, outline the research methodology, and present the results and recommendations of the study.

The research concentrates to customer interface of the organization and to provide practical tools and recommendations around utilizing cultural differences.

### **1.1. Background and justification for the research**

The background for study is the researcher's own experiences and observations in the multicultural business environment later inspired by the studies of understanding cultural differences.

Cultural differences are a subject that can be analyzed theoretically but has not been widely studied. The preconception is that by understanding the differences, the knowledge can be utilized into successful communication. Further this knowledge can be used to support business activities.

## **1.2. Focus of the research**

The research focuses on the customer interface of the selected organization. The research does not cover the organizations internal human resourcing instructions or guidelines but concentrates merely to the customer interface activities.

## **1.3. Strategic questions**

The main strategic question of the thesis is:

- How can the organization utilize the knowledge of multicultural aspects to support successful international business?

The main strategic question directs the research into finding the relevant theoretical information combined with the experiences of the organization.

The supporting question is:

- What preventive actions of utilizing the cultural differences in the customer interface can be identified and contributed to the organization?

The supporting question directs the research into finding the most appropriate practical actions for the organization.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the most relevant and well-known theories around the area of the cultural knowledge. The theoretical framework introduces the general overview of culture itself, globalization and the different theories from the writers and researchers of the area of subject.

#### **2.1.1 Definition of Culture**

Culture is a combination of norms and values that influence human behavior in a specific direction, are learnt, do not change easily, are unique to a particular group, and are passed down over time from one generation to the next. (Kazi, 2009)

Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. (Hofstede, 2001)

Humans have been more successful than other species is not because we have been the strongest animals. We have succeeded as a species because of our ability to form cultures. (Simon Sinek, 2009)

Culture can be defined as the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a group or society, shaping their way of life and influencing their interactions and expressions.

Culture is present in all actions that us humans do. There are differences in cultural aspects in all levels, but taking the whole globe to consideration the differences can be great. Understanding this can be highly beneficial in the communication. Business activities are related to communication between companies and eventually individuals. Harris, Moran, Moran (2004)

There are some elements of culture that can be easily identified. These elements are such as language, ways of greetings, food, clothing and general way of approaching everyday life.

Alternatively, there are elements of culture, that can be difficult to identify, or at least takes more time to identify. These elements are such as beliefs, ethics, humor, gestures, attitudes, manners and thought patterns.



PICTURE1: The cultural iceberg (camhsprofessionals.co.uk)

The Culture Iceberg is a model explains the visible and invisible elements of culture, highlighting how much of culture remains hidden below the surface. It draws parallels between an iceberg, where only a small part is visible above the waterline and the vast majority is submerged, to represent the aspects of culture that people are unaware of or may not immediately recognize. Hall (1976)

### **2.1.2 Definition of globalization**

Globalization refers to the term used to describe the increasing interconnectedness, integration, and interdependence of countries and societies around the world. It involves the exchange of goods, services, information, and ideas across national borders, facilitated by advancements in technology, transportation, and communication. Numerous facets of society, including the business, culture, politics, and ecology, are significantly impacted by globalization. It has sparked the growth of international government systems, increasing trade between nations, the expansion of multinational enterprises, and the sharing of cultural practices. CG CP (Friedman, 1999)

Globalization is shrinking the world in terms of communication and bringing people, cultures, and companies closer to each other. Technology is developing rapidly, and individuals are facing more experiences and interaction with different cultures. This development increases the demands for both personal and organizational communication skills and the importance of cultural knowledge.

### **2.2. Hofstede's 6 cultural dimensions**

Gerard Hendrik Hofstede has published the book "Culture's Consequences" (1980) where he introduces six key dimensions to identify and categorize the cultural differences. Hofstede's six key dimensions include:

- 2.2.1. Power distance
- 2.2.2 Uncertainty avoidance
- 2.2.3 Individualism-collectivism
- 2.2.4 Masculinity-femininity
- 2.2.5 Short vs. long-term orientation
- 2.2.6 Indulgence

The main characteristics of these dimensions are introduced in the following chapters.

### 2.2.1 Power distance

Power distance refers to the level of society's social hierarchy. The Power Distance Index measures the extent to which those people who are at the lower end of the hierarchy accept the fact that social stance or power is not distributed equally in the society. (Hofstede, 1980)

On low power distance cultures and organizations, people such as supervisors and employees are considered equal. Individuals in low power distance cultures exhibit more egalitarian relationships and open communication styles. (Hofstede, 1980)

On high power distance cultures people tend to see that there is nothing wrong with inequality and everyone has specific positions. In these cultures the distance of a supervisor and employees is high. (Hofstede, 1980)

While Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is widely referenced, the concept of power distance is also discussed in various other sources related to organizational and cultural studies. Different researchers may offer different interpretations, but the core idea remains consistent: power distance reflects the extent to which a society, culture, or organization accepts and reinforces unequal power relationships.

This dimension of cultural difference is identified similarly by other researchers such as Erin Meyers, who describes the dimension similarly in the book: "The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business" The Erin Meyers theory is introduced in the chapter 2.3.

### **2.2.2 Uncertainty avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance measures how cultures differ on the amount of tolerance they have of unpredictability.

Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance can be defined as the level to which individuals avoid ambiguity and uncertainty. In societies with high uncertainty avoidance, people typically follow rules strictly and avoid taking risks. (Hofstede, 1980)

In societies with low uncertainty avoidance people are more comfortable with ambiguity, more experimental and likely to take risks and they are less dependent on rules. (Hofstede, 1980)

### **2.2.3 Individualism-collectivism**

This dimension focuses on how well-integrated into groups people are within a society. In individualistic societies, the emphasis lies on personal achievement and rights, prioritizing needs of oneself and one's immediate family. Collectivism indicates that there is a greater importance placed on the goals and well-being of the group.

Individualism is the preference for a loosely organized social structure in which people are expected to look out for themselves and their close relatives. People are expected to be assertive, independent, and self-sufficient in individualistic society. Personal objectives and rights of individuals are prioritized. (Hofstede, 1980)

Collectivism however refers to a preference for a social framework where individuals can expect their peers or members of a particular group to look after them in exchange for loyalty. (Hofstede, 1980)

### **2.2.4 Masculinity-femininity**

This dimension looks at the extent to which a culture supports a traditional view of masculine and feminine traits.

In a masculine culture, men are expected to be assertive, competitive, and focused on material success. There is a significant emphasis on success, competition, and achievement. Women are expected to be more people-oriented, and life-quality-oriented. (Hofstede, 1980)

Hofstede asserts that in cultures with high femininity or civilization gender roles are more flexible and there is an emphasis on quality of life, cooperation, and nurturing. (Hofstede, 1980)

### **2.2.5 Short versus long-term orientation**

Hofstede identifies the time perception of cultures in short vs. long-term orientation scale. The scale explores how different societies perceive time, planning, and the balance between the present and the future.

Long-term orientation is characterized by a focus on the future, it has focus on perseverance, and short-term gratification can be delayed for future benefits. (Hofstede, 1980)

Short-term orientation cultures orientation focusses on the present or immediate future. These cultures pursuits more of immediate satisfaction, fulfilling social obligations, and concern with social hierarchy. (Hofstede, 1980)

### **2.2.6 Indulgence**

The Indulgence measures the degree to which a culture consents or suppresses the gratification of desires and general enjoyment of life.

The High-scoring cultures accept the satisfaction of people's desires and feelings, including having fun and enjoying life. In a culture with a low score, social rules

are more rigid, people's conduct and behaviour are more regulated, and repressing gratification is more valued. (Hofstede, 1980)

### **2.3. Erin Mayers cultural map**

Erin Mayers has introduced a cultural map in her book "The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business" (Meyers, 2014). The Meyers model introduces 8 dimensions to analyze and identify the significant cultural differences includes.

- 2.3.1 Communicating
- 2.3.2 Evaluating
- 2.3.3 Persuading
- 2.3.4 Leading
- 2.3.5 Deciding
- 2.3.6 Trusting
- 2.3.7 Disagreeing
- 2.3.8 Scheduling

The main conclusions of the Meyer are introduced in the following chapters.

#### **2.3.1 The Communicating Scale**

The communication scale on communication scale refers to low context and high context terms. These terms are used in communication and anthropology to describe different cultural communication styles.

Low context cultures have straightforward, unambiguous communication. The majority of information is communicated by words, and people mostly use spoken language to express themselves. Spoken or written word is the primary means of conveying the message in low context societies. These cultures prioritize direct communication and have a tendency toward individualism. (Mayer, 2014)

High context cultures rely on relationships, context, and nonverbal clues in addition to spoken words when communicating. People are expected to comprehend

the communication's context and underlying meanings because a large portion of the information is implied. In high context cultures, trust and interpersonal interactions are highly valued. A lot is spoken through gestures, shared cultural understanding, and nonverbal clues in communication, which is frequently complex and multilayered. (Mayer, 2014)

In order to properly interpret messages, people in cross-cultural communication need to know whether a culture is high context or low context. Understanding these cultural variations can help one communicate effectively and prevent misconceptions in a variety of contexts. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.2 The Evaluating Scale**

The evaluating scale refers to the level of given direct or indirect negative feedback. There are significant cultural differences in what constitutes as constructive feedback.

In direct feedback cultures negative feedback is provided frankly and directly without being softened by positive feedback. In indirect feedback cultures negative feedback is provided softly, subtly, and diplomatically within positive feedback. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.3 The Persuading Scale**

The persuading scale refers to an approach of principles first vs. applications first. When persuading others, some cultures focus more on why while others focus on how.

In the application-first cultures the individuals tend to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion before adding concepts to explain the conclusion. These cultures focus on the question of why. (Mayer, 2014)

In the principle-first cultures the individuals tend to first develop the theory or complex concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. These cultures focus on the question of how. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.4 The Leading Scale**

The leading scale measures the level of respect and deference shown to authority, placing countries on a spectrum from egalitarian to hierarchical.

In egalitarian approach the ideal leader is a facilitator among equals. Organizational structure is flat. (Mayer, 2014)

In Hierarchical style the best leader is a strong director who leads from the front. Organizational structure is multilayered and fixed. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.5 The Deciding Scale**

Mayers deciding scale measures the difference in decision making. The scale varies between consensual decision-making and top-down decision making.

In the consensual decision making the decisions are made in groups by finding consensus. (Mayer, 2014)

In the top-down decision making the decisions are made by individuals, often bosses or other person on the higher level in the organization. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.6 The Trusting Scale**

Mayers trusting scale measures the difference between work and task-based trust to relationship-based trust. On the task-based trust the trust is based on the work results consistency, whereas the relationship based trust is based on personal experiences for example over dinners or other activities outside of the actual work. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.7 The Disagreeing Scale**

Mayer has a dimension for disagreeing scale between confrontational and avoiding confrontation. The scale measures the acceptable level of disagreement and debate that is appropriate in the culture in case. (Mayer, 2014)

In direct feedback cultures the negative feedback is provided frankly and honestly without being softened by positive feedback. (Mayer, 2014)

In indirect feedback cultures the negative feedback is provided softly, and diplomatically. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.3.8 The Scheduling Scale**

The perception of time differs from culture to culture. Mayer describes this as the scheduling scale. On the Mayers scale the time perception can range from linear to flexible on the scheduling scale.

Cultures with linear time perception focuses on one task before they move to the next one. Deadlines are appreciated. In such cultures it can be found impolite to shift attention from one task to the other without finishing tasks. (Mayer, 2014)

Cultures with flexible time perception are flexible where timelines are concerned and believe in multi-tasking. Multiple subjects can be addressed at once, and flexibility is a more valuable quality. (Mayer, 2014)

### **2.4. Trompenaars' seven dimensions**

Dutch researcher Fons Trompenaars has identified seven dimensions of culture, which explain how people from different cultures interact and communicate.

The Trompenaars's dimensions are as follows (Trompenaars, 2020):

- 2.4.1 Universalism vs. particularism
- 2.4.2 Individualism vs. communitarianism
- 2.4.3 Specific vs. diffuse
- 2.4.4 Neutral vs. affective
- 2.4.5 Achievement vs. ascription
- 2.4.6 Sequential time vs synchronous time
- 2.4.7 Internal direction vs. external direction

According to Trompenaars these are the dimensions that highlight the differences in cultural values and behaviors.

### **2.4.1 Universalism versus particularism**

Trompenaars' Universalism vs. Particularism dimension measures the level in which different cultures view the role of rules, relationships, and context in decision-making.

Universalism refers to cultures that believe in universal rules, standards, and laws that apply equally to everyone, regardless of the specific context or relationship. In universalistic cultures, individuals are expected to follow the same rules in all situations, and fairness, equality, and consistency are highly valued. (Trompenaars, 2020)

Particularism refers to cultures where relationships and context emphasizes a larger role in decision-making and behavior. In particularistic cultures, the rules may change depending on the specific situation, context, or the individuals involved. Personal relationships, trust, and obligations can influence how decisions are made. (Trompenaars, 2020)

### **2.4.2 Individualism versus communitarianism**

This Trompenaars dimension measures the way cultures perceive the relationship between the individual and the group, especially how people prioritize between personal goals and larger group goals.

In individualistic cultures, the focus is on personal autonomy and individual rights. People in individualistic cultures tend to prioritize their personal goals, desires, and achievements over those of the group. The individual is seen as the primary unit of society, and decisions are often made based on what is best for the individual, rather than the collective. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In communitarian cultures, the focus is on the group and collective goals. People in these cultures tend to see themselves as part of a larger group, such as a

family, team, or society. Decisions are often made with the best interests of the group in mind, and personal desires may be subordinated to the needs of the collective. (Trompenaars, 2020)

### **2.4.3 Specific versus diffuse**

This dimension focuses on how people in different cultures approach personal and professional boundaries, and how they separate or integrate different aspects of their lives.

In specific cultures defined by Trompenaars, people tend to compartmentalize their lives and relationships. They separate their work and personal life, and are more likely to be direct and task-oriented in their interactions. In these cultures, individuals focus on specific issues or tasks without getting involved in personal matters, and the boundaries between private and public life are clearly defined. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In diffuse cultures, people integrate various aspects of their lives. There is less distinction between work and personal life, and relationships tend to be more holistic and all-encompassing. In these cultures, individuals are often more reserved in initially revealing personal details, but once a relationship is established, it becomes much deeper, with both personal and professional boundaries blending together. (Trompenaars, 2020)

### **2.4.4 Neutral versus affective**

This dimension explores how cultures manage emotions in interpersonal interactions, particularly in the context of business and social settings. It identifies the degree to which emotions are expressed or restrained in communication and behaviour.

In neutral cultures, emotions are controlled and reserved. People tend to suppress or manage the outward expression of their emotions, particularly in public or formal settings. In these cultures, people value self-restraint and are generally

expected to maintain a calm and composed demeanor, regardless of the situation. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In affective cultures, emotions are freely expressed and outwardly shown. People are comfortable expressing their feelings openly, whether positive or negative. In these cultures, emotional expression is seen as an important part of communication and personal interaction. (Trompenaars, 2020)

#### **2.4.5 Achievement versus ascription**

This dimension addresses how different cultures view the basis for an individual's status, recognition, and respect within society or the workplace. Specifically, it explores whether status and respect are earned through achievements or whether they are granted based on ascribed characteristics such as age, social position, education, or family background.

In achievement-oriented cultures, individuals earn their status and respect through personal achievements and performance. Success, skills, education, and measurable accomplishments are seen as the key determinants of a person's position in society or the workplace. In these cultures, status is dynamic and can be changed or earned over time through hard work and demonstrated ability. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In ascription-oriented cultures, an individual's status is attributed based on inherent characteristics such as age, family background, education, or social status. People in these cultures may be granted respect and authority due to factors outside their personal achievements, and social status tends to be more fixed or inherited. Ascription refers to the process of assigning status based on who a person is rather than what they have accomplished. (Trompenaars, 2020)

#### **2.4.6 Sequential time versus synchronous Time**

Trompenaars describes how different cultures perceive and manage time in their daily lives, particularly in the context of work, scheduling, and multitasking by the scale of sequential time versus synchronous time.

In sequential time cultures, people see time as a linear progression, with a clear past, present, and future. These cultures tend to focus on doing one task at a time and value punctuality, deadlines, and schedule adherence. Time is often seen as a limited resource that should be carefully managed. This leads to a structured approach to work, with clear expectations for when tasks should be completed. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In synchronous time cultures, people view time as more fluid and cyclical. Time is seen as happening simultaneously with various events occurring at once, rather than in a strict sequence. These cultures often take a more flexible approach to scheduling and tend to engage in multitasking, with an emphasis on relationships and processes rather than rigid timelines. Punctuality may be less important, and time is often treated as a resource that can be expanded or compressed depending on the situation. (Trompenaars, 2020)

#### **2.4.7 Internal direction versus outer direction**

This dimension focuses on how people relate to their environment and external forces. It addresses whether individuals or groups believe that they have control over their circumstances or whether they believe they must adapt to the forces and circumstances around them.

In cultures with an internal direction orientation, people believe they have the ability to control and shape their environment. They tend to be more self-reliant and believe that individual actions can directly influence the outcome of events. This worldview is based on the assumption that humans can master their surroundings, and they generally value autonomy and personal responsibility. (Trompenaars, 2020)

In cultures with an outer direction orientation, people believe that they need to adapt to the forces of nature or society and that outcomes are more strongly influenced by external forces, such as nature, fate, or other people. These cultures place more value on harmony, flexibility, and adjusting to external conditions rather than trying to impose control over circumstances. (Trompenaars, 2020)

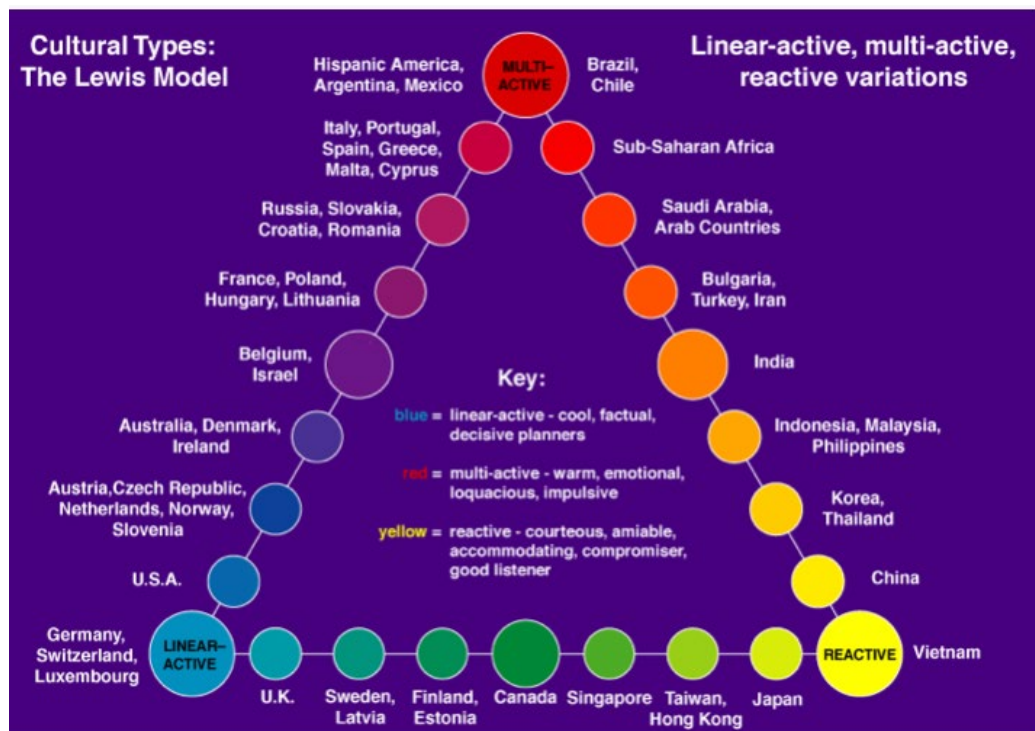
## 2.5. The Richard Lewis model – Cross Culture

Richard D. Lewis is an author and cross-cultural expert who has made contributions to the field of international communication and understanding cultures. Lewis has introduced his theory in the book *When cultures collide: Leading across cultures*.

Lewis has come to the opinion that people can be categorized into 3 distinct groups based on their behavior rather than nationality or religion. His typologies are referred to as:

- 2.5.1 Linear-active
- 2.5.2 Multi-active
- 2.5.3 Reactive

Even though the three types are distinct, each one shares behavioral traits with the other two types. It depends on which one is more powerful. In the workplace, many people vary from their national type, for example, engineers and accountants are often linear while salespeople are often non-linear. multi-tasking, attorneys and physicians Reactive. (Lewis, 2018).



PICTURE 2, Cultural Types: The Lewis Model (<https://www.crossculture.com>).

### **2.5.1 Linear-active**

The dominant feature of the linear-active group is that they comprise. The linear-active group contains mainly the English-speaking world: North America, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and Northern Europe, including Scandinavia and Germanic countries. (Lewis, 2018).

In Linear-Active cultures are task-oriented and organized people who like to plan ahead. They complete action chains by doing one thing at a time, preferably in accordance with a linear agenda. (Lewis, 2018).

### **2.5.2 Multi-active**

Multi-Actives place a high value on their family, feelings, connections, and people in general. They are emotional, highly communicative, and impulsive people. They have a tendency to multitask and are ineffective agenda followers. (Lewis, 2018).

The Multi-actives are more dispersed throughout Southern Europe, the Mediterranean nations, South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Arab and other Middle Eastern civilizations, India and Pakistan, as well as the majority of Slavs. These cultures can be categorized as a group even though they are wildly different from one another in terms of geography, religions, beliefs, and values. (Lewis, 2018).

They share the following behaviors in common: emotion, talkativeness, rhetoric, drama, eloquence, persuasion, importance of religion or creed, primacy of family ties, low trust societies, punctuality, variable work ethic, volatility, inadequate planning, and capacity. (Lewis, 2018).

### **2.5.3 Reactive**

Reactives are good listeners. The majority of the time, they like to first listen to the other person's perspective and understand it before responding and forming their own opinions. (Lewis, 2018).

All the main Asian nations, except for the Indian subcontinent, are home to the Reactive group. The Indian continent falls between the reactive and multi-active group. (Lewis, 2018).

### **2.1. Stereotyping versus cultural knowledge**

Stereotyping and cultural knowledge are related concepts, but they have distinct meanings and implications.

Cultural knowledge refers to the variations in norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, customs, traditions, and ways of life among different groups of people. These differences can arise due to various factors, such as geography, history, religion, language, and socioeconomic status. Cultural diversity is a fundamental aspect of human society and enriches our understanding of the world. Embracing cultural differences involves recognizing, respecting, and appreciating the unique aspects of various cultures without imposing judgments or stereotypes based on these differences. Cultural Knowledge emphasizes respect and appreciation for that diversity. (Kerr, Inkson 2017)

Stereotyping is the oversimplification and generalization of attitudes, opinions, or judgments about individuals or groups based on those individuals' or groups' perceived traits, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or nationality. Stereotypes can result in biased judgments, discrimination, and prejudice because they frequently neglect the diversity within a group. Stereotyping is harmful because it encourages prejudiced thinking and fails to appreciate the distinctive features, experiences, and skills of individuals.

As a conclusion, cultural knowledge refers to the distinct ways of life and customs among various groups, whereas stereotyping entails generalizing about specific people or groups based on observed features. As accepting diversity and comprehending cultural nuances contribute to a more open and harmonious society, it is crucial to be aware of cultural differences and avoid falling into stereotypes.

It's important to note that these cultural dimensions are generalizations and may not apply to every individual within a specific culture.

### **3 Research**

In this chapter, the methodology and results for this research is introduced. It aims to make clear the rationale for the study as well as the methodical approach to answering the strategic questions and research objectives

#### **3.1. Research method and justification**

A semi-structured survey methodology was decided to be used to gather data from the organization. The decision to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative survey was made on the basis to have the qualitative research to be able to have comparative data and quantitative to have more detailed insight and description of the status of the organization.

A combination of close-ended questions and open-ended questions was used to gather the data. The close-ended questions were used to gather the qualitative data and the open-ended questions to allow interviewees to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

#### **3.2. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire of the research contains a set of the questions relating to the interviewee's experiences working in the organization. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections, background, and cultural experiences. The complete questionnaire is attached as an attachment 1.

#### **3.3. Data collection**

The data was collected through a survey from personnel across the organization. The survey included open ended questions to provide the possibility to give more detailed information about the topic.

The interviewees to the survey were chosen from different parts of the organization and there were multiple different backgrounds and positions among the interviewees. The interviewees were selected in order to gain the most coverage of the different customers interfaces and cultural experiences.

The survey was conducted in the December of 2024 and the results of the survey are related to the current global situations. The target organization is located in Finland.

The survey was sent to 8 persons around the organization, which of 6 responded. The data analysis is made for these 6 responses.

### **3.4. Organization culture of the studied organization**

The studied organization is an international technology company. The organization is located in Finland and is homogenous in relation to cultural diversity, with the personnel mainly the similar cultural background. Thus, there are no great cultural differences inside the organization. This also provides the personnel in the organization less possibilities to interact with different cultures within the work. However, all the persons that participated to the survey had personal experiences on communicating with different cultures.

## **4 Data analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction to data analysis**

The data analysis is divided into two main sections; background questions and questions related to the cultural experiences. The background questions serves the purpose of giving information about the interviewees history to give reference to the more detailed questions about the cultural experiences.

The detailed analysis of the interviewee's answers to the research questions in relation to the studied theories and literature is presented in this chapter.

### **4.2. Background questions**

The purpose of the background questions is to give an insight of the different positions and roles that the interviewees have worked in the organization as well as to understand how many and which different countries and cultures the interviewees have interacted with.

#### **Background of the interviewees**

The interviewees were chosen around the organization and there were multiple different backgrounds and positions. The persons were selected on the preconception that they have greatly experience in working on the customer interface. This selection was to have extensive amount of different experiences as possible for the survey data. Below is a list of the past and current titles from the interviewees:

- Customer Trainer
- Customer Support Director
- ILS Manager/Director
- Offset Director
- OEM Support Director
- Project Director
- Product Manager

- Project Manager
- Product Support Manager / Support Manager
- Sales Director
- Service Manager
- Support Manager
- Technology Transfer Manager
- Technical Specialist
- Training Manager
- VP Marketing

All the positions are such that exposes the person in case to direct customer interface experiences.

### **Work experience**

The work experience per person in the organization were between 22 and 27 years, equaling to total of 148 years of work experience in the organization.

### **Amount of different cultures**

All interviewees had interacted with several different cultures within their career in the organization. The number of countries vary between 8 and 30.

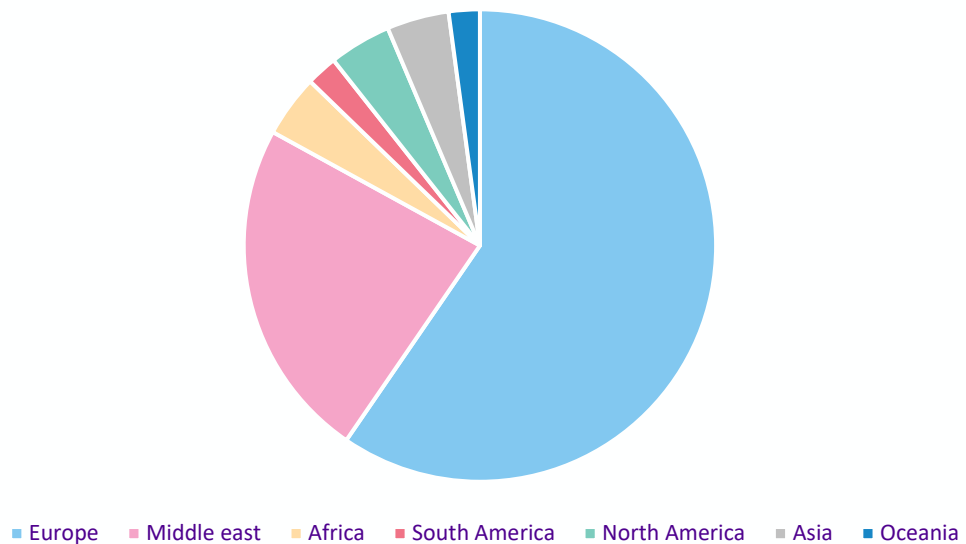
The research shows that the participants had worked with several different cultures within their career in the organization. The total amount of different individual countries that the interviewees have worked with is 46. The different countries are listed below.

- Europe: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, Great Britain, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, United Kingdom
- Asia: Japan, Singapore
- Middle East: Israel, Saudia Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Jordan, Kuwait, Turkey, Pakistan, Turkey

- Africa: Egypt, South Africa
- Oceania: Australia
- North America: Canada, USA
- South America: Brazil

As a summary, the seven continents, Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Oceania were mentioned as cultural areas which have been interacted with. Most quantity of countries are in Europe. The results are not accentuated e.g. by population, and purely counted by the number of countries.

### Interraction with cultures around the world



PICTURE 3. Interviewees interaction with cultures around the world

#### 4.2.1 Summary of background information

The background related questions give the information of the background of the interviewees. In general, the selected interviewees have the experience of several cultures in relatively long time period to give the needed depth to the survey.

### **4.3. Questions related to the cultural experiences.**

**Question: Have you experienced any cultural differences cooperation with these cultures? And if so, which kinds of differences?**

The purpose of the first question was to identify in general whether the interviewees had experienced any differences in cooperation with the different cultures. All the interviewees had experienced some level of cultural differences.

The level of differences varied greatly between the interviewees. follow-up question, which kinds of differences the interviewees had experienced, gave the most detailed insights to the experiences.

The interviewees had identified that cultural differences exist even with closest neighboring countries. The answers are evaluated in reference to data from cultural differences. The tools providing the data is further introduced in the chapter 5.2.

#### **High level differences**

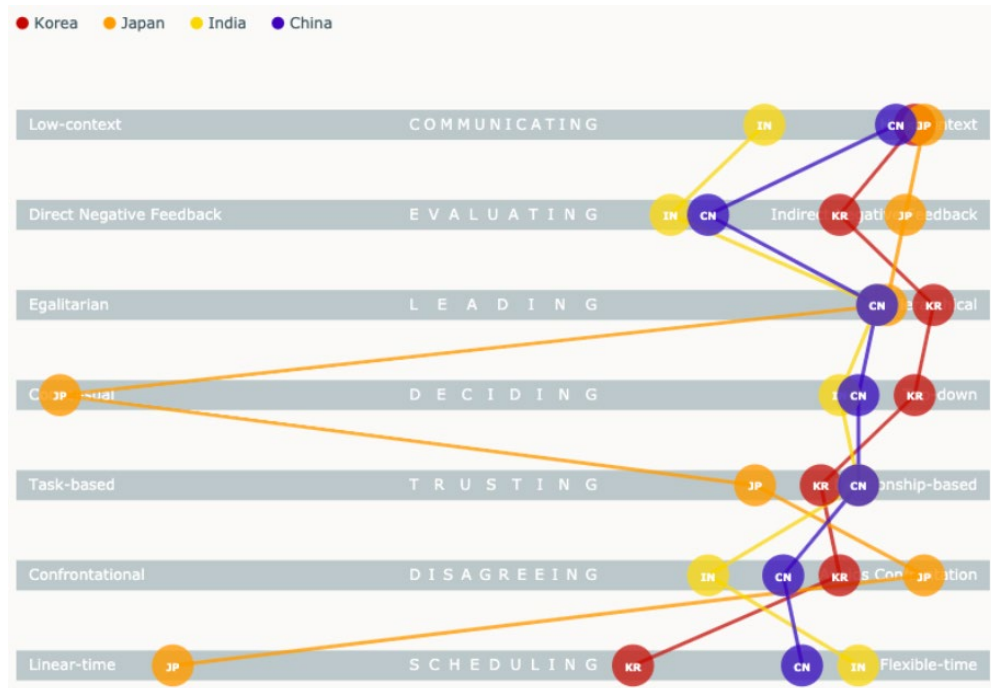
The interviewees raised some of the high-level cultural differences, such as language barriers, religion differences, human rights. These are the kind of differences that can be easily studied in beforehand. These are the visible cultural values, described by Hall (1976) in the form of the cultural iceberg.

#### **Decision making**

Many interviewees described how decision making differs in cultures. It was described how decision making can be very bureaucratic.

It was described how in e.g. Croatia and Japan it is better if someone else can make the tough decisions. "Don't make decision if you can transfer responsibility to someone else".

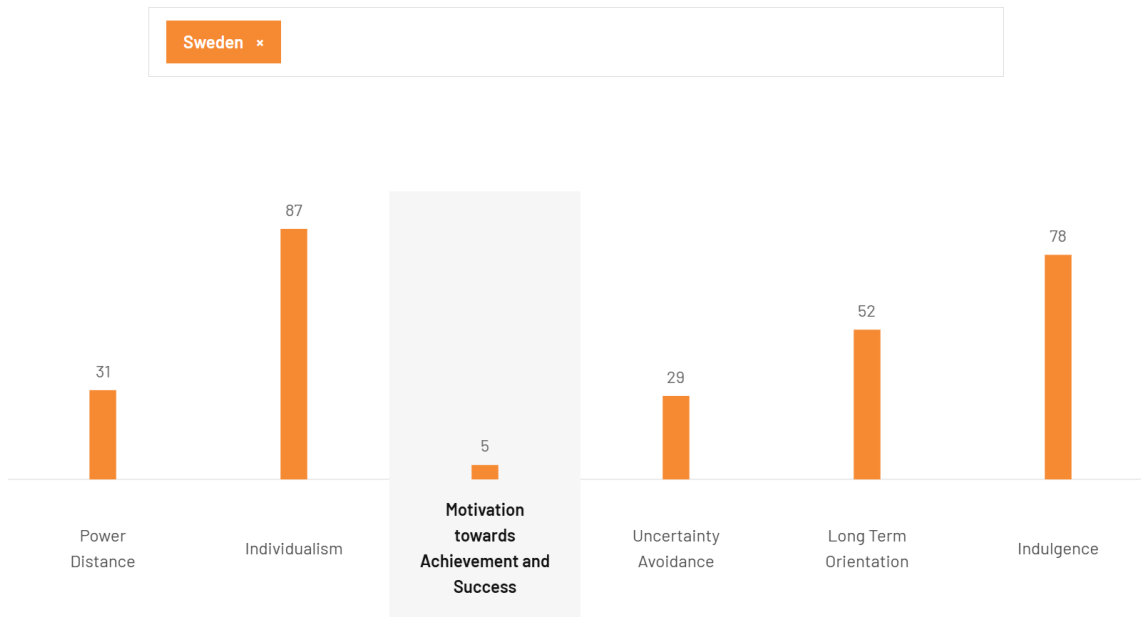
Japan: “If though decisions, it is better to find cause from someone else.” The data from Erin Meyer supports this, as Japan is highly consensual decision-making culture:



PICTURE 4, Erin Meyer cultural map, Korea, Japan, India, China.

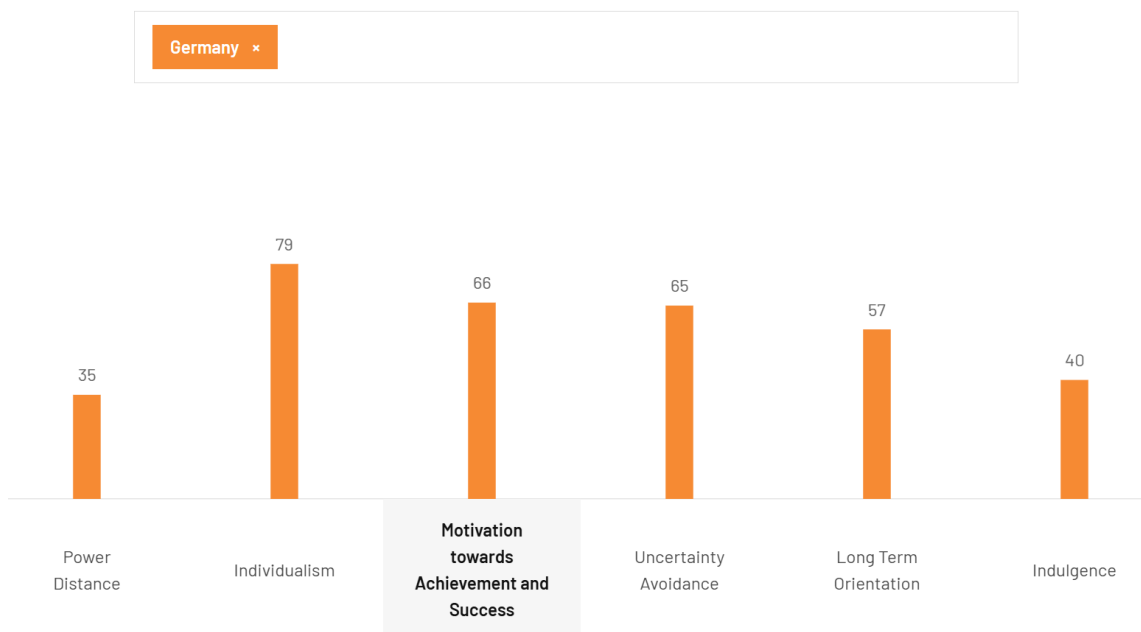
It was also described how decisions are made in Finnish culture in relation to others: “Sometimes Finnish way of thinking is bit too much straight forward and we like to solve things right away.”

One interviewee highlighted that when operating in Swedish culture, much dialogue is needed to find consensus in decision making. The data from <https://www.theculturefactor.com> supports this conclusion as Sweden has very low persuasion to motivation towards Achievement and Success



PICTURE 5. Swedish cultural characteristics

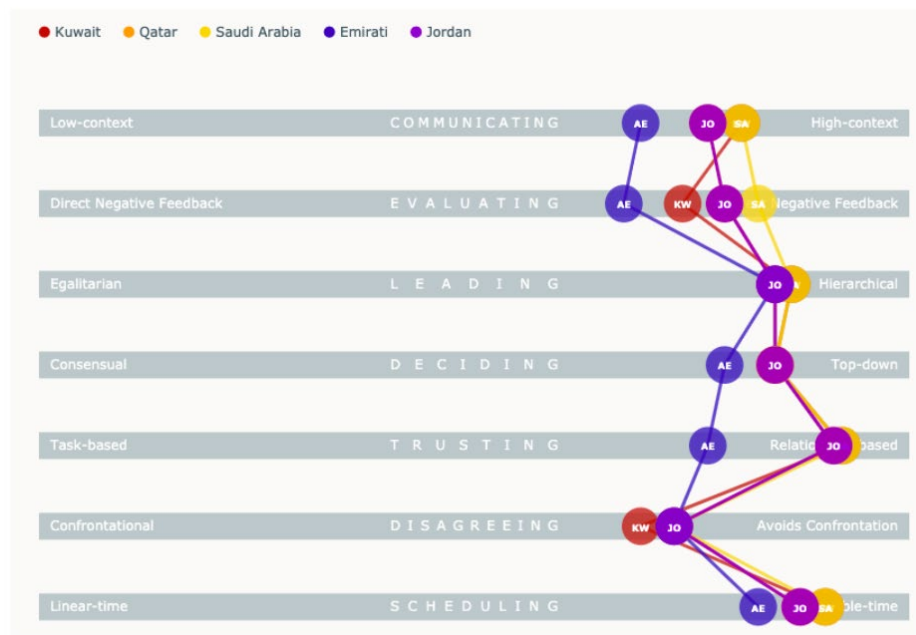
One interviewee highlighted how in German culture the official decision making is commonly needed by high management levels. The data from <https://www.theculturefactor.com> supports this conclusion as Germany has high motivation towards achievement and success. In such cultures, managers are expected to be decisive and assertive.



PICTURE 6. Germany cultural characteristics

## Trusting

One interviewee had identified that in Arab countries personal relations are important. “First you need to sell yourself as a person, then real negotiation can take place.” As Erin Meyers has identified as one of the scales, the trusting scale, which measures the difference between work and task-based trust to relationship-based trust. The data from Erin Meyers cultural map tool supports this, as trust in Arabic countries are very relationship based.

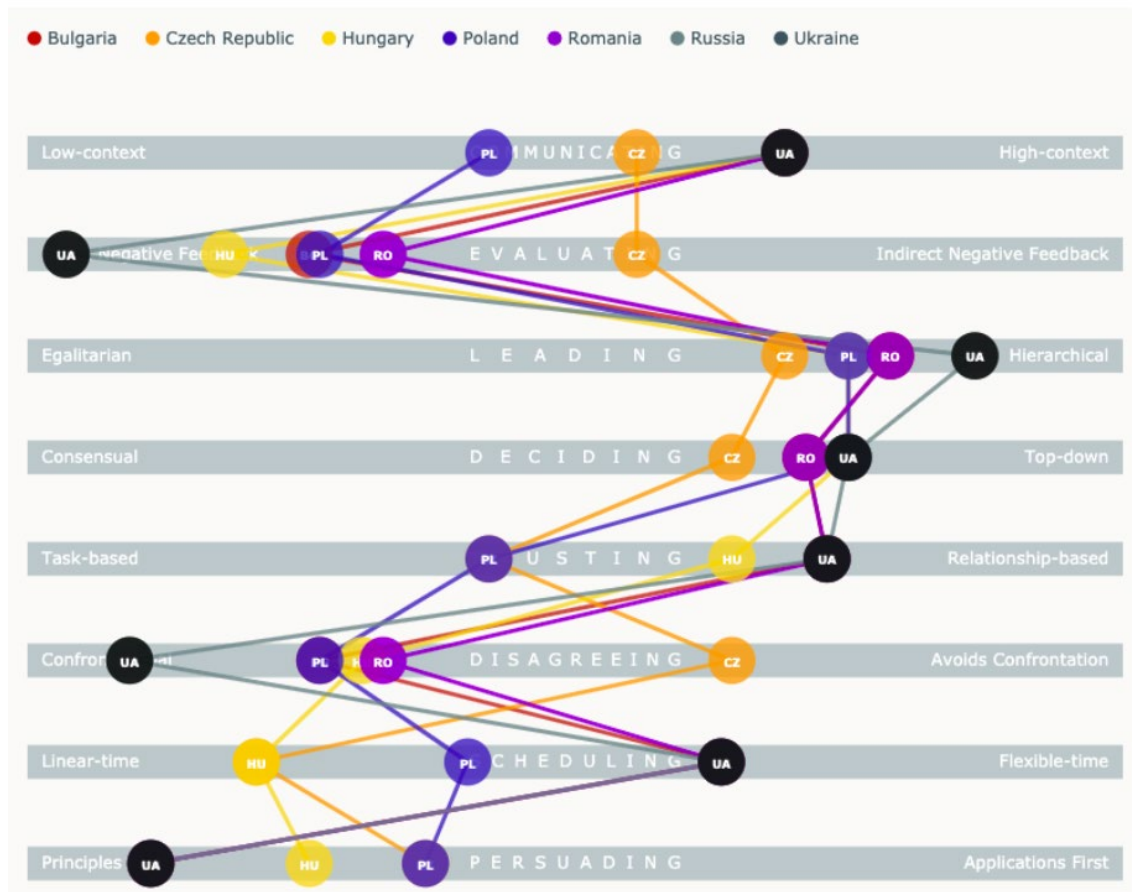


PICTURE 7. Erin Meyer cultural map, middle east countries

## Disagreeing

Communication in Slavic countries was raised as an example. According to one interviewee there are lots of demands in Slavic countries at the first phase. The customers can have very high demands, when they are in strong position.

This can be linked to the Erin Meyers disagreeing scale, whereas the Slavic countries tend to have highly confrontational approach to the disagreements.



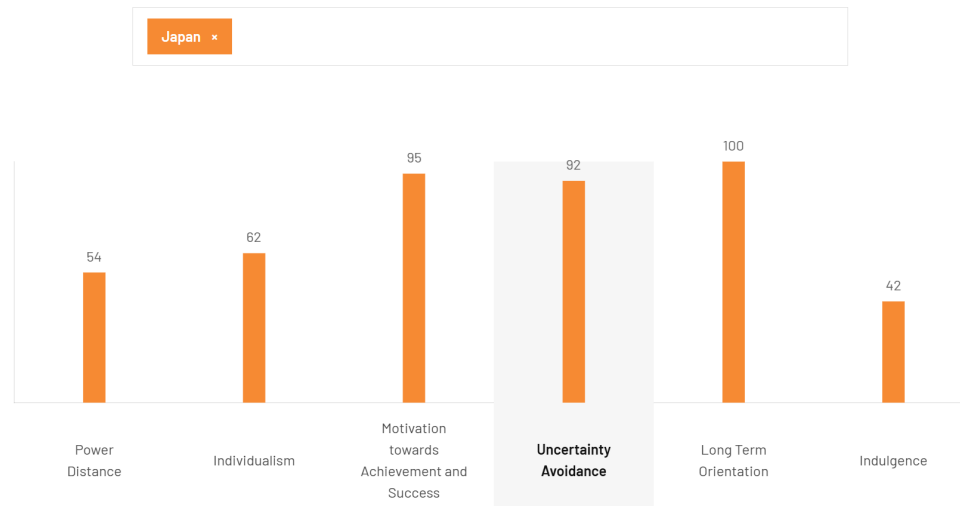
PICTURE 8. Erin Meyer cultural map, Slavic countries

## Uncertainty

One interviewee described how in “Japanese culture it is important the one is not embarrassed or to lose face”.

A comment from one interviewee: “Extremely detail orientation customer, remember everything what was said or delivered before. Bureaucratic approach. If something already offered/discussed need to be changed, Japan is offer ask evidences to explain the changes. Preferably solid evidences from 3rd party.”

The data from <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool> supports this evaluation, as according to their data Japan is one of the most uncertainty orientated countries in the world.



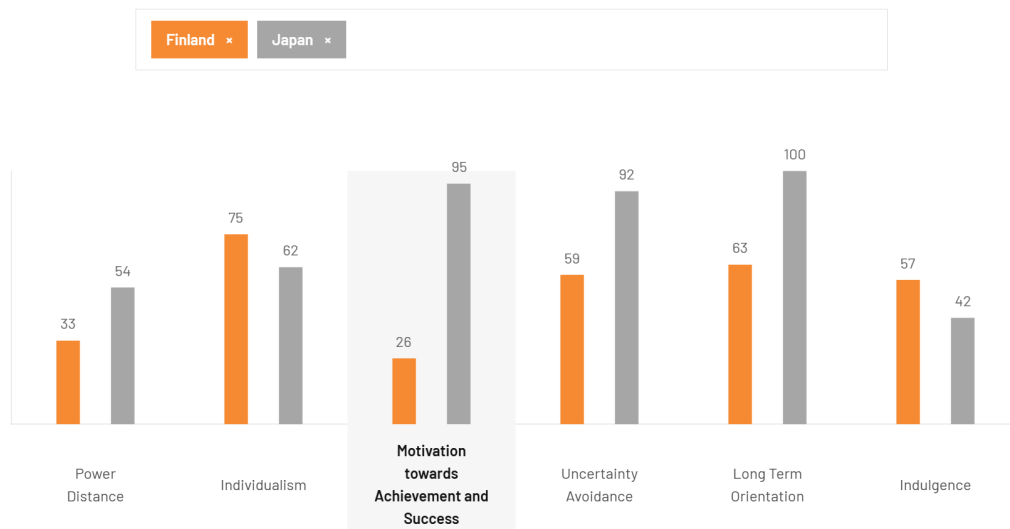
PICTURE 9. Japan cultural characteristics

This high need for Uncertainty Avoidance is one of the reasons why changes are so difficult to realize in Japan.

At least two scales on the Erin Meyers cultural map to support this conclusion. One is the deciding scale, where Japanese culture is very consensual oriented. The second is the disagreeing scale where Japanese culture has high tend to avoid confrontations.

### **Work / life balance**

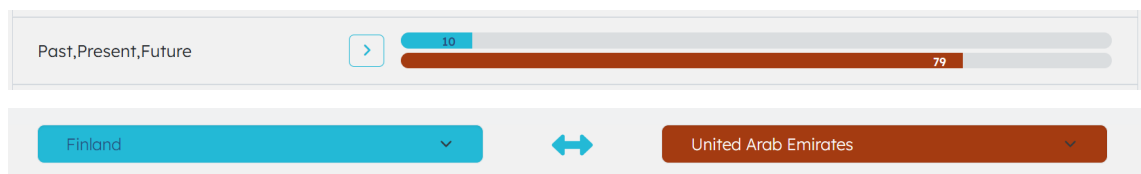
One interviewee raised how “biggest differences come from how different cultures sees work / life balance, e.g. what is more important work or family.” The data from <https://www.theculturefactor.com> measures this dimension, as in some cultures there is very high motivation towards professional success as in other cultures the motivation is more towards the overall quality of life:



PICTURE 10. Japan and Finland cultural characteristics

## The perception of time

The perception of time was raised as an example of the difference which had been identified in different cultures. This dimension is recognized in many theories and is supported by e.g. the data from <https://thtconsulting.com/culture-factory/culture-explore/compare-countries/>:



PICTURE 11. THTconsulting country comparison Finland and UAE

A comment from an interviewee: “The culture and practices of the Arab countries are, for example, very far removed from Western thinking in terms of the perception of time, and this is just something that must be accepted.”

## Similarities

“According to my experience, the Japanese way of doing things has a lot in common with Finnish ways, although certain special features can also be found. For this reason, I have found working with the Japanese quite easy.”

## Summary

“Each country has its own culture and way of doing things. These characteristics need to be learned to recognize and shape one's own behavior, communication, and way of doing things accordingly.” This is one of the main takeaways of the study, how to recognize the cultural differences before entering a new culture, and how to proactively adjust your own behavior and expectations for better success.

### **Question: Have you experienced any situations where cultures have collided? If yes, any examples of collisions?**

Few of the interviewees reported that they had experienced situations where cultures have collided.

The topics were mainly similar to than reported to the previous question. Time perception and leadership styles were raised as topics.

”Sometimes difficult to understand how small things needs to be approved by Senior management. Functional operations are slow.”

”I have travelled to the meeting and inviter is not at the country at all.”

”No limit what customer can claim if they want have something. Not following the Agreements if its not support their Agenda.”

### **Question: What are the best takeaways you have learned when working with people from other countries / cultures?**

Many answers emphasized the positive sides of working with other cultures. This had given the interviewees possibility to meet and work with people from different cultures, which have given the possibility to learn and develop as both as personal and professional level. Terms such as curiousness and respect were raised by the interviewees.

It was raised by one interviewee that people with different cultural backgrounds can make successful cooperation as long as they have the same goals. New ways of working can be learned from people with different cultural backgrounds.

One interviewee raised the important subject that time is needed to build up trust when fitting two cultures together. This is especially important in cultures where the trust is more based on personal relations. Erin Meyer measures this on the Trusting scale, whereas in some cultures the trust is based on the work performance and other on the personal relationship. (Meyer. 2020)

One interviewee described how in general whether life or work in case, the world is not black and white, but matters have many different colors and shades.

One interviewee described how sometimes it is important to show some emotions. By the different theories this is described by Richard Lewis, Erin Meyer and Fons Trompenaars. Meyer on the communication scale, where communication in cultures varies between low and high context content. (Meyer, 2020). Trompenaars measures the level of showing emotions on the scale of Neutral versus affective. Trompenaars (2020). Lewis also identifies that the level of showing, whereas the multi-active cultures are the most emotional (Lewis. 2018).

**Question: Have you received knowledge or training for cultural differences from the employer?**

All of the interviewees reported they had received some training or knowledge for other cultures. However, it could be recognized from the survey answers that the cases for training have been irregular, and even more common in the past than lately.

Some of the comments from the interviewees:

- Interviewee 1: Some training of Arab culture. Half day only, very good
- Interviewee 3: Short introductions, but very rarely
- Interviewee 4: Years ago, I attended an education in Arabic culture, but there have been no trainings since then.
- Interviewee 5: More than 20 years ago, some introduction of Polish culture

- Interviewee 6: Short familiarization trainings for target area cultures

One interviewee had received cultural training from local representatives and commercial entities.

**Question: Do you take cultural differences into account when working with different cultures?**

This question divided the interviewees as most of them described that they do take cultural differences into account. However, one interviewee described that usually the differences are not taken into account.

One topic which was repeated was that the interviewees raised that they wish not to try change other cultures even if these cultures might have manners that differ from their own.

One interviewee had identified that in Japanese culture it is important to recognize who is the boss. Another one described how in a certain culture it was important to have a powerful business card, to create the impression that you actually are the person in charge. These notifications are described as leading styles and power distance described by Erin Meyers and Geert Hofstede. As described by Hofstede, in high power distance cultures, it is important to show respect for authority and hierarchy. (Hofstede, 1980)

Interviewees described that it is important to know how things work in specific cultures and the need to be polite to people in their cultural home. It was also described that as general education involves considering the other person's culture and shaping one's behavior so that it does not offend the other person.

One interviewee described how working with Swedish people, good and thorough planning etc. are very important for them instead of doing something directly.

**Question: How have you prepared yourself / your team into interacting with different cultures?**

Several different kinds of practices were raised in the survey on how the interviewees have prepared themselves for interacting with different cultures.

Some common practices have been using google as method of finding information about countries history and to learn few phrases in the local language. Some interviewees have communicated with persons who have had experiences of interacting in the country.

One interviewee had prepared business cards in Japanese.

It was also raised that interviewees had learned the history, politics and religions from countries in beforehand.

One interviewee described that you learn by doing.

**Question: Are you aware of any researched information or theoretical knowledge related to cultural differences or utilizing them?**

Two of the interviewees were aware of theoretical knowledge, as where the others reportedly were not. This data emphasizes the level of knowledge in relation to the cultural differences. As all of the interviewees were aware that the differences exists, and majority of them had no exposure to theoretical knowledge.

**Question: Would you see it beneficial to have researched information or theoretical knowledge about different cultures before interacting and doing business with them?**

All the interviewees indicated that it would be beneficial to have cultural training before interacting and doing business with these cultures.

It was further commented that it would be "Easier to understand their behavior, to know what subjects is good to avoid", "This would be very nice to speed up the

process to learn how things are working. “and “Yes, might be useful, I there is time to study or budget to buy trainings / lectures.”, “Of course it is very important due to the fact that what more you know easier it is start to make business with foreign cultures.”

**Question: Would you like to share some additional insights or experiences related to cultural aspects of business, that have not been covered in this form?**

The last question of the survey gave the interviewees the opportunity to give additional information that were not covered in the survey.

The interviewees raised few topics. One is to have open mind and to try to learn as much as possible from new cultures.

Another one is to explain the Finnish way of working to the customers from other cultures. One example was raised, that the Finnish way to communicate is direct. The Finnish way is to avoid empty promises and to tell things as they are. A separate comment was raised how some cultures have hidden agendas, and it is important to know which kind of culture is in case.

#### **4.3.1 Summary of findings**

The research gave the needed insight into the organization knowhow on the cultural knowledge.

The main finding in the research was that there is some level of knowledge about cultural differences in the organization characteristics. However, the level of knowledge varies, and is dependent on the mainly of the personal interests of the persons in case. The knowledge is more on practical level, and less on the theoretical level.

According the to survey the organization does not have a plan or guide on how to approach or handle cultural differences. The familiarization to new cultures is

mainly on a personal level and based on personal interests. For individual cases there has been some level of training for new cultures in the past, but this has not been formal mode of operation.

To some extent persons have acquired knowledge on the different cultures, but based on the interviews there is a low level of theoretical knowledge on the topic within the organization. Also, based on the interviews there has been only a little or no amount of theoretical training to the topic.

However, the interviewees had identified many values and differences between cultures, that are similarly identified and analyzed by the authors of the relevant literature.

All the interviewees indicated that it would be beneficial to have cultural training before interacting and doing business with these cultures.

The result of the survey supports the theoretical literature that has been reviewed in this thesis. The cultural differences exist on several dimension and these can be identified and compared with each other.

There were no great presumptions made before the survey was conducted. The level of interest in individual level was positive. However, it was surprising that even though some interviewees understood the existence of cultural differences, these were not taken into consideration. The assumption is that in these cases it was not seen the benefit of utilizing the knowledge or adapting to the differences.

#### **4.4. Limitations**

The survey was conducted for the limited number of persons in one organization within one culture. The results are valid for this operating environment. In other similar cases environments, the results could be different.

It is possible that response bias occurs, as the interviewees might wish to present more favorable statements of their knowledge on the studied topic.

## 5 Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the recommendations for the organization based on the results of the survey and available status of the organization's know-how in relation to the introduced theories.

By utilizing these recommendations, the organization can improve the communication and business success in multicultural business environment.

### 5.1. Gaining basic understanding of new culture(s)

There are some basic steps that can be taken to familiarize one to a new culture, which are introduced here.

- Study the characteristics on the top of the cultural iceberg
  - Research the country's history, culture, and customs to understand its characteristics.
  - Introduce yourself into the language, business attire, greetings etc.
- Research the country's history, culture, and customs to understand its values, norms, and etiquette.
- Familiarize yourself with the country's business practices, including the negotiation style, decision-making process, and communication style.
- Understand the political and economic environment of the country, including the legal system, regulatory requirements, and tax laws.
- Build relationships with local business partners, colleagues, and customers by taking the time to get to know them and their culture.
- Be aware of any potential cultural misunderstandings, such as different attitudes towards time, hierarchy, and directness.
- Respect local customs, traditions, and religious practices, and avoid behavior that may be considered disrespectful or offensive.

## **5.2. Understanding cultural differences with available data**

As basis it is important to understand the characteristics of one's own culture in relation to other cultures. Once this is internalized, the information can be used to compare own cultural aspects to the other cultures.

There are few easily accessible tools that can be used for the identification of a culture and to compare one to another. These tools utilize the collected data in relation to the theories introduced in this thesis. The following tools are introduced:

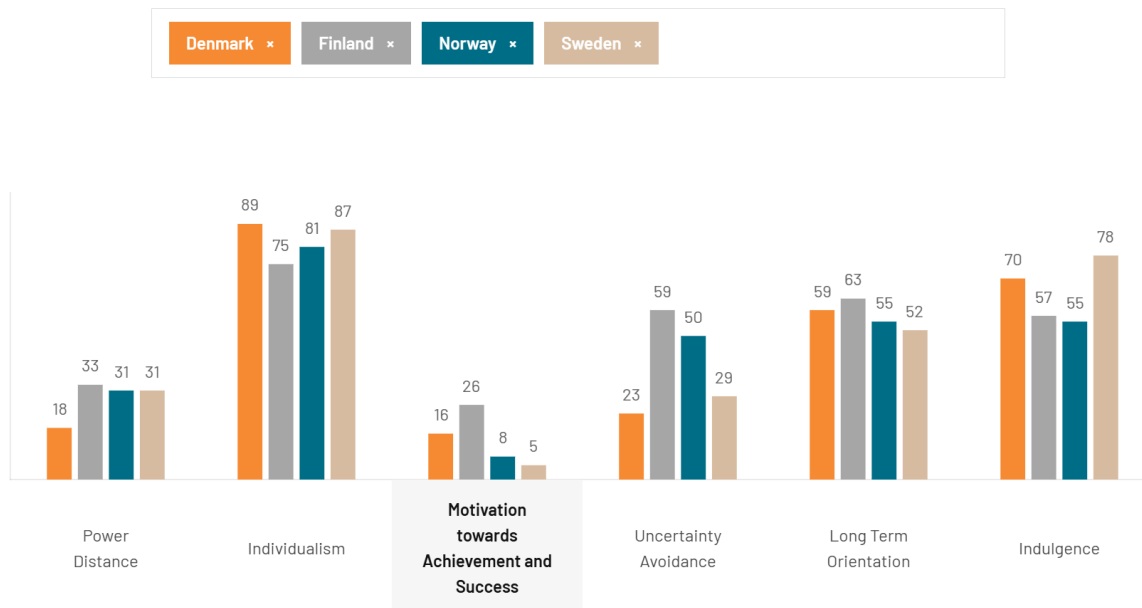
- Country comparison tool by the Culturer factor
- Culture Map by Erin Meyer
- Culture comparison tool by THTconsulting

All introduced tools can be used to view the characteristics of one culture, or to compare different cultures to each other.

### **5.2.1 Country comparison tool by The Culturer Factor**

The Culturer factor webpage : <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool>. contains a tool to compare countries cultural aspects. This tool and webpage are based Geert Hofstede's theories and legacy.

Below is an example of the theculturefactor.com country comparison tools used in terms of identifying the characteristics of Finnish culture in connection to other Nordic countries:



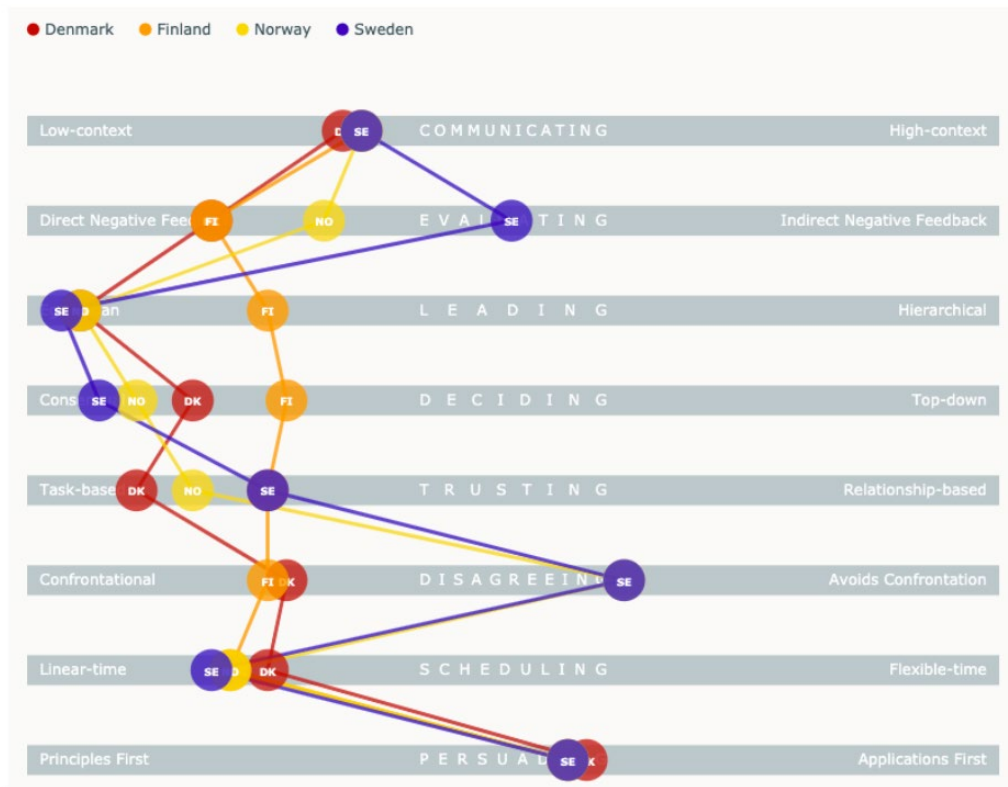
PICTURE 12. Cultural characteristics, Nordic countries

The scales that Geert Hofstede has introduced are used and can be viewed for different cultures.

### 5.2.1 Culture Map by Erin Meyer

Another useful tool for the comparing cultural differences can be found from the Erin Mayers web pages: <https://erinmeyer.com/tools/culture-map-premium/>.

Below is an example of the erinmeyer.com country culture map tool used to identify the characteristics of Finnish culture in connection to other Nordic countries:

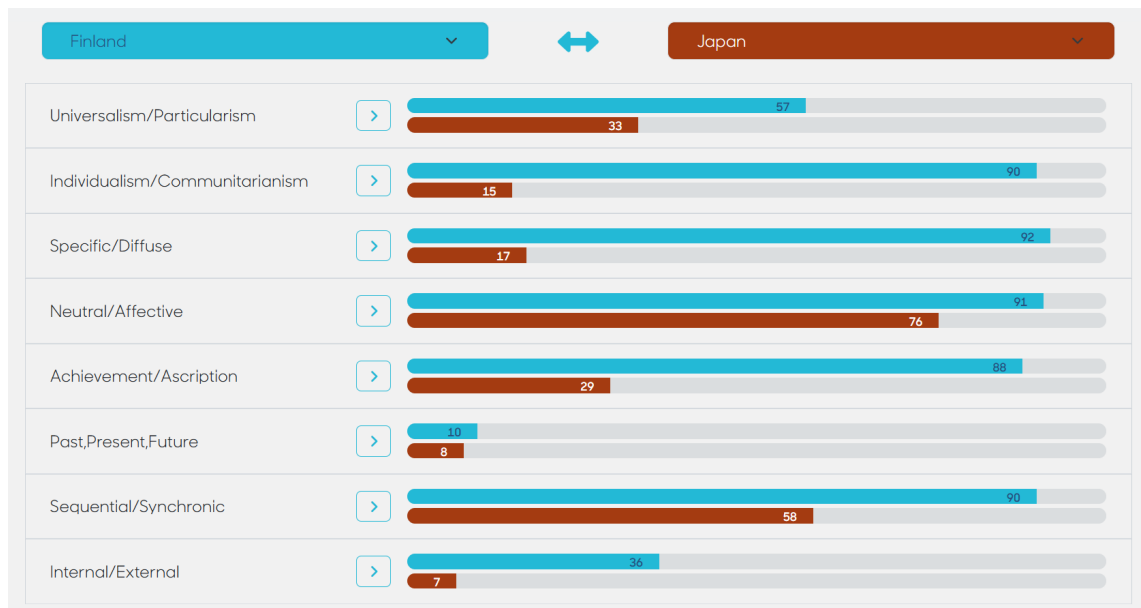


PICTURE 13. Cultural map, Nordic countries

### 5.2.1 Culture comparison tool by THTconsulting

The third tool to be introduced is the culture comparison tool by THTconsulting which utilizes the scales introduced by Fons Trompenaars. The data comprises responses from over 140 countries. The THTconsulting tool can be found from their webpages: <https://thtconsulting.com/culture-factory/culture-explore/compare-countries/>.

Below is an example of the THTconsulting.com country culture map tool used to identify the characteristics of Finnish culture in relation to Japanese:



PICTURE 14. Cultural comparison Finland and Japan

### 5.3. Overview of the characteristics

The most relevant characteristics of the Finnish culture based on the data from the tools are described in the following chapters. This understanding can be further analyzed and compared to other cultures to gain the advantage for the multicultural communications.

#### 5.3.1 Power distance and leading styles

The concept of the leading styles and power distance is introduced similarly by Hofstede and Meyer. Both describes the same topic of measuring the level of difference between leaders and the people to be lead and eventually to how the less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed unequally.

Finland is a country of low power distance. As example this, most people are on first-name basis with their supervisors, if not from the first day forward then at least after a while of working together.

Understanding and comparing the low power distance in Finland to the ongoing or future project country gives the organization information about the level of difference on the power distance. This information can be used to adapt the behavior in the project. For example, in cooperation with a high-level power distance it

is important to understand that persons can have a very different approach when communicating with people in the superior level and lower level.

In high power distance cultures matters as ranks, status and organizational position can be very important. For a person with low-ranking communication can be made difficult to communicate with persons with high rank.

Addressing in Finnish business culture is commonly very informal. However, this is not the case in many other cultures, and addressing with first name can be even disrespectful. In business meetings and other communication, using polite and respectful forms of address is essential to convey professionalism and courtesy.

### **5.3.1 Time perception**

The perception of time differs from culture to culture. This has been identified by many of the different theories. Erin Meyer describes this as the scheduling scale and Hofstede as long vs. short term orientation and Trompenaars as sequential time vs synchronous time.

On the Mayers scale the time perception can range from linear to flexible on the scheduling scale. By Meyer, Finland is on the linear side on the scale. The cultures with linear time perception focuses on one task before they move to the next one and deadlines are appreciated. (Meyer, 2020)

Long-term orientation is characterized by a focus on the future, it has focus on perseverance, and short-term gratification can be delayed for future benefits. (Hofstede, 1980)

Finland is a country of long-term orientation. When working in a culture with any of the two ends of the scale, the time perception of the culture might be very different in terms of for example in deadlines and planning.

### **5.3.2 Individualism and communality**

The aspect of Individualism and communality is described by both Hofstede and Trompenaars. Individual cultures are primarily concerned with people and individuals whereas collectivistic cultures have a strong emphasis on group harmony and cooperation.

According to both scales, based on the analysis Finland is an individualistic country.

### **5.3.3 Feedback and evaluation**

The style of giving feedback and evaluation others diverts from culture to another.

Erin Meyer measures this dimension as the evaluation scale. Mayer ranks Finland as one of the direct feedback cultures. Understanding where own culture versus counterpart's culture falls on this scale will help to adjust communication style for more effective, respectful, and productive business interactions.

### **5.3.4 Motivation towards achievements and success**

People from different cultures are motivated more from achievements and success whereas other cultures from caring for others and quality of life.

The cultural factor country comparison tool has a scale for motivation towards Achievements and Success. This scale is similar to the Hofstede's scale of femininity vs. masculinity, however described in different terms.

Finland is a country of low motivation towards Achievements and Success and one of the most equal countries in the world. In cultures with low score on this scale targets such as free time and flexibility are favored. Focus is on well-being, equality, and quality. Status is not emphasized.

In a culture with high motivation towards achievement and success people are expected to be assertive, competitive, and focused on material success. These values begin in school and continues throughout life.

It is important to understand that most countries are less equal than Finland, and this is to be taken into account when operating in opposite cultures

### **5.3.5 Uncertainty avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance measures how cultures differ on the amount of tolerance they have of unpredictability.

Finland is a country of average uncertainty avoidance. In general this means that in Finnish culture people are on an average level of following rules and avoiding risks.

Finland has a relatively high preference for avoiding uncertainty. Countries with such values have an emotional need for rules, time is money, people have urge to work hard. Values such as precision and punctuality are the norm.

If working with a culture with a low uncertainty avoidance people would like to adjust their behavior into more flexible following of the rules and instructions or to understand the difference.

### **5.3.6 Indulgence**

The Indulgence measures the degree to which a culture consents or suppresses the gratification of desires and general enjoyment of life. Finland is relatively high score which indicates that Finland is an Indulgent country.

Cultures of high score tend to possess a positive attitude and have a tendency towards optimism. In addition, they place a higher degree of importance on leisure time.

Alternative, societies with a low score in this dimension have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. Related to indulgent societies the restrained societies put less emphasis on leisure time.

### **5.3.7 Agreeing / disagreeing**

The style of disagreeing is different across cultures, influencing how people approach situations where opinions, views, or preferences are different.

Erin Meyers dimension between confrontational and avoiding confrontation measures the acceptable level of disagreement and debate that is appropriate in the culture in case.

According to the Meyers country mapping data Finland is more on the confrontational side of the scale. This means that in Finnish culture compared to others discussion and debate is more acceptable than on average.

When working in cultures which avoid disagreement, it cannot be stated that people actually agree with you or your opinions if they do not challenge or debate with you.

In contrast, working with very confrontational cultures, people might challenge or debate highly, which would be considered as normal in their culture. You should not assume that disagreement with an idea equals disagreement with you. Challenging your ideas does not equal that people don't respect or appreciate you as in person.

For successful communication it is important to adapt to the other cultures agreeing scale not to come across too much or little confrontational.

### **5.3.8 Personal and professional boundaries**

The concept of privacy and personal space varies across cultures, influencing how personal boundaries are respected in professional settings.

In high Privacy Cultures people value personal space and privacy, and there is often a clear line between what is considered private and public information. Personal information is kept private, and employees may prefer to keep their professional and personal lives separate. Conversations about personal life in the workplace are often limited. This is more common in western cultures, including Finland.

In low Privacy Cultures people share more personal information, and there may be greater curiosity about colleagues' private lives. There is often more openness in sharing personal details at work, and socializing outside of work is common. In these cultures, boundaries between work and personal life can be more fluid. This is more common for example in Latin American, Middle East, and Indian cultures

In some cultures, expressing emotions fosters connection, trust, and motivation, while in others, emotional restraint is key to maintaining professionalism and respect.

The level of showing emotions differs between cultures. The level of this is described by Richard Lewis, Erin Meyer and Fons Trompenaars. Meyer on the communication scale, where communication in cultures varies between low and high context content. (Meyer, 2020). Trompenaars measures the level of showing emotions on the scale of Neutral versus affective. Trompenaars (2020). Lewis also identifies that the level of showing, whereas the multi-active cultures are the most emotional (Lewis. 2018).

On the Lewis model Finland is between the linear- active and reactive, resulting to not showing lot of emotions. The data from TFT tools supports this by stating that in Finnish culture people adopt a very high tendency to conceal emotions. Meyer has similar results evaluating Finland as low context style on communicating scale.

In cultures that value emotional restraint, showing emotions, particularly negative ones like anger, frustration, or sadness, may be seen as unprofessional or as a sign of emotional instability.

## **5.4. Other applications of communication**

One dimension of communication is the informal communication disconnected from the actual work, such as dinners, giving presents and other related communication. These can be very valuable in some cultures and can be part of the process of gaining the needed trust between the parties (Meyer 2020).

It is noticeable that these manners can vary greatly between cultures. Same practice that is seen as required in one culture can be seen unconventional in another. In some cultures, for example the exchange of business cards or gifts can be essential part of the familiarization whereas in others not seen as relevant. By not knowing the manners, can result into uncomfortable situations for both.

### **5.4.1 Behavior and personal communication skills**

The theoretical knowledge on cultural differences is an advantage when communicating with other cultures. However, there are many individual skills that can be utilized. Below are listed some of the identified individual skills for persons that are an asset in multicultural communication:

- Adaptability
- Assertiveness
- Awareness
- Curiosity
- Cultural awareness / interest
- Communication and language skills
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Open-mindedness
- Persistence
- Politeness
- Patience
- Respectfulness / respect for diversity
- Resilience

Eventually people have different levels of these skills. The skills can be learned, once the importance and possible affects to the communication in multicultural environment is identified.

People tend to over-analyze their role in a group and about how others think of them. (Gregg Vanourek, 2021). Even when people make mistakes in multicultural communication, the counterparty often understands that people from other cultures act differently.

Communication has different layers and utilizing cultural knowledge is one of them, at the same time it is important that people can show their personality and be authentically their selves. Showing personality in business can be valuable, as it helps cooperation, information sharing, foster stronger relationships, differentiate yourself and create a more engaging and authentic environment. (Winsborough, D. Chamorro-Premuzic, T. 2017)

#### **5.4.2 Addressing as part of formality in business**

In business meetings, using polite and respectful forms of address is essential to convey professionalism and courtesy. Being observant and respectful of local customs can improve giving a positive impression in business interactions.

In some cultures, such as Finland, acceptable to address colleagues and business partners by their first names. In some cultures, this could be considered as unpolite, and the expected manner to address others is to use professional or academic titles. In cases where the person's name or title is unknown using "Sir" or "Madam" is a safe and respectful way to address someone in a formal setting.

#### **5.4.3 Business attire as part of formality in business**

Business attire refers to the clothing worn in business settings. It typically includes outfits that convey a polished and respectful appearance.

Business attire in business meetings is essential as it plays a significant role in creating a professional and respectful environment. The importance of appropriate dressing differs from country to another. While too casual clothing can be seen as ignorant in some cultures, too formal dressing can expose the opposing meeting companions into uncomfortable positions. Sabath (2002)

In international business settings, different cultures have varying norms regarding attire. Adhering to a dress attire shows respect for the cultural expectations of the attendees, fostering positive cross-cultural relationships. The correct business attire also emphasizes the credibility of the person / company.

Finland has typically more casual business attire compared to more formal countries. For example, in countries where school uniforms are used, the school uniforms set the base for the more formal business attire.

#### **5.4.4 Similarities between cultures**

The different cultures have often many different ways on handling topics. However, not all aspects of cultures are commonly different. Once the differences and similarities are recognized, the emphasis can be on the differences.

#### **5.5. Proactiveness**

One of the most important takeaways of this study is to identify the importance and opportunities of the proactive actions when entering new cultures. The proactiveness gives the personnel the possibility to study the characteristics of the cultures before actively communicating in one.

The proactive actions allow to have the time and needed information to identify the most important cultural differences between the cultures before the interaction. By doing this, the persons and organizations can utilize the cultural knowledge into successful actions.

### **5.1. Other methods to gain cultural training for specific cultures**

There are several methods on gaining knowledge on different cultures. One method is to acquire training. There are commercial companies that provide cultural training. These can be found by searching companies e.g. from the internet.

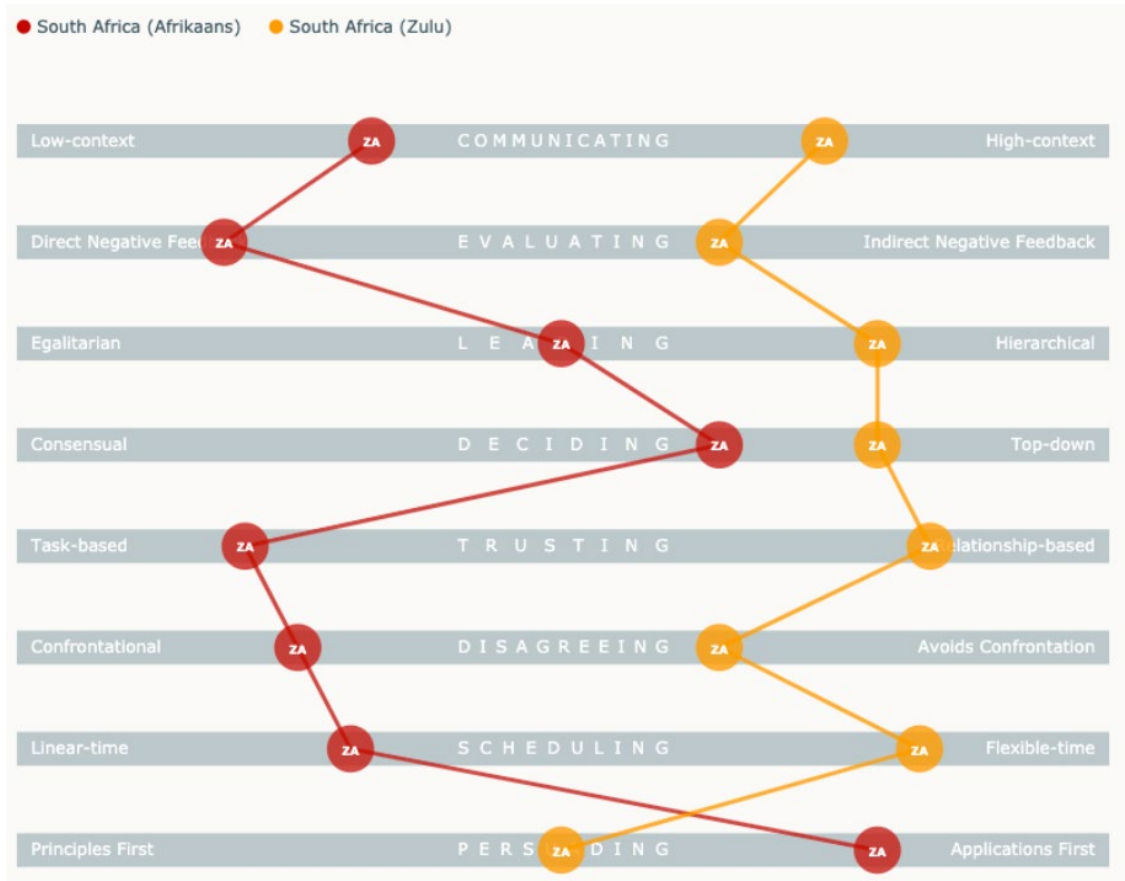
The overall training for cultural difference can be requested from universities, which have the subject on their portfolio.

Benchmarking to other companies that have already interacted with the culture can be very efficient way to gain knowledge. Also, Embassies can be contacted to provide insights into their country cultures.

### **5.2. Avoiding stereotyping**

It is important to avoid stereotyping in order to realize that in one country there can be several different cultures and individuals are different. For example, in South Africa, there are several very different cultures in one country.

These cultures may have very different cultural backgrounds in several levels. Indisputably there are comprehensive differences in the Afrikaans and Zulu cultures. The measurable differences can be identified and visualized to facilitate the interaction. This is illustrated in the picture below.



PICTURE 15. Erin Meyer Country Mapping Tool, South Africa (Afrikaans, Zulu)

## **6 Conclusions**

There are few overall conclusions of the thesis is that can help the organization(s) to facilitate the cultural knowledge into successful communication in international business environments.

As identified both in the literature review and the survey, the knowledge of cultural differences can be utilized into more successful and fluent communication and business activities.

### **6.1. Cultural knowledge benefits to the organization**

Adjusting communication based on culture is essential for effective interpersonal interactions, whether in personal relationships or business settings.

Beneficial and effective communicating and negotiating in different countries requires an understanding of the cultural norms, values, and communication styles that are unique to each country.

It is important and beneficial to understand the predominant cultures in different countries. Depending on the type of organization in case, there can be a need to approach in different ways after we understand both the countries and the organization predominant cultural organization.

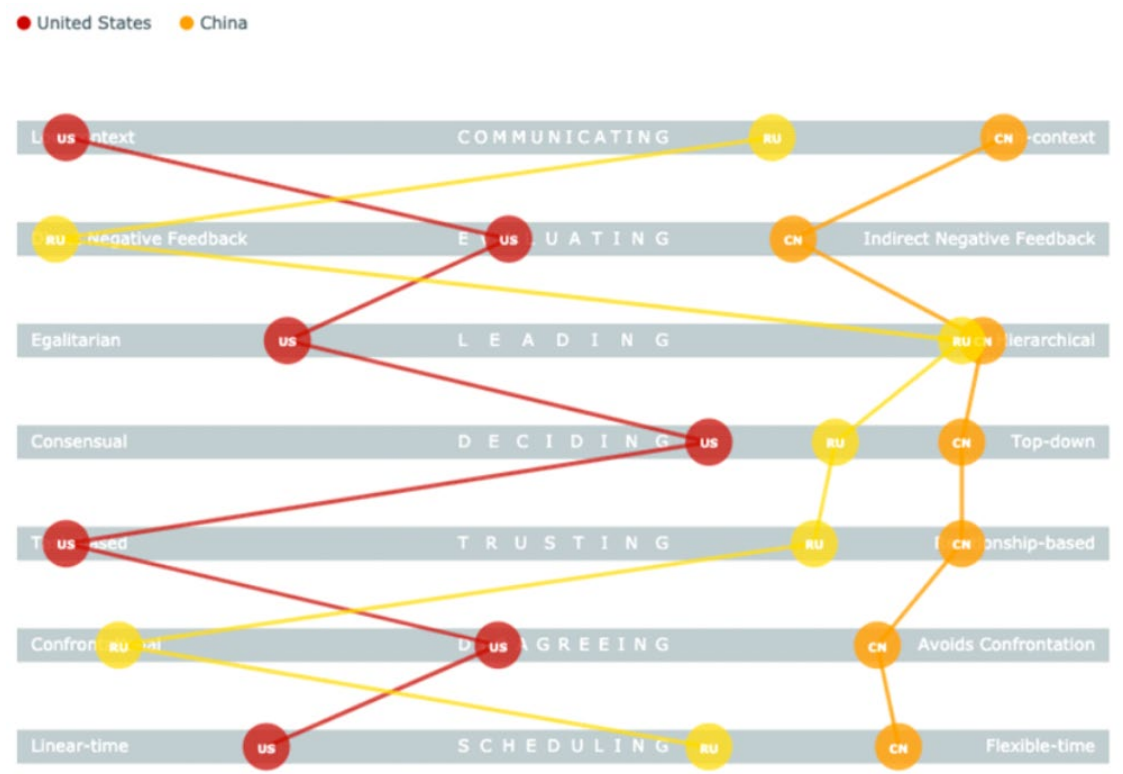
As an example, in high power distance cultures, it is important to show respect for authority and hierarchy. Leaders should be aware of the social status and titles of their colleagues and employees and be sure to address them appropriately. In low power distance cultures, leaders are more egalitarian and approachable.

In multi-active organization culture, it is needed to understand the hierarchy and emotional display of the employees, as well as the linear-active organizational cultures of the efficiency, results, and goal-oriented behavior.

## 6.2. Utilizing tools and available data

Easily accessible data and tools are available. These can be used to create situational awareness for different cultural interactions. The picture below is an example of the three significant countries, United States, China and Russia. It can be seen easily and in informative way that there are great differences in the cultural aspects on behaviors of these countries' cultures.

For example, the communication and trusting scales are almost the opposites between United States and China. By utilizing this e.g. before a business meeting or market entry, can proactively ease the business activities.



Picture 16. Erin Meyer Country Mapping Tool, USA, China, Russia.

## 6.3. Future research suggestions

As this research was conducted for overall understanding of one organization's know how, it would be interesting to research a specific case for a company with the business case in other culture. This would allow to investigate in more detail some cases with successes and failures.

A research suggestion would be to research immigrants in a specific countries' companies and which kind of experiences they might have had, and what are the differences between people from different cultures. For example, what are the differences between Asian immigrants to African immigrants, and which kind of proactive actions can be taken to avoid inconvenience.

The impact of cultural differences on global virtual communication is a proposed research topic. To explore how cultural dimensions affect communication and collaboration in virtual meetings. Whether the challenges in virtual meetings are the same as in face-to-face meetings.

A research suggestion is to study the role of nonverbal communication and body language in communication across different cultures. How do differences in language structures and nonverbal signals e.g., gestures, eye contact etc. impact business interactions, customer relations, and teamwork in multicultural environments.

#### **6.4. The responses to strategic questions**

The strategic questions of the thesis are:

- How can the organization utilize the knowledge of multicultural aspects to support successful international business?
- What preventive actions of utilizing the cultural differences in the customer interface can be identified and contributed to the organization?

By the literature research, data collection and recommendations these questions are answered. There are several proposed activities for the organization that will be beneficial for the multicultural business activities.

## 6.1. Concluding words

Although the research has been conducted on a specific target organization and its personnel, the findings of the research may be applicable to many organizations operating on an international business environment.

The operation of the organization depends on the people working in it and the success is dependent on the level of knowledge of the personnel. At this moment the researched topic, utilizing cultural differences is not commonly studied area in the majority of schools or universities, which makes the area even more dependant on the individuals.

The communication between persons from different cultural backgrounds around the world is getting more common as the world changes. It is getting increasingly important in business life to be able to communicate with different cultures and people. With the correct level of respectful and positive attitude toward different cultures and curiosity to new cultures in conjunction with the correct level of knowledge can facilitate successful communication.

Understanding cultural differences in communication styles, negotiation techniques, business etiquette, and decision-making processes can be crucial. The organization can promote strong connections with partners and clients by understanding cultural differences and preventing misunderstandings.

Understanding and utilizing the knowledge does not equal to be subjugated to the different cultural aspects. The knowledge gives the possibility to understand and adapt in controllable manner and to eventually utilize the knowledge into successful communication and thus successful international business.

Multicultural knowledge enables organizations to develop communication strategies that resonate with diverse audiences. This includes using appropriate language, behavior, and messaging that are suitable for the culture in case.

Investing into cultural training for employees the organizations enhances their cross-cultural competence. By providing information for cultural awareness and intercultural communication training, organizations empower their workforce to

effectively engage with international stakeholders. Individual flexibility and open minded philosophy of life are important characteristics when communicating successfully with the different cultures of the world.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions	1 (2)
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## BACKGROUND

1. What is / has been your main role(s) in the organization related to operating in the customer interface?
2. How many years have you worked for the company?
3. How many different countries / cultures have you interacted with in the current company?
  - a. Which countries / cultures?

## CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

4. Have you experienced cultural differences cooperation with these cultures?
  - a. If yes, which kind of differences?
  - b. Examples?
  - c.
5. Have you experienced any situations where cultures have collided?
  - a. If yes, which kind of differences?
  - b. Examples?
6. What are the best takeaways you have learned when working with people from other countries / cultures?
7. Have you received knowledge or training for cultural differences from the employer?
  - a. If yes, which kind?
  - b. If yes, from whom / which provider?
  - c. If yes, which kind of topics have been addressed?
  - d. Practical or theoretical?
  - e. Which theories?

2 (2)

8. Do you take cultural differences into account when working with different cultures?
  - a. If yes, which kind?
  - b. Examples?
  
9. How have you prepared yourself / your team into interacting with different cultures?
  - a. Which kind of actions?
  - b. Practical examples?
  
10. Are you aware of any theoretical knowledge related to cultural differences or utilizing them?
  - a. If yes, which kind?
  - b. Examples?
  
11. Would you see it beneficial to have theoretical knowledge about different cultures before interacting and doing business with them?
  
12. Would you like to share some additional insights or experiences related to cultural aspects of business, that have not been covered in this interview?

## Appendix 2. Survey invitation

1 (1)

Dear recipient,

I am completing a university degree at TAMK in the "International Business Management" program.

The working title of my thesis is " Utilizing cultural knowledge into success in international business ".

The purpose of the thesis is to study the organizations know how on the cultural knowledge and to provide insights to the organization on the topic.

An essential part of my thesis involves research, in which the level of knowledge is examined.

I would like to invite you to participate in the survey. The survey consists of twelve questions and can be replied via email.

The results are analyzed and used as part of the data base of the thesis. The results are treated anonymously.

Due to the characteristics of the studies, the survey will be conducted in English. Please find the survey as attachment.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation. Looking forward to hearing from you.