



Supporting International Employees Integrating into the Finnish IT Workplace

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research background.....	1
1.2	Commissioning Company.....	2
1.3	Research question and Research objectives	3
2	Theoretical Framework	4
2.1	Literature Review	4
2.2	Motivation Theory	6
2.2.1	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory	7
2.2.2	Herzberg Two-factors Theory	8
2.3	Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory	9
2.3.1	Power Distance	12
2.3.2	Collectivism vs. Individualism.....	12
2.3.3	Uncertainty Avoidance	13
2.3.4	Masculinity vs. Femininity	13
2.3.5	Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation.....	14
2.3.6	Restraint vs. Indulgence.....	14
2.4	Organisational Socialisation Theory	15
2.4.1	Collective vs. Individual.....	16
2.4.2	Formal vs. Informal	16
2.4.3	Sequential vs. Random.....	16
2.4.4	Fixed vs. Variable.....	17
2.4.5	Serial vs. Disjunctive	17
2.4.6	Investiture vs. Divestiture	17
3	Methodology	18
3.1	Qualitative research methodology	18
3.2	Data collection and Data analysis.....	19
4	Interview results	21
4.1	Interview 1	21
4.2	Interview 2	23
4.3	Interview 3	25
4.4	Interview 4	26
4.5	Interview 5	28
5	Analysis.....	29

5.1	Language barriers.....	32
5.2	Cultural differences.....	32
5.3	Onboarding process	33
6	Recommendation.....	33
6.1	Multilingual resources	34
6.2	Structured onboarding process.....	34
6.3	Social integration within the company	34
6.4	Language learning	35
6.5	Training across the company.....	35
7	Conclusion	36
7.1	Conclusion	36
7.2	Limitations of the study	37
	References.....	38

Figures

Figure 1.	Number of ICT companies in Finland from 2017 to 2021 (Statistics Finland, n.d)	1
Figure 2.	Number of ICT companies in Finland in 2023 (Tilastokeskus, n.d)	1
Figure 3.	Five needs in Maslow’s theory (McLeod, 2018)	7
Figure 4.	Herzberg Two-factors theory (Nickerson, 2025).....	8
Figure 5.	Hofstede’s theory (Vizmonte et al, 2024).....	10
Figure 6.	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Scores for Finland and Vietnam (The Culture Factor, n.d)	11
Figure 7.	Six socialisation tactics (Houghton, 2014).....	15

Tables

Table 1.	Interviews overview.....	19
Table 2.	Thematic coding table.....	30

Appendices

Appendix 1.	Interview questions for the CEO of Sufivi Oy – commissioning company
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Appendix 2. Interview questions for international employees

Appendix 3. Interview questions for external HR specialist

Appendix 4. Data management plan

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

In today’s world, Finnish Information Technology (IT) firms are growing rapidly along with the development of digital platforms. As a result, the need for recruitment in this industry is increasing significantly. The Technology Industries of Finland (n.d.) estimates that by 2030, around 130,000 new professionals will be required to meet the growing demands of the Finnish technology sector. To meet this demand, the industry must expand its recruitment efforts beyond Finland’s borders and attract international talent (Pyykkönen, n.d.).

Figure 1. Number of ICT companies in Finland from 2017 to 2021 (Statistics Finland, n.d)

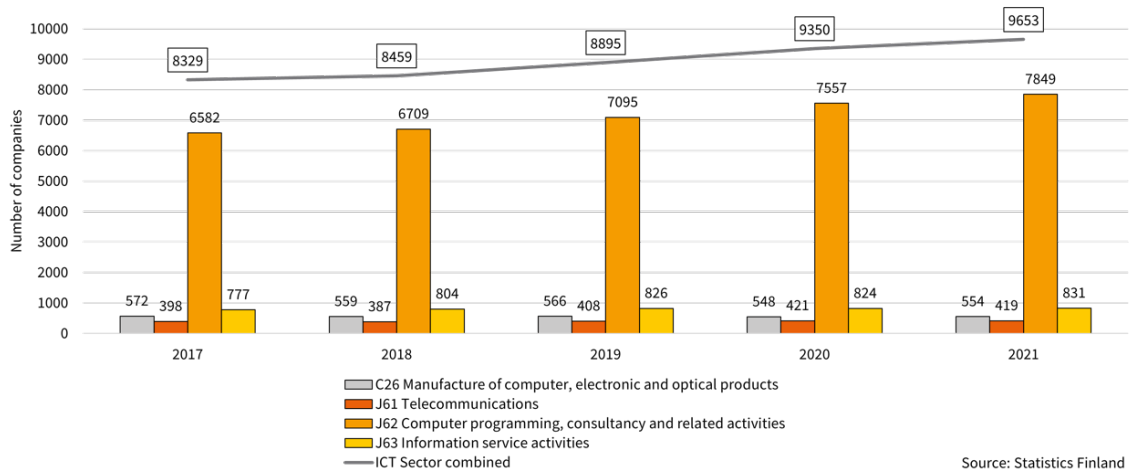


Figure 2. Number of ICT companies in Finland in 2023 (Tilastokeskus, n.d)

Enterprises by industry and size class in personnel (enterprise unit) by Year, TOL 2008 and Information

	Number of enterprises, enterprises
2023	
J Information and communication (58-63)	21,576

These figures reflect the continued growth and importance of the ICT sector in Finland, with a significant number of companies contributing to the country’s digital economy.

On the other hand, Finnish workplace is still national, and it is hard for international employees to integrate into the Finnish working environment. Many international employees are struggling with networking, social inclusion, not being included in decision-making and lack of advancement opportunities, which can affect their long-term commitment to staying in Finland. Additionally, retaining them is also a challenge for Finnish companies (University of Eastern Finland, 2023).

There is a high demand for IT jobs, creating an open door for international employees to bring their expertise to Finnish job market. By welcoming global talent, Finnish companies can benefit from their diverse perspectives, innovative approaches, and broader skill set, which eventually enhances their competitiveness in the global market. With this opportunity, the Human Resource (HR) department plays an important role in promoting this integration for international employees, they are the key to connecting employees and the company together. HR not only contributes to the success and retain of international employees but also strengthens the company's overall growth and innovation potential. However, due to the different in working styles, cultural differences, and language barrier, this can become a challenge.

This research explores the various ways that HR can facilitate for the successful integration of international employees into Finnish IT companies. The author also examines key challenges faced by both company and employees, and the HR practices that can support them. Having effective HR strategies, such as structured onboarding programs, cultural sensitivity training, etc. can significantly enhance the integration process and ensure the company's success in this competitive industry.

1.2 Commissioning Company

The commission company is Sufivi Oy in Finland, located in Helsinki region. The company is providing innovative solutions and services to their customers both locally and globally. Founded in 2017, with a vision to drive technological advancement and efficiency. Sufivi Oy specializes in IT consultant, IT services, and customized technology solutions helping businesses optimize their technological infrastructure. The company was established through international collaboration, including individuals from countries such as Singapore, Germany, and France, who are now based in Finland.

As Finland is now continuing to attract more international talent, Sufivi Oy notices the importance of implementing an effective integration strategy to support their international employees in their transition to Finnish working environment. The company values Diversity – Equity – Inclusion (DEI) workplace, they aim to create a supportive and inclusive working environment for employees from different cultural backgrounds.

This thesis explores how HR strategies and practices at Sufivi Oy can support the integration of foreign employees. Since the company wants to expand its international recruitment, it is essential to establish effective HR practices to attract and retain global talent. The ability to integrate international employees successfully will not only enhance employee satisfaction and productivity but also strengthen Sufivi Oy's position as a competitive company in the IT industry in Finland.

The findings of this study will provide Sufivi Oy with valuable insights and recommendations to improve their HR practices and provide a better support for international talent.

1.3 Research question and Research objectives

The research question of this thesis is “How can a Human Resource department support international employees integrate within the Finnish working environment in the IT sector?”.

The research collected data from a variety of sources, include insights from a handbook, data from articles, interviews with HR professionals, international employees, and colleagues to have in-depth understanding about the topic.

The first objective is to identify the key challenges faced by international employees in an IT company, including cultural differences, language barriers, integrating in the working environment, and the residence permit process. This aspect is explored through interviews with international employees.

The second objective is to analyse the role of the HR department and explore their current strategies in supporting the integration for foreign employees. This side will be explored by literature review and interviews with HR experts.

The third objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of HR practices, it can be assessed through the interviews with employees and HR professionals to have an in-depth understanding from both perspectives.

The fourth objective is to provide recommendations for HR to improve their strategies that can enhance the experience of international employees and supporting a long-term career development for them.

2 Theoretical Framework

The integration of international employees into a new working environment is a complicated process affected by different HR strategies. Understanding the theoretical background of employee integration is important to developing effective HR strategies that can enhance job satisfaction and long-term retention. This framework will serve as the foundation for analysing HR practices at Sufivi Oy, guiding the development of recommendations for improving the company's approach to international employee integration.

These literature reviews explores the key theories, such as Motivation theory, Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory, Organisational Socialisation theory, and experienced studies based on organisational behaviour, cultural adaptation, HR practices focusing on how these factors can contribute to the success of integration of international employees.

2.1 Literature Review

Lu et al. (2024) has identified some challenges for international employees, especially international students including limited knowledge of the job market, unfamiliarity with recruitment practices, lack of industry connections, and language barriers. In addition, the author pointed out that some companies provide unclear communication during hiring processes, making it difficult for international students to navigate job applications effectively.

To overcome these challenges, companies, educational institutions, and recruiters should adopt diverse hiring strategies, transparent recruitment processes, and internship programs tailored for international students. Universities can further support students' employment prospects by strengthening career services, facilitating networking events, and offering Finnish language training to enhance their competitiveness in the job market.

Vasić et al (2022) has identified that language barriers and cultural differences can cause the difficulties for the immigrant workers, and the integration process can be failed for various reasons, usually because of cultural misunderstandings, stereotypes, poor communication skills, workplace dynamics, or personal life challenges faced by the employee. The authors suggest that the company use some socialisation strategies to avoid these challenges. In addition, companies should implement diversity policies and strategies that shape HR practices while promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness within the organisation.

According to Nguyen (2022), international integration is a natural and inevitable outcome of historical progress, influenced by economic, political, and cultural. Global integration has opened up major opportunities for human resource development in Vietnam, such as job growth, skill improvement. With a young and abundant workforce, the country has attracted foreign investment and expanded labor markets. However, challenges like unemployment due to automation affected the progress. To succeed, the author suggests that Vietnam must invest in education, training, and talent retention strategies to stay competitive in the global economy.

As European Labour Authority (2020) suggests to have a pre-onboarding; start the onboarding process for international employees before their first day, foster a personal connection by setting up a virtual meeting with assigned representatives from each departments to explain their roles, helping the newcomer understand the organisational structure, implement buddy program, by proactively addressing these areas, companies can create an inclusive and supportive environment that enhance the success of integration of international employees.

Several previous theses have explored similar topics, they revealed findings regarding the challenges international employees face during their integration process. These challenges are commonly including language barriers, cultural differences and adaptation, social exclusion, and navigating unfamiliar workplace.

As Farooq (2011) has highlighted the key challenges of international employees when they are integrating in the workforce is not only language skills but also the cultural differences. Many foreign employees face biases in recruitment process, limited career advancement opportunities compared to local employees. As Finnish work culture emphasises independence, direct communication, equality and a flat hierarchy (Hoppania,

2024), which may have a significant different from the backgrounds of many international employees.

The report emphasises the need for HR strategies to support immigrant integration, including language training programs, promoting DEI, mentorship opportunities, and clear instructions for career development. Addressing these issues is important for improving employees' job satisfaction, performance, and long-term retention in the Finnish workforce.

Samaeva (2023) has demonstrated the challenges faced by the international students after graduated in finding job in Finland, which are language barriers, discrimination at workplace, hard to build network. These obstacles not only limit the career opportunities of highly educated foreign professionals but also affects Finland's capacity for innovation and economic development. The author suggests some recommendations for improvement, which are providing language support, networking opportunities for the employees, and promoting DEI in the working environment.

According to Saarikoski (2024) not only identified the key challenges faced by international employees, which are language barriers, cultural adaptation, etc. Moreover, the study also highlights the underlying reasons why Finnish companies may hesitate to hire foreign workers, including concerns about language barriers, cultural differences, they frequently raise concerns about how effectively these individuals will adjust to their new environment. The integration process will be even more challenge for them especially in rural area, which can result in feelings of being excluded and may negatively impact their overall job satisfaction or retention. In addition, the immigration process with the administrative tasks is also a key challenge for both international employees and Finnish companies.

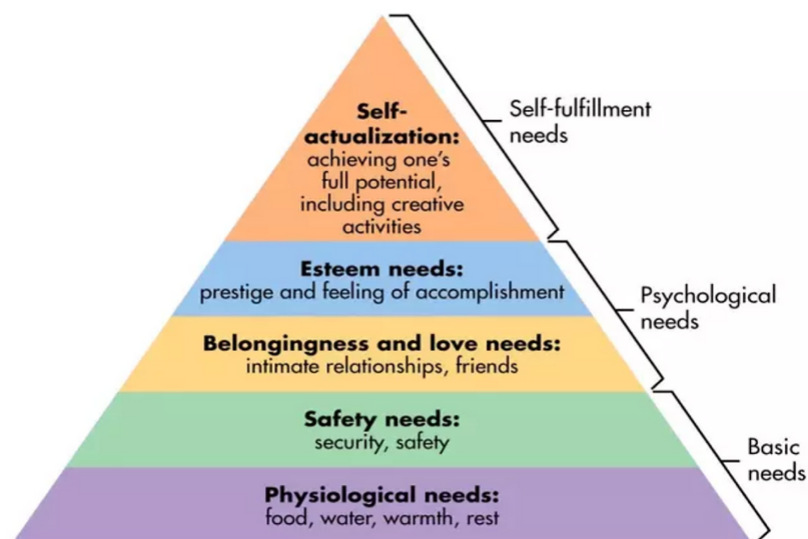
2.2 Motivation Theory

According to (Sands, 2023) motivation theory explores the factors that drive individuals to achieve specific goals, particularly in business and management contexts. Motivated employees tend to be more productive, contributing to increased profitability. Research indicates that motivated and satisfied employees can boost productivity by approximately 12% (Oswald et al., n.d).

2.2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow (1954) proposed that all individuals possess five fundamental needs, which are arranged in a hierarchical structure. Motivation is the key factor lead to job satisfaction and retention of international employees. Starting from basic needs including physiological, it takes priority over all other types of needs. He believed that an individual's drive to meet these fundamental needs is stronger than the desire to fulfill higher-level ones (Mansaray, 2019). In a workplace context, these physiological needs are typically addressed through the compensation employees receive. Safety needs refer to the desire for safety and stability, followed by psychological needs include belongingness and love needs, esteem needs (Maslow, 1954). At the highest level is self-fulfillment needs - a feeling of having fully realised one's capabilities and potential. Mansaray (2019) points out that organisations that invest in professional development, cross-cultural leadership training, and workplace inclusion can see a higher retention rates.

Figure 3. Five needs in Maslow's theory (McLeod, 2018)

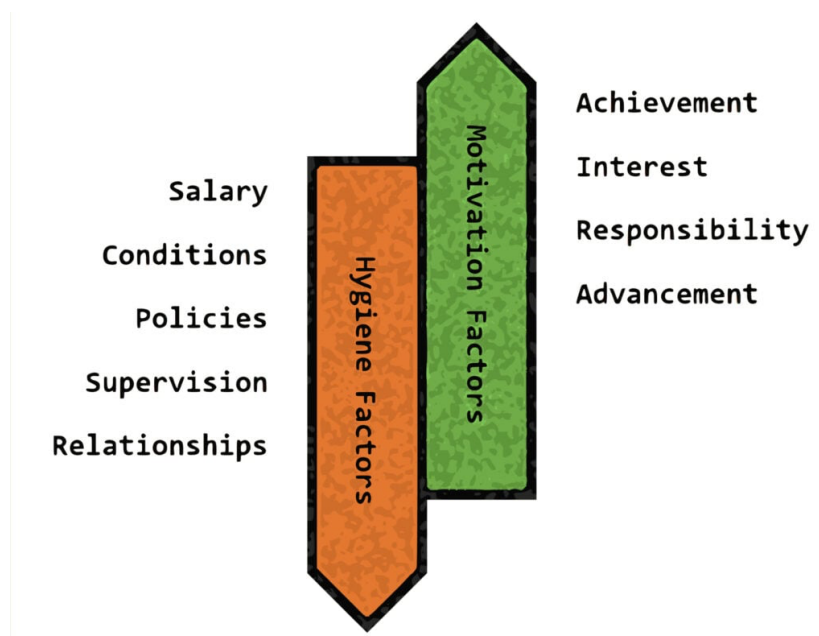


International employees faced various challenges, particularly in safety needs, as outlined in Maslow's theory. These challenges include job security, legal requirements, and the stability in the workplace. In addition, they face difficulties in belongingness needs, such as cultural integration, networking opportunities, and establishing social connections within the organisation and broader professional community (Zhuqing, 2023).

In this context, HR department needs to address each level for a smooth integration process and they can design their strategies in managing international employees based on each level of Maslow's hierarchy to ensure that their employees feel supported and valued. They can support by having a structured onboarding, mentorship/friendship programs to integrate with locals, opportunities for career development. This approach not only enhance the employee's well-being but also speeding their adaptation to a new working environment, fostering a higher engagement.

2.2.2 Herzberg Two-factors Theory

Figure 4. Herzberg Two-factors theory (Nickerson, 2025)



Herzberg et al. (1959) developed a two-dimensional framework to explain the factors that affect employees' attitudes toward work. Initially, he and his colleagues hypothesised that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are influenced by two different sets of factors, meaning they operate independently and cannot be accurately measured on a single continuum.

The first one is motivation factors (intrinsic factors), including achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and personal growth. The other one named hygiene factors (extrinsic factors), including company policies, supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions, salary and job security. With motivation factors, it can affect to employee's job satisfaction, on the other hand, lacking of hygiene factors, it can lead to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).

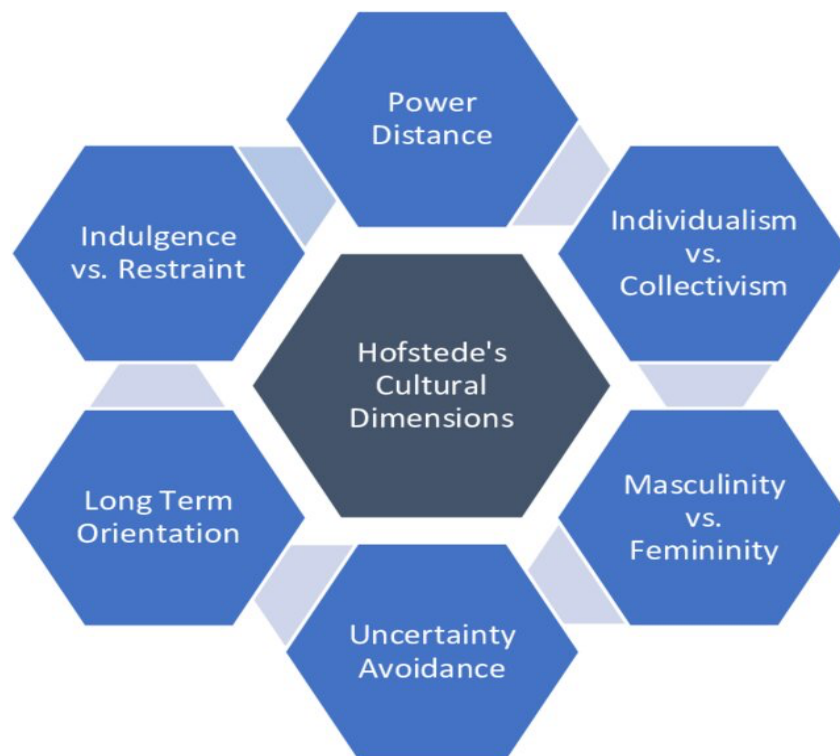
Based on this theory, HR department needs to implement strategies that both can increase motivation and prevent dissatisfaction, as mentioned in the theory. To enhance the motivation, HR should focus on providing challenging tasks, career growth opportunities, and meaningful recognition. Employees should be given leadership opportunities, and continuous learning programs to foster engagement and job satisfaction. Recognising achievements through awards, peer acknowledgment can improve the motivation. In addition, HR must also address hygiene factors to prevent dissatisfaction by ensuring a clear company policies, competitive salaries, supportive supervision, and strong job security. Providing cross-cultural training, and networking opportunities can help international employees adapt more quickly to a new work environment. Ensuring work-life balance through flexible work arrangements, offering legal and relocation support, and fostering a welcoming, inclusive workplace culture (Herzberg et al., 1959).

By implementing these strategies, HR can create a positive, engaging work environment that improves both employee satisfaction and company success.

2.3 Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

According to Hofstede's theory (1980) identifies six dimensions of cultural differences, such as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint can influence how employees interact in the workplace. It is used to understand cultural differences and its impact on organisational behaviour.

Figure 5. Hofstede's theory (Vizmonte et al, 2024)



Carbaugh (2017) shows fundamental insights into how communication is culturally moulded and used in multicultural corporate settings. Although the study focuses on cross-cultural communication in corporate, it provides useful insights into communication techniques. For HR experts, this highlights the significance of understanding language and cultural differences in order to ensure that foreign employees feel integrated into the business culture.

Warren (2017) emphasizes the practical aspects of cross-cultural communication, such as how cultural variations influence communication patterns and the impact of language obstacles in the corporate setting. This recommends HR should create training programs that not only teach the language but also provide insights into local cultural behaviours. It also emphasises the significance of providing tools for translation and localisation to assist international employees in understanding internal practices.

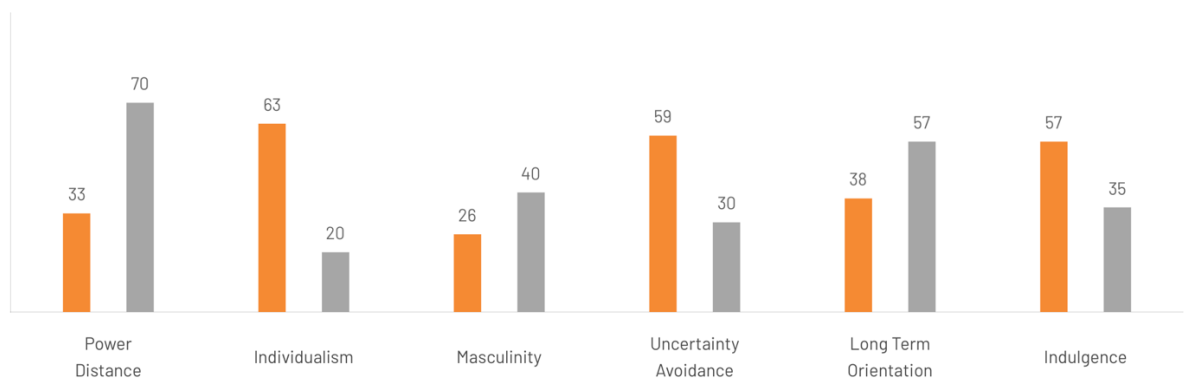
As Ravazzani (2016) have demonstrated the internal crisis communication in multicultural business, which is especially crucial for HR department, where rapid change and crises. The study recommends ways for effective internal communication, with a focus on cultural

sensitivity. HR can use these to create a welcoming atmosphere for international employees, making them feel prepared and supported through organisational changes or crises.

Korhonen et al. (2010) points out the ways in which cultural influences affect lifelong learning. This is needed for HR since it suggests that cultural adaptation is a lifelong process that is necessary for continual education and assistance. HR can support language learning, training and cultural programs to help international employees integrate efficiently over time.

These studies use Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions framework to point out the importance of internal communication within multicultural corporations. And HR plays an important role in helping foreign employees to adapt with new working environment. By understanding, combining and integrating these methods, resulting in higher job satisfaction and performance from international employees.

Figure 6. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Scores for Finland and Vietnam (The Culture Factor, n.d)



The author includes this chart to highlight the differences in working cultures between two countries, which are Finland and Vietnam, using Hofstede's Cultural Dimension as a framework. As the commissioning company was founded by Vietnamese individuals, this comparison provides valuable insights into how culture can affect workplace behaviours, leadership styles, and employees' expectations in both countries.

2.3.1 Power Distance

The first dimension is Power Distance refers to the degree to which individuals in organisations and institutions, such as families, accept and expect unequal power distribution. This concept defines inequality from the perspective of those with less power, rather than from those in leadership positions. It implies that the level of inequality in a society is not only imposed by those in power but also accepted by subordinates (Hofstede, 2011, p.9; Traquandi, 2016).

According to figure 6 has demonstrated that Finland has a low-power distance with a score of 33, meaning workplaces emphasise equality, open communication. In comparison with Asian country like Vietnam, which has a score of 70, a high-power distance, this means that individuals acknowledge and accept a hierarchical structure where everyone has a defined position. Employees tend to expect a clear instruction from their leader, who provides guidance and decision-making (Le, n.d). So, they may find it difficult with informal interactions with managers and the expectation of independent work.

Organisations can support their international employees by providing a clear guidance on workplace hierarchy, promoting open discussions, and explaining for them about Finnish leadership styles.

2.3.2 Collectivism vs. Individualism

The second dimension is Collectivism and Individualism, refers to the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups. In individualism, focusing on personal responsibility, the way they look after themselves and their immediate families. In collectivism, individuals are part of strong, cohesive groups, such as extended families, which provide a lifelong support in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2011, p.11; Traquandi, 2016).

The figure shows that Finland has a high score in Individualism, meaning that people value independence, self-reliance, personal responsibility, and employees are expected to work independently. In contrast, the Vietnamese working culture is highly collectivist, where group harmony, teamwork, and loyalty to family or work units are prioritised over individual achievements. As Le (n.d) points out the relationship between employee and employer is viewed through a moral term, like a family bond.

Based on the differences, HR department can support international employees by providing them mentorship programs, team building activities so they can feel more integrated and connected to an individualism workplace.

2.3.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

The third dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance refers to a society's tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance prefer structured environments, strict laws, and clear rules to avoid unknown situations. They often hold a strong belief in absolute truth and tend to be more emotional and driven by inner anxiety. In contrast, low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more flexible, open to different viewpoints, and tolerant of ambiguity. They minimise regulations and embrace multiple perspectives (Hofstede, 2011, p.10; Traquandi, 2016).

Finland has a high uncertainty avoidance, meaning that clear rules, structured processes, and long-term planning are valued. People tend to avoid the risks and value the stability in business, and they are uncomfortable with uncertainty. While, Vietnam has a lower score, where the employee maintains a more relaxed attitude, they valued the flexibility and adaptability (Le, n.d).

With this dimension, HR department should provide a detailed onboarding and transparent communication to support foreign employees who come from a different working culture to understand Finnish workplace.

2.3.4 Masculinity vs. Femininity

The fourth dimension is Masculinity and Femininity explores the degree to which a society values traditional gender roles. Masculine cultures emphasise clear gender distinctions, strength, and competition, while feminine cultures prioritise gender roles, modesty, nurturing behaviours, and a focus on quality of life (Hofstede, 2011, p.12; Wale, n.d).

The table chart shows Finland has a lower score of 26, which means Finland has a feminine work culture, highlighting work-life balance, social welfare, and collaboration rather than competition. On the other hand, Vietnam has an average masculinity score, meaning workplaces may have a mix of competition-driven values and

cooperative teamwork. But according to (Le, n.d) Vietnamese working culture is also considered as Femininity, people valued the equality and work-life balance.

HR can apply this dimension by providing international employees with work-life balance policies, promoting teamwork.

2.3.5 Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

The fifth dimension is Long-term and Short-term Orientation. Long-term focuses on future success, prioritising patience, perseverance, economy, and gradual progress over immediate results. In contrast, short-term orientation refers to quick results, present-focused achievements, and respect for tradition, emphasising immediate success over long-term goals (Hofstede, 2011, p.13; Wale, n.d).

Finland has a short-term orientation, which means that people tend to focus on immediate goals and results, whereas Vietnam has a strong long-term orientation, where future planning, patience and they invest in long-term success. As Dinh (2024) points out investors can expect that Vietnamese partners will focus on future-oriented objectives and build a long-lasting, sustainable collaborations.

HR department should communicate with foreign employees about Finland's career advancement pathways, provide professional development programs, along with that is providing long-term benefits to help international employees set realistic expectations.

2.3.6 Restraint vs. Indulgence

The last dimension is Restraint and Indulgence, it examines how societies manage and satisfy their desires. It reflects the extent to which people are free to enjoy their lives and seek pleasure or whether their impulses are controlled by societal norms. Indulgent societies promoting free expression of desires, allowing people to prioritise their leisure, enjoyment, and fun. Restrained societies impose social rules and expectations that limit satisfaction, promoting self-discipline over personal desires (Hofstede, 2011, p.15; Wale, n.d).

According to the chart, Finland is more indulgent, which means people prioritise their leisure, their own happiness and the freedom to enjoy life. While Vietnam is more

restrained, prioritising social stability and conformity to societal norms. This results in a more cautious approach to spending, with a greater focus on necessities and practicality rather than immediate pleasure or indulgence (Dinh, 2024).

This comparison highlights the cultural differences that impact employee expectations and HR strategies for integrating Vietnamese employees, and international employees in general into Finnish workplaces. By applying Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Finnish organisations can develop HR strategies, training programs, and support systems that help international employees and students adapt more effectively to the workplace. Understanding cultural differences allows companies like Sufivi Oy to create an inclusive work environment, ensuring international employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to contribute to the company.

2.4 Organisational Socialisation Theory

Figure 7. Six socialisation tactics (Houghton, 2014)

Socialisation tactic	Action	Polar tactic	Action
Collective	Grouping newcomers and putting them through common experiences	Individual	Handling each newcomer individually
Formal	Formal process of specific training	Informal	Informal process of integrating newcomers with existing staff
Sequential	Specific phases of induction	Random	More random approach
Fixed	Fixed timetable of achievement	Variable	No fixed timetable, variable approach
Serial	Newcomer is socialised by an experienced staff member	Disjunctive	No role model is used
Investiture	Uses feedback to affirm the identity and characteristics of the newcomer	Divestiture	No feedback on newcomer's personal attributes

Van Maanen & Schein (1979) describe that organisational socialisation refers to the process through which an individual gains the social knowledge and skills required to successfully take on a role within an organisation. They identified six organisational socialisation tactics that organisations use to integrate new employees into the workplace. These tactics help shape how employees learn, adapt, and engage with their new roles and organisational culture. The six tactics are categorized into socialisation tactic and polar tactic approaches.

2.4.1 Collective vs. Individual

Collective socialisation involves training new employees in groups, providing them with shared learning experiences, mentorship programs, and structured orientation sessions. This approach fosters a sense of community, reduces uncertainty, and ensures consistency in knowledge transfer (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

In contrast, individual put employees in one-on-one or independent learning environments. While this method offers greater flexibility, it may be more challenging for international employees who are unfamiliar with Finnish workplace where managers typically rely on employees to handle their tasks independently without the need of supervision (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Employees in Finland are expected to take responsibility for their work, stay self-motivated, and proactively look for ways to improve their performance (Hoppania, 2024).

2.4.2 Formal vs. Informal

Formal socialisation provides a structured training programs before employees take over their roles. The company can use this approach to implement some orientation sessions, development workshop to help international employees have in-depth understanding of Finnish working cultures (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

Informal socialisation occurs when employees learn through experience, observation, and interaction with colleagues rather than through structured training. While this method allows for more natural adaptation, international employees might struggle without clear guidance or formal onboarding processes (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

2.4.3 Sequential vs. Random

Sequential socialisation follows a step-by-step learning process, which have specific phases induction, from onboarding to skill training, mentoring. This is a structured process that supports employees to understand what to expect at each stage, which can reducing the uncertainty (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

On the other hand, random has no fixed order, which means employees do not have a clear instruction and roadmap (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This can lead to confusion, especially for an international employee who is unfamiliar with Finnish workplace.

2.4.4 Fixed vs. Variable

Fixed socialisation offers employees with a fixed timeline, which is useful for foreign employees, as it provides a clear expectations, structured learning, and a predictable career progression (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

Whilst, variable does not have a predefined timeline, meaning employees adapt at their own pace. While this method allows flexibility, it can cause anxiety among international employees who may be uncertain about when they are expected to reach full productivity or when they will receive promotions or additional responsibilities (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Fixed socialisation processes are more likely to encourage innovative thinking and adaptability, whereas variable socialization processes tend to result in employees adopting traditional and conformist behaviours (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

2.4.5 Serial vs. Disjunctive

Serial socialisation provides new employees with mentors to guide them through the integration process, having experienced supervisors, colleagues can help international employees adapt to new culture (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

Disjunctive socialisation happens when the employee does not have a direct role model, mentors, they have to adapt on their own. With someone already face language barrier, the differences in culture and unfamiliar workplace dynamics, it can be particularly difficult for them (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

2.4.6 Investiture vs. Divestiture

Investiture socialisation values employees' existing skills, previous experiences while helping them integrate into the company. Adopting this approach, company can recognize

the unique strengths and perspectives that international employees bring, this can foster an inclusivity and diversity at workplace (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Saks et al, 2006).

Divestiture socialisation asks employees to forget about their previous behaviours and adopt a completely new norms, habits that dictated by the organisation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

For international employees, HR can apply socialisation tactics such as collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture to provide them a structured support, cultural integration programs, mentorship, and step-by-step onboarding. This ensures that new employees feel welcomed, understand workplace expectations, and smoothly transition into their roles in the Finnish IT sector.

3 Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research methodology

For this thesis, qualitative research methodology is being used. As Hammersley (2012) points out, qualitative research is a social inquiry approach that typically involves a flexible and data-driven approach. It relies on unstructured or semi-structured data, recognising the importance of subjectivity in the research process. This method focuses on detailed examination of a small number of naturally occurring cases and prioritises verbal analysis over statistical.

This thesis aims to explore how HR strategies can support the integration of international employees in Finland, by examining the challenges through international employees' experiences. In addition, using this methodology can also help the author achieving an in-depth understanding from both HR department and HR specialist, offering insightful perspectives on the main challenges, integration process of international employees. As a result, qualitative method is the most suitable, allowing for an in-depth understanding about personal perspectives.

Qualitative research relies on rich, descriptive information, avoiding numerical ranking or formal measurements. Methods such as observations, interviews, and documentary analysis are utilized (Hammersley, 2012). The challenges faced by international employees cannot be explored through numerical data, qualitative approach allows the author to

explore deeper into emotions, motivations and expectations of employees. Since the integration of employees involves adapting to different cultures, organisational behaviours, and personal factors, a qualitative, flexible approach supports to discover themes, such as workplace cultural differences, HR effectiveness, and employee well-being.

In qualitative research, interviews are usually conducted in a flexible and open-ended approach, allowing participants to discuss topics in-depth that are broadly related to the study. The interviewer actively listens and follows up with prompts to encourage further elaboration, detailed explanations, or concrete examples where necessary (Hammersley, 2012).

The author will use open-ended questions for the interviews to not only have a deeper understanding about the challenges faced by international employees with their integration process in a new working environment but also gaining perspectives from HR department about how they address these challenges and their current strategies.

3.2 Data collection and Data analysis

To gain a deeper understanding about the topic, a detailed data collection approach was used, including semi-structured interviews with the founder of the company, HR department, international employees within the company and an external HR specialist.

The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and English languages. Additionally, the interviewees were familiar with the topic, interview questions and being informed beforehand that their answers will be included in the thesis for analysing purpose. The online interviews were held through Teams platform, and all were recorded with the informed consent of the interviewees and securely stored on the author's personal computer. The last interview through WhatsApp platform not being recorded but take note.

Table 1. Interviews overview

Interview date	Interviewees	Position	Location	Interview length

16.3.2025	Interviewee 1	CEO, founder of the commisioning company	Face-to-face	45 minutes
21.3.2025	Interviewee 2	International employee working in ICT sector	Teams meeting	45 minutes
21.3.2025	Interviewee 3	HR specialist	Teams meeting	30 minutes
1.4.2025	Interviewee 4	International employee working in ICT sector	Face-to-face	20 minutes
3.4.2025	Interviewee 5	International employee working in ICT sector	WhatsApp	30 minutes

To analyse the responses from the interviewees, the author employed a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method used to systematically identify and explore

the common patterns, themes across a dataset. It helps researchers understand the shared experiences and common perspectives, rather than focusing on unique or individual responses. TA highlights how a topic is commonly discussed or understood, offering insight into collective meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method being widely used to analyse qualitative data, allows for the identification themes, one of the key strengths is the flexibility and accessibility. It is being widely used across various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Terry et al, 2017).

Thematic analysis is the most suitable for this thesis; by using it, the author will be able to have in-depth understanding, identify, discover and highlight the common challenges experienced by international employees when they start their work in Finland through the interview data.

4 Interview results

The author will present the findings based on the data collected through interviews. The results focused on the challenges that faced by the international employees regarding their integration process, highlighting the key themes. Additionally, the perspectives of the company founder and HR specialist will be considered to offer a comprehensive understanding of integration strategies and potential improvements for HR policies.

4.1 Interview 1

The first interview was conducted with the founder of the company Sufivi Oy, who has approximately 20 years working experiences in the fields.

The interviewee first shared about the company's mission and vision, stating that they want to position themselves as a competitive company and showing their ambition to become one of the leading IT firms in Europe. Furthermore, the interviewee shared about the company culture: "We first start from human being; we need to really care that if they are good person. It is needed to understand that we need to work together as a team, by yourself you cannot do it, but together we can do it. It's not about the work or money, but it's about you". This statement demonstrates a strong focus on human values, personalities, teamwork setting, suggesting that the company values collaboration, trust in the recruitment process and working culture. With this perspective, fostering a sense of

belonging, respect, and responsibility in the context of integration of international employees.

In addition, as the founder of Sufivi Oy and has been working in Finland for 20 years, he continues to adapt to Finnish work culture, while still valued teamwork over working independently. Based on his observation, he expressed his concern that some employees are too focused on their individual tasks and work independently, remain within their familiar culture, which can lead to lack of team interaction between employees, reduced the collaboration. He highlighted the importance of building a close-knit team environment, “together, we can build a strong company” and “happiness is the most important here”, where employees not only work efficiently but also communicate, support one another, and contribute to a common goal. This connects to Hofstede’s Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension, as the founder is encouraging a more collectivist mindset, where teamwork is valued over individualism.

He thinks that one of the biggest challenges he faced when first working with both international employees and Finnish people was the language barrier, and then the differences in cultures. He believes that understanding Finnish working culture is very important for international workers. From his point of view, it is crucial that foreign employees must put the effort in learning, adapting and respecting the local workplace cultures to work more effective and smoothing the integration process. Moreover, he observed and pointed out that international employees also faced the same challenges when they start their work in Finland.

He commented: “Finnish working culture takes time to get to know that”, this observation highlights the real challenges that international employees faced when they enter a new working environment. According to him, HR should have a one-on-one discussion with international employee to have a deeper understanding of their situation when adapting to new workplace. The founder expressed that adapting to Finnish work culture is a long-term process. It also supports the idea that cross-cultural adjustment a continuous learning, and ongoing experience influenced by both individual effort and organisational support. His perspective highlights the important role HR plays in creating a structured, supportive environment that supports international employees understand and embrace the working culture.

When discussing about the hiring process, he believes that selecting candidates who can align with the company’s culture is very crucial, the founder valued the candidate’s

personality more than their technical skills. As he explained: “If the person is not a match with your team or your company, don’t try to put that person in the team. We have to understand who we will taking in and who we will not taking in”, this highlights a strong focus on cultural fit and team connection, suggesting that hiring decisions at Sufivi Oy are made not only based on professional qualifications but also on whether the individual will contribute positively to the collaborative and inclusive environment of the company. Pinadella (2024) has demonstrated that cultural fit plays a crucial role in both job performance and employee well-being, when an individual’s personal values are in harmony with the organization’s culture, it fosters higher levels of trust and a stronger sense of belonging within the company, this alignment has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction, work efficiency, and long-term professional growth.

In conclusion, the insights shared by the founder of Sufivi Oy offer a valuable perspective about the company’s culture, highlights the important of leadership and HR in creating a workplace where international employees feel welcomed, and connected. His insights about human values, teamwork, and cultural fit reflects a deep understanding of the challenges faced by a diverse workforce and the importance of fostering collaboration and inclusion. His personal experiences in adapting to Finnish work culture highlight the idea that successful integration is an ongoing process, and it requires both individual effort and organisational support.

4.2 Interview 2

The second interview was conducted with one international employee, who has been working in IT fields since 2013, moved to Finland in 2023, and he has experience both Finnish and Vietnamese working culture.

During his internship, he noticed that: “Finnish working culture is more about independent, direct communication, they focused more on work-life balanced, and they don’t spend much time to have a short conversation during the day”. Although, the company operated in an international environment and used English as the main language, but during breaks, Finns tend to stick with their group and communicate in Finnish language. At the beginning, it was the biggest challenge for him to adjust and adapt to this since he comes from a collectivist workplace, where social bonding and informal conversations are more common.

The interviewee observed that the most significant difference between his previous working culture and Finnish workplace was working independently. In Finland, the employer expects employees to complete the task without supervision, focusing on trust-based working environment. Moreover, he stated: “overtime is very rare, work-life balanced is valued, and vacation is well respected”, this reflects that the well-being and personal time of employees are prioritised.

Additionally, he identified language barrier as a significant challenge, he explained: “some internal documentations were written in Finnish, it makes me struggle to translate and to understand it”. He admitted that sometimes he even “feel left behind”, this aligns with the safety needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. However, he discovered that the best way to overcome this barrier was to take opportunity, be proactive, and engage actively with colleagues, showing that open communication is the key to adaptation. This insight can support HR in improving their strategies by ensuring that internal documentation is available in multiple languages or common working language. This practice can help reduce the confusion for international employees and it could improve their job performance.

The interviewee shared that he received support from the HR department during his onboarding process. He was provided with clear instructions, a detailed information about Finnish labour laws, and the company’s working culture, mentorship program. This structured and informative approach helped him to understand his role and his responsibility from the very beginning, contributing to a smooth and efficient integration process. His experience highlights the importance of clear and structured onboarding programs in helping international employees adapt quickly to a new work environment.

Overall, the interviewee’s experiences provide valuable insight into the challenges of integrating into Finnish work culture as an international employee. His reflections on differences in communication styles, independence at work, and emphasis on work-life balance. While challenges such as language barriers and cultural adjustment were presented, the interviewee’s proactive approach and the support received from HR, through structured onboarding and mentorship, were significantly contributed to a positive integration experience. His feedback highlights the importance of inclusive HR practices, such as using a common working language, and providing accessible documentation, all of which are crucial in supporting international employees. These findings highlight the role of HR as a main factor in building a positive working environment, where international employees can adapt to new workplace.

4.3 Interview 3

The third interview was conducted with an external HR specialist, who has expertise in people analytics, and currently works in a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Finland. The interview focused on identifying integration challenges from the perspective of an HR professional.

From her experience, the interviewee highlighted that one of the key challenges for international employees is adapting to Finnish culture, particularly in terms of communication and workplace interaction. She observed that Finnish people may first appear distant, which can be misunderstood by newcomers as unfriendly. However, she clarified that once relationships are established, Finns are genuinely friendly, supportive, and willing to help others. As she explained: “Finns seem like they are not too friendly at first, however, inside they’re very friendly and enthusiastic about helping other people.” Additionally, the interviewee identified language barrier is also a big challenge for international employees integrating into the Finnish workforce. She pointed out the required time for learning the Finnish language, it can take “1.5 to 2 years with 6 to 8 hours of study per day” for an individual to be fluent with the language. This highlights the long-term commitment, and effort of foreign workers for effective language learning and highlights the importance of providing language support during the integration process.

To ensure an effective onboarding strategy, the interviewee recommended that the company should assist international employees in registering some essential administrative tasks when they start their work in Finland, such as DVV registration, open bank account, etc., since this can be a complicated process for them. Training should be provided across all departments, not just within HR, and international employees, according to her: “It’s very important to train both international employees and local Finn teams. It will impact on employee engagement. When employees feel they have found the right place to fit in, they will be motivated to work and show their ideas confidentially. In the opposite direction, through training local Finn team members will know how to treat new members, how to build a relationship based on trust and empathy”. This practice would help local and current employees understand how to collaborate effectively with new international employees, thereby fostering a sense of inclusion and helping newcomers feel more connected and comfortable in their new work environment. Furthermore, she emphasised the importance of digitalising the onboarding process, suggesting that adapting digital tools and platforms can enhance accessibility, and create a more efficient onboarding experience for international employees.

In addition, the interviewee suggested that company should viewing international employees as internal customers. She emphasised the importance of applying design thinking process in HR practices, stating: “Improve employee experience by viewing the employee as a consumer, with design thinking principles: empathising with the user, understanding problems, and collaborating.” This approach encourages HR departments to empathise with employees’ experiences, identify integration challenges from their perspective, and develop a suitable, collaborative solutions that could enhance the adaptation, and engagement, improving job performance.

Discussing about the barriers to hiring international employees, the interviewee pointed out both objective and subjective factors. Objectively, Finland’s climate and geographical location can be a challenge for some foreign candidates. Subjectively, certain companies remain hesitant to hire foreign worker due to the difference in language and a lack of trust in foreign qualifications, particularly from Asian countries. She argued this mindset, emphasising the value that Asian employees bring in terms of adaptability, and willingness to learn, which are crucial factors for success in any workplace. These reflections highlight the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) innovations in recruitment and HR policies.

The findings from the interview align closely with the key themes explored throughout this thesis, including cultural adaptation, onboarding strategies, language barriers, and HR’s role in supporting the integration of international employees. Her recommendations suggest that successful integration requires a combination of clear communication, structured onboarding, and cultural awareness.

4.4 Interview 4

The fourth interview was conducted with an international employee, who is originally from Belgium and has been working in the ICT sector in Finland for ten months.

The interviewee first shared about her experience when she started working in Finland, highlighting that she received the support from her colleagues. Although all the documents were originally in Finnish language, her team tried to translate them into English as much as possible for her and ensured that communication in English to support her integration process. When discussing about the differences between two working cultures, she observed that Finnish culture has more frequent and flexible breaks throughout the day,

while, her home country, where she has to work eight hours shift and have around 45 minutes for the break.

The interviewee shared that she doesn't have any problems about the administrative documents when starting her employment in Finland, all the information were very clear and easily accessible online. In contrast, adapting to the working environment was the biggest challenge, as she explained: "I noticed really quickly that I am sort of an outsider". Although the working environment is international, but the main workforce is Finnish employees, so during breaktime, they tend to socialise with their groups and communicate in Finnish language. This experience reflects the social integration barriers that international employees may face, even in multicultural organisations, and highlights the need for inclusive practices that promote cross-cultural interaction.

In addition, she acknowledged that her local colleagues made efforts to include her by explaining the content of their conversations and helping her understand what was being discussed during breaktimes. However, she also noted that during meetings, the group would often switch to Finnish, which at times made it difficult for her to fully participate or stay engaged in the conversation: "Talking about work related stuffs, actually talking about the project that I'm doing, they just tend to, time to time switch to completely Finnish and I'm just there with my limited Finnish", which makes her feels excluded from the team. The company also offers some extra activities and social events for the employees, she expressed her interest in joining these events to have a better understanding about the working culture and she believes that this is a way to build a closer connection with her colleagues. However, she was unable to participate in these activities because all the information was provided in Finnish, this insight highlights that language barrier limited her involvement in social integration with her colleagues. Moreover, she noted that all the training webinars were conducted in Finnish language only, therefore she couldn't benefit from the learning opportunities. This language barrier further impacted her professional development and highlights the need for inclusive training resources.

The interviewee shared that her onboarding experience in Finland was guided by her project manager. Reflecting on her previous experience, she noticed the differences and pointed out that she had to go through all the documents independently. She commented that during the onboarding process, she mainly does it by herself. While, in her home country, she will have a one-on-one discussion with HR to show her around and explain the instruction directly, she identified this as a challenge, as the lack of direct interaction initially made it more difficult for her to familiarise herself with the organisation.

From her experience in the fields, the language in IT sector mainly English, which means that language did not negatively affect her job performance or the ability to carry out her tasks effectively. To support a smooth integration process, the interviewee recommended that new international employees should be active in engaging with the local employees, she highlighted the importance of seeking support when needed, put effort and try to adapt and blend into the new working environment.

In conclusion, the interviewee's experience offers meaningful insight into the integration journey of international employees in Finnish ICT workplaces, highlighting both the supportive practices and the challenges. While her colleagues made efforts to support her by translating documents and using English as the working language, language barriers are still a significant challenges, particularly during meetings, training sessions, social events, etc. On the other hand, the interviewee highlighted the importance of proactive attitude in the integration process, encouraging new foreign employees to be active, seeking for support, making effort to engage with local colleagues. Additionally, it also pointed out the need for inclusive HR strategies, for example multi-languages documents, accessible training webinars to foster an inclusive, supportive working environment.

4.5 Interview 5

The fifth interview was conducted with an international employee, who is Indian and now working in the ICT sector at Sufivi Oy. The interviewee has experience in the fields for seven years and moved to Finland in 2023.

Sharing from his experience, he pointed out: "Adapting to Finnish working culture was a bit challenge at first, mainly because of the communication style", he used to a workplace that has small talk at work and close collaboration, in contrast in Finland, employers tend to value independence, expecting their employees to work independently with minimal guidance. In addition, he observed the same problem with other international employees, particularly during their breaks and informal conversations, Finns tend to communicate in Finnish language, this makes him feel excluded, despite the company operating in international setting, where English is the main working language.

The interviewee reflected on the cultural differences between Indian and Finnish workplaces, highlighting that in India, organisations typically operate within a strict

hierarchical structure, where roles are clearly defined, makes the communication style also different from Finland. In contrast, Finnish companies tend to adopt a flat hierarchy, promoting equality, open and direct communication, informal relationships between employees and management. He shared that, working in Finland, employers genuinely care about employee well-being. They make an effort to listen to employees' opinions, ensure that their voices are heard, and place strong emphasis on maintaining a healthy work-life balance as part of the organisational culture.

When discussing the support provided by HR during his integration process, the interviewee described his onboarding experience as positive and well-structured. As he shared that HR department provided him with clear information about Finnish labour laws and introduced him a buddy program, pairing him with a local employee to support him integrate to the new working environment during the first few months. This practice contributed significantly to his smooth transition and adaptation to the Finnish workplace.

As an international employee, he received equal opportunities for his career growth compared to his Finnish colleagues. The company also provided accessible training webinars and actively encourage him to participate. In addition, there are discussions with his manager regularly to review his job performance and to develop a plan for his career growth within Sufivi Oy. These practices reflect the company's commitment to promote DEI and professional development for all employees.

The interviewee recommended that international employees should try to learn the Finnish language, be proactive, and seek support when needed. Additionally, he emphasised the importance of being open-minded and actively participating in social activities within the company, even if one does not yet speak Finnish fluently. Engaging in such events can help build relationships, connect with local employees, and support smoother integration into the workplace.

5 Analysis

The author will discuss the key findings from the data collected through interviews with international employees, HR professionals, and the founder of Sufivi Oy. The discussion focuses on four major themes that emerged during collecting the data, which are language barriers, cultural differences, HR support and onboarding strategies, and career development opportunities.

Table 2. Thematic coding table

First-Order codes (Quotes / Direct ideas)	Second-Order codes (Interpretive categories)	Aggregated themes
<p>“Sometimes I feel left behind”</p> <p>“I noticed really quickly that I’m sort of an outsider.”</p>	<p>Feelings of exclusion in informal settings</p>	<p>Language barriers</p>
<p>“Documents were only in Finnish”</p> <p>“Training webinars were not in English”</p>	<p>Lack of multilingual support</p>	<p>Language barriers</p>
<p>“They just tend to, time to time switch to completely Finnish and I’m just there with my limited Finnish”</p>	<p>Communication challenges in mixed-language teams</p>	<p>Language barriers</p>
<p>“Focused on trust-based”;</p> <p>“Minor-management”;</p> <p>“Employees are expected to work independently”.</p>	<p>Finnish work culture encourages self-sufficiency</p>	<p>Cultural differences</p>

<p>“Finnish working culture is more about independent, direct communication, they focused more on work-life balanced, and they don’t spend much time to have a short conversation during the day”.</p> <p>“Adapting to Finnish working culture was a bit challenge at first, mainly because of the communication style”</p>	<p>Social interaction norms differ across cultures</p>	<p>Cultural differences, communication styles.</p>
<p>“I had to do most of the onboarding on my own”</p> <p>“There was no one-on-one session with HR”</p>	<p>Gaps in onboarding for some employees</p>	<p>HR support and onboarding</p>

Codes serve as short labels that capture meaningful features of the data, summarizing or describing content that is relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

This table demonstrates how the interviews data was systematically analysed and grouped into broader themes using thematic analysis approach. The process began with identifying first-order codes, which are direct quotes or specific ideas from participants. These were then interpreted into second-order codes, highlighting broader patterns. Finally, these categories were combined into aggregated themes that directly address the research question. This structured approach ensures that the findings provide a clear connection between the data and the conclusions drawn in this study.

5.1 Language barriers

The major challenge for international employees in Finland was language barriers. Even though, English is main language used in the company setting and IT sector, the interviewees still pointed out the difficulties with internal communication, particularly in important materials, such as onboarding documents, internal training webinars, or social event were only available in Finnish. Although working in international environments, many interviewees still experienced challenges in social integration. Breaktime conversations and internal social events were often conducted in Finnish, making non-Finnish speakers feeling excluded. Even though colleagues made efforts to explain conversations, but still during meetings, they incidentally switch to Finnish language. The interviewees expressed that “Sometimes I feel left behind”; “I noticed really quickly that I’m sort of an outsider”

This highlights a need for an inclusive communication strategy. Organisations must recognise that informal interactions are important in building team collaboration. This insight aligns with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), particularly in the levels of safety and belongingness, which are basic needs and psychological needs.

5.2 Cultural differences

Follow by is the cultural differences between Finnish workplace and international employees’ home countries was another theme. Interviewees described Finnish working culture as independent, task-oriented, and direct, with minimal small talk and it valued work-life balance. For employees come from collectivist cultures, where collaboration, hierarchy are more common, this difference was a significant adjustment. These findings can be explained using Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory. Finland scores high in individualism and low in power distance, which reflects the country’s valued equality, and informal relationships between managers and employees. While many international employees were used to more hierarchical structures and close social bonding at work. This created a sense of being an outsider for foreign workers. The importance of understanding these cultural dynamics is supported by previous literature as Pinadella (2024) points out that cultural fit is crucial for smooth integration. Interviewees who adapted successfully by being open-minded and proactive in building relationships with Finnish colleagues.

5.3 Onboarding process

Structured onboarding processes were mentioned as crucial factor in supporting international employees. Participants who received clear onboarding instructions, labour law information, and were paired with a buddy reported a smoother integration experience. In contrast, those who had to complete onboarding on their own, with limited support, felt overwhelmed and excluded from the beginning. An external HR expert also recommended digitalising the onboarding process and ensuring that all departments are involved in the integration process of international employees, not just HR.

In addition, most of the participants felt that they have equal growth opportunities with local employees, they were encouraged to participate in webinars, and they had regular discussions with manager about their development goals. This aligns with the motivation factors of Herzberg's Two-factors theory (1959), where achievement, advancement and personal growth can affect job satisfaction of employees.

It shows that successful integration of international employees in Finland relies on inclusive HR practices, and employee proactiveness. By identifying barriers such as language and cultural differences and recognising the value of structured onboarding and ongoing support, companies can develop more effective strategies to attract, integrate, and retain international employees.

6 Recommendation

Based on the findings and analysis, several key recommendations are proposed to support the effective integration of international employees into the Finnish working environment, especially in the IT sector.

While this thesis focuses on the Finnish IT sector, the insights and recommendations are highly relevant for organisations in other countries that have international talent. Global companies across various industries face similar challenges related to cultural differences, language barriers, and inclusive onboarding. The recommended HR strategies, such as structured onboarding processes, multilingual resources, mentorship programs, and cross-cultural training are adaptable and can be implemented in diverse geographic and cultural contexts. By implementing these practices, international organisations can enhance

employee satisfaction, foster inclusive workplaces, and increase retention rates among foreign employees.

6.1 Multilingual resources

One of the key barriers faced by international employees is the lack of accessible information in English or other commonly used as working languages. Important documents, training materials, and social event announcements are often only available in Finnish, leading to confusion and feelings of exclusion.

The company should ensure that all documents are available in company's official working language, for example informal or formal meetings, announcements and event invitations to encourage the international employees' participation.

6.2 Structured onboarding process

Having a structured onboarding experience plays a crucial role in ensuring a smooth transition for international employees. Without having a structured onboarding can lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and slower adaptation of international employees.

The company can develop a clear and consistent onboarding program for all international hires that should include: an introduction to Finnish labour laws, an overview of company policies, working culture, mentorship or buddy program, having regular one-on-one discussions between managers and international employees to review expectations, performance, and career development plans, improve the onboarding process by using digital platform to improve the accessibility.

6.3 Social integration within the company

Despite working in international environments, many foreign employees struggle to form social connections, particularly when informal interactions between the local employees happen in Finnish.

HR can support by organising inclusive social activities, for instance cultural exchange events, that encourage interaction between international and local employees. Ensure that event announcements and participation guidelines are provided in English or the

company's official working language. Foster a team culture where social bonding and collaboration are encouraged. Social integration enhances team collaboration and helps international employees build meaningful workplace relationships

6.4 Language learning

According to interviewee 4, that English is widely used in the IT sector, but the ability to understand and communicate in Finnish remains a significant factor for enhancing the workplace integration and social inclusion.

The company can provide Finnish language training courses, encourage participation in informal language exchange programs within the company. This could also be in the buddy program where the local employees can be the person to support international employees improve their Finnish language skills. This demonstrates the company's long-term commitment to employee development and improves communication within diverse teams, reduce the sense of being an outsider for an international employee

6.5 Training across the company

International employee integration is not only the responsibility of HR, but it requires the support of the entire organisation. Local employees and managers, leaders must also be prepared to work effectively in diverse teams.

By delivering cross-cultural training sessions across all departments, focusing on cultural awareness, inclusive communication strategies, workshops about biases and unconscious bias, encourage open feedback between team members to foster a mutual understanding and continuous improvement. These practices not only can enhance the collaboration between all the departments but also the relationships between foreign and local workers.

By adopting these strategies, HR departments can play a central role in building a more inclusive, supportive, and culturally sensitive workplace. These recommendations not only enhance the integration experience for international employees but also improve overall organisational collaboration, employee satisfaction, and retention.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Conclusion

This research also reinforced the relevance of several theoretical frameworks, which are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Organisational Socialisation Theory.

This thesis set out to explore how Human Resource (HR) departments can support the integration of international employees into the Finnish working environment, with a particular focus on the IT sector. The increasing demand for international employees in Finland, especially in IT, highlights the need for effective integration strategies.

Using a qualitative research approach and thematic analysis, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with international employees, HR professionals, and the company's founder. The analysis revealed a range of insights into the challenges and support systems that shape the integration journey.

Key findings and thematic analysis show that language barriers, cultural differences, and social exclusion are the most significant challenges faced by international employees in Finland. Even in international companies, informal communication often in Finnish, limiting participation in meetings, social events, and training. Cultural differences in communication styles and hierarchy further complicate integration, particularly for individuals from collectivist or high power-distance backgrounds.

On the other hand, multi-languages documents, structured onboarding processes, buddy program, inclusive communication, language learning courses, training across all departments, and regular career development discussions as effective strategies for smoothing the transition. When supported by an inclusive company culture and proactive HR practices, international employees reported smoother adaptation and equal opportunities for growth.

In addition to contributing to academic knowledge, this thesis offers practical recommendations for HR departments and companies aiming to create inclusive, globally competent workplaces. These include providing multilingual resources, encouraging cross-

cultural communication, training teams on diversity, and offering regular feedback and development opportunities.

In conclusion, effective HR strategies are essential and by investing in inclusive practices, companies in Finland can not only enhance the experience of international employees but also position themselves as attractive and competitive employers in the global talent market.

7.2 Limitations of the study

While this study offers valuable insights into how HR departments can support international employees' integration in the Finnish IT sector, there are still some limitations.

The research was conducted with a limited number of participants, within the IT sector. As a result, the findings may not be the same to all international employees in Finland and other countries, particularly those working in other industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, or education, where organizational structures and workplace cultures may differ significantly.

The thesis primarily focused on the experiences of international employees and HR professionals, without including the perspectives of Finnish employees or managers. Including both sides would have provided a more balanced view of the integration process and highlighted potential gaps.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions for the CEO of Sufivi Oy – commissioning company

Can you provide a brief overview of Sufivi Oy's mission, values, and key operations in the IT sector?

How would you describe Sufivi Oy's workplace culture, and how does it support diversity?

As a Vietnamese founder, what were the biggest challenges you faced when first working with Finnish professionals and international employees, and how did you overcome these differences in workplace culture and communication?

What are the biggest challenges Sufivi Oy faces when hiring and integrating international employees?

Have you noticed any cultural misunderstandings or adaptation difficulties among foreign employees? How does the company handle them?

How do you collect the feedback of employees in the company? What feedback have you received from international employees regarding their experiences at Sufivi Oy?

How does Sufivi Oy ensure equal opportunities for career growth and professional development for foreign employees?

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other Finnish companies looking to improve their HR policies for international employees?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for international employees in ICT sector

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your background (nationality, previous working experiences, etc.)

How was your experience when you have to adjust and adapt to Finnish working culture?
What aspects you found were the most challenging while trying to adapt?

Besides cultural difference, what have been the biggest challenges you faced as an international employee in Finland? Have you ever felt excluded or being misunderstood at work?

What aspects of Finnish working culture do you find most different from your home country?

Did HR provide sufficient information and support regarding Finnish labor laws, company working culture? Did you have any onboarding for new employees, mentorship program to help you with integration process?

Do you feel that you have equal career growth opportunities compared to local employees?
Have you received any training to support your development within the company?

What advice would you give to new international employees working in Finland, especially in IT sector?

Appendix 3. Interview questions for an external HR specialist

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your background, your experiences in HR field?

Based on your experience, what are the key challenges international employees face when integrating into the Finnish workplace?

What are some effective onboarding strategies that can support international employees adapt to Finnish work culture?

In your opinion, how important is cultural training for both international employees and local Finnish teams?

In your opinion, what are the biggest barriers that preventing Finnish companies from hiring and retaining more international talent?

In your opinion, what future trends will shape HR strategies for international employee integration in Finland?

What advice would you give to companies looking to attract and retain more international employees?

In your opinion, how can an employee make their CV stand out to attract employers? What key factors do you typically look for?

Appendix 4. Data management plan

1. Description of thesis research data

The research data for this thesis was collected through semi-structured interviews, a qualitative data collection method that allows for in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, opinions. This approach was selected to gain a deeper understanding of how HR practices can support the integration of international employees into the Finnish IT working environment.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, conducted with international employees, CEO of the commissioning company, an external HR specialist. The interviews were conducted in English and Vietnamese, recorded with the participants' consent.

The data was collected in the form of audio files, and video files, some notes also being taken during the interview. The interview questions focused on the challenges faced by international employees, and HR support, additionally the perspective of an external HR specialist also being considered.

Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research topic. No identifying personal data such as names were included in the thesis. All data was anonymized to protect participants' privacy.

The data was originally collected as audio recordings (MP3 format) and video recordings (MP4 format). Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret the textual data, identifying patterns and themes relevant to the research objectives.

2. Management and storage of the research data

The research data will be stored on the thesis author's own password-protected computer, the data includes audio and video recordings of the interviews. To ensure data security, backups will be saved in a separate, encrypted folder, kept apart from the files currently being analysed.

Only the thesis author will have the access to the data collected, if needed the thesis supervisor may access the data for academic guidance or reviewing purposes. No data will be uploaded to or stored in cloud services.

3. Processing of personal data and sensitive data

This thesis involves limited personal data, specifically the participants' profession, educational background, and previous work experience. This information is necessary to provide context for the research findings and to understand how different backgrounds may influence the integration experiences of international employees in the Finnish IT sector. No contact details, or other identifying information are collected or published.

The collected personal data is used mainly for academic analysis and is not published in any form that could reveal the identity of the participants. Interview recordings are anonymized during the transcription process, and any identifying details are removed.

No sensitive personal data are collected as part of this study.

4. Ownership of research data

The research data collected for this thesis, consisting of audio and video recordings interviews, is owned by the thesis author. The data was collected independently by the author and is used mainly for the purposes of completing this thesis. All interview participants were informed about how the data would be used, and consent was given by all the participants.

The data does not include any copyrighted materials from third parties, or is it part of HAMK research, development, or study project. Therefore, no separate agreement regarding transfer of rights was required.

The results and findings from the research belong to the thesis author. The commissioning company, Sufivi Oy may use the findings and insights from the thesis for internal development purposes, but the full ownership of the written thesis and research results remains with the author.

If any part of the thesis or its findings is to be used publicly or commercially by the commissioner or other third parties, permission must be obtained from the author.

5. Further use of research data after the completion of the thesis

The research data collected for this thesis will not be reused after the completion of the thesis. The thesis author will securely store the data for one year from the date of final

thesis approval to allow for verification of the results if needed. After this one-year period, all data, including audio and video recordings will be permanently and securely destroyed.