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INTERCULTURAL SKILLS OF ADMARES' EMPLOYEES

– comparing Finland and United Arab Emirates

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INTERCULTURAL SKILLS OF ADMARES' EMPLOYEES

- comparing Finland and United Arab Emirates

This thesis concerns cross-cultural communication skills of the employees in Admares and the needed intercultural skills when working in an international company. The thesis examines the concepts of culture, intercultural competence and cultural intelligence and discusses the essence of them in strengthening a company's business performance in global markets. Theoretical framework of this thesis presents Hofstede's cultural dimensions and compares Finland and United Arab Emirates in terms of making business.

Empirical framework of the thesis is conducted with a questionnaire and three interviews. The questionnaire was targeted to employees of Admares and it surveyed employees' attitudes and skills towards cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence. The interviews were targeted to three employees in Admares and the interviews concentrated on working in United Arab Emirates and what kind of cultural collisions these employees have faced whilst working there. The results of the empirical part showed that the level of intercultural skills is high among employees of Admares. The employees felt that they have sufficient skills to conduct their daily work tasks involving international interactions. The results of the questionnaire also showed that employees in Admares experience intercultural skills a meaningful asset when building a global competence and that intercultural skills could be taken more into account in Admares. The interviews showed that Hofstede's assumptions regarding differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates are correct and the interviewees felt that the cultural differences between these two countries are major.

The conclusion of the research is that employees in Admares manage their intercultural tasks well and like to execute the international work situations. When starting a new international project, the employees felt that orientation to the culture of the country where the project takes place would be important and necessary in order to strengthen Admares' operations and business performance.

KEYWORDS:

Gert Hofstede, cultural dimensions, cross-cultural communication, United Arab Emirates, intercultural competence, business performance

Sinianna Kuosmanen

ADMARESIN TYÖNTEKIJÖIDEN KULTTUURISET TAIDOT

- vertailussa Suomi ja Yhdistyneet Arabiemiraatit

Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii Admaresin työntekijöiden kulttuurienvälistä kommunikointia ja siihen vaadittavia taitoja. Opinnäytetyö tarkastelee käsitteitä kulttuuri, kulttuuriosaaminen ja kulttuuriälykyys ja pohtii niiden vaikutusta yrityksen suorituskyyyn kansainvälisillä markkinoilla. Tämän opinnäytetyön teoreettinen kirjallisuuskatsaus esittelee Hofsteden teorian kulttuurin ulottuvuuksista ja vertailee sen avulla Suomea ja Yhdistyneitä arabiemiraatteja kaupankäynnin ja yhteistyön suhteen.

Opinnäytetyön empiirinen osa toteutettiin kyselylomakkeella ja kolmella haastattelulla. Kyselylomake suunnattiin Admaresin työntekijöille ja sen tarkoituksena oli selvittää työntekijöiden asenteita ja taitoja kulttuurienväliseen kanssakäymiseen ja kulttuuriin taitoihin. Haastattelut suunnattiin kolmelle Admaresin työntekijälle ja tavoitteena oli selvittää Yhdistyneissä Arabiemiraateissa työskentelyn piirteitä ja kulttuurisia yhteentörmäyksiä Suomen ja Yhdistyneiden Arabiemiraattien välillä.

Empiirisessä tutkimuksessa selvisi että Admaresin työntekijöillä on hyvät kulttuuriset taidot. Työntekijät vastasivat, että heillä on riittävät taidot ja valmiudet suoriutua työtehtävistään, jotka vaativat kulttuurienvälistä kommunikointia ja osaamista. Kyselylomakkeen tuloksista kävi myös ilmi, että Admaresin työntekijät kokevat kulttuurisen osaamisen tärkeäksi kun halutaan kehittää yrityksen kansainvälistä asemaa. Haastatteluista selvisi että Hofsteden oletukset kulttuurin ulottuvuuksien eroista Suomen ja Yhdistyneiden Arabiemiraattien välillä pitivät paikkaansa ja haastateltavat totesivat, että kulttuurierot näiden kahden maiden välillä ovat huomattavia ja tulevat hyvin ilmi työtilanteissa.

Tutkimuksen johtopäätöksenä on, että Admaresin työntekijät hallitsevat pääosin kulttuuriset työtehtävät hyvin, mutta etenkin uuden projektin alkaessa vieraassa maassa, työntekijöiden perehdytys uuteen kulttuuriin olisi hyödyllistä yrityksen kansainvälisen kilpailukyvyn parantamiseksi.

ASIASANAT:

Gert Hofstede, kulttuurin ulottuvuudet, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä, Yhdistyneet Arabiemiraatit, kulttuurinen osaaminen, yrityksen suorituskyyky

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ABBREVIATIONS

EU European Union

CQ Cultural Intelligence

1 INTRODUCTION

Studying and working abroad, using foreign languages and having friends from different continent are all phenomena that are increasingly present in people's lives in year 2016 in Finland. The conjunctive factor in all of these is the process of adjustment into something that is not quite familiar and known for most people. Overall globalization and its many effects has brought new changes and challenges for people from all over the world to encounter. These changes – increasing multiculturalism among companies and the importance of language proficiency – are inevitable in most developed countries. Yet the attitude towards these changes is something we can impact on ourselves. The bottom line in all these above listed factors is the same; how to meet and relate to people and their habits and culture when they may seem too different and strange to get along with. The author believes that all individuals can acquire skills that ease the process of facing people from different cultures and backgrounds in new situations.

This thesis examines the intercultural skills and cross-cultural communication and the importance of these factors in order to build international competence and consciousness inside a Finnish company operating with global markets. The purpose of this thesis is to find out whether the employees in the company are satisfied to their own level of cultural knowledge and how are they experiencing the work tasks including operating in an international environment and using a foreign language, most commonly English. The thesis is covering the demands that globalization is setting for employees in companies, focusing on a selected company that is presented later. This thesis concentrates on building business performance by investing in cultural skills. This thesis also presents a theory about cultural dimensions and see whether that theory is accurate or not when it comes to the employees of the selected company.

1.1 Presenting the case company

This thesis focuses on a company called Admares. Admares is a global export company using innovative techniques to design and build floating marine solutions and modular buildings. The company was founded in 2014 and Admares employs 41 people (Admares 2016). In the past two years of its existence, Admares has grown tremendously and at the moment the company is strengthening its operations and improving its competitive advantage by focusing on employee satisfaction and expertise. Since the company is young, the business culture among its staff keeps developing and evolving all the time. In situations when a company's structures and the organization itself is changing, an examination of the current stage of the company's processes is important to execute in order to reach the full potential of the fast growing company.

At Admares some of the staff is international and the official language of the company is English. Overall the employees in the company are rather young and both genders are represented. Cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills are essential for employees in Admares because of the international nature and aspirations of the company. The company's customers, suppliers and subcontractors are often from somewhere else than from Finland. This means that every employee in the company, from engineers to financial director and purchasers, have interaction with people from different cultures and possibly from different age groups and backgrounds as well.

The products of Admares are unique and a premium segment. Thus the competence and the professional ability inside the company must be strong and up to date in order to be able to produce high-quality and high-tech products for demanding customers. As a company, being aware of the cultural differences between countries and acknowledging the possible impacts of these differences is important in order to success in global markets. Cultural skills of the employees are also meaningful in order to avoid awkward and potentially negative incidents where an employee does not know how to behave in a certain situation such as selling, marketing or negotiating with a foreign business partner. With a conscious and oriented cultural education a company usually has a better prospect to success internationally and build a better reputation among possible customers and in the industry. Cultural knowledge among staff can be built in several ways, but the first step is to map the current stage of the cultural skills.

The author wants to find out Admares' employees' own evaluation of their current skills regarding cross-cultural communication. In planning the empirical framework of this thesis, the author is going to use Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions and base the research on Hofstede's assumptions. With Hofstede's dimensions the author can assess potential cultural challenges between countries that are selected for the research. With a focus on Admares' features as a company and the employees' self-assessment, the author is able to draw conclusions about the cultural awareness and intercultural skills of the employees. The outputs of this analysis aim at finding out whether Admares should invest into employees' cross-cultural skills more and how the investing could have a positive impact on the company's business performance.

1.2 Objectives of the thesis

The objectives of this thesis are to

1. Find out whether the employees in Admares are satisfied to their own level of cross-cultural communication and the company's input for educating them
2. Find out why cultural understanding and intercultural competence is so meaningful to global companies and to their business performance
3. Find out what kind of cultural issues for Admares' employees there might occur whilst working in United Arab Emirates

The motivation behind this research comes from a strong interest in cross-cultural communication skills, international sales and human resource management. The author is also interested in how to boost companies' business performance by realizing the meaning of intercultural skills. Since Admares' organization culture is being developed, it is essential to analyse the current situation regarding cross-cultural knowledge and map it before starting to make improvements and changes. No assessment of the staff's cultural knowledge and the needs for cultural orientation has been made and the research will clarify these needs and wishes from employees' point of view. When world is figuratively getting smaller and moving of work force is easier and more common, it is vital to invest in these cultural skills and see them as an important asset that an employee, regardless of age, gender and nationality, can adopt.

The other reason why the author finds this topic meaningful is that multiculturalism is a phenomenon that has an increased effect on Finnish working life and the companies operating in Finland. With more concentration on cultural differences among population, it would be possible to decrease the amount of misunderstandings and anger towards different ethnic groups who have, for example, different religion, habits and ways of doing business.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

At first the author is going to introduce the concepts of culture and intercultural competence. These concepts are analyzed from the point of view of business performance and their possible effect to that. The term cultural intelligence is also presented and discussed briefly in order to clarify thesis objective number 2. The next part, chapter 3, is concentrating on Hofstede's main findings regarding cultural differences between countries. The theoretical part of the thesis compares Finland and United Arab Emirates and presents the countries' differences when it comes to working life. The author is going to consider the theory from a point of view of Admares' employees and find reasons why cultural understanding is so meaningful when it comes to global companies and their ability to success. Limitations of Hofstede's theory are also discussed in chapter 3 of the thesis.

After the theoretical framework of the thesis the author is going to conduct a research with a questionnaire targeted to the employees of Admares and interviews targeted to a few employees of Admares. The questionnaire will seek answers to thesis objective number 1 and the interviews to thesis objective number 3. The research questions of the thesis are presented in chapter 4. Methodology of the thesis is also presented in chapter 4, with an analysis of the validity of the research. The conclusions of the research mainly target to find out how the employees experience intercultural skills and their international work tasks, and whether Hofstede's dimensions are valid when it comes to employees in Admares and their attitudes towards cross-cultural communication. The data of the thesis and the results of the research is analyzed in chapter 5. Conclusion of the thesis is presented in Chapter 6 and further research ideas and improvement suggestions for Admares are also discussed.

2 CULTURE AND ITS MEANING TO BUSINESS

In the following chapters the concept of culture is presented and then analyzed how a culture is being formed and what factors effect on the process when culture is being adopted by a group of people. An overview of the cultural framework of Admares is introduced and the possible consequences and results of this framework are considered. The definitions of intercultural competence and cultural intelligence are explained and the positive effects of them to the business performance is analyzed. The author also seeks an answer to the question of how to increase the intercultural competence inside a company and what is the meaning of it to the reputation of a company and to the processes of it among the employees. The question of why some countries and societies are more willing to adapt to different cultures and more easily absorb the cultural impulses than others is shortly discussed. At last the impact of cultural knowledge to business performance of companies is presented.

2.1 Culture as a concept

The definition of culture is diverse and it can be described by several ways. It is for example described simply as “the way people think, feel, and act” (Hofstede 1994 p. 5). The common finding in every description of culture is the fact that culture is something that a group of people have adopted and they collectively practise these thoughts, emotions and actions. Culture can progress and change over time and it is always a collective phenomenon because of the importance of social environment to it (Hofstede 1994 p. 5). In other words, people who share the same culture have some geographical similarities and this fact emphasizes the meaning of area when it comes to culture. Culture has an influence on how we talk, what we eat, how we dress and what things we find important in our everyday life. It can define where we want to travel, at what time we eat dinner and how do we treat our neighbours. It also has an implication to our working life and business: how many hours we work per day and what features we consider meaningful in our business partners.

Cultures can be also mixed together and this is a phenomenon that has happened increasingly over the past two decades. One can also adopt many different cultures and carry them out as the way one likes, and this phenomenon is called mixing, “that takes

place, in language, food habits, customs and so on, in many ways in every country of the world” (Eriksen 2007 p. 108). The phenomenon of mixing increases international companies’ needs to invest into cross-cultural communication skills of its personnel. Nowadays companies’ success in global markets demand cross-cultural competence: “it is at the crux of today’s sustainable competitive advantage” (Oracle 5/2012).

The head office of Admares is located in Turku, Finland and the other countries Admares has operations in are Switzerland, Italy, United Arab Emirates and The United States of America. When it comes to working life, different countries and different cultures may have very various ways of doing business and executing the everyday processes of a company. Employees may have different kind of relationships with each other depending on the country and they may have been used to various habits that can differ depending on the country employees are at. These kind of habits related to work can be the concept of time, the tone that is used in emails and how the decisions are made: with consensus or by one person, rapidly or measuredly and bindingly or adjustably.

2.2 Intercultural competence in companies

Intercultural competence means “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions” (Mc Kinnon, N.D.). In other words, intercultural competence means a person’s will to learn about other cultures and the ability to behave open-mindedly when facing unfamiliar situations with persons who have different cultural background, ethnicity or religion. It is also about knowledge of other cultures and understanding the inevitable changes that globalization has brought to the world, concerning the moving of work force from country to country and the increased international trade and global market activity (Collins 2015). Because of globalization, intercultural competence and diversity among companies is seen even more important factor and homogeneity in personnel can cause even bad reputation and diminish the lucrativeness of the company in the eyes of potential employees (Lahti 2014 Chapter 2.2.).

Since intercultural competence is an important factor in order to success in international trading (Byram 2001 p. 19), it is an advantage for companies to have personnel who master the skills to act and thrive in international environments and interact politely, effectively and by the company values with different cultures. In companies that have

international staff and global aims, it is also important to focus on what happens inside the company: employees from different countries can be a huge advantage for the company because of the possible positive changes they bring to group dynamic, but the differences can also create challenges to the supervisors (Lahti 2014 chapter 1.3.). These kind of challenges can be the lack of mutual understanding, language barrier and the uncertainty and lack of knowledge when it comes to interacting with each other.

The development of one's intercultural competence starts at the individual level: a first step is to study one's own cultural identity and through that invest thoroughly the differences in others (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001 p. 4) and thus learn to recognize and understand the differences. In offices that have employees from several nationalities and cultures, accepting the differences can be easier since a colleague from different country still have some similarities and social cohesion that arise from sharing the same work place. Accepting the differences and uncertainties can be more difficult in situations where a feeling of cohesion is missing and the resemblance is non-existent. These situations can be with foreign customers and suppliers and these are the situations where the importance of intercultural competence is emphasized and the neglecting of it can have a negative influence on company's business performance. The collisions between culture also happens easier when the cultural distance, that means the degree to which cultural attributes differs between countries (Trapani N.D), is larger. Intercultural competence can be seen also a skill that develop the society and gives space to diversity: personal experiences and relationships with people who have different cultural values increase tolerance and thus diminish the negative stereotypes and prejudices rising from uncertainty and unfamiliar (Lahti 2014 Chapter 2).

2.3 Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a concept that describes "an outsider's seemingly natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's compatriots would" (Harvard Business Review 10/2004). Even though some people have higher CQ than others due to parenting or because of the environment one was raised in, it is possible to improve one's own CQ by learning languages, investing into cross-cultural communication skills and gaining international work experience (Triandis 2008 p. xii). In other words, cultural intelligence is a feature one can adopt and develop even

though one may have grown up in a environment or in a society where intercultural skills were not especially valued and fostered.

The concept of cultural intelligence can be also used to map a whole society's competence and an overall attitude to act as a country with culturally intelligent citizens. The question that may arise is why some countries are more willing to adapt to the habits of others, and why do they also master the adaptation better, while other countries refuse to internationalize to the same extent than others. One logical explanation and reason for this quite common phenomenon is having shared markets and strong economic cooperation between countries. In Europe the process of creating well-functioning economic cooperation between countries started by creating European Union (EU), that aims at maintaining peace by creating dependency between its member states (European Union, N.D.). Being a member of EU means certain commitments for the member states, for example open borders, that possibly increases the migration and immigration which in long run will lead to a more multicultural population and people with better intercultural competence. The concept of intercultural competence was presented in chapter 2.2.

Even though EU aims at creating similar rules and policies for its every member state, the geographical and economic differences between the countries effect on the outcome: smaller countries like Finland, has a bigger dependence to other countries because without importing, exporting and investments from abroad, the market area for Finland would not be big enough for its economy to survive on its own. Thus Finland has to adapt in larger scale and take other states and their cultures and habits into consideration if wanting to have economic success and make business. This leads to a conclusion that usually smaller countries with smaller economies and market areas of their own have bigger motivation to internationalize and aspire to multiculturalism (Lewis 2010 p. 104). Lewis (2010) also points out that along with the size of a country's markets, also the culture has an effect of whether a country aims to internationalizing and mixing or keep their own culture and own markets regardless of others. One example is Switzerland: even though Switzerland has ratified some free trade agreements with EU, the country is still fairly reluctant to integrate to the amount of some other European countries (Gstöhl 2002 p. ix). These differences in countries and in people's behavior and beliefs on this matter can be explained on the history of the people in a certain society (Lewis 2010 p. 106).

2.4 Culture and business performance: negotiations

The importance of cultural competence for companies' business performance is increasingly important. Developing the employees' cultural skills inside a company can benefit a company's reputation, image and bring an effective competence advantage in markets. Cultural competence in companies can be built through research and implementation (Banutu-Gomez 2014). Banutu-Gomez (2014) also adds that mimicking other countries values' and cultural norms when entering to global markets can be useful in order to success. In other words, adopting the cultural intelligence that was discussed in chapter 2.3 of the thesis can be helpful for companies wanting to build their business performance in global markets.

In Admares, international negotiations are essential for the success of a company. International negotiations can either boost company's performance or hinder the growth and success of it. Therefore mastering the intercultural negotiation situations is a big advantage for a company and can strenghten the business performance of it. When it comes to international negotiations, it is important to remember that no assumptions about common values and objectives can be made (Hofstede 1994 p. 225). Therefore in negotiation situations cultural understanding plays a big role when wanting to increase the competence of a certain company. When training the employees for being culturally educated, cultural understanding lies at the core of successful training: instead of being an expert of every culture and country in the world, building a cultural understanding and mastering cross-cultural core competency are more important skills to adopt (Oracle 5/2012). In practice this means that adopting certain key elements of cross-cultural communication is usually more beneficial than trying to learn the cultural habits of every country.

It is important to acknowledge that mastering the cross-cultural communication skills will not remove the cultural differences between countries nor necessarily make the business negotiations easy and predictable. Adopting the intercultural skills may prepare an individual for unfamiliar negotiation situations and thus increase the possibility to be successful in negotiations. In companies that invest into cross-cultural communication and see the skills as a valuable asset to advance the business performace, the employees may execute their intercultural working tasks faster and with stronger expertise and professionalism.

3 HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Gert Hofstede is a Dutch cultural researcher who conducted researches about cultural differences aiming at making comparisons and assumptions of the cultures between selected countries. The definition of a dimension in this context is “an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures” (Hofstede 1994 p. 14). Since Hofstede's dimensions are designed especially to compare two or more countries with each other, the author chose to conduct the theory part of this thesis by choosing two countries to compare: Finland and United Arab Emirates. This will contribute to answer the thesis objective number 3 of the thesis. United Arab Emirates is an important market area for Admares and since Finland is geographically and also culturally far away from it, this distance is an essential thing to take into consideration when planning Admares' operations.

The selection of Finland is justified because Admares is a Finnish company, its main operations are located in Finland and the majority of the employees are Finnish. The author chose United Arab Emirates as the other country because of its relevance to Admares. The market prospects there are fortunate because of its growing economy (Khaleej Times 9.12.2015) and Admares has already conducted one project there, which means that the company and its employees have some experience from the country: several employees have spent months working in United Arab Emirates with locals and due to this, these employees will most likely have the competence to provide useful answers about the dimensions to the interviews and thus help the author to make a justifiable and accurate conclusion. The last reason for the choice of the countries was the fact that Finland and United Arab Emirates form an interesting pair of countries to compare, since the countries differ in so many ways: for example their location, main religion, history and form of government are different and thus Hofstede's dimensions can be a useful tool to map and study these cultural differences.

One objective of this thesis aims at explaining and understanding the unique features of both countries and make comparisons between them by using examples based on the dimensions. This thesis presents the dimensions that are called Power distance index, Individualism, Masculinity and Uncertainty avoidance. Next chapters present each dimension at a time. At first the author concentrates on the core principle behind the dimension and then finds possible examples on situations in work places that these

dimensions are usually visible and seek possible collisions between cultures of the two countries. The rankings of the countries in every dimensions the author presents are maintained by Hofstede centre (Hofstede Center, N.D.). The author bases the examples on Admares and its employees and make assumptions based on her own experience of the company. Overall knowledge of Finnish working life and culture in general is used as well.

3.1 Power distance

“Power distance is the extent which the less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede 1994, p. 28).

Power distance in the companies can appear in several ways but the main principle behind the dimension is how equal employees are compared to their superiors and what is the general attitude towards inequality or equality. In other words, power distance index studies how hierarchical is the workplace and what is the attitude towards the amount of hierarchy, whether it is high or low. The hierarchy can appear in several ways in everyday situations in the office. Examples that usually imply high power distance index are high differences on salaries and perks between positions, differences on conducts and rules for superiors compared to their subordinates and strict codes for addressing superiors by their lower subordinates. Emphasizing status is also a way in high power distance countries to show the authority of bosses (Hofstede 1994 p. 36). In high power distance countries, emphasizing status is usually acceptable and appreciated.

In low power distance countries the case is the opposite: subordinates are considered rather equals towards their superiors, power is decentralized and the managerial style is coaching and employees are usually highly-skilled and well-educated (Hofstede 1994 p. 36) which usually enables employees to make more independent decisions regarding their work. In low power distance countries highlighting status and showing signals trying to indicate the authority of a person, can be interpreted as a low self-esteem and the lack of leadership skills (Meyer 2014 p. 122).

Based on Hofstede’s dimensions Finland ranked low on Power distance. Also majority of employees in Admares are Finns and the company is based in Finland. Signs that

strengthen this statement in Admares are using first names for everyone regardless of the title, informal style of writing internal emails, casual dress code, same facilities for everyone in the office and equal rights for men and women. In Admares all of these signs are present in daily life at the office. Having the flat organization model described above is usually a consequence of many factors and according to Hofstede, the factors in a society that effect on the power distance index are a low geographical latitude, small population and wealth of the country (Hofstede 1994 p. 44).

The power distance index in United Arab Emirates is high (90) and this means that the attitude towards power and hierarchy is significantly different than in Finland, when Finland's power distance index is 33. In practice the consequence of the high Power distance index is that the decisions and deals can be made by only one person who has the highest position in the organization. This person's status and authority is usually easily visible to the people inside the organization and also to the partners and customers outside the organization. Strict and formal dressing codes and addressing every person with the right title and with correct tone in business situations can be seen as a sign of respect and proficiency in United Arab Emirates. Neglecting these manners indicate the lack of mutual respect and can even end the cooperation between the parties.

3.2 Individualism versus collectivism

"The role of the individual versus the role of the group in societies" (Hofstede 1994 p. 50).

In countries that are defined as individualistics by Hofstede's dimension, the concept of a family is small and tight and it usually consist of only the nuclear family (Hofstede 1994 p. 50). In these countries people's focus is on themselves instead of in the group of people. Adults make decisions based on their own desires and not necessarily consult their family and relatives about their opinions and wishes. In other words, individuals are seen capable of by their family and the society to make their own decisions and to manage their own life in the way they see the most desirable. In individualistic countries the social framework is usually relatively small and it is acceptable to see, for example, neighbours and colleagues only as acquaintances that share a building or an office together. Due to this, in individualistic countries maintaining personal relationships is

seen something that are based on personalities and are voluntary to build and maintain. In other words, it is not usually interpreted as lack of kindness and respect if neighbours are not friends with each other or colleagues do not spend time together outside the office but respecting other's privacy.

Finland scores high (63) on Hofstede's dimension about individualism and thus Finland is a more individualistic than collectivist country. The individualistic approach can be visible in workplace in everyday situations and also when it comes to decision-making. Employees are expected to act according to their own interests and they wish to be treated as individuals in the company (Hofstede 1994 p. 63). The rewarding system in companies is based on employees' skills and high-performance (Hofstede 1994 p. 65) and not for any other reasons, for example personal relationships.

In Admares the individualistic approach appears in the level of responsibility the employees have about their time using during the work days and working hours: these matters can an employee choose freely as long as the objectives of a company or a team is still achieved. Employees have the support from their supervisors and other team members but the decisions regarding one's own work can be made based on one's own expertise and proficiency. The relationships between supervisors and subordinates are usually friendly and professional. Another key element in individualistic countries regarding working life is the attitude towards feelings: it is more or less seen unprofessional to let personal feelings and relationships effect on the business performance of an individual.

United Arab Emirates scores relatively low (25) on individualism , so it is more collectivist country than individualistic. This implies that the society focuses on the power of the group (Hofstede 1994 p. 50) more than to a performance of an individual. The concept of a family is large and it can contain also friends and relatives outside the nuclear family. Relationships towards the "we" group, that one belongs from the early childhood, is considered extremely important. This group's opinions, desires and expectations can define hobbies, occupation and even a partner to an individual from the childhood to the late adulthood. These factors can be seen in the workplace already at the recruitment process: an employer hires a person who fits to the group instead of just hiring an individual to do the work. Also hiring someone one already knows previously is common in order to reduce risks (Hofstede 1994 p. 63); trust, that is essential in doing business in these cultures, is already gained previously. The relationships between the employee and the employer resembles a family relationships with "mutual obligations of protection

in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede 1994 p. 64). Therefore firing someone because of unsatisfied business performance is not an acceptable reason.

In collectivistic cultures the business deals with partners are based on trust and relationships. According to Lewis (2010) there is a clear contradictory here: Finns assume that excellent product sells itself, when Arabs buy from people they like, not necessarily from those who offer the best product at the best price (Lewis 2010 p. 144). The different attitude towards building personal relationships when doing business can cause misunderstandings and collisions if one is not aware of these cultural differences. A possible situations where one can go wrong are visits to a business partner to another country and the level of courtesy and the amount of activities outside business that one is expected to participate in.

When comparing individualism and collectivism and what employees in these countries expect from work, the factors that are considered important varies a lot. Employees in individualistic cultures value a job that leaves enough time for relationships outside the work and a job that has enough freedom and provides continuous challenge. In collectivist countries employees usually value possibilities to develop one’s skills, for example by having enough training opportunities. Other valued elements are physical conditions regarding the work and a situation where an employee is able to utilize his or hers skills fully (Hofstede 1994 p. 51 and 52). These differences emphasize the core deviation between individualism and collectivism when it comes to working life: individualism appreciates their independence from the organization and collectivism highlights it (Hofstede 1994 p. 52). In practice the differences can be seen in the meaning of the organization in an employee’s mind: an individualist may see an organization only as something that is necessary to have in order to enable smooth processes at work; organization stays at the background. A collectivist may think that an organization is the core factor in work and the reason for an employee to work hard and achieve the goals.

3.3 Masculinity versus femininity

“The desirability of assertive behavior against the desirability of modest behavior” (Hofstede 1994 p. 80)

The dimension about masculinity describes the behaviour that a society finds suitable for which gender (Hofstede 1994 p. 80). This dimension focuses on the overall attitude

of a society with a division by gender: “male achievements reinforces masculine assertiveness and competition; female care reinforces feminine nurturance, a concern for relationships and for the living environment (Hofstede 1994 p. 81). With this division, societies that are ranked as masculine appreciate competition, earnings, recognition, advancement and challenge, where more feminine societies see management, cooperation, living area and employment security as desirable and important values (Hofstede 1994 p. 81 and 82). In general, masculine countries have tougher values where feminine countries appreciate tenderness over toughness.

Finland is ranked by Hofstede as a feminine country with a rather low score of 26. The factors supporting this score are for example the modesty that is seen a highly valued feature in Finnish culture and working life. Bragging about one’s success and achievements is perceived as repulsive behaviour and children are taught from the early childhood that bragging is not permitted nor appreciated. Gender equality in Finland is one of the highest in the whole world (World economic forum 2016 p. 172) and striving for similar possibilities for both genders when it comes to career, family or life in general, is shaping a society to a way where it is more feminine than masculine. Masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct, which usually is related to gap in gender equality. In contrary, femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap (Hofstede 1994 p. 82 and 83).

The meaning of a career to an individual can vary a lot in feminine societies: “both men and women may or may not be ambitious and there should be no gender difference in the ranges of the answers of both sexes about the need for a career” (Hofstede 1994 p. 93). In other words, in feminine societies it is acceptable for both genders to either want to have a career or do not want to have a career, where in masculine societies a career is a thing for men and not wanting it is seen socially unacceptable. When it comes to working life, companies in feminine countries usually aim at solving disagreements by compromising and negotiating instead of a conflict (Hofstede 1994 p. 92).

Finnish government has made up some ground rules for companies to comply that advances the feminine process of negotiating and solving issues by conversation and consideration. One of these ways is electing an occupational health and safety representative to a company among its employees. The representatives protect the employees in ambiguous situations and make sure that all health and safety issues regarding employees’ work have been taken into consideration. The health and safety representative is compulsory to elect if a company employees over ten employees

(Työsuojelu 8/2015). In Admares the representatives were chosen in September 2016. Other elements that strengthen the statement of a feminine company are the flexibility in working hours, that enables employees with children to leave early from work if they have to. Overall the general attitude is more “work in order to live” than “live in order to work” (Hofstede 1994 p 93).

United Arab Emirates is ranked as a masculine country with a result of 50. This means that according to Hofstede, United Arab Emirates is more of a masculine country and it values results, competition and hard work. Masculine countries stress the meaning of a career and high income (Hofstede 1994 p. 96). Management style in masculine countries can differ a lot from feminine countries: a masculine manager wants to be in charge for the decisions and consensus among the group is not seen evitable in order to decide something. In masculine countries the disagreements can be solved by a strong argument: conflicts are seen normal and an inevitable part of working life.

The difference between the countries concerning this dimension could be mainly seen in a style of making decisions and possibly in the general attitude towards work and how meaningful role it plays in employee’s life. It can be assumed that in United Arab Emirates work, at least for males, have an important meaning to one’s life and the style of making decisions according to work is aggressive, competitive and tough. In Admares the general approach to work is that it is meaningful, but life has to be more than work. It is possible that in United Arab Emirates the attitude towards work is more strict and therefore Finnish softer values that appreciates solidarity and cooperation may cause a minor collision between the countries. Despite the difference in the ranking between the countries, United Arab Emirates scores on the halfway of the scale. Therefore even though United Arab Emirates is more masculine than Finland, it does not score very high on the masculinity dimension, which can diminish the cultural differences between the countries.

3.4 Uncertainty avoidance

“the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations” – (Hofstede 1994 p. 113).

The dimension of Uncertainty avoidance describes the level of uncertainty that people in the society are willing to handle and how do they deal with the fact that the future is

unpredictable. How one relates to uncertainty is a subjective experience and it can be partly shared among a group of people: uncertainty can be acquired and learned from others (Hofstede 1994 p. 111). In other words, the feeling of fear and inconvenience that a group of people feel towards something is usually inherited and continued in a culture from a generation to another. In countries that score high on this dimension and thus have a strong uncertainty avoidance, people appear as busy, fidgety, emotional, aggressive and active whereas in countries with low uncertainty avoidance, people appear as being-quiet, easy-going, indolent, controlled and lazy (Hofstede 1994 p. 115). When it comes to working life, a factor that is typical for a country with a high uncertainty avoidance is having many rules and regulations with most people following them. Other features that support high uncertainty avoidance are having long careers in the same company in the same position, and the mindset that time is money.

Finland scores rather high on this dimension (59) that means it is more of an uncertainty avoidance country. This comes out as the need of having a distinct structure in organizations (Hofstede 1994 p. 116) and in companies. In Admares the need for structure is visible for example in organizational charts, that are updated regularly as the company develops. It is seen essential and meaningful that employees are aware of the structure and functions in the company. Other features in workplace indicating a strong uncertainty avoidance index are the large amount of internal rules and regulations: policies, documents and instructions that are created to control the work process (Hofstede 1994 p. 120) and possibly clarifying the organizational chart as well. In Admares, new policies are provided continuously.

A key factor in uncertainty avoidance index is that having the rules and policies are more important than complying with them: the existence of the formal regulations is more relevant than what happens in reality (Hofstede 1994 p. 121). In Admares the process of creating organizational culture, values and rules is ongoing. Having an action plan and a considered strategy is seen important and valuable, like practices for employees as well. Travel policy, including instructions of reclaiming travel expenses, and phone policy are processes that have been created during this year to guide the employees of Admares and to create a coherent company culture. Being busy and having deadlines that cannot be exceeded is an inevitable element of a project work since a project always have a timeline (No Limits Leadership Inc. 2006). Because of this, the amount of work tasks that are urgent can be great. This leads to the statement, that is typical for

uncertainty avoidance culture, and possibly every employee in Admares can admit: time is money.

The differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates are the smallest concerning the uncertainty avoidance dimension when United Arab Emirates scores 80. Both of the countries have strong uncertainty avoidance. Yet United Arab Emirates has a relatively stronger index than Finland. Because of this, it can be assumed that the features in Finnish working life regarding this dimension apply to United Arab Emirates as well, only the features are more intense. The need of rules and regulations can be bigger and the fear of the uncertainty can be higher. Hofstede (1994) also pointed out that the internal rules in the company are associated to the power distance index as well: “where power distances are large, the exercise of discretionary power by superiors replaces, to some extent, the need for internal rules” (p. 121). This statement indicates that even though United Arab Emirates scores much higher than Finland in the uncertainty avoidance index, the urge of having and complying with policies and regulations may not be remarkably higher because of the strong power distance index United Arab Emirates has. Therefore it can be assumed that the core elements of this dimension – the desire of having rules and structures, avoiding uncertainty as much that it is possible and the will to work hard and accurately – would not cause a cultural collision between these two countries.

3.5 Conclusion of the dimensions

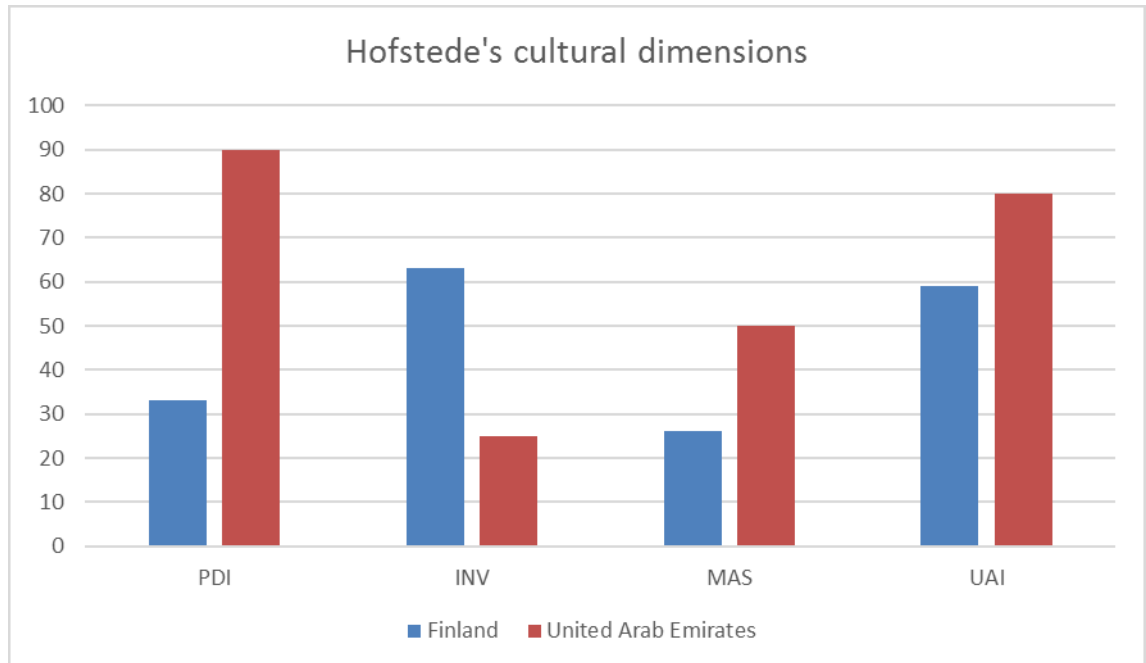


Figure 1. Hofstede's dimensions describe the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates

PDI = Power-distance Index

INV = Individualism versus collectivism

MAS= Masculinity versus femininity

UAI = Uncertainty avoidance Index

The previously presented dimensions described the two countries' attitudes and reactions towards specific areas of life and analyzed the possible problem areas when working together. Since the aim of this thesis is to study the working life and its forms, the author concentrated mainly on the effect of the dimensions in situations related to work and the special features of it when working in an international company. The concentration was in Finland and in the United Arab Emirates and the cultural differences between these two countries. United Arab Emirates is an important market area for Admares and being aware of the employees' skills and positions about the cultural features of United Arab Emirates may benefit Admares' projects and the satisfaction and

expertise of the employees in the future. The dimensions showed remarkable differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates when it comes to business behavior.

Figure 1 indicates the differences between the countries and their ranking on the dimensions that were presented earlier in chapter 3. According to the dimensions, the differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates are the biggest in power distance index, when Finland ranked 33 and United Arab Emirates 90. The figure also shows that in Individualism versus collectivism, Finland is significantly more individualistic than United Arab Emirates. In individualism dimension Finland ranked 63 and United Arab Emirates 25. In masculinity versus femininity the difference between the ranking was rather moderate: Finland ranked 26 and United Arab Emirates 50. Uncertainty avoidance index was the only dimension where both countries were on the same side of the pillar: Finland was ranked 59 and United Arab Emirates 80.

In Power Distance index the differences concerned mainly decision-making in companies, the level of formality in dress codes and how to address people; in United Arab Emirates using titles and formal addressing of people is extremely important whereas Finnish people tend to use first names even when one is addressing one's superior. Because of these differences, the attitudes towards power and hierarchy differ a lot and there can be seen a clear collision between the policies. Ways of making business are opposites and the countries value different things. Based on this, it can be assumed that these reverse systems in the countries can cause problems when trying to collaborate. Because of this, it is important to master the intercultural skills and adapt and understand these differences and respect them. Possible ways to respect the high power distance society when doing business there is to dress more formal, address people correctly and respect the local habits and ways of interacting with business associates.

In Individualism versus collectivism, the differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates concerned the position of an individual in a group of people and the attitude towards colleagues and other people in a person's social group. United Arab Emirates is ranked by Hofstede clearly as a collectivistic culture, which means that personal relationships and feelings are present when doing business; arabs make deals with those they trust and with those they like and not necessarily with the one with the best offer. Also the pressure of the group is larger than in Finland and an individual is expected to hear out from her or his closed ones when making an important decision regarding work or private life. In Finland the situation is opposite: personal relationships are not seen

essential when making business and an opinion of an individual is counted as valued as an opinion of a certain group.

In a dimension of masculinity versus femininity the fundamental issue concerns that does a society value toughness or tenderness. Masculine values - competition, success, challenge and material values - are appreciated in some countries that are ranked as masculine. Masculine values often correlate with distinct and separated roles for both genders: in masculine societies men should be tough and women tender. In feminine societies the appreciated values concerning work life are cooperation, solidarity and fairness. Clear gender roles do not usually exist that clearly in feminine societies and it is acceptable for women to have a career and for men to not have a career. In masculine societies competition between employees in companies is normal and in general the working life is tougher. In feminine societies the approach to work is "work in order to live" instead of "live in order to work".

In Uncertainty avoidance the difference between the countries was the smallest of all dimensions. Both Finland and United Arab Emirates are ranked as countries that avoid uncertainty if possible. The key feature in this dimension is the attitude towards guidance and rules: according to Hofstede, Finland and United Arab Emirates have a positive attitude towards rules and regulations and internal policies in companies. In other words, the need of guidance is strong in both countries. The uncertainty avoidance index was the only dimension where these two countries did not have a remarkable differences in Hofstede's dimensions. That leads to a conclusion that perhaps Finland and United Arab Emirates would not have any complications doing business when it comes to setting some ground rules and operating by the policies that are agreed.

Otherwise Hofstede's dimensions imply that Finland and United Arab Emirates have significant differences and there might be some collisions between these two cultures when working together as a customer and a supplier. The thesis objective number 3 aimed at mapping the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates and discuss these differences with Hofstede's theory. With chapter 3 that thesis objective is covered. A conclusion of the theoretical framework is that a strong knowledge about cross-cultural communication and experience of each other's cultural features would be the key to make sure the cultural differences are not effecting negatively on the business performance of Admares.

3.6 Limitations of Hofstede's theory

Whilst Hofstede's research of cultural dimensions is widely used and referred to, the study has several limitations that are important to notice when using the theory. One of the disadvantages is that the study was conducted in 1994. It is likely that over the time, the cultures that were studied had changed and the data may not be accurate anymore. Other limitation is that the dimensions are designed to define a culture as a whole and therefore it leaves out the individuals in the culture (Culture and Business N.D.). The emphasize in the research should be in the fact that the model cannot be applied to individuals but to use as a general guide for understanding the cultural differences (Clearly cultural, N.D.).

One limitation is the impact of culture on how one understands the question asked in the research. Example can be found in the dimensions: "especially in group-oriented cultures, individuals might tend to answer questions as if they were addressed to the group he/she belongs to. While on the other hand in the United States, which is an individualistic culture, the answers will most likely be answered and perceived through the eyes of that individual" (Clearly cultural N.D.). This indicates that different cultural groups may understand differently the questions asked and due to this, the results of the Hofstede's questionnaire may not be accurate. Regarding this thesis, the interview questions presented in the empirical framework concerning Hofstede's theory were designed from the point of view of an individualistic country. Due to this, the style of conducting the questions may be biased.

4 RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The empirical part of the thesis aims at finding out whether the theory used and assumptions made in the theoretical part are accurate when it comes to the employees of Admares and their work with international environment. By this the author seeks an answer to a thesis objectives numbers 1 and 2. The empirical part of the thesis is conducted based on the theoretical part that focused on cross-cultural communication skills and intercultural competence and then later on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The next chapters present the methods used in executing the research and what factors influenced the choice of the research methods. The research questions that are clarifying the purpose of the research are presented and explained briefly and at the end the author discusses about the reliability and limitations of the research conducted.

4.1 Research methods

The empirical part of this thesis combines qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to get the most accurate and relevant outcoming to meet the author's research objectives, that are presented in chapter 1.2 of the thesis. The research is conducted in two parts using two different research methods. The first part of the research is an e-questionnaire about cross-cultural communication skills and about the general attitudes towards international interactions. The questionnaire is addressed to the whole staff of Admares and it concentrates on the employees' skills and attitudes towards cross-cultural communication and the validity of cultural skills when operating in global markets.

The second part of the research uses interviews as a qualitative research method. The author interviews three employees in Admares who have spent a lot of time during the past year in United Arab Emirates, mostly in Dubai. Due to this, their experiences and point of views about the cultural differences provide up-to-date and valuable data to the author's research. The interviewees were chosen because of their strong working experience in United Arab Emirates. The interviews focus on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the features of them. These features are covered in chapter 3 of the thesis. The e-questionnaire was sent to these three interviewees as well.

4.1.1 Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to get an inclusive picture of the current stage of the Admares' employees' cultural awareness and skills. The author conducted the questionnaire as an e-questionnaire in SurveyMonkey. The link to the questionnaire was sent to every employee in Admares via email with one week time to respond. Since majority of the employees most likely conducted the questionnaire in their working time, the questionnaire was designed in a way that it is easy and fast to answer and takes no more than five minutes to complete. The author assumed that all employees are not familiar with all the concepts and terms presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis, so no difficult terms or concepts were used in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contains ten multiple choice questions. The author chose to use the multiple choice question in order to keep the questionnaire fast and simple to answer. Another reason to keep the answer options closed, was to be able to influence on how the respondents will answer and minimize the respondents' efforts when filling the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed and executed in English so that every employee is able to answer it.

The age and gender of the respondents were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire. The information of the age and gender of the employees in Admares has an important role for the author's research, since the globalized working life with its new demands is rather new issue, and thus younger people usually have an advantage when it comes to international knowledge and adaptability. When the respondents were asked to fill their age on the questionnaire, they have four options to choose their age from: Under 25, 25-37, 37-50 and 50+. The reason to form four age groups shown above is to keep the answering process as anonymous as possible but still get some information of the age of the respondent that may be a valid information when it comes to work experience and attitude towards multiculturalism.

4.1.2 Interviews

The questions about United Arab Emirates and its special cultural features were only asked from employees with experience from the country. These employees have the ability to provide comprehensive answers about the country and its culture when it comes

to doing business. Whether the amount of the answers was more limited in this way and thus the sampling was rather small as well, the answers were more thorough and useful when asked from specifically selected employees. Therefore the author chose three persons among the employees who have worked with Admares' project in United Arab Emirates during the past year. These three persons have different work tasks in the company and this provided versatile visions about the subject.

The objective of the interviews was to find out how the employees have experienced the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates that are discussed in chapter 3 with Hofstede's theory. The purpose was to examine whether the example situations and questions, the author have presented based on cultural dimensions, are seen complicated or difficult by the employees as Hofstede suggested. In other words, the purpose was to either verify Hofstede's and author's assumptions about Finland and United Arab Emirates or come to a conclusion that the assumptions are not accurate. When the assumptions are not accurate it can be assumed that the differences in Hofstede's dimensions do not necessarily mean issues in real working life between the countries.

The interview questions were designed beforehand in a way that all four dimensions that are presented earlier are attached to the questions. The interview questions also considered the possibility to effect positively on the company's business performance by investing into intercultural skills and studies the possible negative effects of neglecting the intercultural skills when working in United Arab Emirates. The author wishes to get an overview of the visions and feelings of the selected employees that have working experience from United Arab Emirates.

It is important to notice that since the author and all the employees interviewed are Finns, the interviews were held in Finnish. The interview questions were asked in Finnish and the answers were in Finnish too. The decision to held the interviews in Finnish was made to create a natural atmosphere that is fruitful for conversation and for new insights about the topic. The interviews took place during autumn 2016. When analyzing the answers of the interviews in chapter 5 the author translated the answers from Finnish to English.

The questions asked in the interviews translated to English were:

Do you think working in United Arab Emirates is hierarchical, if so, how do you recognize this hierarchy?

Have you faced situations where you have negotiated with someone who cannot make the decision because they lack the authorization to do so?

Do you feel like the local partners want to form a relationship before start working together, e.g. is building trust important when it comes to making business?

Is there competition between the employees in UAE? Is the working life considered tough?

Are the rules and regulations obeyed? Have you faced bribery whilst operating in UAE?

4.2 Research questions

The research questions of this thesis are

1. What is the current level of cross-cultural communication skills among the employees in Admares?
2. What is their self-assessment on the subject and do they find intercultural skills meaningful?
3. Is Hofstede's country profile of Finland justifiable and accurate when it comes to employees in Admares?

The research questions first concentrate on cross-cultural communication among the employees in Admares. The aim is to find out do the employees find investing into cultural skills valuable and important asset that can benefit Admares' business performance. Also the employees' attitude and self-assessment towards situations that require international interactions and intercultural competence was covered in the questionnaire. The types of interactions was also separated in the questionnaire: email and phone correspondance and face to face interactions were both considered separately. The author chose to divide these two forms of interacting in order to get more specific results about the attitudes and skills about the different kind of intercultural work tasks.

The questions of the interviews focused on the cultural dimensions and they seek an answer to whether Hofstede's dimensions about Finland and Finnish culture in a relation

to the culture in United Arab Emirates are accurate or not when it comes to the employees in Admares.

4.3 Reliability of the research

The conclusion of the research was made by combining the data from the questionnaire and from the interviews and then conclude the findings together with the theoretical framework. The results from the questionnaire and from the interviews are presented in Chapter 5. The results from the questionnaire is presented using percentage distributions. The results from the interviews are presented by analyzing the answers of the respondents and justifying these answers by Hofstede's dimensions.

Since the questionnaire was anonymous, it can be assumed that the respondents provided honest answers to the questions and chose the answers they found the most suitable for them. The interviews were not totally anonymous in a sense that the author was aware of the identity of the respondent whilst holding the interviews. No personal information about the interviewees was published in the thesis. The author only published their area of expertise in Admares.

The objective of the questionnaire was to get a conclusion about the opinions of the employees in Admares, so in order to get a valid result, the percentage of the employees answering to the questionnaire had to be sufficient. The questionnaire was sent to 41 employees and 25 of them responded to the questionnaire. Therefore the percentage rate was 61% which can be considered valid.

The interview part consisted of three employees' interviews and when it comes to the reliability of the research, it is important to remember that the amount of responses was rather small and the answers were subjective: how an employee experiences some working situations may depend a lot about previous experience, attitude and earlier knowledge. Therefore because of the small sampling and the subjectivity of the method, the end result can be questionable. Another fact to consider carefully when analysing the responds to the interviews is that the respondents' experiences of United Arab Emirates are from Dubai, that is the most developed and Western city in United Arab Emirates. Because of this, it is necessary to remember that the opinions and results presented here do not necessarily give accurate picture of the whole country and its cultural features when it comes to doing business.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis and observations of the research are presented in this chapter. At first the author presents the results of the questionnaire and make analysis about the possible reasons that led into that result. The responds of the questionnaire were analysed one question at a time and the percentage rates to every respond options were also counted. The results of the interviews were analysed one interview at a time. The comments, examples and additional observations of the subject provided by the interviewees are also presented in the analysis. Issues that need to be taken into consideration concerning the end-results of the questionnaire and interviews are introduced.

5.1 Results of the questionnaire

The overall response rate to the questionnaire was 61 % so the author got 25 responds out of 41 to the questionnaire. The response rate was rather good and the possible reasons effecting reductively to the response rate could be hurry or an oblivion of a possible respondent. The first question in the questionnaire asked the gender and age of a respondent. The most common group to answer to the questionnaire were males from age 25-37 years and thus it can be assumed that males from age 25 to 37 are the most common age and gender group in Admares or that they were the most active group in responding to the survey.

Question 2 was “How often do you interact via phone or email with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” The options to choose from were daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly and never. The most common answer was daily, and 60% of the respondents chose this option. The second most popular answer was weekly and 35% of the respondents chose that option. 5% of the respondents chose the answer monthly. Nobody answered less than monthly or never, which indicates that all employees in Admares have regular phone and email interactions with people from different countries and cultures.

Question 3 was “How often do you interact face to face with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” and the answer options were same

than in the previous question. The most common answer was monthly with 47% of the answers. 33% answered weekly, 12 % daily, 4% answered less than monthly and 4% answered never. When compared these answers to the previous question, the result shows that face to face interactions are less frequent than email and phone correspondence among the employees in Admares. The division of percentages between face to face interactions and phone or email interactions is remarkable: email and phone interactions are a lot more common than face to face interactions. Therefore it can be assumed that the employees are more used to the email and phone correspondence compared to face to face interactions.

Question 4 focused on employees self-assessment towards their intercultural skills. The question was “Do you feel that you have sufficient skills (cultural or language skills) to give your full expertise in the work tasks that require email or phone interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” The answer options were Yes in all situations, Yes in most situations, Yes, sometimes, No, not always, No, never and My job description doesn't include any international phone or email interactions. 76% of the respondents chose “yes, in most situations” and 20% answered “yes, in all situations”. 4% of the respondents answered “no, not always”. No other answering options were chosen. This indicates that the overall level of expertise when it comes to intercultural phone or email correspondence is rather strong among employees in Admares. The employees trust in their own skills in these interactions and they are confident about their level of expertise. The results of the question 4 may correlate with the results to the question 2: since majority of the employees who responded to the questionnaire, have daily intercultural email and phone correspondence, these situations may have become a routine for most of the employees which explains employees' expertise in these tasks.

Question 5 was “Do you feel that you have sufficient skills (language or cultural skills) to give your full expertise in the work tasks that require face to face interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” The answer options were same than in the previous question. 58% answered Yes, in most situations and 38% Yes in all situations and 4% answered No, not always. No other answering options were chosen. The interesting conclusion that can be made with question 4 and 5, is that in general, face to face interactions are found easier than email and phone correspondence. The author assumes that the reasons that make face to face interactions easier than email and phone correspondence is the fact that with face to

face interactions it might be easier to express oneself with gestures, facial expressions and with the overall behavior in the situation. These matters may diminish the chance of misunderstandings and thus they are found more pleasant and easier interactions to execute.

Question 6 was “How do you feel about the work tasks that require email and phone correspondence with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” The answer options were

Most of the time they are pleasant and easy, I like doing them,

Most of the time they are pleasant and challenging, I am nervous but excited

Most of the time they are unpleasant and difficult, I don't like doing them

It depends on the situation

My job description doesn't include any international email and phone correspondence

63% answered that the interactions are pleasant and easy, 21% answered that they are pleasant and challenging and 16% answered that it depends on the situation. This indicates that the majority of the employees like executing the intercultural work situations and find them pleasant. Some employees also answered that their approach to these situations depends on the situation. This can mean that certain topics or people are found easier and more pleasant to work with whilst some situations can be found difficult and unpleasant.

Question 7 was “How do you feel about work tasks that require face to face interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?” The answer options were same than in the previous question. 62% answered that the interactions are pleasant and easy, 21% answered that they are pleasant and challenging, 13% answered that it depends on the situation and 4% answered that his/hers job description doesn't include these face to face interactions.

Question 8 examined cross-cultural communication and the employees position towards it. The question was “Cross-cultural communication means the ability to successfully form, foster, and improve relationships with members of a culture different from one's own” (East-west Business Strategies). Do you feel that investing into employees' cross-cultural communication skills would benefit Admares' business performance?”. The

answer options to this question were Yes, definitely, Yes, most likely, Yes, possibly, No, maybe not, No, definitely, I don't know. 28% of the respondents chose the option yes, definitely. 36% answered Yes, most likely and 32% Yes, possibly. No other answering options were chosen. These answers show that employees in Admares find cross-cultural communication skills meaningful and an effective way to improve business performance.

Question 9 was "Do you feel that employees' cross-cultural communication skills are taken enough into consideration in Admares?" and the answers to that question were very scattered. The most common respond was yes, possibly and all the other options were answered as well. A figure below indicates the division of the responds in percentages.

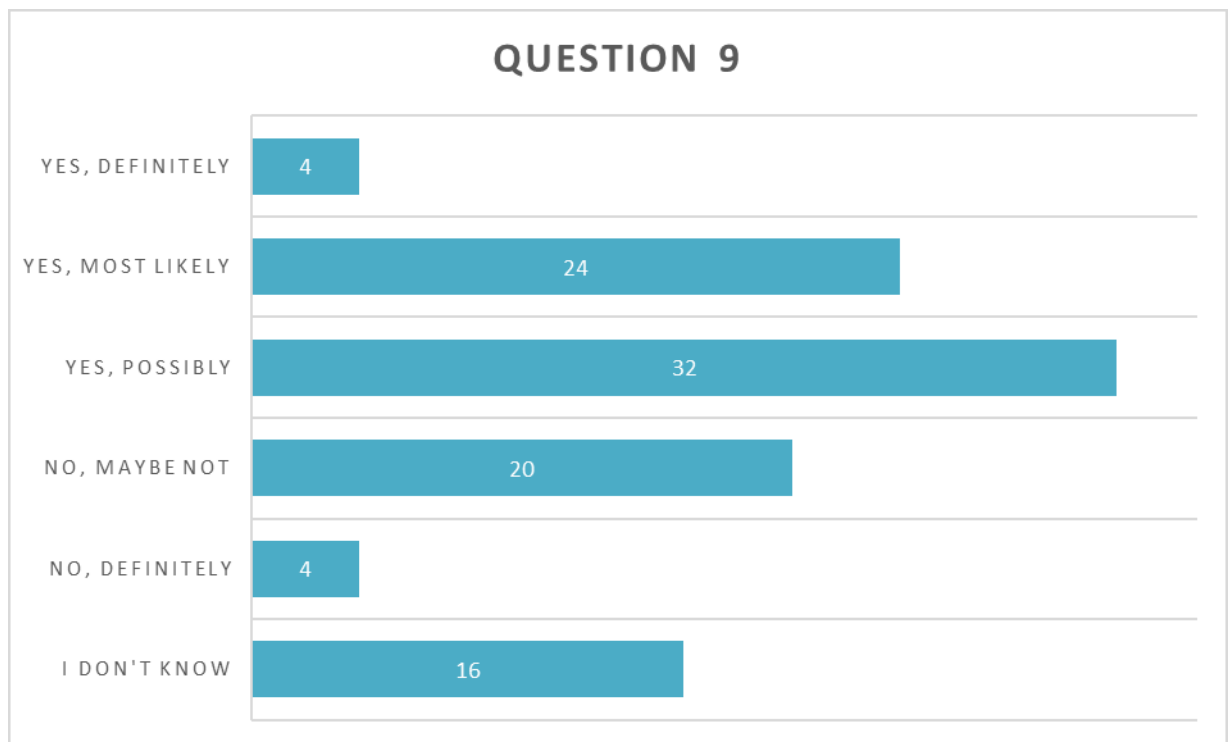


Figure 2. Figure 2 indicates the responds to question 9 of the questionnaire.

The conclusion that can be made from question 9 is that the employees have very different opinions towards the current amount of cross-cultural communication education in Admares. Majority of the respondents thought that cross-cultural communication skills are possibly taken enough into consideration. Only very small amount of respondents were absolutely sure that the cultural skills has taken enough into consideration or that they have not taken enough into consideration. The reason for this divergence in

responds can be that the employees experience cross cultural communication differently. Other reason may be that due to their different positions in the company, employees would need various cultural education between each other and therefore they find the existing cultural concentration so differently.

Question 10 was “When a new Admares project is about to begin in a foreign country, in what ways the cross-cultural communication of the employees could be improved? Please select all the options you find useful”. Because of the possibility to choose more than one option, the percentage rates are over 100. 83 % of the respondents thought that a briefing for the employees would be an effective way to increase the cross-cultural communication and thus strengthen the competence of Admares. 50 % thought that a guideline booklet for the employees would be a good tool as well and 20 % thought that a request for the employees to familiarize themselves with the cultural rules and habits would be a useful way to approach the issue. Every respondent answered that some training would be good to have: 0 % chose the option “no improvement or training is needed” or “I don’t know”. In the open comment section came one comment to the question 10:

“It would be good to brief the people involved in either sales or project execution to at least master the basic greetings and manners of the destination country. For instance in Asia, just the way you treat the other person's business card is a non-verbal message in itself.”

A conclusion of the results is that even though the employees find their own level of cross-cultural communication skills sufficient for their daily operations in Admares, employees still think that cross-cultural communication skills are essential for the company. Some of the employees think that Admares should focus more on the intercultural skills of the employees. An explanation for this could be that even though the employees manage well their day-to-day operations that include international interactions, employees feel that when a new project starts, somekind of cultural investment is necessary. With a proactive approach to the cultural differences before a new project, the motivation of the employees could be strengthen and Admares could avoid some possible cultural misunderstandings according to the cultural environment of a new project.

5.2 Results of the interviews

The second part of the empirical framework of this thesis was three interviews. The interviews dealt with every Hofstede's cultural dimension at a time and aimed at finding out whether they are accurate or not in the case of Admares' employees. The dimensions are presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis, in chapter 3. The author asked the same questions from every respondent and the answers were analysed individually. The questions were asked and answered in Finnish and the author translated the questions and answers in English. The observations and general opinions of the respondents are also presented, if they provided any, during the interview. The questions asked in the interviews are presented in chapter 4.1.2 of this thesis. The original questions asked in Finnish are attached in Appendix 2.

Interview 1:

The area of expertise of the respondent is marketing. He agreed that hierarchy is strong in United Arab Emirates and titles are used when addressing people. Emphasizing a person's status and high position in the company is also common, and the people holding the highest power in the companies can be recognized by the gowns they are wearing. These gowns implicate status and authority in United Arab Emirates. Respondent 1 said that the situations where an employee in United Arab Emirates cannot make a decision without asking a confirmation from their superior, are regular and usually rather frustrating as well because they take time and complicate the working process.

With Individualism and collectivism the questions asked concerned building the relationship before starting to work together and continuing the process of building trust while working. Respondent 1 mentioned that his experiences concerning the process of building trust are not in line with Hofstede's dimension: with negotiations one goes straight to the point and socializing together before starting to work is not seen necessary. The author also asked that do emotions and personal relationships effect on the decision-making or working habits and the respondent said no: his experience was that working conditions and ways are really professional and personal feelings are put aside at least when interacting with the other party, in this case Admares. He added that the situation is possibly different inside companies in United Arab Emirates when there is no foreign companies or partners involved.

Regarding the masculinity versus femininity dimension, the questions concerned about competition among employees: do competition exist among employees and what is the general attitude towards strong competition. The author also asked how the decisions are made: with compromises and negotiations or with a conflict. The respondent 1 said that there are some competition among the employees and since it is very male dominant country, the masculine values are more appreciated than the feminine ones. Therefore competition is strong and it is seen a good value to pursue. The respondent 1 said that based on his experiences, all the decisions are made based on negotiations, compromises and careful consideration instead of conflict.

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance index was covered with questions concerning the planning of the operations and then sticking to the plan. The respondent 1 stated that he thinks that everything goes according to a plan and the regulations and policies are obeyed while working. No bribery or any kind of deceptions are occurred and thus the cooperation runs by the contract.

Interview 2:

The area of expertise of the respondent is project managing. When asking about the power distance she emphasized the meaning of titles and authority. She stated that people in the highest positions in the companies know their value and power and they want to emphasize their authority. The ways of highlighting the status and power are their appearance and the need to be in control when making decisions. She added that hierarchy is visible in the sense that everyone has their own place and position in the company and these orders are respected. Like respondent 1, respondent 2 also admitted that situations, where an employee from United Arab Emirates cannot decide something because of hierarchy, are usual and cause some frustration and complications to the schedules by slowing them down.

On Individualism respondent 2 also agreed that building a close relationship is not necessary and socializing on one's free time is not seen important. She also considered the possibility that her gender may influence on this as well: because of the different position for women in the work life and society, building trust with a woman is possibly not seen necessary and desirable. She admitted that the meaning of a group can sometimes be bigger than the meaning of an individual and tight groups where one look after one another are rather common inside companies.

Respondent 2 replied that masculine values are clear in the society: competition is tough between the employees and constant improvement and struggle is necessary in order to keep the acquired position in a company one is working in. One reason for the high competition is the fact that in Dubai, there are a lot of foreign workers to compete from the employment with locals. Sometimes conflicts occur: respondent 2 said that disagreements are aimed to solve by negotiations but sometimes they evolve to conflicts and this is seen rather normal behaviour when making business in United Arab Emirates.

The approach to uncertainty avoidance in United Arab Emirates is rather similar than in Finland in practice as well: rules are seen desired and valued but reality can be something else. Respondent 2 said that being organized is seen important like in Finland but when it comes to project work, the schedules and plans sometimes change unexpectedly and this is important to be aware of. Respondent 2 said that no bribery has occurred whilst she has worked in United Arab Emirates.

Interview 3:

The expertise area of the respondent is engineering. About power distance he told that the hierarchy in United Arab Emirates is very strong and visible in work situations. The situations, where an employee in United Arab Emirates cannot make a decision because it is out of his authority, are daily and these situations take a lot of time and effort which is frustrating. Respondent 2 said that titles are used and it is important to address people correctly. Also the authority and power of the highest operators in the company is visible. The person holding the most power has a certain place where to sit, certain clothes to wear and usually a group of people following him. Respondent 3 also emphasized that in United Arab Emirates the power is vertical where in Finland power is distributed rather equally and therefore it is more horizontal.

Concerning individualism versus collectivism, respondent 3 stated that a culture of socializing is very strong in United Arab Emirates but only among locals. The highest influencers in companies are usually very eager to socialize and can often give an invitation to join for a coffee. Respondent 3 also said that it takes a while to earn the trust among the locals, but after reaching the certain level in the relationship, it is easy to receive favors and the general approach is different. In that sense it is justifiable to state that building relationship among partners are considered meaningful in United Arab Emirates.

Respondent 3 could not answer whether competition between employees exist in United Arab Emirates. He stated that the working life in general is rather tough in a sense that employees work many hours per day and work is considered an important factor in one's life. About the conflicts, respondent 3 answered that based on his experience, decisions and misunderstandings are always aimed at solving by a compromise. Therefore, conflicts have not occurred whilst he has worked in United Arab Emirates.

When it comes to rules and regulations, respondent 3 emphasized that the amount of paper work and byrocracy is endless in United Arab Emirates. Regulations and official contracts are often required and the need of paper work is sometimes rather exhausting. However, respondent 3 said that even though there is a lot of paper work to fill and the work and operations are organized on paper, the reality is something else. The schedules can change rapidly and deadlined can be exceeded. These statements support the Hofstede's claims that when it comes to uncertainty avoidance, having the rules and regulations is more important than actually operating by them in reality.

6 CONCLUSION

The conclusion combines the empirical part of the thesis and the results of the two research methods used: the e-questionnaire and the interviews. The conclusion aims at clarifying the results of the research and provide discussion and analysis of the subject. The author will also discuss if the research objectives were met and the research questions answered by the empirical framework of this thesis. The research objectives were presented in chapter 1.2 and the research questions in chapter 4.2 of this thesis. The conclusion also aims at giving further research topics and providing suggestions of how Admares could improve its business performance by concentrating more on cross-cultural communication skills of its employees.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to map the current intercultural skills of the employees in Admares and to find out the employees' assessment and opinions of the topic. The interviews aimed at finding out how the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates presented by Hofstede effect on working life in practice. The main objective of the theoretical framework was to study the impact of cultural knowledge to business performance and to present the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates. The results of the theoretical and empirical framework show that cultural skills are important for companies' business performance and for global success. With a considered and adequate cultural familiarization, Admares' employees would perform better internationally and the cultural ability of the employees may enhance the company's business performance.

The research question one focused on the current level of cross-cultural communication skills among the employees in Admares. The results of the reseach showed that it is rather good: employees in Admares find intercultural interactions pleasant and they find their own cultural skills sufficient to be able to execute their work tasks. Employees find intercultural skills meaningful and important in order to advance Admares' business performance on global markets. Employees' opinions about Admares' sufficient concentration on the employees cultural skills in the company were scattered. This indicates that employees in Admares have different views about Admares' input in educating them regarding intercultural skills.

Research question 3 concentrated on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and it can be stated that Hofstede's country profiles of Finland and United Arab Emirates are justifiable and

rather accurate. The interviews showed that there are some deviations between Hofstede's assumptions and the data gathered from the interviews. Results of the interviews also showed that the cultural differences between Finland and United Arab Emirates can cause frustration in Admares' employees whilst working in United Arab Emirates. In order to minimize the amount of problems and frustration, predicting the possible cultural collisions and problems could improve the outcome.

For further research the author suggests advancing the process of strengthening the intercultural skills of the employees in practice. The research could contain an orientation plan for cultural education and a vision how to implement it. The research could concentrate on how to execute a useful orientation for employees when starting a business operations in an unfamiliar country and find the key factors for successful cultural learning in Admares.

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1. Age: Under 25, 25-37 37-50 50 + **Gender:** Female, Male

2. How often do you interact via phone or email with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than monthly
- Never

3. How often do you interact face to face with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than monthly
- Never

4. Do you feel that you have sufficient skills (language or cultural skills) to give your full expertise in the work tasks that require phone or email interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Yes, in all situations
- Yes, in most situations
- Yes, sometimes
- No, not always
- No, Never
- My job description doesn't include international phone or email interactions

5. Do you feel that you have sufficient skills (language or cultural skills) to give your full expertise in the work tasks that require face to face interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Yes, in all situations
- Yes, in most situations
- Yes, sometimes
- No, not always
- No, Never
- My job description doesn't include international phone or email interactions

6. How do you feel about the work tasks that require email and phone correspondence with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Most of the time they are pleasant and easy, I am in control in the situation
- Most of the time they are pleasant and challenging, I am nervous but excited
- Most of the time they are unpleasant and difficult, I don't like doing it
- It depends on the situation
- My job description doesn't include any international email and phone correspondence

7. How do you feel about the work tasks that require face to face interactions with a person outside the company who has a different nationality than you?

- Most of the time they are pleasant and easy, I am in control in the situation
- Most of the time they are pleasant and challenging, I am nervous but excited
- Most of the time they are unpleasant and difficult, I don't like doing it
- It depends on the situation
- My job description doesn't include any international email and phone correspondence

8. Cross- cultural communication means “the ability to successfully form, foster, and improve relationships with members of a culture different from one's own” (East-West Business Strategies).

Do you feel that investing into employees' cross-cultural communication skills would benefit Admares' business performance?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, most likely
- Yes, possibly

- No, maybe not
- No, definitely
- I don't know

9. Do you feel that employees' cross-cultural communication skills are taken enough into consideration in Admares?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, most likely
- Yes, possibly
- No, maybe not
- No, definitely
- I don't know

10. When a new Admares project is about to begin in a foreign country, in what ways the cross-cultural communication skills of the employees could be improved? Please select all the options you find useful.

A briefing for employees about the specific country and the culture of it

A short guideline booklet for employees about the jnejne

A request for employees to familiarize oneself with the specific county jne

No improvement or training is needed

I don't know

None of the above, write your own answer

Haastattelukysymykset: Interview questions

Koetko Arabiemiraattien olevan hierarkinen valtio? Käytetäänkö titteleitä? Onko tilanteita, jossa henkilö, jonka kanssa keskusteleet ei voi tehdä päätöstä, vaan tarvitsee jonkun ylemmän tahon varmistuksen asialle? Huomaako selvästi, kuka on johtaja, esimerkiksi pukeutumisesta?

Ollaanko paljon tekemisissä töiden ulkopuolella? Halutaanko luoda suhde, ennen kuin työskennellään yhdessä?

Vaikuttavatko tunteet/henkilökohtaiset suhteet päätöksentekoon?

Onko kilpailua työntekijöiden välillä?

Miten päätökset tehdään, kompromissein ja neuvottelulla vai ovatko konfliktit yleinen tapa ratkaista ongelmat?

Onko toiminta suunniteltua ja organisoitua? Toimitaanko rajoitusten ja sopimusten mukaan, vai taivutetaanko sääntöjä, esimerkiksi lahjonnalla?