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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FROM MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Challenges and ways to overcome them

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with intercultural communication from a managerial perspective. The objective of the study was to examine the intercultural communication challenges managers face in their work in international organisations, as well as to examine possible ways to overcome the challenges.

The theoretical part of the study is divided into two sections: culture and communication. The section titled Culture covers the definition of the concept, Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures, and culture's influence on perception. The section titled Communication discusses intercultural communication, the communication process, communication styles, language, and nonverbal communication. Data for the theoretical part was gained from published sources, as well as from electronic sources.

The empirical section is based on a qualitative approach. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with three managers in international companies with extensive international experience. In addition, a teamleader of multicultural teams with a consultation background in intercultural communication and management was interviewed.

According to the study results, there are five main areas of challenges: the deep level of culture including values and norms, interpretation and perceptions, communication styles, language, and nonverbal communication. Challenges in these areas create miscommunication and misunderstandings in intercultural communication from the perspective of the interviewees.

The study results indicate that in order to overcome challenges in intercultural communication, it is necessary to have an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others, and to have cultural awareness. Developing understanding is important in order to better interpret others and to avoid misunderstandings. Furthermore, based on understanding, expectations as well as communication and behaviour should be adjusted depending on the cultural context. Moreover, looking for similarities instead of differences helps to build basis for communication, and enhances mutual understanding.

Keywords: culture, intercultural communication, manager, international organisation

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä opinnäytetyö käsittelee kulttuurienvälistä viestintää johtajien näkökulmasta. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia mitä kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän haasteita johtajat kohtaavat työssään kansainvälisissä organisaatioissa, ja mitä keinoja olisi haasteista selviytymiseen.

Työn teoreettinen osuus on jaettu kahteen osaan: kulttuuriin ja viestintään. Ensimmäisessä osassa määritellään kulttuurin käsite, esitellään Hofstedin kulttuurien ulottuvuudet, ja kulttuurin vaikutus käsityksiin ja havaitsemiseen. Toinen osa käsittää kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän, viestintäprosessin, viestintätyylit, sekä sanallisen ja sanattoman viestinnän. Aineisto teoreettiseen osuuteen on kerätty sekä painetuista, että digitaalisista lähteistä.

Empiirisessä osiossa on käytetty laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Aineisto on kerätty hyödyntäen puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja. Opinnäytetyötä varten haastateltiin kolmea johtajaa kansainvälisistä yrityksistä, sekä yhtä monikulttuuristen tiimien johtajaa, jonka tausta on kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän ja johtamisen konsultoinnissa.

Opinnäytetyön tulokset osoittavat viisi aluetta, joilla kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän haasteita esiintyy: kulttuurin syvätaaso – arvot ja normit, tulkinta ja käsitykset, viestintätyylit, sanallinen- ja sanaton viestintä. Haasteet näillä viidellä alueella aiheuttavat väärinymmärryksiä ja viestinnän epäonnistumista.

Haasteista selviytymiseen kulttuurienvälisessä viestinnässä tarvitaan ymmärrystä ihmisten kulttuuritaustoista ja kulttuuritietoisuutta. Ymmärryksen kehittäminen toisten kulttuuritaustoista on tärkeää, jotta pystytään paremmin tulkitsemaan heitä ja välttämään väärinymmärryksiä. Tiedon ja ymmärryksen pohjalta odotuksia, sekä käyttäytymistä ja viestintätapoja tulisi sopeuttaa ja muokata vastaamaan kulttuurista kontekstia. Lisäksi, samankaltaisuuksien etsiminen erilaisuuksien sijasta on tapa rakentaa pohjaa kommunikaatiolle ja molemminpuoliselle ymmärrykselle.

Asiasanat: kulttuuri, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä, johtaja, kansainvälinen organisaatio

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“We are all the same and we are all different.”
-Kelly Moran

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the thesis introduces the aim of the study and the research questions. The theoretical framework and research methods are introduced. In addition, the structure of the thesis is presented at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Background of the thesis

Due to globalization, there is an increase of linkages and interaction among the world's unique cultural groups (Barnett & Lee 2002, 285). The ability to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds has become increasingly important in today's multicultural environment. With the increasing internationalization, intercultural understanding is of major importance (Rothlauf 2014, 23).

Communicating across cultures continually involves misunderstandings caused by misperception and misinterpretation. When the sender and a receiver of a message come from different cultures, the chances for the message to be transmitted accurately are low. (Adler 2015, 2.) Gestures, words and expressions may have completely different meanings in different cultures. The same message said to members of different cultures may result in many differing interpretations of the message.

International business activities all involve communication. In the global environment, activities such as exchanging information, decision making, negotiating, and leading, are all based on the ability of managers to communicate successfully with employees and managers from other cultures. (Adler 2015, 1.) Managers in the global environment have to be aware of the complexity of the values, norms and beliefs that distinguish one cultural group from another and greatly impact on communication (Rothlauf 2014, 7; Jandt 2007, 48).

The thesis topic was chosen based on strong personal interest in intercultural communication, and on interest in hearing manager views of intercultural communication. The thesis offers tools for managers and for anyone engaged in international business to identify the challenges in intercultural communication, and to effectively communicate with people from different cultures.

1.2 Research questions, objectives and limitations

The main study objectives are to examine what intercultural communication challenges managers face in their work in international organisations, and what possible ways there are to overcome the challenges.

The research problems are:

- What intercultural communication challenges do managers face in their work in international organisations?
- What are the possible ways to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication from the point of view of managers?

The focus of the thesis is on intercultural communication. The communication challenges and ways to overcome them are represented from a managerial perspective, but the thesis will not cover the area of management to any larger extent. The emphasis is on the experiences and views of the interviewees. Furthermore, the author does not examine intercultural communication in a certain company; instead, people from several companies are interviewed.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical part of this thesis is divided into culture and communication. The section titled Culture consists of definition of the concept, Geert Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures, and culture's influence on perception. The theoretical framework of culture forms the basis for understanding intercultural communication.

The section titled Communication includes a definition of the concept and discusses intercultural communication, intercultural communication process, communication styles, language, and nonverbal communication. The objective of the selected theories is to demonstrate the interconnection of culture and communication, as well as the interconnection of the selected theories.

1.4 Research methods

The terms quantitative and qualitative are used to differentiate both data collection techniques and data analysis procedures. The term quantitative method is primarily referred to any data collection technique or data analysis procedure that uses or generates numerical data. The term qualitative method, on the other hand, is primarily used to describe any data collection technique or data analysis procedure that uses or generates non-numerical data. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 151.)

Furthermore, quantitative approaches often deal with explanation, testing of hypotheses and statistical analyses, whereas qualitative approaches are concerned with interpretation and understanding. The aim in qualitative study is often to have a holistic understanding of a phenomenon. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5.) Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meanings people have constructed, how people interpret their experiences and the world in which they live in (Merriam 2009, 13). The research method applied in this thesis was qualitative, given the nature and aim of the study. Since the author aims at exploring the perspectives and experiences of the interviewed people, a qualitative method was chosen.

Data for the thesis was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Data for the theoretical part was obtained mainly from books and electronic books, in addition to some academic journals and websites. The empirical part consists of primary data from semi-structured interviews with four people in four different companies. The data collection for the empirical part is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The general structure of the thesis is explained in Figure 1.

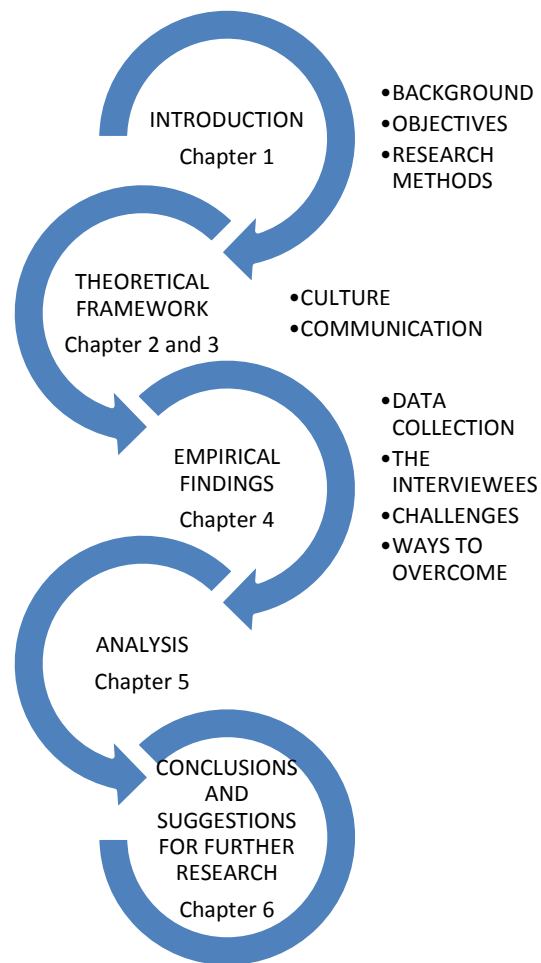


FIGURE 1. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of a theoretical as well as an empirical part, divided into six chapters. The theoretical part is divided into sections on culture and communication. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of culture, as well as Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures, and culture's influence on perception. Chapter 3 discusses intercultural communication, intercultural communication process, communication styles, language, and nonverbal communication.

Chapter 4 introduces the data collection process, the backgrounds of the interviewees, and the empirical findings of the study. Analysis and discussion of the results is provided in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, final conclusions and suggestions for further research are made. In addition, validity and reliability are evaluated in Chapter 6 as part of the conclusions.

2 CULTURE

This chapter of the thesis introduces the concept of culture, the dimensions of national cultures, and culture's influence on perception.

2.1 Definition of culture

Culture is a difficult term to define, and different anthropologists have given different descriptions to culture (Aneas & Sandín 2009). The different definitions stem from the fact that culture is included in many different fields of research which leads to strongly differing conceptions (Rothlauf 2014, 24).

Culture consists of the language patterns, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs and patterns of thought (Barnett & Lee 2002, 276). Jandt (2007, 7) treats culture similarly as: *“the totality of that group’s thought, experiences, and patterns of behavior, and its concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior[...].”*

Geertz (1973, 89) defines culture as a system of meanings and symbols, in which social interaction happens:

[Culture is] an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

Barnett and Lee (2002, 277) also approach culture from the perspective of meanings and symbols. Culture is a *“group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are understood”*. Meanings are attributed to verbal and nonverbal symbols. Culture is the consensus about the meanings of symbols which are held by the members of a society. The consensus is necessary for understanding, encoding and decoding messages.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 4) define culture as “*the collective programming of the mind [...]*” which distinguishes one group from another, or the “*unwritten rules of the social game*”, meaning the unspoken behavioural norms.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 6-8) classify the elements of culture as *symbols*, *heroes*, *rituals* and *values*. Symbols represent the most superficial part, whereas values are the deepest manifestations of culture. *Symbols* refer to the verbal and nonverbal language, which carry meanings that are only recognized as such by people who share the culture. *Heroes* represent persons, imaginary or real, who serve as cultural heroes and models for behaviour. *Rituals* are collective activities that are essential within a culture. Rituals include ways of greeting, showing respect to others, ways of using language, and communicating beliefs. *Values* reflect the deepest level of culture. They reflect what is good or bad, moral or immoral, permitted or forbidden, normal or abnormal. According to Martin and Nakayama (2010, 95) values are the most deeply held beliefs shared by a cultural group. They represent widespread emotions, of which one is often not aware (Rothlauf 2014, 31).

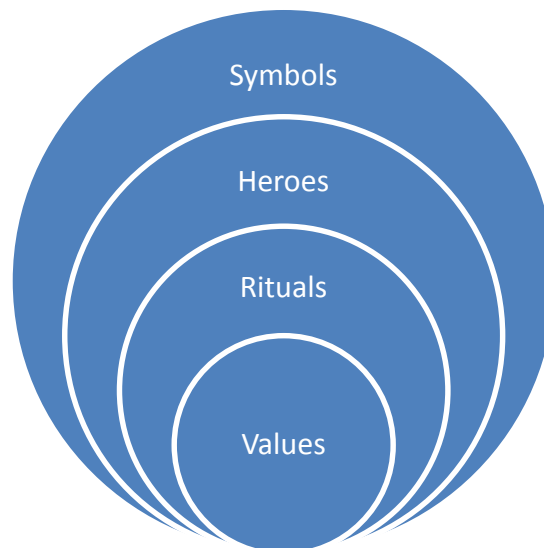


FIGURE 2. Elements of culture as an “onion” (adapted from Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 7).

Similarly, French and Bell (1979) in their classic "Iceberg Model" identify and illustrate the visible and invisible elements of culture. As depicted in Figure 3, iceberg has a visible tip, which represents the areas of culture we can see. Only a small portion of the culture is visible, consisting of behaviours, ways of life, laws and customs, institutions, techniques, rituals and language. The visible area represents the impact of culture in daily life. The more powerful and larger part of the iceberg and culture is beneath the surface and invisible. These are values and norms, religious beliefs, worldviews, motivations, attitudes and expectations. (Shi & Liu 2012; Rothlauf 2014, 26.) Invisible elements of culture that are below the surface, are explanations and sources for the visible features of culture, and play a more important role when communicating with other cultures (Rothlauf 2014, 27; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 24).

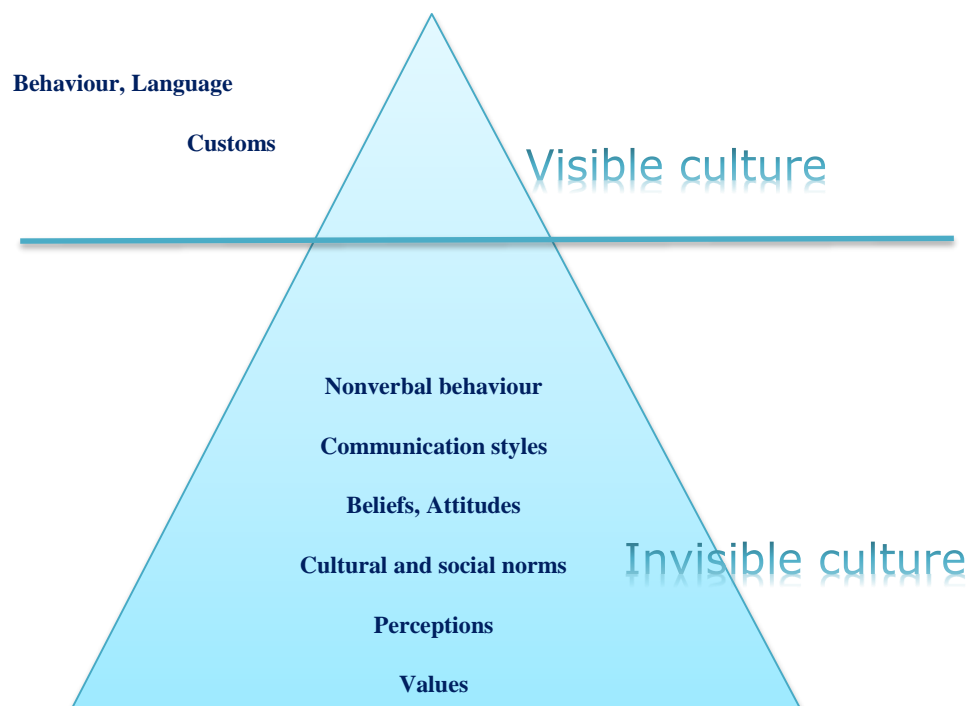


FIGURE 3. The cultural iceberg (adapted from Interkultura-konsult 2015).

Cultural behaviours are thus the visible signs of values and beliefs deep inside the culture that have formed in a society over time. The only way to deal successfully

with people from different cultures is knowing and understanding what is invisible and beneath the surface, and to shape one's own behaviour and expectations according to that knowledge (Solomon & Schell 2009, 36).

2.2 Dimensions of national cultures

The Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede published his study on over 100,000 employees of the multinational IBM in 1980. His attempt was to examine value differences among national societies. Hofstede originally identified four dimensions across which cultures vary. He labeled the dimensions as individualism – collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity – femininity. (Jandt 2007, 159; Martin & Nakayama 2010, 103.) Later, two other dimensions, long-term versus short-term, and indulgence versus restraint were added (Geert Hofstede 2015). In this thesis, only the original four dimensions are examined.

The communication differences between cultures can be explained and predicted with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which are based on value differences among nations. The cultural value differences influence patterns of communication. For example, people from individualistic cultures value direct communication, whereas people in collectivistic societies prefer indirect communication and avoidance-style conflict resolution. (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 100.) Identifying cultural values help us to understand differences in communication across cultures, even though not all the people in a society share the dominant value orientations, and the value orientations held may additionally differ depending on the context (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 106-107). The main points of the four dimensions of national cultures are depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures.

Power Distance (PDI)	Individualism-collectivism	Masculinity-femininity	Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High PDI societies: • respect shown toward elders and people in higher status • a more autocratic and paternalistic leadership style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low PDI societies: • democratic and consultative leadership style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectivistic societies: • harmony maintained, direct confrontations avoided • high-context communication • interest of the group, <i>We</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualistic societies: • direct communication, clarity, direct requests • low-context communication • interest of the individual, <i>I</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masculine societies: • Assertiveness and ego enhancement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminine societies: • nurturance and relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High UAI societies: • strict rules and norms for behaviour • more expressive and show more emotions • Conflicts are avoided <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low UAI societies: • dissent acceptable, conflict potentially constructive

Power distance

Hofstede (2001, 98) defines power distance as “*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally*”. The basic issue is how a society handles with inequalities (Jandt 2007, 172). According to Hofstede (2001, 98) in low power distance societies, inequality should be minimized, as opposed to high power distance societies where inequality is accepted, and every individual has his or her rightful place. Power distance reflects the distribution of power in societies (Jandt 2007, 172). Hofstede (2001, 107) suggests that in high power distance societies, there is more concentration of authority, and hierarchy in organisations reflects the inequalities among superiors and subordinates.

Furthermore, the power distance dimension indicates the dependence and relationships between subordinates and superiors. In high power distance countries, there is more dependence of subordinates on superiors. In those

countries, a more paternalistic and autocratic style of leadership is preferred, whereas in low power distance cultures, a consultative style of decision making is preferred, and an ideal boss is democratic. Respect is shown toward elders and people of higher status in high power distance societies. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 45-46.)

Individualism - collectivism

Individualism – collectivism is the major cultural dimension used to explain differences and similarities in communication between different cultures. This dimension affects communication through its influence on norms and rules in relation to group identities, and the strong differentiation between ingroups and outgroups. (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 27-30.)

Hofstede (2001, 225) defines an individualistic culture as a society in which social ties between individuals are loose. Everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate families only. In collectivistic societies, on the other hand, individuals are “[...] *integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups* [...]” in which individual’s self-image is defined in terms of “I”, whereas in collectivistic societies it is “We” (Hofstede 2001, 225; The Hofstede Center 2015). In individualistic societies, one’s personal identity is defined by their individual characteristics, not by their group membership (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 75). According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 74) in collectivistic societies, the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual. Opinions are predetermined by group membership (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 109).

In collectivistic cultures, harmony should be maintained and direct confrontations are avoided, whereas in individualistic cultures, communication is more direct. Kim (1994) argues that members of collectivistic cultures are more concerned with avoiding hurting others’ feelings, whereas members of individualistic cultures are more concerned with clarity in conversations, and see clarity as a prerequisite for effective communication. (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 30.)

According to Kim & Wilson (1994) direct requests are seen as the most effective strategies to achieve goals in individualistic cultures, as opposed to collectivistic

cultures, where direct requests are seen as the least effective strategies (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 30).

Moreover, individualistic and collectivistic cultures can be examined by their way of communicating along a dimension from high-context to low-context (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 89). High-context communication is referred to a style of communicating in which little is in the explicit, transmitted part of the message, because much of the information is in the physical context or internalized in the person. In low-context communication, much of the message is in the explicit code (Hall 1989, 91; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 89). In collectivistic cultures, high-context communication is more common, as opposed to individualistic cultures, where low-context communication prevails (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 89-92). High-context and low-context communication styles will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3 covering communication.

Masculinity - Femininity

Masculine society encourages assertiveness, competition and ego enhancement, whereas in feminine society, there is a tendency for nurturance and a concern for relationships, regardless of group ties (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005; Hofstede 1998). According to Hofstede (2001, 297) a society is called masculine, when the emotional gender roles are distinct: *“Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”*. In feminine societies, both men and women are supposed to demonstrate feminine traits.

Furthermore, in masculine countries, management is more decisive and aggressive, whereas feminine management is based on consensus and intuition. In feminine countries, there is a preference for resolving conflicts by compromise and negotiation, in masculine countries, the strongest wins. Moreover, in feminine cultures, there is a larger share of women working in professional jobs, and vice versa in masculine societies. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 141-147.)

Uncertainty avoidance

Hofstede (2001, 161) defines uncertainty avoidance as “*the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations*”. This dimension expresses a society’s tolerance of the ambiguous and unpredictable. Human societies have developed ways to manage the uncertainties. Ways to handle the uncertainties in the behaviour of other people are laws, rules and strict codes of behaviour. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 165.) In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, people tend to have clear and strict rules and norms for behaviour for virtually all possible situations (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 36). According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 165-166) feelings of uncertainty are acquired and learned, and are part of the cultural heritage of societies, as are the ways of coping with them. They reflect the collectively held values of a society, and lead to collective patterns of behaviour.

People from high uncertainty avoidance cultures are more expressive and show more emotions, with the exception of Japan. People from these cultures may seem busy, nervous and aggressive, while people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures may appear quiet, controlled and dull, even lazy. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 171-172.) In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, dissent is acceptable and conflict is seen as potentially constructive, whereas in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, people prefer to avoid conflict. There is also a strong desire for consensus in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, and a behaviour differing from the normal is not acceptable (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 37).

Furthermore, according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 195- 197) feelings toward people from other cultures vary with uncertainty avoidance. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, what is different is seen as interesting, and there is positive or neutral attitude toward foreigners. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, different is perceived as dangerous, and there is more ethnic prejudice and xenophobia.

2.3 Culture's influence on perception

For Goodenough (1964, 36) culture is “*the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them*”.

This suggests that people from different cultures perceive and interpret differently. Culture has in fact a great influence on perceptions. According to Jandt (2007, 67) culture influences how people perceive the world. The world is sensed in a similar way by people from different cultures, but the way people process and understand the information obtained from senses, is taught by culture. Perception process is categorized into three different stages: selection, organisation and interpretation. Each of the steps are affected by culture.

In the first stage, selection, we select what we draw our attention to. We get much information through our senses, more stimuli than we could ever manage, so we unconsciously select only the most important things. Our cultures teach us what is important to select from the vast amount of information. In the second stage, organisation, we organize the information in a meaningful way into categories. Language and culture give us the categories. In addition, different cultures categorize information in varying levels of detail. The third stage is interpreting, in which we give meaning i.e. *decode* the information we have selected and organized. The meanings we give to our perceptions are greatly affected by our cultural background. Our interpretations are culturally learned. The same message can have several different meanings, and can be interpreted very differently in different cultures. (Jandt 2007, 54-68.)

Adler and Gundersen (2008, 73) similarly argue that perception is culturally determined, and can be inaccurate:

We therefore see things that do not exist, and do not see things that do exist. Our interests, values, and culture act as filters and lead us to distort, block, and even create what we choose to see and hear. We perceive what we expect to perceive. We perceive things according to what we have been trained to see, according to our cultural map.

3 COMMUNICATION

This chapter of the thesis introduces the concept of communication and intercultural communication. In addition, it discusses the intercultural communication process, the different communication styles, and the concept of language and nonverbal communication.

3.1 Shared understanding

"Culture is communication and communication is culture", states Edward T. Hall (1973, 186). Communication and culture are inseparable and reciprocal, culture influences communication, and vice versa (Jandt 2007, 27; Martin & Nakayama 2010, 95).

An interpretive perspective emphasizes the symbolic nature of communication (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 94). Communication can be understood as the *"[...]interpersonal interaction by means of a linguistic symbol system[...]"* which includes verbal - the words we say, para-verbal - the tone and how we say the words, and nonverbal elements - our body language (Knapp 2015). According to Martin and Nakayama (2010, 94) the symbolic meanings are conveyed through verbal and nonverbal behaviours.

The goal of communication is to develop a shared understanding between the interactants (Rogers & Kincaid 1981, according to Barnett & Lee 2002, 276). Communication is *"a process in which two or more individuals or groups share information in order to reach a mutual understanding of each other and the world in which they live"*, (Kincaid as cited in Gudykunst 2002, 184). According to Kincaid (1979) the mutual understanding is approached but can never be perfectly achieved (Gudykunst 2002, 184).

3.2 Intercultural communication

Karlfried Knapp (2015) defines intercultural communication as:

[...] the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups, which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behaviour.

Similarly, according to Barnett and Lee (2002, 277) intercultural communication is *"the exchange of symbolic information between well-defined groups with significantly different cultures"*.

The defining characteristic of communication is meaning, and communication occurs whenever a meaning is ascribed to another person's behaviour and words, to the symbols that carry meaning (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 94). Different cultural groups have differing systems of meaning. Therefore, the exchange of information is much more difficult in intercultural communication. Individuals often have to negotiate the meaning for the exchanged symbols in the communication process. As a result, intercultural communication contains greater risk of misunderstanding. (Barnett & Lee 2002, 277.)

When we communicate, we expect the other person to share our symbol system. The words and gestures have agreed-upon, shared meaning. When communicating, we assume that the other person takes our intended meaning, but especially when individuals come from different cultural backgrounds, and thus have different symbol systems, the assumption is probably wrong. (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 94.) The meanings can be read correctly only if one is familiar with the behaviour in its cultural context (Hall 1989, 42).

Bennett (1998, 3) states that in intercultural communication one cannot assume that the other person shares the same assumptions and responses to messages as he or she: *"an attempt to use one's self as a predictor of shared assumptions and responses to messages is unlikely to work"*.

Often the misunderstandings in intercultural communication come from the differences how people view communication in different cultures. For instance in Asian cultures, the goal of communication is to cooperate to make meaning, and respecting relationships is often more important than exchanging information. In

intercultural communication, serious misunderstandings can occur. The different values held in each culture greatly impact the communication decisions and interpretations. (Jandt 2007, 47-48.)

3.3 Intercultural communication process

Berlo (1960) defines communication as a process of transmitting messages from a sender to a receiver, who interprets these messages and gives them meaning (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 112). In efficient and successful communication, the meaning of the message is understood. For the message to be understood, the interactants must share a vast amount of common information called grounding (Clark & Brennan 1991, according to Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113). The grounding information is based on each individual's field of previous experience, and between people from different cultures, there are more differences in their fields of experience. Communication between cultures is more demanding than communication in one culture, since there is less common information, less grounding, between individuals from different cultures. (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113.)

Both the sender and the receiver have an active role in the communication process. Figure 4 shows how the communication process involves a source, who has a message to be transmitted, a channel through which the message is transmitted, and a receiver of the message. The message is encoded, which means that the message (ideas and thoughts) is put into symbols. The symbols into which thoughts and ideas are encoded, include words and nonverbal language. All communication is in the form of symbols representing ideas or thoughts one desires to communicate. The receiver of the message then has to interpret (decode) the message. (Jandt 2007, 32-34; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113-114; Rothlauf 2014, 142-143.)

Decoding is the opposite process of encoding, it means giving meanings to the symbols received, interpreting the symbols. To see if the message is understood, one has to evaluate the reaction and feedback of the receiver. "Noise", as depicted in figure 4, refers to anything that distorts the message being sent. Successfulness

and effectiveness of communication depends on minimizing the "noise" affecting the communication. (Jandt 2007, 32-34; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113-114; Rothlauf 2014, 142-143.) If there are big differences between the two cultures, it can create too much "cultural noise", and the communication can fail (Gibson 2002, according to Rothlauf 2014, 143).

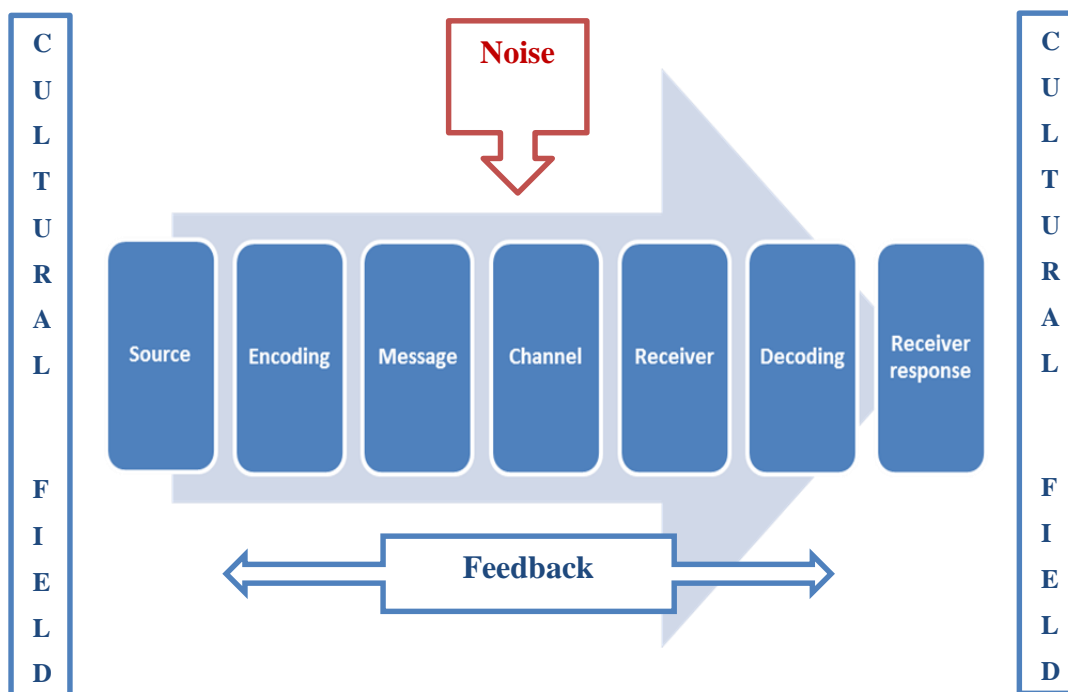


FIGURE 4. Communication process (adapted from Jandt 2007, 33 and Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113).

All of the elements in the communication process are affected by the cultural fields of the communicators. The cultural field means the culturally based elements of a communicator's background (e.g., values, attitudes) that influence communication. (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 113.) Firstly, the meaning of the message is grounded in the personal field of experience and in the associated cultural field of the sender, which both affect how the message is encoded.

Secondly, the symbols used to express a thought or idea vary depending on the cultural field. This includes not only language and nonverbal communication, but also communication styles and practices. Every culture has its own typical ways of language use and communication behaviours, and this affects communication. In order for the communication process to be successful, the symbols must be encoded into a form that can be understood, both parties need to be skilled in the communication channel in use, and also understand the cultural fields of the other. With understanding, it becomes easier to use symbols that will be encoded and decoded similarly. (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 114.)

3.4 Communication styles

Solomon and Schell (2009, 139) refer to communication styles as the ways societies use language, including verbal and nonverbal, the directness or subtleness of the language, the way people use words or gestures to express themselves, and the importance of harmony and *saving face*.

In the literature, there are various communication style theories, some including only two dimensions, others as many as four. In this thesis, the two major dimensions of communication styles, high-context versus low-context, and direct versus indirect, will be presented. In addition, a third communication style, based on Solomon and Schell's (2009) classification of communication styles, avoiding conflict and saving face, will be presented.

The communication styles reflect cultural values and beliefs such as importance of relationships and attitudes toward *saving face* and avoiding conflict (Solomon & Schell 2009, 142). Different communication styles are responsible for many of the conflicts that arise between people from different cultures. The problems may be caused by different priorities given for values such as truth, honesty, preserving harmony, or avoiding conflict. In communication across cultures, the differences in communication styles can contribute to misperceptions and misunderstandings. (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 229.)

High-context and Low-context

Edward T. Hall (1989) distinguishes cultures based on their way of communicating to high- and low-context cultures. In high-context communication, information is more in the physical context, or supposed to be known by the persons involved, internalized in the person, while very little is in the explicit, coded part of the message. In high-context cultures, much is self-evident and not explicitly said. However, in low-context cultures, most of the information is in the explicit verbal message. (Hall 1989, 91; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 89.) Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 89) suggest that low-context communication is typical for individualistic cultures, while in collectivistic cultures, high-context communication predominates.

According to Gudykunst (2004, 58), high-context communication tends to be indirect and often ambiguous, while low-context communication, which is usual in individualistic cultures, is more direct. Gudykunst & Lee (2002, 36) argue that high-context communication is often seen as ineffective by the members of low-context cultures. However, this is not necessarily the case, since high-context communication, like low-context communication, can be effective or ineffective. High-context communication is often effective. Effectiveness comes from the listeners' understanding of how to interpret the indirect messages of the speakers.

Direct - Indirect

Direct versus indirect communication style indicates the level of directness of communication, and the extent to which speakers reveal their true intentions through explicit verbal messages (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 228; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 118). In cultures with direct communication style, people are more straightforward and say what they mean briefly and clearly. Direct communicators expect to be taken at their word and express disagreement openly without being considered as disrespectful. In cultures with indirect communication style, nonverbal nuances, gestures and tone of voice are important. Listeners are expected to interpret messages, and the same verbal message may mean something totally different depending on the nonverbal message. Indirect

communication is far more subtle, and speaking eloquently is important. (Solomon & Schell 2009, 145-146.)

One example of indirect communication style is when a person cannot directly say no, but may look for a soft way to communicate, and convey the idea of “maybe” with contextual cues. Individualistic cultures often have direct communication style, whereas indirect style is more often associated with collectivistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, maintaining harmony is often more important than being honest. For collectivistic cultures, truth is not absolute, but depends on the situation (Martin & Nakayama 2010, 229; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 118-119.)

Avoiding conflict and saving face

Stella Ting-Toomey (1994, 3) explains the concept of face: “*face involves the claimed sense of self-respect and self-dignity in an interactive situation*”. It is related to identity respect, disrespect, dignity, honor, shame and guilt. Face is a symbolic resource in social interaction, it can be threatened, honored and maintained over. (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2002, 145.) In many cultures, especially in Asia, *saving face* is of great importance. The concept of face is associated with collectivistic societies. The importance of face is a consequence of people living in tightly-knit societies, where social contexts are important. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, 90.) Avoiding conflict is a way to show honor and respect to another person. Giving negative feedback to a subordinate publicly may cause the subordinate to lose face. In cultures where saving face is important, people value acting in a way that helps one save face. (Solomon & Schell 2009, 147)

3.5 Language

One of the problems in intercultural communication is the language. Because different cultures have different values, beliefs and attitudes, their languages are also different from each other (Lim 2002, 74). Every culture has their own distinctive speech code (Philipsen 1992, according to Lim 2002, 73).

As stated by Karlfried Knapp (2015) the problems in intercultural communication become especially noticeably when one of the participants in intercultural

interaction has to use second or foreign language, which means the participant has just a partial mastery of the "symbol system underlying the interaction".

Different cultures have different systems of meaning (i.e., languages), which confuses people from different cultures and makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to understand each other. (Lim 2002, 69)

Even though English is the international language in business, it does not mean that it is understood universally. In international business it is most likely that at least one of the communicators is not speaking English as their native language, and may be struggling with comprehension and word choice. Different levels of language fluency and comprehension should be taken into account. There are challenges also related to interpreting, accent, and characteristics of word usage. Many peculiar expressions that can be found in English are not necessarily familiar to and understood by people whose native language is not English. (Solomon & Schell 2009, 156). Competent speakers should be able to use language functionally in specific social and cultural contexts (Hymes 1971, according to Lim 2002, 73).

Silence is one issue which is perceived differently in different cultures. It is perhaps one of the most misinterpreted aspects of communication (Solomon & Schell 2009, 154). Silence is often considered in the West as blank in communication, whereas in Asia, silence is valued and preferred to improper words (Lim 2002, 77). In cultures where *saving face* is important, and negative responses are avoided, it is also used in order to avoid giving negative response and in order to avoid conflict. (Solomon & Schell 2009, 155.)

Jandt (2007, 63) argues that language separates people especially in the case of high- and low-context cultures. As explained earlier in this thesis, in high-context communication, more of the information is in the physical context, for instance in nonverbal signs. In low-context communication, most of the information is in the explicit code, i.e. speech (Hall 1989, 91).

3.6 Nonverbal communication

Linguistic barriers in intercultural communication are blended with differences in nonverbal communication. In an interaction between two cultures, there can be thousands of potential differences in nonverbal communication that contribute to misunderstandings. Most of the differences are the result of culture. (Andersen et al. 2002, 90.) Nonverbal communication includes body movements and positions, gestures, touching, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice and space usage (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 125). From 60 to 70 percent of communication is in fact nonverbal (Solomon & Schell 2009, 147).

Nonverbal behaviours have the same functions all over the world, however the meanings of nonverbal behaviours across cultures can vary significantly (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 125). For instance, according to Solomon and Schell (2009, 151) shaking the head from side to side often indicates a lack of understanding rather than disagreement in many Middle Eastern societies. Indirect eye contact with superiors and elders is preferred in many Chinese cultures, and prolonged eye contact may be taken as a challenge. However, in Western cultures, eye contact is usually crucial, and represents sincerity, concentration and even intelligence. According to Wood (2013, 95) nonverbal communication, for instance eye contact, reflects underlying cultural values. For instance, U.S. society values frankness and assertiveness, and direct eye contact is thus considered appropriate.

Rothlauf (2014, 146) states that the interpretation of nonverbal behaviours according to own cultural norms leads to misunderstandings since the conversational partner has his or hers own encoding. Understanding intercultural communication requires an accurate perception of what is conveyed in the nonverbal mode. (Rothlauf 2014, 146). Key is not to assume that the meaning of any familiar gesture in one's own culture, a smile or a nod, could automatically be interpreted in the same way in another culture (Solomon & Schell 2009, 149).

In high-context cultures, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, nonverbal communication has more meaning to people, whereas in low-context cultures verbal communication and other explicit messages are considered more important.

High-context cultures, such as Japan, rely heavily on nonverbal codes, whereas in low-context cultures, such as in Germany, people look for the meaning in words. (Hackman & Johnson 2013, 304). Communicators from high-context cultures expect others to understand the subtle gestures and cues that people from low-context cultures do not process (Hall 1976, according to Andersen et al. 2002, 100). In the worst situation, people from these both cultural extremes fail to recognize these basic differences in behaviour and communication, and badly misinterpret the causes for behaviour (Andersen et al. 2002, 100).

The dimensions of national cultures also affect nonverbal behavior. For instance, a culture's individualism or collectivism affects nonverbal behaviour in many ways. People from individualistic cultures keep more space and distance between each others (Gudykunst et al. 1996, according to Andersen et al. 2002, 94). Another example is power distance. In high power distance cultures, people are expected to show only positive emotions to superiors, and negative emotions to people with lower status (Matsumoto 1991, according to Andersen et al. 2002, 96). In high power distance cultures, subordinates show more bodily tension and smile more in an effort to please superiors and appear polite (Andersen & Bowman 1999, according to Andersen et al. 2002, 96).

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter of the study introduces the data collection method for the empirical part, the selection and background of the interviewees, and answers the research questions:

- *What intercultural communication challenges do managers face in their work in international organisations?*
- *What are the possible ways to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication from the point of view of managers?*

4.1 Data collection

Data for the empirical part was collected utilizing semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were contacted by email, and the topics to be covered in the interviews were sent to the interviewees in advance. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of the opportunity for collecting a rich data, with depth and significance (Saunders et al. 2009, 324). The author had a list of themes and questions to be covered. According to Saunders et. al (2009, 320) the order of the questions in semi-structured interviews may be altered from interview to interview, additionally, some questions may be omitted depending on the organisational context. Additional questions may also be required to explore the study objective, given the nature of the interview. The author slightly altered some of the interview questions for one of the interviewees, since the interviewee has a slightly different occupational and organisational background than the other three interviewees.

Furthermore, referring to Saunders et al. (2009, 324), the author utilized the possibility of semi-structured interviews to probe answers, when the author wanted the interviewees to explain more or build on their responses. Semi-structured interviews also give the opportunity to probe the meanings interviewees give to particular words and ideas. The nature of semi-structured interviews may lead the interview into areas of discussion that had not been previously thought about, but which are in fact significant for the understanding, and hence give the opportunity to collect a rich data. (Saunders et al. 2009, 324.) The author gave the

interviewees the possibility to somewhat freely tell about their views and experiences.

The interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were additionally taken. The recordings were later transcribed and analysed. Interviews were carried out in November 2014. The total combined time of the four interviews accounted for approximately 7 hours. Interview with Interviewee 1 was conducted in two parts, totally accounting for 2 hours 15 minutes. Interview with Interviewee 2 lasted for 2 hours. Interviews with Interviewees 3 and 4 lasted for approximately 1 hour 15 minutes each. Empirical data was further analysed by identifying concepts and organising and sorting the data into themes based on the theoretical background knowledge (Silverman 2011, 275).

4.2 Selection and background of the interviewees

Four people were interviewed for this thesis. Two interviewees in executive level management, and a marketing and sales manager were interviewed. In addition, an experienced consultant in intercultural/cross-cultural communication and management was interviewed. The interviewed consultant is also a teamleader of a multicultural team of 66 members in organisation X. The interviewees were carefully selected, and the author made sure before interviewing that the persons have suitable background and international experience to be able to obtain comprehensive answers.

Two executive level interviewees were chosen to obtain broad understanding of the areas studied, whereas interview with the marketing and sales manager provided a more practical, day-to-day experiences. The author wanted to interview the consultant/teamleader in order to obtain views and experiences from a professional in intercultural communication. The consultant was referred to the author by Interviewee 1. Interviewed marketing and sales manager was referred to the author by her superior at work. Interviewee 1 is the author's acquaintance, and the author knew his background to be very international. Interviewee 4 was referred to the author by the author's friend.

The three interviewed managers are working for companies all operating in different fields, in engineering/technical consulting, welding technology, and food/medical packaging industry. The interviewed consultant has consulted many well-known companies in Finland, and had her own company for twenty years until spring 2014 providing intercultural/ cross-cultural communication and management consulting and training services. The consultant is of Indonesian origin. All of the interviewees have extensive international experience and knowledge of intercultural communication through working and living abroad, and managing multicultural teams. The interviewees' career histories are long, all have over 20 years of experience in international environments.

The interviewed three managers are all working in international organisations, namely multinational companies. The companies in which the interviewed managers are working, are all categorized as large, since the companies in question all have more than 250 employees, and the annual turnovers are more than 50 million EUR (Yrityssuomi 2015). In the following, the backgrounds of the interviewees are explained in more detail. Table 2 summarizes the interviewees' backgrounds.

TABLE 2. Background of the interviewees.

INTERVIEWEE'S POSITION	COMPANY'S FIELD OF ACTIVITIES	COMPANY/ GROUP SIZE AND TURNOVER	WORLDWIDE
INTERVIEWEE 1 Managing Director of the subsidiary (Finland, Baltics and Russia)	global engineering and technical consulting group	Group: 7.000 employees, EUR 1 billion. Subsidiary: 251 employees, EUR 42 million	Operates in over 30 countries, projects in over 80 countries.
INTERVIEWEE 2 Consultant and teamleader of a multicultural team (66 members) in company X	Intercultural/cross-cultural communication, management and business consulting		
INTERVIEWEE 3 Director of Sales and Marketing of the Nordic Operations and CIS countries	global supplier of packaging films and packaging solutions	1800 employees, net sales 500 million	11 manufacturing plants and 13 sales offices around the world
INTERVIEWEE 4 Managing director of the subsidiary and CEO of the group	manufacturer of arc welding equipment and provider of solutions for welding	626 employees 111 million euros a year	global group consisting of 16 companies worldwide

Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 is the Head of Business Area Finland, Baltics and Russia in a global engineering and technical consulting group covering energy, industrial and infrastructure markets. The group employs approximately 7.000 people with net sales approximately SEK 8 billion / EUR 1 billion per year. The group operates in over 30 countries and has projects in over 80 countries. The interviewee is also the

President and Chairman of the Board of xxx Oy companies, Managing Director of the subsidiary in Finland, and globally the Head of the group's Thermal Energy Division. The interviewee has worked 25 years for the same group. He has spent much of his career abroad. Earlier, the interviewee was living in Hungary as the managing director of the Hungarian branch office, which was a two year post. Before that, he was living in the UK for two separate times for projects, as project manager and sales manager, altogether 6 years. The interviewee has a Master's degree of Science in Technology, M.Sc. (Tech.).

Interviewee 2

Interviewee 2 is an Indonesian consultant providing intercultural/cross-cultural communication and management training services for companies mainly in Finland. The interviewee is also a teamleader of a multicultural team in company X. She manages a team of 66 members of different nationalities. The interviewee had her own private limited company for twenty years providing intercultural/cross-cultural communication and management consulting and training services for businesses, and has consulted many well-known companies in Finland. At the moment, the interviewee works as a freelance consultant. She also provides business consulting, for instance for Finnish companies in their business expansion plans into Southeast Asia, and provides *Doing business in Asia, and –Muslim countries* -courses.

The focus of her training is on Asian countries: Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Malesia, and Muslim countries, such as Turkey and United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, she is now giving training on Nigeria, and promoting Nigerian business. The interviewee is part of many organisations and NGOs promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance of cultural differences, and promoting anti-discrimination. The interviewee is the Vice Chairman of ENAR Finland (The European Network Against Racism) which is an EU organisation based in Brussels. The interviewee is also the Chairman of Nusantara Ry promoting Indonesian and other Asian cultures in Finland. The interviewee has been living in Finland for over 20 years, and has a university degree in economics. From the age

of 19, she has been promoting international understanding through the organisation AIESEC.

Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 is the Director of Sales and Marketing of the Nordic Operations (Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe), and CIS countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) of a leading global supplier of packaging films and packaging solutions for food industry, medical, pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors. The company employs approximately 1800 people, net sales being 500 million euros, with 11 manufacturing plants and 13 sales offices around the world. The company is part of a bigger group, a Finnish international industry and trade conglomerate, consisting of four business divisions. The group employs 5000 people with a turnover of 1.7 billion euros.

The interviewee graduated in production economy from a technical university, specializing in international operations of industrial enterprise. In 1991 he was employed to a company that helped Finnish businesses to expand into the Russian market. In 1994 he went for training in Asian business, and worked in Hong Kong for half a year making marketing studies for businesses. Later, he was hired to a company X which wanted to expand its operations into China, and offered him a job. He was based in Finland, but was a big part of the time in China. Subsequently, in 1997, he was hired to his present company that also wanted to expand its operations into the Chinese market.

Interviewee 4

Interviewee 4 is the Managing director of a world-leading manufacturer of arc welding equipment and a provider of solutions for welding. Global revenue of the company is 111 million euros a year (2013), with approximately 650 employees. The company is a subsidiary of a global group consisting of 16 companies around the world. The interviewee is also the CEO of the group. The interviewee came to the company in 1989 for summer job. After that he was working in the German and French subsidiaries during his university studies. In 1993 he started as an

Area Export Manager, and was appointed the Managing Director of the company's subsidiary in France the following year, where he was living for 4 years. After that, he moved to Germany to run the company's German business for 4 years, and at the same time, was the Sales Director globally. He came back to Finland in 2001, and have been the Managing Director and CEO of the group since 2002. The interviewee has a Master's degree of Science in Economics, M.Sc. (Econ.), and additionally Executive MBA (EMBA) degree.

4.3 The challenges in intercultural communication

The interviewees mention several challenges in intercultural communication. The challenges can be grouped into five categories: 1. Deep level of culture - values and norms 2. Interpretation and perceptions 3. Communication styles 4. Language 5. Nonverbal communication. This categorization is based on the author's interpretation of the study results and the theoretical background knowledge. It should be noted, though, that all the challenges presented are in interaction with each other.

The challenges are depicted in Figure 5. These challenges cause miscommunication and misunderstandings. The challenges are seen as the causes for failure in achieving the main goal of communication which, in the interviewees' opinion, is conveying the message and getting the message understood.

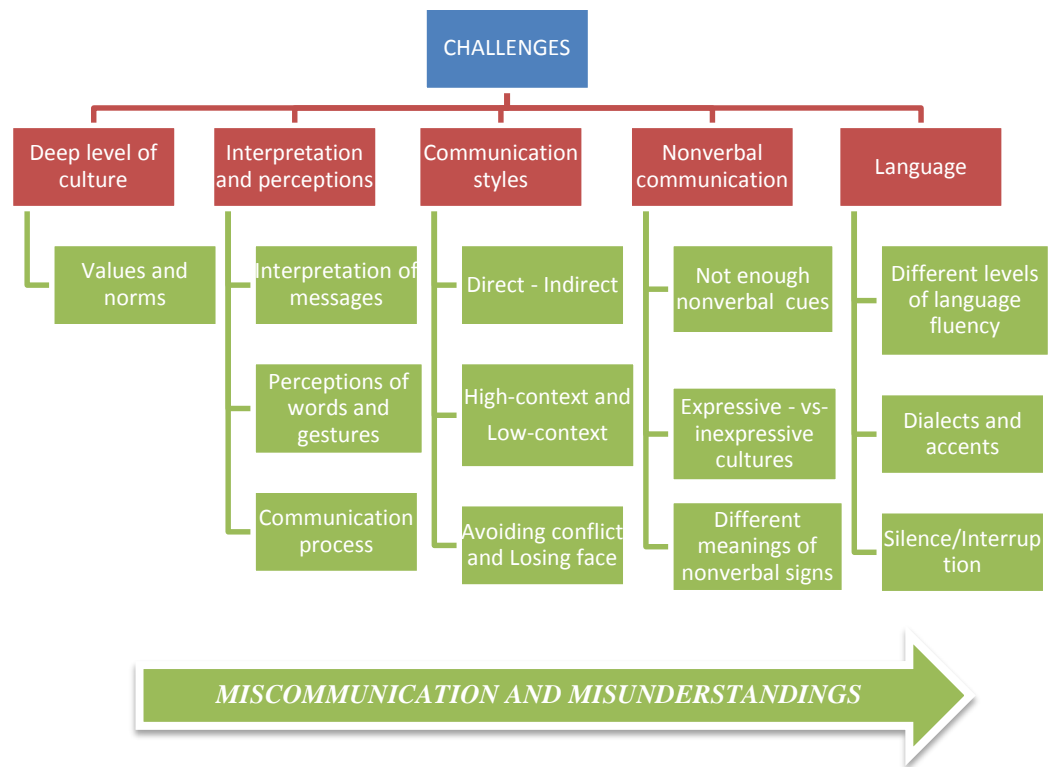


FIGURE 5. The challenges in intercultural communication.

4.3.1 Deep level of culture - Values and norms

Interviewee 1 argues that the biggest challenge is to understand the cultural backgrounds of others in order to get the message understood. Interviewee 2 argues that if one does not understand the others' cultural background, it can lead to impoliteness, and unnecessary mistakes. Moreover, Interviewee 2 asserts that if there is a failure in communication, it is always both sided, we are not understanding the other one's cultural background enough to understand them.

The differences that come from deep inside the culture are seen as obstacles for communication. For instance, Interviewee 4 points out that one aspect is how men and women communicate in organisation in some cultures. He argues that from the surface those aspects may seem easy, but can strongly impact on daily communication, for instance on what one can say or cannot say, and what kind of jokes one can tell.

The dos and don'ts are pointed out by two of the interviewees. Dos and don'ts, i.e. what one should and should not do in a particular culture are part of norms (Días 2015). Norms are in the deep level of culture according to French and Bell's (1979) iceberg model. Interviewee 4 gives an example of the dos and don'ts. The interviewee tells that when he is in India they always eat with hands, and only use the right hand when eating. Using left hand would be embarrassing, and even offensive, as left hand is considered unclean in India.

The differences in understanding values are pointed out as one obstacle by the interviewees. Interviewee 3 sees this as one of the biggest problems, understanding of honesty especially. Also Interviewee 4 points out the aspect of values, and tells about an incident related to understanding of honesty:

There is one example, it was a Finnish public company, very international one. They had an international management meeting, and they went through the values of the company. One of the values was honesty. And then the CEO explained what honesty is and how it affects the activities in the company. And then after the presentation the Italian manager of the Italian subsidiary was kind of willing to talk, and then he said: "Hey could you explain me a little bit more of this honesty thing, because I didn't quite get what it is?" And then there was another explanation and they discussed about it, and then this Italian guy says: "Oh now I understand! You mean perfectly honest!" So there we go, cultural differences and how people understand and interpret different things. So honesty for a Finn, or for an Italian, or for an Indian could mean different things in practice.

Two of the interviewees argue that Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures, which are based on value differences, are one aspect which affect intercultural communication, and differences in them create challenges. Interviewee 2 argues that this is seen for instance between Finland and Indonesia, because of the great differences in power distance. The interviewee remarks that in Finland, which is a low power distance culture, people use first names. In Indonesia with high power distance, calling by first names would be considered very awkward. Formal titles are used to address people in Indonesia, and there are hierarchies and many formalities, of which many are not aware.

Moreover, during a meeting, the teamleader is the one who is talking, while in Finland anybody can say their opinions depending on the context, and not just the leaders, Interviewee 2 notes. Furthermore, Interviewee 1 points out that in Scandinavia, managers often want to have discussions and hear views from the staff before decision-making. But some members from different parts of the world in the organisation see this as incompetence of the manager if he starts asking questions. In Asia, a manager is to give instructions, and a subordinate rarely questions the instructions.

In addition, Interviewee 1 remarks that collectivism in some cultures creates the importance of building and maintaining relationships. Interviewee 2 notes that sometimes Westerners are not understanding enough the importance of building relationships and investing time in getting to know each other, and can make huge mistakes by not taking this into account.

4.3.2 Interpretation and perceptions

Interpretation is one of the biggest aspects the interviewees see problems in when communicating with people from different cultures. Interviewee 1 remarks that the defining characteristic of intercultural communication is actually the different ways of perceiving messages because of the different cultural backgrounds:

The communication is made through the filters, each of them [each person] have their own filter, which is determined by their cultural

backgrounds. Things are actually perceived in different way when they are filtered through their individual cultural backgrounds.

The interviewees strongly point out that the same message can be understood in many different ways depending on the cultural background. As Interviewee 1 says, the basic problem is how the message that is said to people from different cultural backgrounds is understood, how it is perceived. The reaction and response from members of different cultures can be very different:

If you say one thing to the members of different cultures, there will be four different perceptions of this message. And there might be one for which this is even an insult. So you have to understand that what you say may not be perceived in a similar way for the members of different cultures, and there is room even to create negative impact from something.

In addition, the communication process seems to produce interpretation problems in intercultural communication. As Interviewee 1 notes: “*So each person have to think it, say it, somebody has to hear it, interpret it and understand it*”. The interviewee implies that during that process, the message is probably altered from the original intended one when it reaches the receiver.

Furthermore, the different perceptions of certain words, expressions and gestures across cultures are pointed out as one of the challenges. Interviewee 4 notes that interpretation of certain concepts may cause misunderstandings. He talks about an incident that they had in India, where the word *bonus* was understood differently, and did not carry the same meaning as in Finland. According to the interviewee, in Finland the word *bonus* is related to results, and is not an automatic addition to salary. In India, it was understood more like a “holiday money”, or “Christmas money”, instead of performance based bonus. The performance based bonus was something different, but both were bonuses. Once, because of the results of the Indian daughter company, Interviewee 4 made an announcement that there will be no bonus, and some people understood that the normally fixed part of the salary, being the “holiday money”, will not be paid, and eventually they had to correct that misunderstanding. The interviewee argues that the more global you become,

the more aware you need to be of the different concepts people have in different cultures.

4.3.3 Communication styles

Based on the interviews, one of the challenges in intercultural communication are the different communication styles. According to the interviewees, the communication behaviour of people from different cultural backgrounds is seen as difficult to understand. Communication can be very straightforward in Scandinavian environment, whereas in some other cultures it can be very indirect, as Interviewee 1 points out. Referring to high-context communication, Interviewee 3 notes: *“In Japan it is totally different, and it is very hard to understand what they really think, and how they behave, you don’t know what they finally mean”*.

The interviewees all point out, that one problem is that in some cultures, people do not show and admit easily if they do not understand. This is related to avoiding *losing face*. Interviewee 1 explains that if a Finn does not understand, he will immediately ask: “What do you mean, I don’t understand?”, but in some cultures that would be impossible. Interviewee 2 notes that the fear of losing face may also cause people to prefer being quiet, avoid the topic or avoid looking. The interviewees see this case especially with Asias, who tend to avoid *losing face*. The interviewees argue that in Asia, people do not ask questions if they do not understand, and certainly do not indicate if they do not understand.

And of course in Asia, people hate to say no, so they tend to say yes, even if they mean no, or at least maybe. So when you ask a Chinese guy did he understand, the very likely answer is yes, and then a month later you actually discover he did not understand a thing. (Interviewee 4, 2014.)

Interviewee 1 gives a similar example:

Giving instructions in Scandinavia, in Europe, does not mean one way street, you give instructions, and if he or she does not

understand, he will ask, and then start to carry out the work. But in Asia they are not asking questions, and they certainly do not indicate if they do not understand or cannot do these things. So they can go away with the instructions, stay away two weeks, and when you go and ask how is the job doing, then you can realize that he did not understand what you were really asking, but he could not say that he cannot do that or he did not understand.

4.3.4 Language

Language seems to be just one of the many problems. Three of the interviewees point out that in intercultural situations, often all are speaking English as their second language, and this creates challenges in communication. One problem is overestimating the language skills of others. Interviewee 4 argues that especially people from Western countries and the native speakers of English tend to overestimate the language skills of others. Interviewee 4 continues that people have very different levels of language fluency, and when addressing a larger audience, one can never be sure that everybody has understood. In addition, Interviewee 4 notes that the different dialects and accents also create challenges.

Interviewee 4 and 2 point out the aspect of silence. Interviewee 4 notes that in France, Finns often encounter challenges, because their view of silence is somewhat different from the French. In France, long silence is often regarded as a sign of stupidity or lack of intellectual capacity. Interviewee 2 notes that she mistook the Finnish silence as a sign of sadness when she came to Finland.

In addition, the different views of interruption in different cultures create misunderstandings. Interviewee 2 argues that people from more expressive cultures expect the communication to be very alive, and they would not consider interrupting as insulting, since that would be an indication of interest from the other side. But in some cultures, such as in Finland, interruption would be considered as rude, Interviewee 2 argues.

4.3.5 Nonverbal communication

In addition, nonverbal communication seems to pose problems in intercultural communication. Interviewees 1 and 2 point out the issue of nonverbal communication. Interviewee 2 argues that in some cultures people are not used to showing many gestures and body language, and that makes it difficult for people from more expressive cultures to understand their emotions if they are not showing any expressions.

Interviewee 2 sees this problem especially with the Japanese. The interviewee argues that because Japanese tend not to look in the eyes, and their facial expressions are very little, it is very hard to understand them. In the interviewee's opinion, communication with the Japanese is especially hard for her because people in her culture are the opposite, expressive, talking from the touching distance, and using many gestures and body language. *"We are very warm but when we talk with the Japanese, they are like closed walls"*, Interviewee 2 says. The interviewee discusses that the challenge is the limitation or the ability to understand the other if the other one is not giving enough signs. *"So the less we use body language, the less we understand each other"*, Interviewee 2 asserts.

However, Interviewee 2 notes that sometimes the problems come from the different meanings of some gestures people have in different cultures.

In the next subchapter, possible ways to overcome the communication challenges are presented.

4.4 Ways to overcome the challenges

The interviewees were asked to reflect and suggest some possible solutions to the communication challenges presented. The findings are presented in this section. The presented ways to overcome the challenges are connected to each other.

The fundamental challenges in intercultural communication from the perspective of the interviewees are miscommunication, misunderstandings, and getting the message understood, which are manifested through the five challenging areas of

communication presented in the previous subchapter. The suggested ways to overcome the challenges are grouped accordingly: 1. Cultural awareness 2. Interpretation and perceptions 3. Communication styles 4. Language 5. Nonverbal communication. Ways to overcome the communication challenges based on the interviews are depicted in Figure 6.

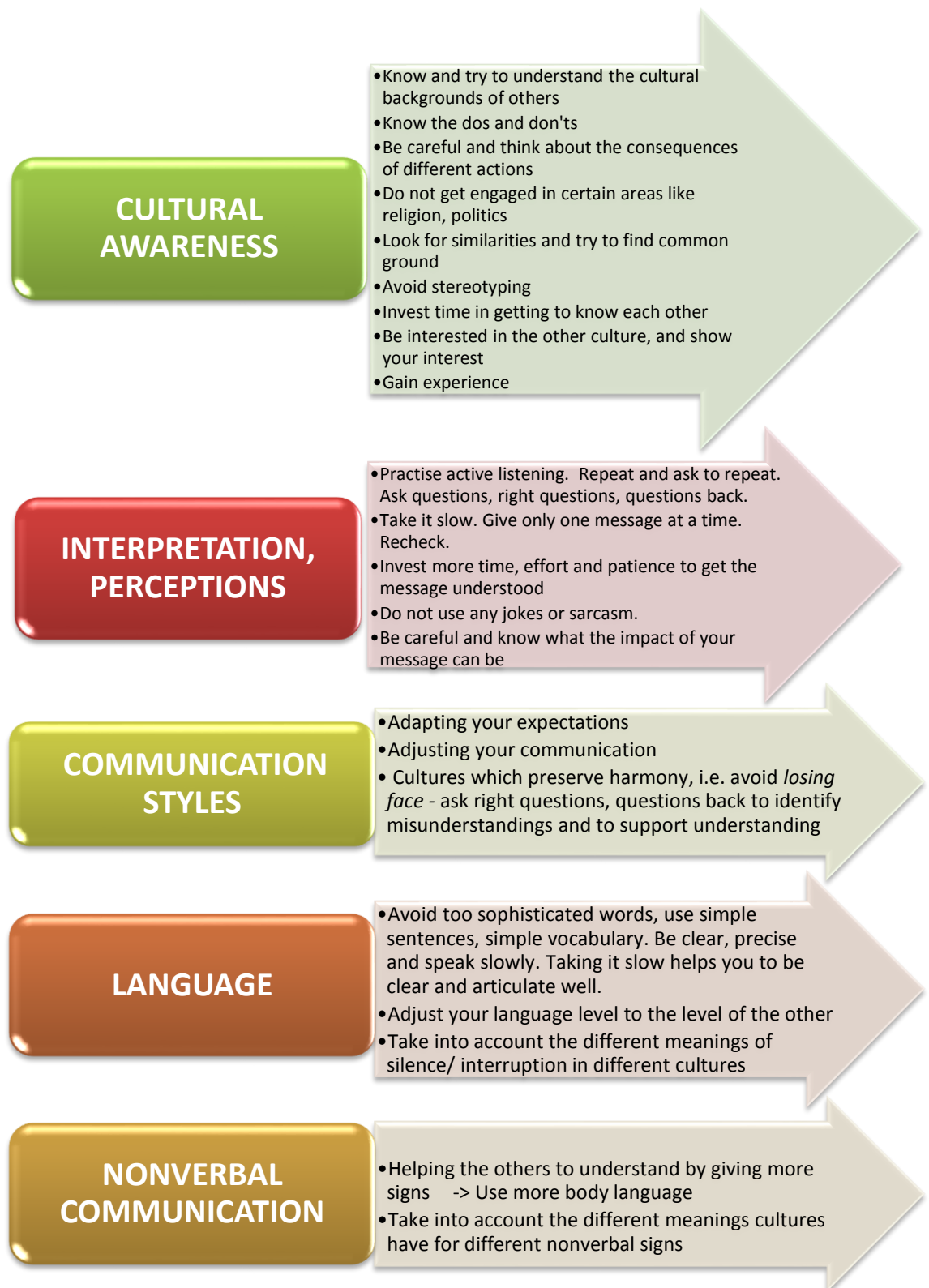


FIGURE 6. Tips on how to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication.

4.4.1 Cultural awareness

The interviewees emphasize an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others. Interviewee 1 argues that especially a leader should have a broader understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the people in his or her organisation, and to understand at least the basics of the cultural backgrounds of his or her team. Interviewee 2 argues: *"If we do not understand a person's background, we cannot understand everything that they say"*.

In order to avoid potential misunderstandings in intercultural communication, one has to be culturally aware, Interviewee 4 argues. The interviewee asserts that not only language skills are enough, but cultural awareness. By being culturally aware, one can at least avoid the worst mistakes or pitfalls, the interviewee argues. Interviewee 4 suggests that this includes knowing the things which one should or should not do in a specific culture, referring to the dos and don'ts. Interviewee 4 argues that the minimum one should know, are in fact the dos and don'ts. Interviewee 1 suggests that one has to think about and be careful about what the consequences of different actions in different cultural contexts can be. Moreover, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 point out that certain areas of discussion should be avoided, such as politics or religion, and to enter those areas just if one knows enough.

Interviewees 1 and 2 advice concentrating more on similarities rather than differences, and trying to find the common aspects in the cultures in question. Interviewee 2 argues that in order to bring two people with different cultural backgrounds together, we should look for similarities: *"What separates us are the differences, but what brings us together are the similarities, so look for more similarities"*. Similarly, Interviewee 1 says: *"The similarities give the basic backbone, and on that backbone we can start to build the communication, and try to understand the differences"*.

Interviewee 1 and 2 suggest that stereotyping should be avoided. Stereotypes are beliefs of a group of people with certain traits (Sanderson 2010, 332). Interviewee 2 argues that with knowledge, it would be possible to at least reduce stereotyping. Interviewee 2 says that stereotyping is normal and human, and can not be totally

avoided, but it can be reduced. However, Interviewee 2 suggests that sometimes stereotyping can help in understanding cultural differences.

Because the focus of communication in some cultures is on people and preserving long-term relationships, the interviewees argue that it is important to invest time in communication in those cultures. Patience and time should be invested in first getting to know each another, building relationships, and getting to the deep level with people in some cultures. *“Finns should understand that it is necessary to invest time in getting to know the people first, and not just push their own agenda”*, Interviewee 2 argues.

Interviewee 1 advises to learn about cultural differences, to be interested in the other’s culture and to show the interest. *“Showing the interest is the best icebreaker, and a good small talk also”*, Interviewee 1 remarks.

4.4.2 Interpretation and perceptions

Interviewee 1 argues that it should be understood that what we say, may not be perceived in the same way by members of different cultures, and the message conveyed might also create an unintended negative impact on someone. The interviewee suggests to be very careful with the possible impacts of the message conveyed. Interviewee 1 further presents some possible ways to enhance understanding. More time, patience and effort is needed to convey the message, and to make sure the message is understood.

Furthermore, Interviewee 1 advises to use active listening, i.e. listening, repeating and even asking the other one to repeat, to ensure mutual understanding.

According to the interviewee, the key is to ask the right questions, questions back, and using very short messages. The information flow should be cut into pieces; first giving one message and making sure it is understood, then giving another piece of information, and finally rechecking that everything is understood correctly.

Caution should be applied when using jokes. Jokes, funny expressions or sarcasm should not be used in order to convey the message, Interviewee 1 advises. The

interviewee asserts that the message is unlikely to be understood if jokes are used, since jokes are understood very differently in different cultures. Interviewee 2 also points out that one has to be careful about what kind of jokes to tell.

Related to the possible misinterpretation of different words, expressions and gestures, Interviewee 2 argues that we should aim at understanding the other person's cultural background in order to interpret the verbal and nonverbal symbols correctly. The interviewee suggests that we should gain more experience, because with experience, we start to learn the meaning of some gestures and expressions, and we do not misunderstand that much anymore.

4.4.3 Communication styles

Interviewee 1 emphasizes the importance of knowing and understanding the different cultural backgrounds of others and the different ways people communicate. Interviewee 1 suggests that expectations should be adjusted, for instance, one should understand that communication can be very straightforward in Scandinavian environment, but the opposite in some other cultures. The reasons for the different communication behaviours would be good to understand, as suggested by Interviewee 3. Interviewee 1 further suggests that one should take into account the different backgrounds of others, and to adjust one's own communication and behaviour accordingly. Interviewee 1 argues that when working in multicultural environment, there is a need to use different methods and ways of communication depending on the cultural context.

Interviewee 2 points out the issue of harmony, which is related to *losing face*. Preserving harmony, avoiding disputes and especially avoiding losing face, is very important in some cultures. Interviewee 2 argues that in order to prevent the other people from losing their face in those cultures, negative feedback should be given indirectly and privately, and positive feedback should always be given first.

Interviewee 1 suggests that when one is dealing with cultures in which *losing face* is avoided and people do not like to say no, or avoid admitting they do not understand, the key is to ask questions, the right questions, questions back, and

also to pay more attention to the other methods of communicating, for instance use active listening, repeating, short messages, and giving one message at a time in order to support understanding.

4.4.4 Language

Interviewees 1, 2 and 4 suggest using simple sentences, simple vocabulary, and to select the simplest way to express things, especially if the communicating parties are non-native English speakers. Interviewee 4 notes that too sophisticated words should not be used in every context. Interviewee 4 suggests that because people have very different levels of language skills, it would be important to adjust the language level one is using to the level of the other, and not to overestimate the capacity of others.

Interviewee 1 argues that in order to avoid the problems with language, it is important to take it slow, which enables clarity and good articulation. In order to get the message across and understood, it would be important to be precise, clear, and speak slowly, Interviewee 1 suggests.

As mentioned earlier, the different perceptions of certain words and expressions is one challenge. By understanding the other person's cultural background, it would be possible to better understand what is meant with certain words and expressions in different cultures, Interviewee 2 suggests. Different perceptions of silence and interruption should also be taken into account, as noted by two of the interviewees.

4.4.5 Nonverbal communication

Interviewee 2 suggests that we have to help others understand by giving more signs, in other words, use more body language when communicating with people from other cultures. The interviewee emphasizes that in communicating, people are looking for understanding between each other. It is a win-win situation when we get our message across and the message is understood correctly, Interviewee 2 argues. The interviewee suggests that we should cooperate in order to help the

other to understand our messages better, and that cooperating would then mean giving enough signs, i.e. using more body language in order to support the message.

However, because sometimes the misunderstandings originate from the different meanings people have for different nonverbal signs, Interviewee 2 suggests we should understand the person's background and gain more experience in order to learn and understand what the different nonverbal signs in their cultural context mean.

5 ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the empirical findings already presented in the previous chapter. The author examines the empirical study results on the theoretical framework, and provides her analysis of the results.

5.1 Cultural awareness

The interviewees expressed that cultural differences are the reasons for many of the communication challenges they encounter in their work. Interviewees argued that the different cultural backgrounds of people are the cause for the different ways of understanding messages and for the different communication behaviours for instance. Moreover, the interviewees emphasized that the differences in understanding values and norms is one of the biggest obstacles in intercultural communication. The theoretical data supports this view of the important role of values. Martin and Nakayama (2010, 229) argue that the problems in intercultural communication are often caused by the different priorities given for values, such as honesty and preserving harmony. The values greatly impact the communication decisions and interpretations (Jandt 2007, 47-48).

Interviewees expressed the difficulty of understanding the peculiar communication behaviours they encounter when communicating with people from different cultures. They remarked that there is though, always a reason for the behaviours and actions, and that it would be good to understand the reasons for them. Theoretical data suggests that the explanations for the visible parts of culture, for the language patterns, customs and behaviour, come from deep inside the culture, from the invisible components of culture, which are values, beliefs and cultural and social norms (Rothlauf 2014, 27; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 24).

Although the interviewees argued that the differences in understanding values is one of the biggest obstacles in communication across cultures, they did not directly express that it would be important to recognize the values of another culture. Solomon and Schell (2009, 36; 51) argue that the only way to interact successfully with people from another culture, is to know and understand what lies in the invisible culture, being the values and beliefs, and to use that

knowledge to predict the way people communicate in a variety of situations. For instance, cultures with individualistic values tend also to value direct forms of communication, whereas people with collectivistic values tend also to value preserving harmony over truth, and prefer indirect methods of communicating (Martin & Nakayma 2010, 100; Thomas & Peterson 2015, 119.)

Interviewee 4 emphasized that one should know at least the dos and don'ts of a culture, which is culture-specific knowledge (Pilhofer 2011, 42). However, the dos and don'ts can sometimes be stereotypical, and do not always take into account the different situations and contexts (McMahon 2012).

As pointed out by two of the interviewees, stereotyping should be avoided. Referring to Jandt (2007, 76–79), stereotypes are a stumbling block in intercultural communication, because they cause us to assume that a widely held belief of a group is true of all members of that particular group of individuals. However, as suggested by Interviewee 2, stereotypes can sometimes be helpful. Accurate, descriptive instead of evaluative stereotypes in fact allow people to understand and act appropriately in new situations (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 78; Adler 2015, 6).

Interviewee 4 emphasized that in order to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication, one has to be culturally aware. Cultural awareness can be defined as a "*sensitivity to the similarities and differences that exist between two different cultures and the use of this sensitivity in effective communication with members of another cultural group*" (Health Education and Training Institute 2015). Cultural awareness must be supplemented with cultural knowledge, which is defined as familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, values and belief systems of the members of another ethnic group (Adams 1995, according to Cisneros 2008, 20).

The interviewees did not always specifically refer to cultural awareness, but they emphasized understanding of the different cultural backgrounds of people, and understanding how the different backgrounds affect communication. Interviewee 1 advised to learn about cultural differences, and to be interested in another's culture. Interviewee 2 argued we should aim at developing understanding of the

cultural backgrounds of others in order to better interpret and understand them. These also refer to cultural awareness, as another common definition of cultural awareness defines it as "*developing a sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group*" (Adams 1995, according to Klawitter 2007, 56). According to Jandt (2007, 47) cultural awareness is essential for effective communication with people from other cultures.

Although the interviewees expressed the importance of understanding the cultural backgrounds of others, they did not directly mention the importance of first understanding one's own culture. According to Klawitter (2007, 56) before one can successfully interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, it is essential to become aware of their own culture.

5.2 The different systems of meaning

The interviewees expressed that one of the biggest challenges in intercultural communication are the different interpretations of words, expressions, and nonverbal signs. Similarly, the theory suggests that different cultures have different systems of meaning, and expectation that the other person shares our symbol system is probably wrong. The consensus of the meanings of symbols would be necessary for understanding (Barnett & Lee 2002, 277.)

Furthermore, the interviewees highly emphasized the challenge of interpretation of messages. Same message conveyed to members of different cultures may result in many differing interpretations of the message, and one can never be sure if everybody has understood the message correctly. This is related to the communication process, in which messages are encoded and transmitted from a sender to a receiver, who interprets them and gives them meaning (Thomas & Peterson 2015, 112).

As pointed out by Thomas and Peterson (2015, 114) for the communication process to be successful, the symbols, i.e. words and nonverbal signs should be encoded into a form that can be understood, and the parties need to understand the cultural fields, e.g. values and attitudes, of the other. With understanding, it becomes easier to use symbols that will be encoded and decoded similarly.

Interviewee 2 suggested aiming to understand the cultural backgrounds of others in order to interpret the different nonverbal and verbal signs correctly. Interviewee 2 suggested that by gaining experience, one starts to learn the different meanings of verbal and nonverbal signs in different cultures.

Interviewee 2 further suggested that people should give more signs, i.e. use more body language, in order to help the others understand. However, the author notes that since the misunderstandings often happen because of different meanings people from different cultures give to nonverbal signs, this may not be a feasible way to improve understanding. On the contrary, Solomon and Schell (2009, 157) actually suggest limiting hand gestures and maintain moderate body posture when interacting with other cultures, and watching carefully how locals interact and adjust nonverbal behaviour accordingly.

In addition, the author notes that Interviewee 2, who is of Indonesian origin, was the only one of the interviewees who emphasized the importance of nonverbal communication. Interviewee 2 was also the only one who provided some possible solutions for the intercultural communication challenges through the aspect of nonverbal communication. The other interviewees, who are all Finnish, only emphasized the aspect of differing perceptions of words and language. The reason for this difference might be the fact that Indonesia is a very high-context culture where people are more dependent on nonverbal signs (Centre for Intercultural Learning 2015), whereas Finland is often considered as a low-context culture where people rely more on verbal signs to communicate (Osland & Florenthal 2009, 99; Jandt 2007, 67-68).

5.3 Understanding, adjusting and creating common ground

The differences in communication styles, especially between direct and indirect, and high-context and low-context, were seen as one of the biggest challenges in intercultural communication by the interviewees. Interviewee 1 suggested that one should take into account the different backgrounds of people, and to adjust one's own communication and behaviour accordingly. He argued that one should have knowledge and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others, and adjust

expectations accordingly, for instance understand that communication and actions can be very indirect in some cultures compared to the Finnish style. Furthermore, Interviewee 1 suggested that one should also adjust their own communication, behaviour, and methods and ways of communicating depending on the cultural backgrounds of others. Similarly, in the case of language, one should adjust their own language level to better fit with the other, and not to overestimate the capacity of others, as suggested by Interviewee 4.

The theoretical data supports the idea of adjusting. Solomon and Schell (2009, 36-37) argue that the way to interact successfully with people from different cultures is shaping one's own expectations and behaviour according to the knowledge of the other's cultural background.

Some of the suggestions for ways to overcome the communication challenges reveal the interviewees' own culturally affected views and goals of communication. For instance, the interviewees argued that the main goal in communication is basically to get the message through and understood. Jandt (2007, 47-48) argues that the main purpose in some cultures is information exchange, whereas in some other cultures, respecting and preserving the relationships through communication is more important than message exchange.

Furthermore, Interviewee 1 suggested that in order to get the message through, one should be precise, clear, and speak slowly. The author understands this approach from a manager's point of view, and this might be feasible for diminishing the misunderstandings regarding language. However, this suggestion is represented from the point of view of a person from an individualistic culture where direct communication is appreciated and viewed as the most efficient communication style (Gudykunst & Lee 2002, 30; The Hofstede Center 2015). Too direct style in an indirect culture may not communicate information most effectively, and could even be seen as coarse and unsophisticated (Solomon and Schell (2009, 159).

Even though the interviewees highly emphasized the aspect of saving face in some cultures, only Interviewee 2 pointed out that one should not cause the *other one* to lose their face, for instance, one should give negative feedback only

indirectly and privately. Two of the interviewed managers only noted that the aspect of avoiding losing face makes people not to admit they do not understand or to avoid saying *no*. As Solomon and Schell (2009, 147) argue, in cultures where saving face is important, it would also be important to act in a way that helps the other one to save their face.

As two of the interviewees suggested, looking for similarities instead of differences, and seeking common aspects in each other's cultures, help to "build backbone", i.e. basis for the communication. This could be thought of as creating *common ground*, a basis for mutual understanding. This aspect is pointed out in the literature. Sadri and Flammia (2011, 268) argue that focusing on the similarities of cultural beliefs and values, and seeking common ground, rather than emphasizing cultural differences is important in order to build meaningful, peaceful dialogue and connections in intercultural communication. According to Liu, Volcic and Gallois (2014) in order to avoid conflicts in intercultural communication, one should focus on building common ground, seeking commonalities in goals, expectations and values. Interviewee 1 suggested that on the "backbone", which is built by the similarities, we can start to try to understand the differences.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This section shortly concludes the study and summarizes the main findings. In addition, reliability and validity are assessed, and suggestions for further research are given.

6.1 Answers for the research questions

- *What intercultural communication challenges do managers face in their work in international organisations?*

The interviewees presented challenges in five areas that the author labelled accordingly: 1. Deep level of culture – values and norms 2. Interpretation and perceptions 3. Communication styles 4. Language 5. Nonverbal communication.

Challenges in these areas create miscommunication, misunderstandings, and problems in getting the message through and understood. Figure 7 depicts the challenges.

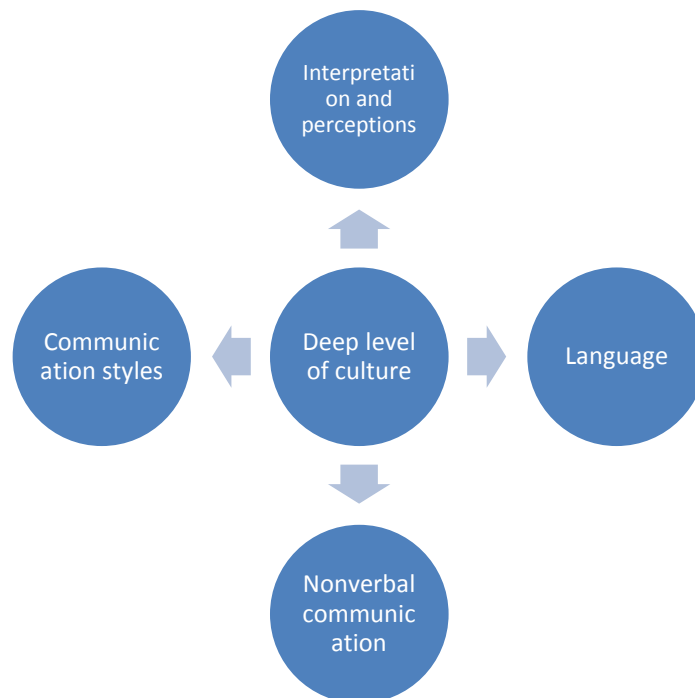


FIGURE 7. Challenges in intercultural communication.

The deep level of culture, being values and norms, was seen as one obstacle. Challenge is the differences in values and norms across cultures, and different perceptions of values. Differences in them was seen for instance affecting what one can say or do, and what one cannot say or do in a particular culture from the point of view of the interviewees. However, based on the theoretical and empirical data, the author has concluded that the deep level of culture is rather the source of the challenges, which affect all the other four challenges depicted in figure 7.

Interpretation of messages, and different perceptions of certain words, expressions, concepts and gestures were seen as one of the biggest challenge. Same message said to members of different cultures might result in many differing interpretations of the message. The different communication styles are one challenge. Differences between direct and indirect, and high-context and low-context communication were seen as challenging. In addition, a communication style which aims at preserving harmony and avoiding losing face was seen as problematic.

Language was pointed out as one challenge. Obstacles with language are the different levels of English of people from different cultures, overestimating the language skills of others, and different views of silence and interruption. The different meanings of words and expressions, which is also related to interpretation and perceptions, were seen as problematic. Nonverbal communication was regarded as one challenge. The challenge is the limitation to understand others if they are inexpressive, and do not give enough nonverbal cues. This challenge was seen especially between people from expressive and inexpressive cultures. Moreover, the different meanings of nonverbal signs in different cultures were regarded challenging.

- *What are the possible ways to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication from the point of view of managers?*

In order to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication, knowledge and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others was seen as necessary. Some of the interviewees referred to cultural awareness. Developing understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others was seen as necessary in

order to better interpret others and in order to avoid misunderstandings. Knowing the things that should and should not be done in a specific culture was seen as important. Gaining experience, being interested in another's culture, and looking for similarities instead of differences as a way to build basis for communication were also seen as ways to overcome the challenges in intercultural communication.

Alongside understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others, and with gaining experience, also the interpretation of the different meanings of verbal and nonverbal signs was suggested for improvement. It was also suggested that using more body language would enhance understanding. Language level should be adjusted depending on the context, and simple vocabulary should mostly be used in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Communication, behaviour, and the methods and ways of communicating should be adjusted depending on the cultural backgrounds of others. Figure 8 summarizes the idea of knowledge and understanding, adapting and adjusting.

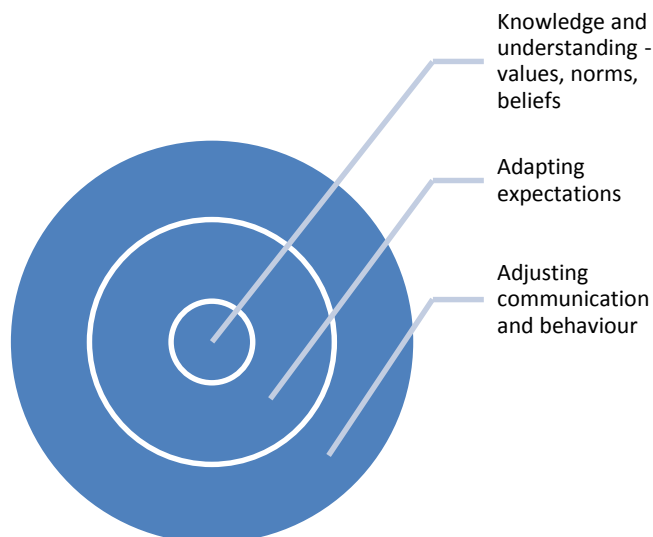


FIGURE 8. Understanding, adapting and adjusting.

There should be prior knowledge and understanding of the cultural backgrounds of others. The different cultural backgrounds should be taken into account, and expectations should be adapted accordingly. Based on the knowledge and understanding, communication and behaviour should be adjusted, and different ways and methods of communicating should be applied. With knowledge and understanding, one can adapt expectations, and accordingly adjust communication and behaviour depending on the cultural context.

6.2 Reliability and validity

Validity is broadly described as the extent to which a study measures what it purports to measure (Given 2008, 909). Concerning validity, the study reached its goal of providing answers to the research questions. The research methods proved suitable for studying the phenomena. Qualitative method and semi-structured interviews helped the author to reach her goal of studying the experiences of managers. The interviewees were carefully selected for the study, and all of them possessed required background and knowledge in order for the author to study the subject. Although the author would have had the opportunity to interview more managers, the four interviews were sufficient in answering the research questions. (Hiltunen 2009.)

Reliability refers to replicability, whether or not possible future researchers could repeat the research and would yield the same results and interpretations (Silverman 2006, 282). Regarding reliability, the author believes that if the study was to be repeated, it would not necessarily lead to the same results. Every interview was a unique interaction between the author and the interviewees. In order to increase reliability, the author aimed at making the research process transparent by describing the process and the methods used in detail. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and carefully analysed. In addition, the author strived to make explicit the theoretical stance from which her interpretations took place. (Silverman 2006, 287.)

6.3 Suggestions for further research

The author discussed the different leadership styles across cultures with the interviewees, which the author found to be very interesting, but did not include them into the study. Furthermore, some of the interviewees highlighted the importance of intercultural communication skills and cultural awareness in their work as managers, as well as in their organisations in general.

The author also discussed training needs with the interviewees. Moreover, during the course of the research, the author found that it would be valuable to study intercultural communication competence. Consequently, the author considers the following topics worth exploring:

- Developing intercultural communication competence
- Need for intercultural training in companies
- Leadership styles across cultures
- The importance of intercultural communication competence for managers

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